

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Notes and Queries.

PSALM LXXVIII. AND THE PENTATEUCH.

A WRITER in the "Notes and Queries" of your June (1895) number finds in the omission of the third, ninth and sixth of the ten plagues of Egypt by the author of Psalm lxxviii. an indication that he "may have happened to have beside him the MS. which is called J, and not the supposed E and P MSS. of the New Critical School. If, however, we carefully compare this part of the Psalm with the corresponding chapters of Exodus, there will be little room for doubt but that the Psalmist *had beside him* no MS. at all, complete or incomplete, of the Pentateuch, but that he had previously made himself conversant with it so as to carry in his head all the leading features and phraseology of the sacred text. When composing, then, this poetic appeal, probably addressed to the northern tribes either after their revolt from the house of David in Rehoboam's days,¹ or possibly at the time of some earlier outbreak of disaffection, he enumerated the provocation of their forefathers and God's merciful interpositions on their behalf, he did so, not by unrolling a book of the law and quoting passages here and there, as a writer might do in these days of multiplied and handy Bibles, but by recalling from *memory* appropriate incidents to illustrate the truths he would impress on his readers.

That he had not the text beside him is, I think, shown by the order in which he enumerates the plagues he does mention. He passes from the first to the fourth, then incidentally notes the second, and, omitting the fifth as well as the sixth, he goes on to the eighth, and, returning to the seventh and omitting the ninth, concludes with the destruction of the firstborn. This is, to say the least, a most improbable arrangement if the text of Exodus or of the hypothetical J MS. had been before him. And this improbability is greatly confirmed if we compare his language with that of the Exodus narrative. The word used by the Mosaic writer for locusts in the account of the eighth plague is ארבה; the Psalmist, however, though he uses the word, relegates it to a secondary place, and gives prominence to what was then probably a more familiar name of the insect חסיל. Again, in the first plague he substitutes the poetic נזולים for the אנפים and מקוה מים of Exodus; so, too, the destruction caused by the hail is altogether independent of the details given of it in Exodus, and, while in the latter the cattle are spoken of as מקנה and בהמה, the Psalmist uses מקנה and בעיר; the employment of רשף instead of the more detailed description of the lightning in the earlier history may be due to the poetic style of the later composition.

The supposed undesigned coincidence in favour of the use of J only by the Psalmist is, however, finally done away with when we observe that he not only omits the three plagues mentioned in the June paper, but also the fifth (the murrain on the cattle), and Exodus ix. 1-7 is assigned by the critics also to J. It is true the writer under review considers the murrain is mentioned apparently in ver. 48b, for his ver. 49 is

¹ The defeat of Ephraim mentioned in ver. 9 seems either to be one not recorded in the Bible, or else possibly their overthrow in Jephthah's days. I cannot think myself it was so recent as the one described in 2 Chron. xiii. as the illustrations of our author are all taken apparently from the early history of the nation; indeed, the children of Ephraim of ver. 9 reads as if in opposition with "their fathers" of ver. 8.

clearly inapplicable, regarding רָשָׁף perhaps as meaning pestilence, as in Deut. xxxii. 24; but the parallelism of the verses is altogether against this hypothesis, for then we should have three half-verses given to the hail, followed by one half-verse only for the murrain.

Although, therefore, it is clear that the Psalmist had not a copy of the law or of J¹ before him, his language is so permeated with Mosaic expressions that we are justified in holding that it was from the Law substantially as we know it to-day that he borrowed his illustrations. The account of the plagues is set out in ver. 43 as $\text{אֲהַרְתִּי וּמוֹפְתֵי$, the very language of Exod. vii. 3, and six times used in Deuteronomy and always of this Egyptian Deliverance. In ver. 44 the $\text{יֵאָרִיחַם יִהְיֶה לָדָם}$ is a distinct recollection of the language used in Exodus of the turning the Nile water into blood so as to render it *undrinkable*; the עַרְב of ver. 45 is nowhere used but of the plague of flies in Exodus, and in Psalm cv., which, like the present ones, borrows the word. Equally restricted is the use of צַפְרָדַיִם (frogs) in the second part of the verse. Again, the first part of ver. 51 is almost a literal quotation from Exod. xii. 29. Then the expression that the waters *covered* the Egyptians is clearly borrowed from the language of Exod. xiv. 28.

Not to pursue these illustrations further, we think we have established on such evidence as sensible men would act on in daily life that the Book of the Law, substantially as we have it to-day, was as familiar to a pious Israelite living in the days of Rehoboam, or possibly as early as those of Absalom's and Sheba's revolt, that is anterior to the supposed composition of J, E P, and D, as the Authorized Version is to Englishmen now, and that he knew its authority was so recognised by his fellow-countrymen that he feels he may draw from its pages what they will acquiesce in as being an account of God's dealings with their ancestors. Mr. Chancellor Lias, in his interesting and weighty essay in "Lex Mosaica," at page 238, draws a valuable inference as to Samuel's environment from his resemblance to the Covenanters of the seventeenth century, and by similar reasonings we may safely infer that in the days when our Psalm was written the Law of Moses held in Palestine the same unquestioned pre-eminence that the Bible now holds in Christian countries. It is not to be wondered at the critics feel how essential to their theories it is to push the Psalms down to a very late date indeed in the history of the Israelitish people. Fortunately for the cause of Truth, most of the Psalms harmonize as little with this "New Light" as the Pentateuch itself does.

Much critical learning would be saved and many brilliant discoveries of facts which never existed would be spared us if critics could only project themselves back from this book-abounding age into one in which books and records were rare and only to be found at certain centres often far removed from one another.

J. D. TREMLETT.

DALETHORPE.

¹ That the knowledge of the Psalmist was not limited to the J portions of the Law may easily be shown from earlier parts of the Psalm. When describing the passage of the Red Sea, he dwells on the division of the water (בִּקְעָה יָם) and the waters standing בְּמִוֹךְ נָר , thus referring to Exod. xiv. 16 assigned to P, and to Exod. xv. 8 assigned to E. Then the giving water from the rock refers to Exod. xvii. 6 assigned to E, and to Num. xx. 8-11, given by the critics to JE; the wind bringing fowls for the people to eat rests on Num. xi. 31, which is also assigned to JE.