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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

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## Is the Old Testament Authentic?

BY THE REV. J. ELDER CUMMING, D.D., GLASGOW.

### I.

MANY indications have been seen lately that the tide of criticism on the Old Testament books has begun to turn; and men are setting themselves quietly to ask the questions—What has been proved? How far has the Bible been affected? What has been lost? And what gained? The subject is very far from having been exhausted. The Church has rather waited to allow all to be said on the advanced side that can be said; and, day by day, I believe that men are growing less satisfied with the conclusions which are being urged and pressed on our acceptance by the new school of critics.

The questions raised by what is often called the Higher Criticism on the Old Testament, but which I prefer to call the New Criticism, seem to demand more careful consideration than they have yet received in some of their aspects and results, and I propose therefore, shortly, to consider four leading subjects which are raised by them. These may be stated as follows:—

I. What is the result as to the Old Testament which the advanced critics claim to have reached? That is a question of fact.

II. How far is this represented by them as consistent with the spiritual truth and teaching contained in the Old Testament? And how far is it really so?

III. Are we to regard the authority of Jesus Christ as sufficient to settle such questions, if He be found to give any deliverance upon them; and do His declarations on the subject amount to such a deliverance?

IV. How far are the views advocated by the critics in question consistent with the position of the New Testament generally as an authoritative teacher of spiritual truth?

Before proceeding to answer these questions, it is necessary to premise that we have to deal with a variety of authors in more than one country, and that the results arrived at by some must not be attributed to all. Some occupy distinctly rationalistic ground, protesting against the miraculous as impossible, even in such a matter as the resurrection of Christ. Others contend that they believe in the miraculous and in inspiration of a kind, and even in evangelical doctrine. We do not, therefore, attribute the opinions or statements,

which we may have to quote or examine, to any writers, save by their own admission. Some such expression of caution it seems only fair to give at the beginning. Besides which there may be a question whether certain writers are to be regarded as belonging to the class of new critics or not. With such admissions then cheerfully made, and with much caution as to individual names, let us look at the four leading questions which have been already indicated.

I. The results which the New Criticism claims to have reached with regard to the Old Testament may be stated as follows:—

1. *With regard to Chronology.*—Its authors maintain that we have no book, and practically no reliable consecutive teaching, that can be shown to be earlier than the days of Isaiah or Amos. These prophets may be said, roughly, to have lived about the time of Hezekiah in the eighth century before Christ. It is admitted that many earlier fragments are to be found in the various books, transmitted by tradition; some of them historical; others legislative; and others poetical. Various tests have been suggested and employed to distinguish and mark out these fragments. With regard to all of them, however, it is maintained that there has been a process not only of editing and revision, but of alteration and adaptation; which has extended to the thought, the historical statements, and the language. The thought of long subsequent ages has been interpolated into these fragments so as to make them mean something greatly higher and more spiritual than their authors could possibly have meant. What were deemed by the editors to be historical inaccuracies have been dealt with by them, and altered, so as to reconcile the statements to their views of what was fact. Two different narratives, often inconsistent with each other, and drawn from different sources, have been pieced together; the beginning and the end of one of them being separated from each other, and the body of the second inserted between. And in such alterations and manipulations, many words belonging to the long subsequent date of the editors have been inserted.

2. *With regard to Historical Fact.*—It follows from statements already made, and is abundantly evident otherwise, that the authors of the New Criticism claim to have invalidated the entire historical accuracy of the earlier portion of the history of Israel, as well as the still earlier history

which the Old Testament embodies. That early biblical history is indeed so bound up and intertwined with the spiritual teaching of the Old Testament, that the one is necessarily invalidated, or at least made utterly uncertain, by the removal of the other. The only sources of early history that are admitted by the New Criticism are traditional scraps that have been put together, edited, and revised as the other Old Testament documents have been. They stand, therefore, on the same fundamental basis (with the qualification of more or less probability) as the traditional stories of the Deluge and the Serpent found in classical and other ancient literature; or as the Chaldean tablets of the Deluge or the Creation. This is the contention that practically appears in every page of the advocates in question. What, therefore, they leave us is not history, but part tradition and part fiction.

3. *As to Spiritual Teaching.*—The critics proceed upon the general idea that the teaching of the Old Testament must have a marked development from obscurer and elementary beginnings to the fuller light of later days. And they press this idea (which no doubt has a certain portion of truth in it) to the extent of leading them to reject the earlier teaching in the Old Testament as being much too clear and pure for so early a time. When confronted with the Decalogue, for instance, and its remarkable and fundamental spiritual teaching of the most far-reaching character, they are unwilling to allow that, in its present form, it could possibly have been given in the days of Moses; maintaining that, at the utmost, there can only have been a germ of ten words or precepts which has not been accurately preserved, but has been altered, revised, and added to in much later times. Some of the critics have even given us what they think to be a truer version of the Ten Commandments. The result of this general view of the development of the Old Testament Scriptures is, that the spiritual truth which we connect with the work as a whole had its beginning, not with Moses the law-giver, but with Amos, who himself tells us that he was of no prophetic or official position, but a peasant from the hillsides.

4. *As to the Levitical Institutions of the Jews.*—It is contended by the new critics that these are the creation, not of the days of Moses (about B.C. 1500), but of that of Ezekiel (B.C. 560), or possibly a hundred years after him. And they maintain, not merely that the records of Leviticus, Exodus,

and Numbers are the production of a post-Exilic age, but that all references in what we call the earlier works of the Bible to the Levitical system have been added, or at least revised and amended, in much later times.

5. *As to the origin or composition of the earlier books of the Old Testament*, the view maintained by the new critics is, that on the basis of traditions current among the people, as to their early history, various unknown writers drew up, at a comparatively late period, a number of documents, none of which are now existent in full. None of these documents is admitted to be older than a hundred years after the death of Solomon. The nearest approach to an entire document is the collection of laws in Ex. xx.—xxiii., xxxiv.; in Lev. xvii.—xxv.; and in Deut. xii.—xxvi. With these exceptions, the older documents are only now found in fragments, pieced together by one or two writers of a still later date, and ear-marked by certain letters. Two of the early documents are supposed to be distinguished by the Hebrew names which they respectively give to God. One is supposed to be distinctively *prophetic* in character, and another to be distinctively *priestly*. The critics have set themselves with redundant labour to mark out the separate portions of these various documents as used in the manufacture of the present books. In addition to the features already described, as belonging to them, the critics rest on the language, and especially on the style, of the various books and portions thereof as the ground of their judgment of date, authorship, and accuracy.

But the most potent factor in the judgments formed is what is deemed *the internal evidence of the various narratives*, and *the relation of this to the assumed development of truth among the people of Israel*.

The treatment of the Book of Deuteronomy is perhaps the most noteworthy in the series. There is a general concurrence of the critics as to its origin, but it may be worth while to describe it as given by one of the latest writers on the subject, Canon Cheyne. In the reign of King Josiah (about 620 B.C.), during the cleansing of the temple, the book of the law is stated to have been found in the house of the Lord (2 Kings xxii. 8). The finder is recorded to have been the high priest of the day, whose name was Hilkiah. Along with a scribe called Shaphan he submitted it to the king, who, on hearing it read, was dis-

turbed and much alarmed at the divine threatenings against Israel contained therein. According to Canon Cheyne and most of the new critics, we have here the story, not of *the discovery*, but of *the original authorship* of the Book of Deuteronomy. Hilkiah had written it in the name of Moses, justifying it to himself under various pretexts, which are suggested; and then being at a loss how best to secure for it public authority, he contrives the fiction of its being found in the temple; succeeds, with the help of Shaphan, in terrifying the king; and thereupon finds his literary effort acknowledged and promulgated throughout the kingdom as a veritable production of Moses the law-giver of Israel. This statement is by no means a caricature, as might be supposed, but will be found as nakedly described, as I have done, by the learned Professor in the *Expositor* of February 1892. There may be, as there has been, a dispute whether this literary labour of Hilkiah is to be deemed *a forgery*, from the point of view of his age. That, in the present day, we should consider it so if done now is admitted; but whether or not the high priest be a forger, framing among others the law and threatenings against deceit and lies (Deut. v. 20, xix. 18, xxxii. 4), there is no question that his alleged conduct towards the king was that of disloyalty and falsehood. He is represented in a word as an unprincipled deceiver; and it is from the brain and heart of such a man that the Book of Deuteronomy in its form and in much of its substance is supposed by the New Criticism to have sprung.

One wonders whether those who have imagined such a theory as to the origin of Deuteronomy, have read the whole of the chapter (2 Kings xxii.) in which the incident of the finding of the book is described? In particular, what do they say to the answer of God (ver. 16) sent to King Josiah? Did it come from God, or was it made up by the prophetess Huldah? Did she also impose on the king? If so, to what extent? Did she consult God at all, or only pretend to do so? If she did consult God, did she report truly what He answered, if He answered? For this is what she reported, that God declared He would bring on Jerusalem "*all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read.*" *All the words that had been forged*, as we now think it! Surely the morality implied in all this is as bad as was ever laid by Pascal and others at the door of the Jesuits!