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1930

736TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, MAY 12TH, 1930,

AT 4.30 P.M.

DR. JAMES W. THIRTLE, M.R.A.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the following elections :—Dr. Mary R. Fleming, Life Associate (from Associate) and Joseph Cecil Fromow as an Associate.

Dr. THIRTLE then introduced Prof. J. Garstang, D.Sc., F.S.A., to deliver his lecture on "Joshua and the Higher Critics," from a written précis with lantern slides, which he described from personal knowledge.

JOSHUA AND THE HIGHER CRITICS.

By PROFESSOR J. GARSTANG, D.SC., F.S.A.

THE conscientious inquirer to-day cannot ignore the results of Textual Criticism, to which, during the last two generations, some of the highest scholarship and learning has been devoted ; nor can he, on the imperfect evidence hitherto available, dismiss Bible narrative in general as devoid of historical foundation. Neither attitude is justified by the tendencies of modern research. The Homeric poems describing the Trojan War provide apt illustration. Criticism at one time tended to strip these of all reality, but the recovery of the Hittite records and their decipherment have established a background of Achæan activities in Asia Minor, fully accordant with the historical setting of the poems. Palestine since the War has witnessed an unparalleled activity in archæological investigation, and the results throw light in particular upon the period of Joshua and the Judges.

The historic sites and walled cities which the lecturer had the privilege of repeatedly visiting while excavation was in progress, during the seven years that he directed the British School of Archæology in Jerusalem, and the Department of Antiquities in Palestine, impressed him deeply with a sense of material reality underlying the historical narrative in the Books named. The impression, however, eluded definition, and he has devoted a number of years to a further study of the matter.

The received text of the Bible contains, as all know, numerous discrepancies, of which examples can be found in the opening chapters of the Book of Judges. Thus, the first verse makes it appear that the events subsequently narrated came to pass after the death of Joshua; but the death and burial of Joshua are described in the second chapter (verses 8, 9), as occurring after those events. Another illustration appears in the allusion to the capture of Jerusalem (i, 8), which is in disagreement with verse 21, and contradicts the statement of Joshua xv, 63. Thus:

Joshua xv, 63.—As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out (J).

Judges i, 8.—And the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it and smote it with the edge of the sword (P).

Discrepancies of this kind and other textual difficulties have led scholars to examine closely the literary and grammatical structure of the text, which is found to be a composite production, and the growth of centuries. The original nucleus of the Book is found to comprise two independent strains of tradition, which are believed to have been set down in writing during the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. and in part welded together during the seventh century B.C. The symbols used to denote these elements in the text are J, E, and JE respectively. These old documents were grouped, amplified, and explained from a national and religious standpoint, in the sixth century B.C. by the Deuteronomistic School (D), under which the Bible began to take connected form. Then ensued the Exile, during and after which the Book was further supplemented and edited from the point of view of the organized priesthood (P), in the light of more recent political developments. Thus the Old Testament did not gain its final form until about the second century B.C. Even so, no

surviving Hebrew version of the text can be attributed to an earlier date than the end of the first millennium A.D. Earlier copies exist of the Greek rendering, known from the circumstances of its translation as the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX), which was begun at Alexandria about the middle of the third century B.C., and may thus preserve the original form or meaning of various passages better than the Massoretic or standard Hebrew text.

Finding that some of the passages ascribed to the later hands evoked big archæological problems, the lecturer decided to examine separately, in the first instance, the archæology of the earliest documents: the result was so full of promise that Sir Charles Marston, on being informed, made it possible for the lecturer to return to Palestine in 1928 to test this clue upon the spot. Every identified site mentioned in the oldest sources (J, E, and JE) of the Books of Joshua and Judges was revisited, while three selected cities, Jericho, Ai, and Hazor, were examined more deeply with the spade. The impression now became positive. No radical flaw was found at all in the topography and archæology of those documents. It must not be supposed that the lecturer necessarily rejects the later elements D. and P. as unhistorical; on the contrary, each is found to enfold information derived from earlier sources; but their precise historical value and relevance is a more complex question, involving also a wide and searching archæological investigation. He simply lays them aside for the time being, and deals with those elements which may be rightly claimed as the foundation of the Bible narrative.

* * * * *

The subject-matter of the Book of Joshua may be divided broadly into two parts: (i) the attempt of the Israelites under Joshua to gain a footing in Canaan by force of arms; (ii) the settlement of the tribes. Confining attention entirely to the old sources J and E, it will be appreciated that the attempt to force an entry was not attended by permanent success, whereas the subsequent settlement was effected for the most part without the use of arms, a fact which seems to reflect a radical change in the political conditions. The Book of Judges contains, for the most part, only a series of fragmentary records. Stories of local episodes have survived, while prolonged years of rest are devoid of incident. But it is apparent that, during the long period which it covers, the union of the tribes was often in jeopardy.

Now and again the silence is relieved by an account of some national effort, like the great rally of Deborah, until under Gideon the need for the king or common leader began to find definite expression. Two factors are evidently necessary for a proper understanding of these Books—for Joshua a fixed date on which to base the history of Israel in Canaan; for the Judges an historical background, such as Egypt can most fittingly supply, seeing that the land was for centuries under Egyptian suzerainty.

All the cities mentioned in the early documents of Joshua and Judges i to v which can be identified, like Gezer, Megiddo, Bethshean, and Hazor, flourished during the Bronze Age, and occupied for the most part the great strategic positions of the land. Moreover, the names of not fewer than twenty-four cities of the Canaanites in the age of Joshua are identical with those mentioned in the annals of the Pharaohs of the XVIIIth Dynasty in particular the records of the hundred years between the conquests of Thothmes III and the decline of the Empire under Akhenaten, 1475–1375 B.C. In some cases, the accordance extends clearly to their strategical importance. Thus among the cities which the Israelites could not capture, Bethshean, Megiddo, Acco, Gezer, Jerusalem, and Gaza, are found to have been organized centres of Egyptian authority. It would seem then, at first glance, that the background to the exploits of Joshua in the land of Canaan was that which is disclosed by Egyptian records of the fifteenth century B.C.

In an effort to secure some more tangible evidence on this point, preliminary excavations were undertaken on behalf of Sir Charles Marston by the lecturer in 1928 on the three sites which Joshua is stated to have destroyed, namely, Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. Each place showed traces of destruction near the middle of the Late Bronze Age, or about 1400 B.C.; and a more complete investigation of the ruined fortifications and site of Jericho, made in the spring of this year, as before, for Sir Charles Marston, has contributed a wealth of evidence in support of this conclusion. The city of Ai and the camp enclosure of Hazor were apparently abandoned from that time, while Jericho was not rebuilt for some centuries. Moreover, researches made independently by the American School of Oriental Research, on the sites of Bethel and Debir, disclosed layers of destruction, in each case, dated also in broad figures, though with less certitude, to the end of the fifteenth century B.C.

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These conclusions are found to tally closely with the one clear indication in Biblical tradition. This is embodied in the statement that the Exodus took place 480 years before Solomon began to build his temple—that is, about 1447 B.C.—so that the date of Joshua's invasion of Canaan would fall about 1407 B.C. This tradition has generally been assigned by critics to a later source and treated with mistrust, as the round figure involved is found not to agree with the summary of details recorded in the received text of the Book of Judges ; but by omitting the details assigned by Criticism to the later hand of P, it is found that the discrepancies disappear. The record is obviously derived, then, from the old tradition which pervades both Books.

All the available archæological and literary evidence, therefore, points toward the same date in the middle of the Late Bronze Age, about 1400 B.C., as the starting-point of the history of Israel in Canaan. Upon this basis the historical details and topographical allusions in the old sources of the Book of Joshua are found, on examination, to accord with the material results of investigation : while the fragmentary picture of Israel's position under the Judges is found to fit adequately into the frame provided by Egyptian chronology, and to correspond closely in certain details with the record of Egyptian relations with the Land of Canaan. There is, then, no reason to doubt but that the traditions embodied in the old documentary sources (J and E) of both Books were founded upon fact. It is also made clear that the passages which Criticism has found to be the earliest (and labelled J.E. and JE) have, in fact, this distinction, that they are practically free from textual discrepancies and archæological anachronisms. The archæology of the later documents (D and P) is a more complex study, involving further years of active research.

In conclusion, the lecturer passed a tribute to the scientific interest and generous enthusiasm of Sir Charles Marston, which have made possible these later investigations, including not only the visitation of the sites involved in these researches, but also the excavations at Hazor, Ai, and, most recently, Jericho.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Dr. Thirtle) said : It affords me much pleasure to call for the thanks of the meeting to Professor Garstang for the lecture delivered in our hearing. We have not all found ourselves

in Jericho, the place ; but we have been privileged this afternoon to make acquaintance with the material remains of the ancient city, as well as certain others, famous in Bible story. The learned Professor has come before us as an archæological expert—indeed, as one who has achieved a remarkable success in laying bare, not only the old-time Canaanite city, but also the forbidding walls by which it was surrounded—walls in regard to which a truly marvellous narrative has come down to us in the Book of Joshua.

For many years past we have been following the progress of excavations upon the site of Jericho—excavations that have been prosecuted with special vigour, and attended with rich results since Dr. Garstang assumed direction of the work. Now we seem to have reached the final chapter in the development of inquiry along really systematic lines ; and in the result we are justified in a confidence, strong and confirmed, as to the historical character of the Old Testament Book of Joshua, the book in which we have an explicit account of the conquest of Canaan by the Children of Israel.

We are profoundly grateful for the story thus unfolded. It is a story which goes a long way to discredit Higher Critical views of the Old Testament records. In regard to that method of approach to ancient documents, we have not sat in vain at the feet of Professor A. H. Sayce, President Melvin G. Kyle, and Sir Flinders Petrie, all of whom have lectured before the Institute in regard to Israelitish history. Dr. Kyle, it will be remembered, gave to the world, a few years ago, an important book entitled “ The Deciding Voice of the Monuments in Biblical Criticisms ; ” and we of the Victoria Institute have heard Dr. Garstang with special avidity and confidence because convinced that the work of the axe and spade is more to be trusted than are the views, at once confused and conflicting, of arm-chair theorists.

Though at the outset, in generous spirit, our lecturer invoked a measure of consideration for the Higher Critics, at length he was compelled, as we have heard this afternoon, to throw them over in regard to the Book of Joshua. We have heard him say, with reference to the tradition (or history) of Joshua’s invasion of Canaan, something like this—“ By omitting the details assigned by Critics to the later hand of P. (otherwise the ‘ P. document ’), it is found that discrepancies in the text disappear. The record as we have it

is obviously derived from the old tradition which pervades both books (Joshua and Judges). In this matter, the Critics have fallen into error."

In like manner, Dr. Kyle, in the book which I have named, wrote in anticipation of the results now achieved. Here are his words: "Will it not seem to most people that the failure of the excavations to confirm the P. document, considering all the circumstances and facts, discredits the Critical partition which produced the P. document, rather than the complete narrative in Joshua from which this part of the P. document is extracted. Excavations in Palestine confirm the narrative of the conquest as it stands in the Bible."

Again and again, in the course of years, we have met with instances of confusion introduced into Oriental history by means of Western misunderstanding being, so to say, "read in"; and the Book of Joshua, equally with other writings, has suffered from just such treatment. Not in vain, then, and not too soon, has the excavator gone abroad, and we particularly welcome the work of Dr. Garstang, with results that are at once rectifying and decisive.

For one thing, the results developed are such as encourage us, all the time, to meet with suspicion the demands of a criticism conceived upon what are largely Occidental lines and impressions. For another thing, such results justify as a settled principle the exercise of reverent patience in dealing with difficulties encountered in the text of the Old Testament. If, as a fact, the ancient writings are worthy of study by intelligent men and women, then antecedently we do well, all the time, to apply ourselves with care to the text itself before devising measures for discrediting the same, and employing such epithets as "myth" and "legend" in the description of sacred Books.

Again, I thank the Professor for his address, at once instructive and lucid, and ask that the vote may be accorded with acclamation: which was done.