

**“TURN  
and  
BECOME  
like  
CHILDREN”**

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**Refuting the Presumed Contradictions  
of *The Jerusalem Bible*  
Old Testament Commentary**

**James H. Kurt**

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*The author has sought counsel from a Catholic Scripture scholar to avoid straying from the teaching of the Church.*

**for**  
**St. Thérèse**

**“As Scripture says, ‘I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise  
and bring to nothing all the learning of the learned.’”**

1Cor. 1:19

**“My son, says the Lord, listen to my words, the most  
delightful of all words, surpassing all the knowledge of the  
philosophers and wise men of this world. *My words are spirit and  
life* and cannot be comprehended by human senses alone.**

**“They are not to be interpreted according to the vain  
pleasure of the listener, but they must be listened to in silence  
and received with all humility and great affection.”**

Imitation of Christ: Book 3, Ch. 3  
(Office of Readings, Mon. of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Week)

**“Faith in Christ is the foundation of the whole Bible,  
a lamp and a key to its understanding.”**

Saint Bonaventure  
(Office of Readings, Mon. of the 5<sup>th</sup> Week, Ord. Time)

**“Receive the Word of God, not as the word of men,  
but, as it truly is, the Word of God.”**

1Thes. 2:13

## APOLOGIA

I am not a scholar. This is my first apology. Though it is not entirely true, on two counts: I am not a religious scholar – I have no doctorate or any significant religious accreditation – but I do have an MA in another field and have been teaching on the college level for twenty years or more, so school itself is not unfamiliar to me. And though I have no university training in Scripture, I have done extensive reading on my own.

Perhaps my background can best be understood in light of my undergraduate studies: I am an alumnus of New College (of the University of South Florida), a particularly rigorous school and one which emphasized independent study. I was trained to work without supervision and have followed this practice for the thirty-seven years since my graduation, particularly with regard to the Scriptures.

I have read the Bible cover to cover ten times, seven different versions with commentaries, including the ten-volume *Navarre* (wherein I found O.T. commentary as troubling as in *The Jerusalem Bible*). For me, there has been no more instructive practice than this cover-to-cover reading. I recall clearly how the first time I did so the Old Testament bled into the New and the Bible became one whole, integral work – one Word, really. I no longer had a fragmentary understanding of it, like possessing only a portion of the pieces of some intriguing puzzle. Unfortunately, this broken vision of Sacred Scripture seems predominant, most notably amongst scholars.

In addition, I have read the readings for Catholic Mass three times daily for at least twenty-three years, along the way publishing a book (*Our Daily Bread*) with a page of writing for every single Mass of the liturgical calendar (over 700). I have since published two other books on Scripture, one surveying the Old Testament and another the Gospels. I have long followed the Bible's command to "meditate on the Word of God day and night," a most indispensable practice.

I would say I have learned best how to read Sacred Scripture from the Fathers of the Church, the Saints, etc., especially as their writings appear in the Office of Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours, which I have prayed daily for nearly twenty-five years. I have also taken great edification hearing scholars like Dr. Scott Hahn and Fr. Mitch Pacwa elucidate the Word of God. So when I chastise biblical scholarship, I do not refer to all scholarship (I have, in fact, had a Scripture scholar review this book)... only what seems an unfaithful kind, which, unfortunately, does seem to prevail.

The two principle tools I employ in my own approach are 1) trust in the Word of God and 2) common sense. As for the first, I believe at the very least the legal maxim of “innocent till proven guilty” should be applied – this requirement would seem appropriate even for nonbelievers approaching the Bible; but for those purporting to be believers, and in particular those representing the Church, faith in the inspired Word should also be a prerequisite. They ought to realize that one cannot begin to comprehend Scripture without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, “describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms” (1Cor.2:13), as it were.

But lest I be written off as a “fundamentalist”, it is the second tool upon which I have primarily relied to explicate the difficulties with this commentary. I have read what it says and considered it with common sense and found it wanting, not only in a few instances here and there, but throughout in hundreds of cases. I have found a preponderance of “reasonable doubt” and done my best to state it clearly, in chapter and verse.

My second apology regards tone. I do not bear animus toward any particular scholar (or at least I hope not, lest I find my own soul in mortal danger), but there is a certain call to repentance wrought into this work, which I pray has love at its heart. I have specifically tried to avoid personal criticism by referring throughout to “the commentary” and not “the commentator.” This was a very conscious decision. It is also a very appropriate one, since it is the commentary itself with which I am concerned, a commentary that

has been produced by multiple hands and which reflects general problems.

But I do apologize for the times I go too far. Perhaps I could better understand scholars' publishing and professional pressures, the increased call for specialization, and the incredible proliferation of secondary literature; and I do not wish to justify those times I fail to control my tongue... but in my defense, is it wrong that "zeal for the Father's House consumes me"? Is there no place for righteous anger when the divine Word is not respected and souls are put in jeopardy by those most entrusted with their care? It is no excuse for disrespect but does indicate the need for severity.

Let me frame the seriousness of the matter in this way: as I write this, the Church is the subject of a global sexual abuse scandal. Virtually everyone has come to realize the absolute horror of priests' involvement in the abuse of children, seminarians, and religious, as well as its cover-up by bishops. To characterize the gravity of the situation, my own bishop has employed the biblical quote: "It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone put around his neck than that he should lead astray a single one of these little ones" (Lk. 17:2). And it is true. This is an abominable sin.

But the sin extends beyond the flesh to the faith of those abused who can no longer trust in the ones to whom they looked for truth. And this diminishing of faith and trust in God and His Church extends beyond those sexually abused. In his letter, "The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse," Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI notes: "The phrase 'the little ones' in the language of Jesus means the common believers who can be confounded in their faith by the intellectual arrogance of those who think they are clever."

How often I have witnessed the faith of the common believer confounded by the cleverness of the clever who undermine the veracity of the inspired Word of God with theories founded on a disturbing lack of faith and reason! (Were I not seeking to avoid becoming "passion's slave" I would say they seem to originate in the pits of hell itself.) Since they have been presented as accepted

teaching in seminaries and unsuspecting priests echo them along, these vain academic constructs filter down to the man in the pew who hears, among many things, that “the Word of the Lord” is not the Word of the Lord but the imaginings of prophets, some of whom did not exist at all and all of whom had their own motivations (rather than the inspiration of God). Is it any wonder we have so many “nones” taking refuge outside the Church when the very Bible itself is offered forth as a collection of contradictions lacking integrity?

The state of Scripture commentary has torn at my heart for many years and driven me to take on this work of producing a record of how far biblical scholarship has gone astray (in hopes it shall not occur again) when it is the last thing I would have chosen to do. I have begged the Lord to take it from me any number of times. I have repeatedly expressed these prayers in parenthesis throughout this writing, though most I have deleted from the text.

I am told, and I know, that I will be ridiculed for proposing the necessity of reading the Word of God prayerfully, with the faith of a child, in order to interpret it well. And I realize that however clear the logic I have presented in disputing the hundreds of instances of illogic found in this commentary, still it will very likely be completely ignored by the powers that be in the exegetical world. I have in fact already experienced such outright rejection with regard to this book, for the only censor into whose hands I could get the manuscript (after six months of trying several avenues) promptly dismissed it for confirming Moses as author of the Pentateuch. To such a state have we come; such fundamentalism we must fight.

But perhaps I am in good company, for in the document quoted above the pope emeritus notes that, at around the time of the publication of the JB commentary (1966), “Students caught reading [his] books were considered unsuitable for the priesthood. [They] were hidden away, like bad literature, and only read under the desk.”

We appear to have made progress since then, so there is hope someone will give it a fair hearing. I place all this in the Lord’s hands.

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## **PREFACE**

The prophet Joel tells us (3:1-2) that in the end times the LORD will pour out His Spirit on all mankind: the old shall dream dreams and the young see visions, and even the maidservants, those in the lowest places, will be filled with the Spirit of God and declare His glory. The prayer of Moses will indeed be fulfilled – all shall be prophets.

These are the days in which we live, days of a new Pentecost with sundry movements, mostly lay, abounding in the Church. The universal call to holiness articulated by Vatican II is being answered, played out in our midst.

And at pilgrimage sites like Lourdes and Fatima and Guadalupe, Our Lady is appearing, and it is to children and those like children she consistently comes, for the LORD is revealed only to the eyes of children. The wise of the world cannot see Him.

And was not Stephen like a child as he stood accused before the Sanhedrin with the “face of an angel” (Acts 6:15), a face like the One they had so recently condemned? But he did not shrink before the religious leaders of his day. He spoke with a wisdom even they could not gainsay, for it was he who was indeed like a child; it was he who had the Holy Spirit, whom they resisted at every turn.

And this child spoke to them of their sin, about which they did not wish to hear. And this child they indeed killed, even as he was given vision of the Lord on high.

One’s standing in the Church or in the world is not what opens one’s eyes to the presence of God – only the innocence found in the faith of a child can do this. And so, though with no formal religious education, no letters behind my name to provide prestige, in this faith I trust as I call to task those in places of authority in the Church and say: “You who had the Law brought to you by angels are the very ones who have not kept it” (7:53), chastising the prevailing biblical scholarship as expressed in this commentary.

May the Holy Spirit be upon me.

## INTRODUCTION

One cannot read a single verse of Scripture without utter trust in the Holy Spirit; we must come to the Word of God with the heart of a child and sit at the feet of the LORD listening to Him speak. Else our eyes will inevitably be blind. At this idea, the unbeliever will scoff; of this truth, the believer has no doubt.

Make no mistake, as one reads the Bible, one will certainly encounter passages that seem contradictory or which raise questions in one's mind. It is especially at these times that we must trust, bringing our questions to the LORD in prayer, and *read the text carefully*. He will bring light out of darkness.

How many times I have had to do this, I cannot count; and as many times as I read doubt-filled commentaries, more questions are raised.... Yet *every single time* the LORD has provided answer to these questions, answers that are most often so simple and obvious one wonders how the questions arose at all.

But those who give in easily to the doubts (or court them), who expect not to find questions and so are unable or unwilling to seek answers – essentially, those who do not recognize their own shortcomings as human beings subject to sin and so do not attribute the cause of their confusion to themselves but presume it must be the LORD and His Word that are mistaken – these, unfortunately, remain in darkness. And many spread that darkness abroad.

Is this not the principal problem: scholars' default response is that the Word of God is flawed and not that they and their theories are flawed? Do they not put faith in their own interpretations rather than in the LORD; and are these not unquestioningly accepted by those who follow them, those who often do not read the Word of God but trust only in the scholars' word? Thus, is the human word not treated as if it were divine even as the divine Word of Holy Scripture is treated as a human construct?

### *Turn and Become like Children*

In *Introduction to Christianity* Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) speaks well of how history and technology have overtaken, consumed, the field of learning and essentially turned it upside down, attempting to *create* reality, to make a world in their own image rather than discern the one before them. But as the future pope so clearly stated: meaning is something that must be *received*, not made. And if reality must be received, how much more must the Word of God be received, how much more must it be *listened to* in faith to be understood. But this is a foreign concept to the scholars of whom I speak.

The more fundamental problem, as already mentioned, is that people, even scholars, do not actually *read* the Bible, much less meditate on it and let it rule their lives. How does this comport with proper study? How can one understand a book, any book, if he does not read the book but puts his trust in others who likewise do not read? What reading they do is perfunctory and only through the lens of some academic theory, and is therefore colored by the doubt these theories inevitably sow. Thus they indeed have eyes but see not, ears but hear not.

Since faith brings light, lacking faith (and proper study), they lack even the common sense to be able to see what is on the page before them. Looking only at the surface of things, they see nothing, not even the surface of things.

## **Joseph Sold into Slavery**

I could give countless examples from the commentary in *The Jerusalem Bible* Old Testament (not to mention sundry other commentaries) – and unfortunately I shall before this writing ends – but perhaps one having to do with Jacob’s sons will suffice for now, at least to give some sense of the senselessness of which I speak.

In Genesis 37, the commentary – which espouses the generally accepted idea that various sources have been brought together – finds proof for its theoretical multiple authors by confusing

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references to the Ishmaelites and the Midianites. It says that in one place Joseph is sold to the Ishmaelites by his brothers, while in another place it is the Midianites who extricate him from the well, into which his brothers have thrown him, and take him to Egypt themselves. Unfortunately, it cannot see two obvious things: first, that the Ishmaelites and the Midianites are the same people; second, that “they” in v. 28 (“[T]hey drew Joseph up out of the well. They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites.”) refers in both cases to the *brothers* (apart from Reuben), in accomplishment of Judah’s plan. The Ishmaelites cannot sell Joseph to themselves, can they?

The main cause of its confusion seems to be an inability to reconcile Reuben’s plan and Judah’s plan – thus the imposition of two traditions, two sources. The commentary may have gotten confused by the text stating that when “Reuben went back to the well there was no sign of Joseph” (29).

Here, too, careful reading is needed, but lacking. The whole picture must be seen; it is very simple and clear. Reuben has separated himself from his brothers to circle around and accomplish his plan of rescuing Joseph from the pit without their knowing (“to restore him to his father” (22)). In fact, the text next states he “went back to his brothers” (30), thus confirming his separation from them. And while he was gone, his brothers sold Joseph off at Judah’s suggestion – Judah also trying to spare Joseph’s life. (I note that in v. 30 Reuben says, “What am I going to do?” “I,” not “we,” so he is clearly alone.)

This might seem a relatively minor error on the part of the commentary, but such errors are wrought throughout its course; and it is mistaken ideas like this that it offers as “substantiation” for its theory of a contradictory text derived from multiple sources that so undermines the integrity of the Word of God.

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## **Benjamin to Egypt**

Another place diligent study is needed but sorely lacking surrounds the brothers' return to Canaan after their first encounter with Joseph in Egypt, and his insistence they bring Benjamin back with them (Ch. 42-43).

Upon being told of this demand, Jacob absolutely refuses, fearing the loss of his youngest son (and only other son of Rachel, his beloved). At this point Reuben vows the life of his two sons if he doesn't bring Benjamin home safely. But Jacob refuses to listen.

Then, "when they had finished eating the grain they had brought from Egypt" (43:2) – a period that must have been weeks, if not months (Judah, in fact, says they have "wasted so much time" in v. 10), and as a hungry Jacob tells his sons to return to Egypt for more food – at this later point, as Jacob again hesitates to send Benjamin... Judah vows to take all blame upon himself if Benjamin does not come back safely. And Jacob relents.

This is all quite straightforward, but somehow the commentary sees the fact that both brothers make vows as evidence of the different "traditions" it cannot help but promote... as if one source could not relate both vows but a separate one was necessary for each. There is no reason to see this as anything other than the one continuous, integral account it is. We simply have another of the multitude of instances in which the commentary creates contradiction to substantiate its unfounded theory.

## **David and Saul...**

Let me note one other example, since I have just encountered it, and since it clearly illustrates the process of discovery that occurs in a humble reading of the Word of God, facing with faith and careful study whatever doubts may arise.

As mentioned, each time I come upon this or another commentary presenting what at first seems a logical question

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regarding the integrity of the Word, I am confronted with doubt – could this be true? But each time I face that doubt and investigate it. And though this has happened hundreds of times, each time the doubt must again be objectively confronted (as wearying as this can be). And, again, *every time* the Word of God has proven itself. Every time. But I would never have repeatedly gotten to the truth without faith in God (that He knows better than we do), as well as common sense.

In 1 Samuel, the commentary surrounding David’s meeting Saul and Saul’s calling him to serve him as a musician to soothe his savage breast is, as usual, focused on the idea that there are varying accounts – again based on supposed contradictions in the text.

One question revolves around David coming to the battle line from his father’s house in Bethlehem after the text had previously said David had entered Saul’s service. Despite the fact that the text explains (in 17:15) that “David alternated between serving Saul and looking after his father’s sheep at Bethlehem,” the commentary insists on calling this a contradiction, conveniently choosing to conclude that the above verse is a later addition intended to explain contradictions away. And this despite the verse’s explicit confirmation in 18:2 (“Saul kept him by him from that day forward and would not let him go back to his father’s house”), which is inexplicably overlooked. Do you see how the default mode is to doubt God’s Word, and where that leads?

But I would like to focus on the commentary regarding Saul’s question when David kills Goliath. He asks a couple of times whose son David is (17:55 & 58). The commentary assumes (in its inclination toward division) this means David is “unknown to Saul,” and so finds further evidence of contradiction and support for its multiple authors theory.

When I considered the passage previously, I realized there could be a couple of logical explanations: Saul could have forgotten who David is – he’s a busy king with a lot on his mind and David is just a servant boy. I also thought it possible that Saul asks out of a kind of

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disbelief – how could someone that brave be the son of Jesse from poor old Bethlehem?

These are both reasonable explanations and enough to counter the division assumed by the commentary. But considering the matter further (please see how the LORD works in those who meditate on His Word), it dawned on me: David has already been anointed by Samuel! Saul could well have gotten wind that an anointing has taken place (which may well be the reason the evil spirit comes upon him, necessitating David's melodious harp). He may even have heard that it was one of Jesse's sons... and he may begin here to realize as he sees David running to meet Goliath (and later with the giant's head in his hand) that the end of his reign – which Samuel has already prophesied – stands before him. And so it is out of an abiding fear he inquires.

It is not long after (when they return from defeating the Philistines) that Saul, upon hearing the women praise David above himself, first flings his spear at David, attempting to pin him to the wall. By this time he clearly knows who David is. He then explicitly tells his son Jonathon he will not assume the throne as long as David lives. So it is in the scene with the Philistine giant that Saul's eyes begin to open to the fact he dreads: David will be king.

The process of discerning I went through shows how answers to doubts that are easily raised, resolution of apparent contradictions, is not such a pat exercise but can take time and attention (as well as faith and prayer), which any commentator should be willing to give... or do a disservice to the Word of God, remaining himself in ignorance and leading others astray.

### **“Ill-Assorted”?**

As I read this section further, the commentary becomes even more unbalanced in its assumptions; and I begin to see there must be

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more behind this than ignorance – one detects the pride of Satan at work. Throwing all caution to the wind (of relativism), the commentary speaks (in Ch. 18) not only of additions and glosses and contradictions, but goes so far as to criticize the text for verses that are “overloaded” and “unnecessary” and “ill-assorted”... though all is quite clearly, and necessarily, organized. The blind pride is remarkable (if not frightening).

In the chapter, Saul – realizing that YHWH is with David and his kingdom is therefore lost – after failing to spear David to the wall, tries to kill him by the sword of the Philistines, putting him at the head of the troops in battle. But David is continually victorious and only grows in popularity and esteem. Saul then hopes David will die attempting to gain 100 Philistine foreskins as dowry for his daughter Michal. But this plan also fails miserably. He then (in Ch. 19) openly sets out to kill him. Again, this is all quite clear and well composed, meriting none of the commentary’s harsh criticism.

Another example of the commentary’s blindness to the text is its stating that Ch. 19 does not square with Ch. 20 (and so, of course, there must be multiple authors) because in Ch. 20 Jonathon is unaware of Saul’s pursuance of David (to kill him), whereas in 19 it is clear he knows of his father’s murderous intent.

But the commentary completely overlooks the fact that when confronted by Jonathon, *Saul takes an oath not to kill David* (see 19:6), and they are reconciled. This is what Jonathon knows. That Saul later breaks that oath and attempts again to spear David, and then seeks to kill him in his bed (which for some reason the commentary says occurs on David’s wedding night, though it has been some time since his marriage to Michal: he is simply in bed with his wife) – this is *not* known to Jonathon, for Saul has indeed hidden it from him. Again, it is a remarkably clear and simple thing but the commentary in its preoccupation with delineating varying accounts completely misses these basic facts set forth in the text.

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## **Tragedy**

It is a heavy cross to bear, having to read such troubling commentary, especially in a Bible of eminent prestige that has been so influential in the Church and among its priests and scholars. And it is a heavier cross having to point out these obvious defects, particularly when there seems no end to them. The thought of it is overwhelming.

But the tragedy of the commentary's influence is certainly the greatest weight, the most troubling factor. How can this be? How can it have taken such a foothold and gained such traction, receiving ready acceptance by the teachers of the faith? And can anyone wonder why the Church has been in such a state, why souls have been leaving in droves, looking at the mindset of its scholars?

I think it must be recognized that it can only be sin that has been Satan's way in; it must have been the wide acceptance of grave sin by a majority of the Church's influential members at the time of this commentary's publication that provided it the standing it has enjoyed. What else could be responsible? And has it not served to increase that sin among us? When we are sinful, we will accept all sorts of heresy, and even seek them in order to justify our sin.

Is the tragedy coming to an end? I have read that this Documentary Theory of multiple accounts based on a multitude of presumed contradictions is losing its hold on the souls of the leaders of the Church. It may be so. I pray it is. But still I hear otherwise orthodox, faithful priests (and others) express unquestioned acceptance of its voice.

Perhaps I must take upon myself the weight of pointing out the defects in this commentary as a record of the wayward path of Bible scholarship in our time. I know I would prefer not to do so, but there does not seem to be a choice, unless I wish to go against the will of God.

And so, on I must go.

Do I take one by one every false contradiction and every unfortunate division created thereby? Or do I glean the commentary, highlighting some of its main problems? Let me begin and see where the LORD leads.

# 1. THE PENTATEUCH

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH

The problems with the commentary show themselves very early on. In the first two pages of this initial Introduction (to the first five books), it speaks of Genesis consisting of “two unequal parts” (p. 5) disparages Jacob’s “guile,” and states that Leviticus “breaks the thread of the narrative” (6).

### “Unequal” Parts

Why must Genesis be separated into two parts, and why are the parts termed *unequal*? Abraham (whose entrance signals the supposed break) is certainly an important figure, but so is Noah, so is Adam – why is the line broken in this arbitrary fashion?

### Jacob’s Guile

The commentary also repeatedly calls Jacob a “crafty” man. It is true that his name and his supplanting hold of his brother’s heel (in the womb) do witness to a certain wiliness, which he has in fact demonstrated in dealings with his brother and on other occasions... but it should also be recognized that it is Rebekah who is his guide

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before his blind father and that it is she who hears and follows the voice of the LORD, not Isaac, whose concern (as with Esau) is for his belly. Jacob is the LORD's chosen son. (One should also remember the LORD will eventually change Jacob's name to Israel and that Jesus calls Nathanael a "true Israelite" specifically because he is "incapable of deceit" (Jn.1:47).)

## **Leviticus' "Break"**

And though Leviticus is concerned with laws, this does not mean the narrative "breaks." This unfortunate choice of words belies right away a certain lack of respect for and understanding of Sacred Scripture.

## **Moses' Authorship**

As the Introduction to the Pentateuch continues, it focuses on its principle justification for undermining how it was written: the Documentary Theory – that multiple authors of various documents are responsible for its composition. Though it admits from the first that millennia of historical understanding, not to mention the Bible itself, credit Moses with composition of the Pentateuch – and that neither Jesus nor His apostles ever question this – still the commentary does not hesitate to do so, and on the vaguest of considerations brazenly states that it is now "impossible to ascribe the whole work to a single author" (p. 7). So much for Jesus, the Fathers of the Church, Jewish tradition, and the Bible itself. We now know better.

And why? Because it finds "a variety of style, lack of sequence, and repetitions in narrative," as if a single author could never vary his style, repeat himself, or differ with the commentary's view of what should be the order of telling.

## **Ancient Writings**

The Introduction admits it cannot gain any real measure of precision for this Documentary Theory, and recants on one of the theory's foundational components – that the biblical writings are not very ancient. But even as it is now unable to deny its ancient origins, even as it begins to witness the dissolution of its theory, it doubles down on it, again, on the shakiest ground.

## **“Discrepancies”**

It insists that “discrepancies” in the Pentateuch “abound” and that they “strike the reader” immediately in Genesis (p. 8). One wonders what reader it refers to, for in ten readings of the Bible cover to cover and any number of individual readings of Genesis, this reader has found none. One who reads carefully and trusts in the Holy Spirit – the preeminent Author of Scripture – will find the needed wisdom to resolve any seeming contradiction.

## **Two Creation Narratives**

The Introduction gives three examples of these “discrepancies.” First it says there are “two narratives of Creation,” presumably meaning that Genesis 1 and 2 are incompatible. But these are not contradictory accounts, nor do they address the same subject matter. Genesis 1 gives a comprehensive overview of all Creation (in seven days); Genesis 2 focuses specifically on the creation of man (and woman) in the Garden of Eden. It makes perfect sense to approach the narrative in such a natural order – a general overview followed by a closer look at the most important detail.

Perhaps the commentary suffers from some common misconceptions or presumed contradictions, like questioning how light can be created on the first day and the sun on the fourth... as if they are the same light, as if the Light in which the LORD is robed is

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the light of the sun. Do those asking such questions not believe that in the New Jerusalem there will be no light from sun or lamp? Do they think therefore that Heaven will be in utter darkness? (Or that the light the Big Bang Theory discovers at the beginning of time is sunlight?) I don't know.

And as for those who ask how Genesis 1 could state that man is created after the animals though it seems in Genesis 2 he is created before them, they should at least ask if woman is not an essential part of man – is man not incomplete before woman is created? For Genesis 1 says, “male and female He created them,” and in Genesis 2 woman is clearly the final creation. But there seems a preference for straining out gnats and swallowing camels.

## **Two Genealogies**

The next “discrepancy” the Introduction offers forth is completely mystifying. It states that there are “two genealogies of Cain-Kenan” and cites the passages. I thought at first that perhaps this one might be based on the confusion of names or the fact that biblical men often have multiple names... but it has not even that cover. Unbelievably, it refers to two *completely different people*, two *completely different genealogies*, one for Cain and the other for Seth – whose grandson was Kenan – as if they are the same. (I'm not making this up.) These are, for those unfamiliar with the Bible, two different sons of Adam, with two different genealogies.

It is difficult to understand how the commentary has made such a blatant mistake (and highlighted it in the Intro). One can only assume it has gotten lost in some similarity of names and this has blinded it to basic facts. And on scholarship such as this rests the overthrow of Jesus and the Fathers and history.... Who can fathom it?

## **Two Flood Accounts**

The last in this series of “discrepancies” upon which this Documentary Theory rests is that there are two accounts of the Flood. Despite the fact that in the very next line the Introduction states (with regret) that the idea of the Pentateuch being “interwoven” by scissoring and reshuffling accounts must be “abandoned,” in the commentary on the Flood (Ch. 6-8) it does a remarkable job of scissoring up the text into the tiniest of pieces – even cutting verses in half and declaring one verse in the midst of many from a different author.

And what is the reason for this scissoring? On what grounds does it cut up the text? Really, no grounds. It restates the general idea that it finds two voices – one “vivid and picturesque,” the other “prosaic” (Ch. 6) – and proceeds to invent contradictions that do not exist. There is only one voice and it is steady throughout, often quoting the LORD God Himself, and His voice does not vary between the two supposed accounts.

The commentary also cannot seem to resolve that it could both rain and that waters could rise up from the earth. It must be one or the other... and so there must be two authors. To take one characteristic example: the commentary divides verses 7:11 and 7:12 on this basis. Verse 11 states that “all the springs of the great deep broke through, and the sluices of heaven opened”; Verse 12: “It rained on the earth for forty days and forty nights.” First the commentary seems unaware that saying “the sluices of heaven opened” is another way of saying “it rained,” and so the two verses say the same thing (the second confirming and detailing the first). Then, *most* remarkably, it attributes verse 11 to the author who is supposed to be more “prosaic” and verse 12 to the one who is more “vivid and picturesque”! So it is more prosaic to speak of “sluices of heaven” opening and more picturesque to say, “It rained.” Again, on observations such as this the whole theory rests.

## **Two Names for God**

The commentary divides two of its four imagined accounts by the usage of different names for God, Yahweh and Elohim – as if a single author must hold to only one name! (Does not the name of the greatest prophet, Elijah, itself witness to the unity of these names? God is God!) And it calls one account “lively and vivid in style” and the other more “measured.” Setting aside the distinctly subjective nature of such assignments, why the commentary concludes an author is unable to write vividly in one place and pragmatically in another is a mystery – except that it is so set on its arbitrary academic exercise that it never stops to consider the obvious.

## **Legislative Verses**

Then it creates an additional author (“Priestly”) for the legislative verses, and proceeds to remark how the other “two authors” don’t address this subject matter. So, it separates these passages out, assigning them a different author, then concludes that the other two “have very few legislative texts” and so there must be a separate author! Such self-justification is truly remarkable, but what is more remarkable is that the commentary cannot see it.

## **Simple Faith**

Perhaps most revealing of the problem is its statement that “the first eleven chapters of Genesis must be considered separately” because they speak “in a simple, pictorial style suited to the mentality of unsophisticated people” (p. 9). It is here I would like to state my central thesis clearly (though its style be disparaged as “pictorial”): We must turn and become like children to begin to understand the Word of God. The blindness we suffer otherwise is

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tragically evident in the above quote and in the Documentary Theory in general.

The commentary speaks condescendingly of the ignorance of simple faith, implying that the mind of modern man knows so much more than the ancients and it could say everything better. It cannot. The beginning of time and Creation could not be rendered any more clearly than in Genesis (or it would have been); and if we do not listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit therein we will remain lost in a vain pride that exalts itself above God.

*We must be as children.* We must be humble and faithful, trusting in the LORD and in His Word, or His presence will not be revealed to our eyes, however much we theorize.

## **No Separation**

There is no difference, no separation, between the narrative addressing Abraham and that addressing Noah or Adam or anything else. The commentary does not believe the Flood (or what came before it) actually occurred, and for this reason it separates it from what it gives grudging acceptance of historicity. Because it has no faith in the inspired Word of God (or respect for it), it “discerns” contradictions and invents theories to “prove” its doubt-filled views.

## **On Doubt**

A word should be said about the role of doubt in the life of faith. Some say that doubt serves to foster faith. If this is so, it is because the LORD is able to overcome all darkness, and the more we realize this, the stronger our faith becomes. But it is the devil himself who is the sower of doubt. And however futile it may be in the end, and whatever good may result (as with the Cross and the kiss of Judas), it is *still the devil's work* to sow doubt in the hearts of God's little ones (which is each of us).

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“Obstacles are sure to come, but alas for the one who provides them! It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone put around his neck than that he should lead astray a single one of these little ones” (Lk.17:1).

## **Suspicious Attitude**

Finally, though the Introduction concedes that “the old suspicious attitude towards these narratives has had to be abandoned under pressure from the data recently provided by the historians and archaeologists of the Near East” (p. 10), it continues to foster this “suspicious attitude” by persistently dividing the Word in an arbitrary and unfounded fashion. It remains blind because, as indicated in the quote, it relies solely on historians for its guidance and not at all on faith in the LORD, which would reveal to its eyes much more quickly and certainly the veracity of the Bible.

It realizes that “unless we concede that these events really happened and that Moses is truly a figure of history, the subsequent history of Israel, its loyalty to Yahwism and its attachment to the Law will all defy explanation”; but it has no qualms about undermining Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, which, as we have said, has been held throughout Jewish history... and by Jesus, His apostles, and the Fathers of the Church. Nor does it hesitate to negate out of hand any historical reading of the events and figures that precede Abraham, upon which the Word of God and the truth of Creation rest.

It is only the faith of a child that will save us from such tragic blindness.

# GENESIS

## In the Beginning

From the very beginning of the Bible proper, the commentary sets up its arbitrary categorization of “sources,” of different authors, focusing particularly on what it terms the “Priestly” and the “Yahwistic” sources – one being more “theological,” the other more “concrete”... again assuming a single author cannot speak theologically at one time and concretely at another (or both simultaneously), given that there is even any such distinction at all. The subjectivity of the separation is certainly suspect. But from here on it does all it can to fit the text into these preconceived notions, even if it has to contradict itself (as we have seen in the Introduction to the Pentateuch re the rain in the Flood account).

## “Primitive Science”

But first I would like to address more particularly its idea, common in many commentaries, that in Genesis, especially Gn. 1, “the text makes use of the primitive science of its day.” There are several problems with this view of Holy Scripture.

For one, it seems to place the Word of God in a subservient position to science (especially modern science), as if science is the measure of all things and the Word of God, at least in Genesis, cannot be expected to compete with its advanced intelligence. This is, of course, the exact opposite view anyone of faith would hold, for the mind of man (science) can never measure up to the Word of God (prophecy). As I have noted elsewhere, the problem is not that the ancients had a limited sense of science, but that modern man has *no* sense of prophecy. He cannot even begin to understand what it means to call Scripture the Word of God because he sees all (and in

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particular these words) as the product of the mind of man, and judges them accordingly. Lacking any real belief in God or in His inspired Word, he exalts his very limited mind over the infinite Mind of the LORD.

Science is not the measure of things; it does not speak with the greatest authority (as is widely believed in our age) – God does. And the Bible, including (and perhaps *especially*) Genesis, is God’s Word. And so the prophecy of Genesis far outshines anything science might discover. Its authority is ultimate, and science is subservient to it as man is subservient to the LORD... or should be, if all were in proper order.

### **“Its Day”**

The other questionable part of the above quote is “its day,” as if the Word of God can be limited by a particular epoch. And of course it is obvious to modern man that our epoch (where in the last century more blood was shed than all others combined) far surpasses any of the past in intelligence. We know better than anyone who has come before – this goes without saying. But what the modern mind in its extraordinarily limited nature (limited by its being human and by being modern) is that God and His Word *transcend* time: He holds all time in His Hand.

### **Spoken Perfectly**

The LORD could not say any better now than He did then what occurred at the beginning of Creation; if He could, He would. He could easily speak to a prophet today (or any day), and that prophet could declare His words to us... but there is no need: He has spoken perfectly in the way we can best understand what is beyond our minds to comprehend. We must but accept that Word as His children.

But this we cannot do. Against this idea our hearts are hardened, our minds are blinded (by pride), and so we grope in the dark for “better” answers, which will never come.

## **Points of Agreement**

The commentary states that we should not seek “points of agreement between this schematic presentation [Gn. 1] and the data of modern science.” (Notice the use of the word “schematic” and its implication that God’s Word is contrived, whereas science has the truth.) But any true science will harmonize well with the LORD’s authoritative account of His work, for it will bow to the Hand that made it and thus be enlightened to understand what is true.

For instance, the Big Bang Theory travels back to the beginning of time and there finds a wall of light it cannot pass, beyond which it cannot reach. And what does the Bible tell us? That in the beginning there was nothing but darkness, emptiness, a “formless void” beyond the knowledge of man; and then, “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

Science should test its theories against the Word of the LORD if it is concerned with the truth of things; it should not be vice-versa as is commonly thought today, and evident in Bible commentary as well. (It should also be noted that any interpretation of Scripture should likewise be true, and so ought to be subject to the Church.)

Modern man must rediscover the profound truth of the prophecy of the Word of God and reverence it – he must, in a word, be humble as a child or remain forever lost.

## **Civilization and Worship**

Continuing with some specific problems with the commentary in Genesis: it states with regard to the story of Cain and Abel (Ch. 4) that it “presupposes a developed civilization” and “an established form of worship,” thus calling into question the historical validity of

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the narrative. But one must question the basis of such assumption. Could there be no sheep for Abel to tend? And could they not be offered to God? Why should there not be sheep from the beginning, and why should man from the beginning not be inclined to tend them or to offer them to the LORD? It takes but a movement of the heart to make a sacrifice. Has man not been created with the love of God in his soul? Here we have the beginning of what shall eventually develop into Temple worship, after being advanced by Noah's sacrifice upon leaving the Ark and other sacrifices along the way.

### **“Time Passed”**

The commentary also states that the text presupposes the existence of men that might kill Cain and a clan that would rally to him, again calling into question the veracity of the narrative. But there are two words in the text the commentary overlooks: “Time passed” (4:3). Before Abel is killed, before Cain is cursed, *time passes*. The text does not say how much time, but since time is measured in hundreds and even thousands of years in the beginning, it could easily be enough for generations of offspring to have been born. But because the default mode of the commentary is to doubt the Word of God rather than seek its truth, it overlooks this point and drills holes into Scriptural authority instead.

### **History and Chronology**

In Ch. 5 the commentary, in typically arbitrary fashion, says of the roll of Seth's descendants (as it continues dividing the text and freely doubting its veracity): “Neither history nor chronology is to be looked for here,” though the text explicitly states these are *genealogies*, genealogies recorded with special care and utmost reverence by a people for whom they were of the greatest importance. It is not at all clear, except for its inherent inclination to doubt the Bible, why the commentary calls these lists “the fossilized

remains of ancient traditions.” Why such a deprecatory tone? (It would be an improvement if it at least gave these “fossils” the same reverence it gives those of dinosaurs.) This is precisely meant to be history and chronology, likely the most accurate we can obtain of the times.

## **Hundreds of Years**

The reason for its doubt soon becomes evident as the commentary proceeds to question the number of years the ancients are said to have lived. It begins with the assumption that this cannot be – people simply could *not* have lived nearly a thousand years – and so it invents a reason why these numbers are present, though that reason has no foundation in the text. It says the Bible wants to show how man’s years steadily decreased because of his increasing sin, but it ignores the fact that there is *no lessening* of years in the roll of Seth’s descendants, despite the fact that it leads directly to the near destruction of mankind (for its sin) in the time of Noah.... And then it completely ignores (or dismisses) the fact that, in the verses immediately following, the text states Yahweh decides with regard to man that “his life shall last no more than a hundred and twenty years” (6:3), calling the passage in which it appears “obscure.” Again it creates a theory and ignores or changes facts to fit it.

One wonders how anyone of faith, who believes in the eternal life Christ brings to man, could have such difficulty believing that men in the beginning lived for hundreds of years. It seems they do not possess the faith they profess but have rather been conditioned by the mind of the world.

## **“Enlargement”**

We have already addressed (p. 15) the sand on which the commentary builds its “two accounts” theory of the Flood narrative, but it should be repeated that the commentary simply does not

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believe that such a worldwide Flood ever occurred. Despite noting that Babylonian stories relate something “remarkably similar,” the commentary theorizes in Ch. 6 – again with no stated basis – that the source for both accounts could not have been the Flood itself but must have been some *unknown* writing about disastrous floods that afflicted the Euphrates and Tigris region and which “tradition had enlarged.” Again, it has no proof for this “enlargement” idea except its doubt that there could have actually been a worldwide Flood.

### **In a Cubit**

One wonders how particular to get in noting the discrepancies in the commentary. With the *Navarre* Old Testament I noted every problem, but I think there is just too much here to do the same – there would be no end to this writing. For instance, also in the Flood account the commentary states that the phrase, “And in a cubit you shall finish it,” “yields no satisfactory sense” following the command, “Make a roof for the ark” (6:16). But could not the roof just be an additional cubit high? And why should the commentary be the arbiter of what makes sense and what doesn’t and rewrite the Bible accordingly (cutting the phrase in question in this instance). Is it all-seeing and all-knowing? Is it not God who is all-seeing and all-knowing; and is this not His Word? And should we not receive it as the gift it is?

### **Doubtful Details**

I can’t get into all of the small doubtful details continually repeated throughout the commentary. I leave it in God’s hands; I believe He would want me to give a more general account of the problems, which should be more than sufficient... if what I have written thus far is not already sufficient to show the disturbing nature of this commentary. But we shall see.

## “Priestly”/“Yahwistic” Confusion

In Ch. 10 the commentary continues its arbitrary separation of the text into “Priestly” and “Yahwistic” accounts, managing even to divide a rather straightforward genealogy into sections, apparently because “Yahweh” is mentioned at one point (so it can’t be by the “Priestly” author anymore), and there is a small amount of information about certain persons, like Nimrod (which of course the “Priestly” author would not give)... and the dry recounting of names isn’t like the “Yahwist” (though some of it is attributed to him).... I’m afraid it is all quite absurd.

## Babel

It also sees discrepancy between God blessing Noah and his sons and calling them to multiply on the face of the earth (in 9:1), as He did with Adam, and the account of the Tower of Babel (in Ch. 11), where the LORD confuses men’s tongues and they then become separate peoples spread throughout the world. It thus conflates being blessed and *filling* the earth with being cursed and “scattered” (11:9) across the face the earth, and therein finds contradiction. Its main problem seems to center around the end of the genealogies of Noah’s sons. The text states that “from these came the dispersal of the nations over the earth” (10:32), which it sees as contradicting the Babel story. But the Babel account comes *immediately* after the above verse and simply gives the *reason* for the dispersal, which, of course, was constituted by Noah’s descendants.

## Understanding God’s Providence

The commentary does state (in 10) that this is one subject with “two complementary aspects” – God’s power and man’s sin – and this represents a profound insight into how seeming opposites can work together... but one wishes such understanding of the work of

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God's providence was more present throughout the commentary and not just here where, really, it is not so needed, since the account is fairly straightforward. (And one wonders why we are told we have a "different explanation of the diversity of peoples" in Ch. 11, thus seeming to contradict its own "complementary" wisdom.)

## **"Mythical" Nimrod**

One final note on this section: the commentary states that the "character" of Nimrod (10:8-9) is "derived from a Mesopotamian mythical hero of uncertain identity." Here is another glaring example of how the commentary does not hesitate to cast doubt upon the biblical text, suggesting Nimrod is not the son of Cush, not a real person at all, and basing this, remarkably, on a mythical hero which it cannot even name! So a real person (according to the Bible) is derived from an *unknown* mythical figure. Would it make such a baseless claim about someone in any other book?

## **Another Document**

The commentary then proceeds to tell us that Ch. 14 – wherein Abraham rescues Lot and meets Melchizedek – is not from one of its (imagined) three main sources but from another "document of great age" (of greater age than Abraham), which, of course, it cannot name, nor does it have any proof of its existence (as with its other "sources"). It seems to have no need to rely on proof when it has supposition ready at hand.

## **Abraham Enhanced**

It then proceeds to tell us that said unknown document has been "touched up" to make Abraham seem like a much braver soul than he actually was. So now it presumes to know, without compunction for its aspersion and with no grounds for such supposition at all, that

Abraham and his men could not have acted courageously to save his nephew Lot, all the while completely ignoring the way in which God watches over and blesses Abraham.

### **Melchizedek Doubted**

In the process it casts doubt on the figure of Melchizedek and thus the root of tithing, of Christ's priesthood, of the Eucharist... again, with no hesitation, and with no basis other than it can't find proof elsewhere for the names of the kings mentioned in the chapter. And so it is free to "improve" upon Holy Scripture.

### **Other Shortcomings**

For now I will avoid further detail about the "Priestly"/"Yahwistic"/"Elohistic" labyrinth the commentary continues to construct – suffice it to say it persists throughout the Pentateuch. But there are a few other presumed problems one should clarify: re Ch. 18, 1) Abraham would not so readily "run" to and bow before his three guests if he did not sense their divinity from the first; 2) Abraham is concerned for Lot and his family (the ten) as he intercedes with God; and, re 19, 3) Lot offers his daughters because he realizes the "men" being accosted are angels, and he is trying to protect them. But these shortcomings in the commentary are not of a troubling kind.

### **Hagar the Strong**

Perhaps the next doubtful, though not uncommon, comment is the presumption that Hagar could not have carried Ishmael into the wilderness, since he is apparently fifteen years old, thus casting a shadow over the veracity of the passage (Ch. 21). But has anyone stopped to consider how this unusual fact might be so? What if Hagar was a particularly strong woman, a large woman used to

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demanding physical labor and heavy burdens, as women (especially slaves) often were in the past and as is suggested by Sarah's mistreatment of her in the text? And what if Ishmael was a boy of small stature, one who was petulantly whining and refusing to walk (as his name and the circumstances would suggest)? Could such a mother not carry her son in this extraordinary, and extraordinarily tragic, situation? (One thinks of the Pieta and Our Lady holding her much more fully-grown Son in her arms.) It is certainly possible; and since the Word of God says it is so, it is very likely that it did happen in this way. But since, again, the default mode is to doubt rather than believe the Word of God, this consideration is never made. (The commentary also presumes Ishmael must be younger than fifteen because he is "playing" (v. 9) with Isaac, a toddler – but a person of *any* age can play with a child.)

## **Hopscotch Sources**

In Ch. 22 the commentary continues to weave its tangled web of sources, saying of the sacrifice of Isaac, "The narrative is commonly credited to the 'Elohistic' stream of tradition [it is interesting, is it not, that the commentary always places the "sources" in quotation marks, unintentionally suggesting their dubious nature], but it includes 'Yahwistic' elements." And the commentary indicates these specific "elements": vv. 11, 14, 15, and 18, playing hopscotch with the Word of God all because the Name "Yahweh" is used in these verses and of course the "Elohistic" source could *never* use the Name "Yahweh" (or indeed it would be the "Yahwistic" source). Is there no one else disturbed by the absurdity in all this, upon which reputable scholarship is based?

## **Not Dead Yet**

In 24 the commentary says that “vv. 1-9 presume that the patriarch [Abraham] is on his deathbed,” and that mention of his death here has been “removed” to justify a later passage. But the only presumption of nearing death is on the commentary’s part. The text just says Abraham is “an old man” who wants to find an appropriate wife for his heir (Isaac).

## **Nahor’s House**

In every place Rachel is called the daughter of Bethuel, but the commentary says (still in 24) a couple of these verses have been “amended,” that they originally called her the daughter of Nahor. Even if this were so, there is no insurmountable difficulty with Rebekah being called both the daughter of Bethuel and the daughter of Nahor, and the text saying that she lives in Nahor’s house. The commentary realizes Bethuel is the son of Nahor, but it is somehow ignorant of the fact that, especially in ancient cultures (but even in many today), to be the daughter of one’s son is to be one’s own daughter. How it cannot know this common fact is beyond understanding. But it gives the commentary another excuse to speak of “a further change” to the text. (At most we have a clarification for those who, like the commentary, might become confused.)

## **To Escape *and* to Find a Wife**

In 29 the commentary continues with its divisive mindset regarding Jacob’s leaving Canaan for Haran and his meeting Rachel there. It cannot imagine that there could have been two motives for his going: to escape Esau’s wrath *and* to find a wife. They are simply irreconcilable to the commentary (in its narrow vision it must

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be one or the other), and so it invents separate authors for each motive.

The text is very clear (at the end of 27) that Rebekah insists Jacob flee to avoid his brother; and she tells Isaac that Jacob must go to her homeland to find a proper wife. (Whether this latter is a genuine concern or not does not matter for the integrity of the text.) Isaac then blesses Jacob's journey in 28, praying for a good wife for his son... and Jacob comes directly to his uncle's house, where he sees Rachel and falls in love with her. The story is very straightforward and integral; why are separate accounts devised? There is no reason except that the commentary has a divisive mind.

I have previously mentioned (pp. 11-12) the commentary's disparaging remarks regarding Jacob's "cunning" character; here I will repeat that Rebekah does the will of the LORD in gaining Isaac's blessing for Jacob rather than Esau. It is not merely that the ancients "ascribe every event to God" (Ch. 27) and this is another example of their simplistic faith, as the commentary indicates – it *is* the will of God that the child of the spirit (Jacob) find his rightful place ahead of the child of the flesh (Esau)... and that Isaac's preoccupation with his belly might be mercifully thwarted.

### **“Slight Evidence”**

One interesting note in this section of the commentary (in 29) states: “Narrative attributed (though on slight evidence) to the ‘Elohistic’ tradition.” It is refreshing to see it recognize its “slight evidence” in this instance, but it would be more helpful if it recognized how slight its evidence is everywhere; or, more to the point, how the “evidence” it offers throughout for its multiple authors theory is unfounded, is no evidence at all, and is, in fact, harmful to right interpretation.

## “Surprising” Prayer

In Ch. 32 the commentary finds it “surprising” that Jacob would pray to the LORD (whose promise he has) as he hears that his brother Esau – who when last seen was resolved to kill Jacob – is coming to meet him with four hundred men as he finally makes his way back to Canaan with his wives and children and all his goods. This prayer does not seem to fit with what the commentary sees as a “purely factual account” (as if prayer cannot be a fact, and as if it is not perfectly logical in this situation)... and so it concludes that “it is a later elaboration.” Such blindness.

The commentary should rather see the *necessity* of this prayer, since it is what gives Jacob the idea to divide his family and goods and send them ahead of him along with an offering to appease Esau; and that it is absolutely indispensable to understanding the following scene, wherein Jacob wrestles with the LORD and His angel (and, I would say, with Esau).

## Joseph’s *Continuous* Story

We have already discussed the unfounded division wrought by the commentary regarding Joseph’s being sold into slavery by his brothers (see pp. 4-5). Next the commentary, with no explanation and for no apparent reason, states that Ch. 40 “tells the same tale” related in Ch. 39 “differently” and so of course (what else?) we have two different authors at work. But Ch. 40 doesn’t repeat *anything* related in Ch. 39; it is a clear *continuation* of the same story (“some time later...” v. 1) – one that extends into Ch. 41... where the commentary also sees division.

Ch. 39 tells of Joseph, after finding an honored place in Potiphar’s house, being thrown into prison at the accusation of his master’s wife (after her failure to seduce him). In Ch. 40 we find Joseph in prison, interpreting the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. And then in 41 Joseph is called from prison to interpret

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Pharaoh's dream. There is a clear line from one part of the story to the next with *no repetition* between chapters and so not even an *opportunity* for "difference." Yet the commentary (from thin air) declares it present.

We have also earlier discussed the contradiction invented by the commentary surrounding Jacob's hesitation to send Benjamin to Egypt with his brothers and the vows Simon and Judah make to try to convince him (see p. 6). So I think I will complete Genesis with two notes:

## **Through Beersheba**

First, the commentary again creates division to support its multiple authors theory by stating that in Ch. 46 Jacob is presented as leaving for Egypt from Hebron *and* from Beersheba. It sees this as two separate, though reconciled, traditions. But why must they be separate? Why can't it simply be just as the text says: he set out from Hebron, stopped at Beersheba (to offer sacrifice), where the LORD spoke to him reassuringly, and then continued on? The idea of two traditions is pure invention.

## **Jacob's Prophetic Blessing**

Then the commentary blatantly contradicts itself regarding Israel's blessing of his sons (in Ch. 49). It, refreshingly, seems to understand the presence of prophecy in Scripture, stating that Jacob "foretells the destiny of his sons"; but in the next breath it declares the blessings (I won't discuss here its calling them a "poem") "cannot be earlier than David's time" because of the prominence given Judah by his father! Is it prophecy or is it not prophecy? If it *foretells* the destiny of his sons, including that of Judah (which Jacob may have already gleaned in Judah's offering of his own life for Benjamin's safe return from Egypt), then it need not be written *after* the fact.

## *Exodus*

This tragic ignorance of the nature and power of prophecy is a principle defect of the commentary of the *Navarre* Old Testament (among others), and I imagine it will rear its faithless head more so as we go along in this one.

# EXODUS

## God's NAME

Let us begin Exodus by addressing the commentary surrounding Moses being told the NAME of the LORD at the burning bush on Mount Horeb (Ch. 3). The commentary can be forgiven for not presenting a clearer sense of the Divine NAME – which is “YHWH” (the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter NAME) and not “Yahweh,” the interpolation of the vowels coming much later – for what is said is adequate and according to the general understanding of the NAME. That the Tetragrammaton is itself a silent Word, a Word that literally (and paradoxically) silences the tongue, that it thus expresses very well “the impossibility of giving an adequate definition of God”... it cannot be expected to know. But the division it again creates around the NAME and the worship of God it is not possible to overlook.

In Ch. 3, the commentary posits three authors: one who sees worship of YHWH even before the Flood; a second who gives God the Name “El-Shaddai” (Almighty); and a third that presents the LORD giving His NAME to Moses on Horeb. And, unbelievably, it tells us the passage wherein Moses is given the Divine NAME (YHWH) is from the “Elohistic” source and not the “Yahwistic”! Again, the utter artificiality of this division is so obvious and so disturbing.

YHWH is God. Worship of Him and of His Presence among men (and the forgetfulness of it) goes back to the Garden of Eden.

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This same YHWH (or Yahweh) is also El-Shaddai – or is the LORD of Lords not all-powerful? And the fact that He reveals His NAME in this special way at this particular time to His servant Moses does not mean He was not worshiped before this; nor does it contradict that He is all-powerful. The LORD who reveals His NAME to Moses is the same LORD worshiped for all time, and that LORD is almighty. We don't need three separate authors to tell us this.

## **The Plague of Three Authors**

The commentary continues (and continues) its attempts to force three authors upon the Pentateuch, stating in Ch. 7: “It is most probable that in this narrative of the plagues we must recognize a variety of traditions, though it is difficult to decide precisely what belongs to each.” But this “difficulty” does not stop the commentary from forging ahead with its vain divisions. (I was tempted to write in the margins here, “Blah, blah, blah...”. Forgive me.) One wonders why, if it is so hard to figure out the supposed divisions, is it so “probable” it is divided at all – why “must” we continue presuming multiple authors in the text, other than to fit the preconceived theory?

## **Parting of the Red Sea...**

Another divisive passage of note surrounds the parting of the Red Sea in Ch. 14. Here three authors are again presumed: one mentioning the angel, another Moses raising his hand, and a third the wind. Again it is a mystery why these three aspects of the narrative require three separate authors, or why they would even be suggested. They occur immediately after one another and follow very naturally and logically.

The angel causes a dark cloud to come between the Israelites and Pharaoh's army; Moses raises his hand; and the wind blows all night to separate the waters. The last two directly follow (in the same

*Exodus*

verse): “Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. Yahweh drove back the sea with a strong easterly wind all night” (21). Yet the commentary seems especially unable to reconcile these last two, as if they are differing accounts, as if it has to be one or the other. There is no reason for such broken thinking. Moses raises his arm according to YHWH’s command, and YHWH sends the wind. (This is strikingly similar to when Moses has to keep his hands raised in order for Joshua to defeat Amalek in battle (see Ch. 17).)

### **Manna Blasphemy**

The commentary (in 16) then pauses in the desert for a brief blasphemy, conjecturing that “the manna is possibly the juice of some local shrub.” And is one to suppose that the Holy Eucharist, of which the manna is a clear sign – especially re its *unknown*, heavenly origin – might have a likewise natural explanation for its nourishing and redemptive qualities? (One wouldn’t be surprised to hear this further blasphemy.)

### **God’s Thunderous Voice**

The commentary also states that 20:18-21 would be better placed earlier (after 19:19) – again not hesitating to presume better knowledge than Scripture – apparently because God had been speaking to Moses in peals of thunder and then told him to go down the mountain to the people, where He speaks His words/commandments... and then comes 20:18-21, which again mentions thunder. The commentary seems to want to keep thunder passages together but fails to see how the thunder accompanies God’s commandments as well. V. 18 begins, “All the people shook with fear at the peals of thunder”; and in v. 19 they beg Moses: “Do not let God speak to us or we shall die.” This indicates well how the thunder has continued throughout the LORD’s intervening words, that it is indeed an accompaniment to His voice (one could say, *is*

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His voice). In fact, the text specifically states in 19:19 that “God answered him [Moses] with peals of thunder,” and the editor has himself changed “a voice” to “peals of thunder,” as noted in the commentary, well aware of the direct relationship of the two.

## **“God Said to Moses”**

Another disappointing comment (in reference to Ch. 25-31) presumes: “When the author gathers all together under the formula, ‘God said to Moses,’ he is asserting the divine authority behind the religious institutions of Israel.” This is principally a problem with wording, which suggests that what follows the “formula” – and to use the word “formula” is itself especially suggestive of human contrivance – is not necessarily the Word of God, as stated (and believed by those of faith), but a convenient attribution to the LORD of what is actually the work of man. It thus insinuates the text is essentially lying to the reader... and we should expect such untruth in Scripture. A very dangerous (if not blasphemous) implication.

## **The Tent and the Sabbath**

The commentary continues to rewrite, or at least reorder, Holy Scripture, toward the end of Ch. 31 finding “no connection” between a long passage discussing the making of all that is needed for worship in the tent in the desert, and Moses’ instruction to keep the Sabbath, which follows. What the place of worship has to do with the Sabbath, it cannot seem to imagine.

And it also continues its arbitrary division of the text on admittedly shaky foundation: “Scholars recognize various traditions in 32-34 but cannot decide on the precise contribution of each.” Who needs precision or even evidence when you have assumption and presumption? It seems that even if scholars contradict themselves, still they must be more reliable than Scripture.

## **“Face to Face”**

The commentary presumes another passage out of place in Ch. 33, finding contradiction with its stating that “Yahweh would speak with Moses face to face” (11), and nine verses later Yahweh telling Moses: “You cannot see my face.” There are many paradoxes in the Bible that require wisdom to discern – the humbled are exalted, one must die to live... but this one should not be that difficult to resolve if one but reads both verses carefully.

One says Yahweh *spoke* with Moses face to face (emphasis on the speaking); the other that no one can *see* His face. So Moses speaks with the LORD in an intimate fashion – this is the meaning of “face to face” – but to actually *see* the face of the LORD, who is invisible, is indeed impossible (at least until the Incarnation of the Christ, who is the very Image of the invisible God).

Confusion is understandable, but it is not an excuse for saying what Scripture clearly states is not possible, especially regarding something as significant as Moses’ relationship with the LORD. But if one would destroy the foundation of prophecy, which is set on Moses, then casting such aspersion and spawning doubt on this matter makes perfect sense. (It is not really that difficult to understand what is being said here, is it? Thus one is led to consider ulterior motives.)

## **Moses’ Radiant Face**

The commentary again presumes to juggle verses of Holy Scripture to suit its opinions, this time desiring to move the end of Ch. 34 to Ch. 31; and in a note of particularly bold supposition, it calls the last two verses of 34 an addition whose statement is simply wrong. It believes, and does not hesitate to proclaim, that Moses’ face only shone when he spoke with the LORD on Mount Sinai, that his face did not shine after he spoke with YHWH in the Tabernacle (the “addition”). Let me be just as bold in proclaiming – his face

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shone in *both places*! It is not the place that causes the radiance but the presence of the LORD and Moses' intimacy with Him. He spoke intimately with the LORD in *both* places and his face therefore shone in *both* places.

## **Levites, Taxes, and Shekels**

Finally, the commentary also sees a passage at the end of Ch. 38 as a "later addition." In it the Levites are called to the work of making the Tabernacle, an offering is taken from the people to cover the cost, and this cost is presented in shekels. According to the commentary, it is an addition because "the Levites were not yet established, the tax was not yet imposed, nor the distinction between the shekels yet made." But there certainly were sons of Levi, Levites, established as one of the twelve tribes of Israel, and it makes perfect sense for them to be called to such work at this time; that there will be a regular tax imposed later in no way precludes an offering by the people at this time; and the shekel distinction (if not the inception of this system) could simply be a translation of the monetary system of the time to that which became common later. In other words, there is again no reason to cast doubt on the integrity of Scripture and serve to undermine its authority.

# **LEVITICUS**

Just a couple of notes re Leviticus:

## **Conjugal Holiness**

Regarding Ch. 18, the commentary states: "This chapter is a literary unit. It is more akin to Dt. than the rest of the 'Law of Holiness.'" This suggests, again, that the chapter does not belong

### *Numbers*

where it is because it is unrelated to what is around it. The implication is that “rules for conjugal relationships” have little, if anything, to do with holiness.

The commentary could not be more wrong (though the thought is not surprising, since the commentary was published in 1966 and likely reflects the spirit of the sexual revolution burgeoning at the time). These are perhaps the *most important* rules regarding holiness. As YHWH says in verse 24: “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these practices, for it was by such things that the nations that I have expelled to make way for you made themselves unclean.” Idolatry is called adultery for a good reason.

## **Continuing Feasts**

There is also a parenthetic at the beginning of Ch. 23 that is called a “later addition” for no reason. And the commentary states verses 10-14 “interrupt the enumeration of feasts,” despite the fact that they continue reference to feasts and lead directly to the following passage.

# **NUMBERS**

## **“Artificial” Numbers**

The commentary in the first chapter states of the number of fighting men over the age of twenty: “It is doubtless artificial.” The number is simply too high for the commentary to believe, and it proves its “artificiality” by referring to a verse in Exodus that relates the *same* number. So, if the number were different, that would be cause for doubt and support for its divisive theories; the number is the same, and so it is “artificial.” (Does this not indicate well the

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default mode of doubt in which the commentary is mired?) The Bible is doomed either way – the Word of God has no recourse, no possibility of authenticity.

## **Different Numbers**

In the same note the commentary declares the number also contradicts one given in the Song of Deborah after an Israelite victory in the time of Judges. So, because it differs from this figure, which comes centuries later and refers to the number of Israelites from “five cities,” the book of Numbers is doubted for its numbers. (One couldn’t make up such absurdity, only scholars grasping by any means.)

## **Different Lists**

The commentary regularly continues its conjecturing re “Elohistic” and “Yahwistic” and “Priestly” sources.... Then in Ch. 13 it asks the reader to compare a list there with one from Ch. 1, suggesting that the difference in names, and the similarity of some to persons from David’s time, means we again have a contradiction in Holy Scripture.

But these are two *completely different lists!* The first is the heads of the tribes of Israel who helped Moses number the people; the one in Ch. 13 is a list of men from each tribe being sent to reconnoiter the land of Canaan. Two different jobs, two different lists. Why the commentary conflates them, I don’t know (except again for its divisive inclination). And why it should be surprised at the similarity of certain names at different times is again unknown – except to promote its preconceived notions – since this is a common occurrence.

## **Boundaries of Canaan**

In a particularly shortsighted interpretation of verses in the same chapter (13), the commentary shows (again) how Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled: indeed, hearing they hear not, and seeing they see not. In one verse (21) the text presents the entire boundary covered by those reconnoitering Canaan; in the next verses (22-24), it speaks of a *particular part* of their journey, notably, where they cut down the legendary large cluster of grapes symbolic of the fruitfulness of the land. Failing to see these are two separate references, the commentary again declares contradiction. (One would have thought the phrase "at the end of forty days" a verse later (25) would have helped it recognize that only a small part of the journey is being referred to in verse 22... but perhaps it did not read that far.)

## **Korah's "Fused" Revolt**

Regarding Ch. 16, the commentary sees the "fusing" of two sources, one religious and the other political, in the revolt of Korah along with Dathan and Abiram and, really, all the people. Instead of realizing how religion and politics are naturally "fused" in Israel – since all power comes from God – it artificially separates them out with no textual grounds other than the fact that both sons of Levi (religious) and sons of Dathan (apparently political) join forces against Moses and Aaron. But even after the destruction of Korah and his family, *all* the people, as I say, still rebelled against Moses and Aaron and were threatened with extinction by YHWH. So, again, with no foundation the commentary manufactures division.

## **Moses' Anger**

In Ch. 20, after again admitting it is "difficult to distinguish" one source from another, the commentary again does not hesitate to declare two sources; and instead of simply recognizing the sin of

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Moses before the people is that of anger – that driven to impatience by the people’s constant complaints, Moses’ imperfection before the LORD is revealed – and remaining blind to the greater significance of this (that even the humblest among us is not God... and thus does Jesus come), it conjectures that the account must be watered down or that this passage has been moved here and that passage there...

Look at what is *there!* It is sufficient. Moses is as God to the people and he has broken before them and displayed great anger, a deadly sin, while standing in the place of the LORD. You need know nothing more or invent anything else. Stop and *Listen to the Word of God*, you rebels!

## **Balaam Narrative**

The echoing of mistaken assumptions goes on and on (and on) as, speaking of Ch. 22-24, the commentary states that the division of the text into “Yahwistic” and “Elohistic” traditions is “sometimes inconsistent.” What it is, is utterly without foundation – there is one integral narrative regarding Balaam.

## **Levite Clan Division**

Next, the commentary sees in verses 57 and 58 of Ch. 26 “two different clan divisions of the Levites,” theorizing the second to be “earlier.” But in v. 57 is given the three sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari; then v. 58 lists sons of each and one grandson. These latter apparently, logically, became the most prominent members of the clans (after their fathers’ death) and so are singled out. There is no difference, no contradiction, no reason to sow division.

## **Mosaic Authority**

The commentary then deems the end of Ch. 31 an addition because its theology is more developed (not recognizing this as simply *part* of the development), and it suggests the last two verses are from another hand, though they are a direct continuation. It ever continues its unsubstantiated pronouncements on omissions and additions and multiple and unknown sources.... Then in Ch. 34 it casts aspersion upon Mosaic authority, serving well Satan's undermining of Scriptural authority in a more direct manner.

It states that "the editor invokes Mosaic authority" (as if such authority is not otherwise present) for the division of the land of Canaan that actually takes place under Joshua later. But the text simply states that to Moses was given the general boundaries of the Promised Land and the names of those who would later partition it, *not* the partitioning itself, which indeed comes later.

Where is the call to cast doubt on Mosaic authority, to imply it is something that needs to be manufactured rather than something deemed by God? Has the commentary some proof or reason to question thus the Word of the LORD? There is none. But this does not stop this deadly work from being done (nor its working upon many unsuspecting souls who swallow such heresy whole).

On to Deuteronomy.

# **DEUTERONOMY**

It should be noted again that the commentary is very capable of providing helpful information to the reader. But its proclivity toward division of the text along arbitrary lines far outweighs whatever beneficial scholarship it offers.

## **Moses' Discourse**

In Deuteronomy, Moses' single speech to the people is divided into several separate discourses. It wouldn't necessarily be a bad idea to assign sections to the discourse according to subject matter presented so one could grasp its message in a more orderly fashion. But it is simply not possible to take the commentary in this way (nor does it present it in this way). It has so damaged its authority with its absolute insistence on unfounded division that casts doubt on the Word of God, that any division becomes suspect as another example of questionable scholarship (much like the boy who cried wolf).

The link between the "first discourse" and the "second" is very direct (see Ch. 4): all speaks of the Law and the commandments of the LORD. No textual reason for any separation.

## **Canaan Unconquered**

After seeming to question (in 6) the prevalence of the Shema, seeing it as somehow exclusive to Deuteronomy – though it was present on foreheads and doorposts throughout Israel – the commentary then has difficulty reconciling (in Ch. 7, et. al.) how God can call, indeed command, the Israelites to destroy the nations in Canaan thoroughly (by His power) and the fact that they failed to do this but left foreigners amongst themselves. Simply explained: God's will is one thing; man's work quite another. It should not surprise us that man falls short of fulfilling the LORD's commands. Nor that God makes use of man's shortcomings, in this case utilizing the remaining peoples as a test for the Israelites, one which they, again, inevitably fail. So, the conquest led by Joshua was strong and sure, but fell short of God's will.

## **Foreshadowing Solomon**

Also, in a minor wording difficulty, the commentary states that verse 17:17 “alludes” to Solomon. A better word would be “foreshadows.” They certainly do speak of Solomon’s fall, but in a prophetic, not a manipulated, fashion.

## **Moses’ Final Blessing**

The commentary goes on to speak of other verse interruptions and additions, but I will spare the reader and myself their explication. Though I must say it is troubling that the commentary attributes the composition of Moses’ final blessing of the tribes (Ch. 33) to some time *after* the conquest, i.e. when Moses was dead and thus could not have spoken them. So, though the text clearly states, “This is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, pronounced over the sons of Israel before he died” (33:1), we are to believe that these clear words are not his and, again, the commentary knows better. Here, based on “the archaic vocabulary and the tribal situation,” words are removed from Moses’ mouth. (Can there be any wonder why the Faith is so abandoned today?)

And so the Pentateuch ends.

## **2. THE HISTORICAL BOOKS**

### **INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH, SAMUEL AND KINGS**

#### **Cloud of Doubt**

To begin, there is a problem with terming these books and the several following “The Historical Books,” since it serves to separate them from those preceding, casting a certain cloud over the historicity of the Pentateuch. This is done despite the fact that, as this Introduction states: “Their content forms a direct continuation of the Pentateuch” (p. 267). It might have been better to place them under the category of “The Early Prophets,” as is done in the Hebrew Bible. But this cloud of doubt is in keeping with the bent of the commentary (and biblical scholarship in general, unfortunately).

#### **“A Religious Lesson”**

This Introduction continues to overemphasize the human element, saying the authors have “extracted a religious lesson” from Israelite history, as if religion isn’t something plain as day throughout Israelite history; and of course it continues also to speak of “a group of traditions,” “component parts,” and “successive editions” (268-69), all without any substantiation other than the commentary’s prejudicial conjecture. How many times can we hear that “the work is not from one hand” (272) and other such unfounded declarations...? Much of this will be repeated in the books themselves, so I will pass on to them without delay.

## **JOSHUA**

### **“No Literary Relationship”**

Arbitrary division continues to be sown in the commentary on Joshua, as a “collection of traditions” is quickly proposed. May the LORD and the reader forgive me – and, I hope, teach me – but I cannot continue to parse what the commentary means by things like their being “no literary relationship” between Ch. 2-9 of Joshua and the first four books of the Pentateuch, when there *is* a clear continuation. At this point I find myself assured that none of its wild claims have substance. (May another take up such troublesome questions if deemed necessary.)

### **The Scarlet Cord**

On other matters, the commentary sounds rather like a picky critic in stating that vv. 17-21 of Ch. 2 come “too late in the narrative.” But proper story order is not its main target; by suggesting the passage comes from a different tradition, it seems to want to discount the scarlet cord used by Rahab and its allegorical correlation to the blood of Christ... which is framed as an invention of the Fathers of the Church.

### **Memorial Stones**

Then in Ch. 4 the commentary sees “two distinct traditions” surrounding the stones taken from the Jordan and those planted in the Jordan after the Israelites’ miraculous crossing. But again we have one continuous, integral narrative. First, Joshua tells a man from each tribe to take a stone from the dry Jordan and set up a monument in the camp; then he sets up other stones in the (still-dry)

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Jordan where the feet of the priests who carried the ark stood. Why is this so difficult to understand? Why can it not see there are two separate monuments? It is a mystery... except again for the shortsightedness of the commentary and its inclination to division, its prevalent lack of childlike vision (or common sense).

## **The Trumpets of Jericho**

In 5 the commentary terms Joshua's encounter with the Archangel Michael ("captain of the army of Yahweh") "the remains of a lost tradition" – though all that is missing is its respect for the text. Then in Ch. 6 it invents two traditions, two conflicting accounts regarding the march around Jericho.

The narrative is clear that for the first six days the Israelites marched around Jericho once a day led by seven priests with their trumpets; then on the seventh day they marched seven times, and on the seventh time around the war cry was sounded... and the walls fell. The commentary, apparently fixated on the fact that initially the text does not *specifically* say the trumpets were blown on the first six days – nor that they weren't blown, just that the priests had them – assumes the verse means the trumpets were not blown the first six days. It may also be confused by the declaration at the end of the narrative that the priests blew their trumpets on the seventh day before the war cry was sounded, assuming this means it was the only time trumpets sounded. But one can easily understand, without specifically being told, that if the priests had trumpets the first six days they'd likely be blowing them, especially if this is corroborated in the rest of the narrative... and that the author would duly want to emphasize the blowing of the trumpets at the most dramatic moment of the narrative. But, again, because it is so inclined to create division, this simple logic escapes the commentary.

## The Ban

In the same chapter (6), the commentary makes perhaps its most harmful division. Addressing the ban on Jericho, it states: “The conception of God as a merciful father will later correct this primitive interpretation of His absolute dominion.” This pernicious argument unfortunately lends support to the most troubling conception, common (as a virus) among scholars and generally as well, that there are two Gods – the punishing one of the Old Testament and the loving one of the New. There is but *One God* and the Bible speaks of Him *throughout*.

The merciful LORD is proclaimed throughout the Old Testament, and His punishment upon those who do *not* show mercy is clear; and in the New Testament, Jesus brings to fulfillment both the mercy of God, in the saving forgiveness He effects upon the Cross, and the absolute justice of the LORD that comes in the unquenchable fires of hell. Justice and mercy are two sides of the same coin, and the LORD integrates them perfectly, as does His Word. (If anything, the punishment (as with the mercy) is greater in the New Testament, since it is now not merely temporal but eternal.)

## Joshua at Gilgal

The commentary then calls 8:30-35 an “interruption” because before and after this passage Joshua is at Gilgal. It cannot imagine that he could have gone to Mount Eliab to offer sacrifice to the LORD (for his victories in battle) and then returned to his camp (at Gilgal). Apparently this would make too much sense.

The commentary also remarks that Ch. 10 has a “composite nature,” again unable to interpret the movements of Joshua and so finding contradiction. But the sequence is quite clear: in v. 15 Joshua “returned to the camp at Gilgal.” In 16 we are told the five kings fled and hid in the cave at Makkedah, and that “news of this was

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brought to Joshua.” This line should indicate to anyone with sense that Joshua was *not* at Makkedah at this point (as the commentary presumes) – why would news of what is going on there be brought to him if he were already there? He is sent for by his troops, whom he gives instructions regarding what to do in his absence. By v. 20 Joshua has joined the fight, and upon its completion camps at Makkedah. It is a straightforward narrative, but the commentary nonetheless gets confused and so conjectures division.

## **The Conquests of Canaan**

In this section the commentary also continues unable to reconcile that there were two *major* conquests that destroyed most of the nations of Canaan, followed by *smaller* ones attempting to complete the job. Instead it sees, as usual, only “variance.”

## **The Anakim Destroyed**

One repeatedly wonders how many of the “discrepancies” in the commentary to note... but one goes on.

In Ch. 11 the commentary finds discrepancy with the fact that the text here says Joshua wiped out the Anakim, and later that it was Caleb who drove them from Hebron. It cannot understand that as head of the Israelite army Joshua stands for the whole army, of which Caleb is an important part, and that Ch. 11 speaks of Joshua in this way. The text also says, “Joshua mastered the whole country” (v. 23). Are we to believe from this that he personally led every battle throughout the land of Canaan, or perhaps that he single-handedly conquered the country? That is the logical conclusion of the commentary’s thinking.

## **The Inheritance of Simeon**

The commentary becomes comical (absurdly so) at the beginning of Ch. 19. It tells us that the tribe of Simeon “had been incorporated into Judah,” indicating that it has lost its identity. As proof it references Jgs.1:3, where the note says again that the tribes “merge” (despite the fact Judah expressly states they will march with Simeon “into [their] allotted territory” after Simeon marches with Judah into theirs)... and as proof it refers back to its note in Ch. 19 of Joshua. So we are to understand that one note is proof of the other where no other proof is given! As I say, comical.

The text itself gives a clear understanding of the relationship between the two tribes. It tells us Simeon was “encircled” (1) by Judah: “The inheritance of the sons of Simeon was taken out of the portion of the sons of Judah, because the share of the sons of Judah was too large for them; this is why it was within the inheritance of the sons of Judah” (19:9). Simeon is not *lost* within Judah, just *located* (“found,” if you will) there. But the commentary prefers its imaginative forays to the Word of God. (Perhaps it delights in such sojourns, I don’t know.)

Later in the chapter the commentary ventures into similar imaginary exploits about the tribe of Dan, which was allotted its portion in the north from the beginning, but for which the commentary plots a long and winding road to its home.

## **The Transjordan Memorial**

After dismissing Ch. 22 as coming from a “separate tradition,” the commentary becomes as confused as the Israelites about the altar the Transjordan tribes build before crossing back over to their territories. The difference is that the ancient Israelites understood the tribes’ explanation, whereas the commentary remains in the dark.

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The commentary sees this passage and the Israelites' anger about the altar as coming from a sentiment of a later "period of centralized worship" – thus the "separate tradition." But one does not need to project into a later period to know that the Israelites were to worship *one* God (the only God). The other tribes see the altar as opposing true worship of Yahweh. But the Transjordan tribes explain well to their brothers that the altar is intended "not for holocausts or other sacrifices but as a witness between us and you and among our descendants after us, proving that we do indeed worship Yahweh" (26-27). It is in fact built upon another important memorial – the circle of twelve stones Joshua took from the Jordan. So it is faithful worship of the one God that is questioned, not the place itself. This is why "the whole community of the children of Israel mustered" (v. 12) itself to war against their seemingly apostate brothers.

Enough of Joshua.

## **JUDGES**

### **The Conquests...**

The first pages of Judges are filled with passages misinterpreted as contradictions by the commentary. It repeats its inability to understand that under Joshua a general conquest was enforced, and then after his death a series of smaller ones, which were not entirely successful in ridding the land of its native peoples. As Yahweh tells Joshua (toward the end of his life): "Much of the country still remains to be subdued" (Jos. 13:1). It does correctly recognize that "the conquest is delayed as a punishment for infidelity" (Ch. 2), as the text makes clear, but still cannot resolve the general and the particular conquests... and so posits contradiction in Scripture.

## *Judges*

It also exaggerates the failure of the conquests, going so far as to state that because of the remaining peoples “the southern tribes were thus almost entirely cut off from the northern.” But all the text says is that Canaanites remained “among them” (1:29), and that they were subjected to “forced labor” (1:28, 31, 33, 35). How slaves could prevent the free movement of their masters is another unsolvable mystery.

### **Jerusalem and Bethel**

The commentary earlier says that the verse stating Judah conquered Jerusalem at this time (1:8) is a “gloss” (its favorite word) because David is the one who conquered Jerusalem... as if there can be only one conquering of a city. One need not be a biblical scholar to know David’s conquest occurs much later; and even verse 21 of this same first chapter states that the Jebusites were *not* driven from Jerusalem: “Even now the Jebusites are still living in Jerusalem with the sons of Benjamin.” It is these Jebusites, or rather their descendants, whom David conquers (after they had likely taken over from the Benjaminites).

On another, minor point, the commentary states that the book of Joshua does not mention the capture of Bethel recounted here. But Joshua is dead at this time and the book bearing his name records events only up till his death. Why does the commentary expect it to speak of something that happened after Joshua died? (Another mystery of the mind of the commentary.)

### **The Canaanites’ Survival**

In Ch. 2 the commentary states well the theme of Judges: temporary saviors repeatedly arise each time the people fall into unfaithfulness to YHWH – then immediately casts doubt over this succinct outline, calling it a “didactic theme” “insinuated” by the

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“editor.” And all this because it is completely unable to reconcile multiple explanations given for God allowing the Canaanites to survive. It just can’t imagine that it could be because of the Israelites’ sins *and* to train them for war *and* to test them *and* to preserve the land (as well as a sign of God’s merciful patience with the Canaanites’ infidelities). The narrowness of its vision is remarkable.

## **The Idols of Gilgal**

Skipping over a few relatively minor wording problems, the next wrongful presentation of multiple accounts occurs in regard to Ehud’s killing the Moabite king (in Ch. 3). Its theory here is based on its confusing the “Idols of Gilgal” with the place Gilgal. The text merely says Ehud passes the *Idols* as he leaves the king’s presence (2x), but the commentary cites these two verses as proof that he was *in* Gilgal (and not west of the Jordan, as indicated). It is hard to tell if this is a case of simple ignorance, or if it is a conscious confusion of the text to suit its divisive purpose. One prays it is the former, though either way it is troubling.

## **Shamgar**

The problems steadily continue in the beginning chapters. Still in 3, the commentary suffers compound confusion over Shamgar for his being placed between Ehud and Deborah, saying that he “amputates” their stories and should come much later. It cites the Song of Deborah’s mention of a Shamgar in 5:6 as evidence. But 5:6 just states when he lived, and that time is *before* Deborah’s rise. So why say he should come much later when this is his time, according to its own evidence? Just leave him and his single verse as is, for goodness sake. At least *try* to trust the Word of God.

## **Jabin and Sisera**

Then in Ch. 4 the commentary again becomes easily confused, telling us that Ch. 5 says “it was Sisera who was the Israelites’ opponent,” but in 4 it says it was Jabin. One feels compelled to speak as to a small child in an attempt to explain a simple thing: *Jabin* is the *king*; *Sisera* is the *commander* of his *army*. They are *both* enemies of Israel working *together* to overthrow Israel. *OK?* (Can a scholarly work really be this ignorant?)

## **Brother Benjamin**

It is difficult to understand the commentary’s note on the Song of Deborah (re 5:14-18) saying that Benjamin is here “more closely associated with Ephraim,” and even that he is incorporated into the House of Joseph. All this because, in a list of his fellow Israelites that joined Ephraim in battle, Benjamin is called his “brother.” All his brothers are his brothers! They are *all* sons of Israel and therefore brothers. Just because the word is used in reference to Benjamin is no reason for such assumption of special familiarity, especially not to the lengths to which the commentary goes.

## **Gideon and the Angel**

In Ch. 6 the commentary accuses the text of “misplacing” the verse (21) in which the angel of YHWH vanishes in the fire that consumes Gideon’s offering, all because afterward Gideon calls out to the LORD and He answers with a word of peace... and so, “Yahweh is still present.” Any simple (normal) reading of the passage would find no conflict, but the commentary cannot see how God’s angel could disappear and God Himself afterward speak to the soul He calls to judge His people. Why? Why does the commentary invoke such confusion, not only confusing His angel with the LORD Himself, but His physical presence with His voice...? Why can it not

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simply read (and accept) *what is there?* Instead, in its ignorance, it repeatedly sits in judgment of the Word of God.

Later in the same chapter the commentary calls an “interrupting... gloss” part of a verse (31) that flows perfectly with the context; then it says the name given Gideon has the “opposite” meaning than that stated in the text... no doubt misinterpreting the meaning.

## **Jephthah’s Father**

Mercifully, we are able to skip a few chapters, but on the first verse of Ch. 11 the commentary instructs: “Note how the country is personified,” in reference to Jephthah’s father, whose name was Gilead. It seems to suggest his name was not actually Gilead, or that Gilead the *country* is his father (and that this same “father” – the country – somehow had other sons who persecuted Jephthah)...? I don’t know. The mind of the commentary is mystifying.

## **Samson**

The commentary proceeds (in Ch. 13) to call Samson a “supposed” historic person, and says that the attribution of his great strength to God is merely “a very ancient tradition” attributable to “popular imagination.” Would that it could see the popular imagination in which it itself is enmeshed, and leave the Word of God be.

It then cuts “with his father and mother” from the text – after “Samson went down to Timnah” (14:5) – because Samson is alone when he kills the lion. But could he not have walked well ahead of his parents on the journey, particularly considering his impulsive nature? This is not considered before rewriting Holy Scripture.

## **Micah**

In Ch. 17, after recognizing well the “sacrilegious innovations of Micah,” the commentary calls Micah and the Danites “sincere Yahwists” because they coopt a Levite to serve as priest for their idolatrous shrine. How can one be both sacrilegious and a sincere worshiper? And, of course, it wants to move this passage to an earlier time, because it “seems” right. One cannot help but see the commentary like the men in these days before the monarchy, when “every man did as he pleased” (6). And there is no sincere faith, or wisdom, in that.

### **The Benjaminites’ Defeat, Etcetera...**

It does not seem necessary to address every supposed “combination” of accounts and “gloss” and “edit” and “exaggeration” propounded by the commentary – enough should be enough. And so I will skip a few passages here (as I have done elsewhere and shall continue to do).

But this does not take us far along.

In Ch. 20 the commentary says that two documents are “evident” and would, it seems, eliminate vv. 36b-44. Though there is repetition of events, the verses above give a more detailed explanation of the battle and the Benjaminites’ defeat at the hands of Israel. And the facts do not contradict.

The commentary then declares “several traditions” have been “collected and juxtaposed” to form Ch. 21. But the text is all one – fully integrated with no contradictions, no pieces... and no reason for such supposition.

And so ends Judges.

## RUTH

Just two problems:

### **“Fictitious” Names**

The commentary suggests that the names of those in the book may be “fictitious”; instead of realizing that names express the essence of the person, it finds their appropriateness contrived. This kind of doubt would cast a fictitious shadow over the Bible in general (as indeed it has, along with much else in the commentary), given that so many names (all?) are so very appropriate.

### **Boaz, the Father of Obed**

It then states that the genealogy at the end cannot be by the same author because it lists Boaz as the father of Obed, not Elimalech, for whom Boaz was to raise up descendants. It posits that this was “the whole point of the story.” If one views it with worldly eyes, not as a sacred book but just another secular tale regarding family and property, then, yes, I suppose the commentary would be correct. But the Bible is something else. The actual grandfather of the great King David, the ancestor of the Christ and in many ways His image, should be known. The point of the story is not property rights and names being carried on – it is more spiritual than “legal.” (Not to mention this is how the genealogy appears in Matthew and Luke... nor that it makes no sense to posit different authors anyway.)

# 1 SAMUEL

## **Hannah's Song**

The commentary states that Hannah's song, which it rightly describes as "the prototype of the Magnificat," has been "put into Hannah's mouth" – implying they are not her words (nor God's... and would it thus say the Magnificat is not Mary's inspired words either?) – and that its tone is "impersonal." How this inspired prayer by one who begged the LORD in such desperation for a child and now rejoices in the great grace upon her can be called "impersonal" is remarkable and serves only as a convenient theory for this doubtful commentary. She is the needy soul raised from the dunghill who declares God's goodness and justice. (And Mary's words are her own as well.)

## **Eli's Condemnation**

The commentary then calls 2:27-36 "a subsequent insertion" because it believes there would be no point in the LORD later revealing to Samuel the condemnation on the House of Eli if He had already declared it to Eli, as if confirmation is not only unnecessary but somehow contradictory... and as if the LORD would not speak this word to Samuel to confirm also his own call as a great prophet to whom the LORD indeed speaks. And why this passage would be subsequently inserted if it is not needed is another unsolvable mystery of the illogical mind of the commentary.

But the commentary answers this question, and thereby confirms the absolutely labyrinthine absurdity of its logic. It says in reference to 3:11-14, where the LORD reveals Eli's condemnation to Samuel, that it was "probably added after 2:27-36 had been inserted." So, 3:11-14 is "unnecessary" if 2:27-36 is present, therefore 2:27-36 is

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an insertion... and then 3:11-14 is added after 2:27-36... *to make 2:27-36 unnecessary?* Who can fathom the unbelievable mind(lessness) of this commentary? (And how did it gain the standing it has?)

Then the commentary states of the beginning of Ch. 4 that it “has only superficial connections with the preceding,” and so slices up the text to suit its preferences. But Ch. 4 could not follow more directly from the end of Ch. 3, where Samuel has told Eli of the message he received from the LORD (that his house will be condemned) – for in Ch. 4 we see that prophecy come to pass. The ark of God, which it was Eli’s responsibility to protect, is captured by the Philistines; Eli’s two sons are killed in the battle; and upon hearing this news, Eli falls backward in his chair and dies. It is impossible to think of anything that would more perfectly follow. But the commentary is not interested in mining the perfection of the Word of God but in proclaiming thoughts from its own (diseased) imagination. And so... on it goes.

### **“Royalist” and “Anti-Royalist” Themes**

In Ch. 7 the commentary does the same – pronouncing a break in the narrative where there is none. At the end of Ch. 6 the inhabitants of Kiriathjearim are called on to take possession of the ark, and Ch. 7 continues with the narrative of the ark, as it finds a home amongst them. We are also told of the longing of the people for YHWH, especially as the ark was not with them. This introduces the account of how Samuel judged Israel and brought them back to true worship of the LORD. But the commentary is only concerned with promoting its imaginary “royalist” and “anti-royalist” themes, and so cannot see the integral nature of the narrative. (It also states 6:15 “interrupts the narrative,” though all the verse says is that Levites took down the ark. Since its crystal ball tells the commentary the Levites did not do this, it invents an addition by a “scrupulous editor.”)

The commentary steadily continues its invention of these “two schools of thought” surrounding the monarchy in Israel; and it becomes another excuse for propounding added and edited verses, and variously scissoring up the text. All this because it is woefully unable to recognize the obvious: that all the people demand a king (“royalist”), but God does not wish it (“anti-royalist”), though He allows it. It is as simple as that. No call for two varying accounts... unless one has an a priori inclination to create division in the text, which blinds one to the obvious.

### **The King’s Oppression**

In the same section (Ch. 8 ff.), the commentary terms Samuel’s description of what the king (whom the people demand) will bring, a “satire [that] implies extensive experience.” But there is nothing funny about the travails the people will suffer under the kings; and it does not require the events to have already taken place, as the commentary implies – this is *prophecy* (imagine that!) of what *will happen*, and which does come to fulfillment, especially under Solomon. But since the commentary has little sense of prophecy, and no belief in it, it spins its own tangled web of explanation.

Again, I will not address every “gloss” and “insertion” the commentary contrives – or we will be here for two eternities instead of one – but I will note further re the above division that the weakness Saul exhibits (in Ch. 10, etc.) is not “anti-royalist”: it is a simple fact. And it poignantly reveals the weakness of all human beings before God, how we all fall short of His glory.

### **Saul’s Institution... and Rejection**

The commentary also imagines two separate accounts around the institution of Saul as king because in Ch. 11 his kingship is “reaffirm[ed]” (v. 14) after he proves himself in battle, leading to a great celebration. But there is no reason what had been proclaimed

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before could not later be confirmed, and it would not take two accounts to present both. (Also, Ch. 12 directly follows the end of 11; no need to place it back a chapter or two as the commentary suggests.)

The woeful, utterly arbitrary division continues as the commentary calls Ch. 13 “composite” and scissors it up, again taking an integral, logically progressing narrative and manufacturing various accounts. It does not recognize Saul’s impatient offering of sacrifice in Samuel’s stead as meriting the prophet’s chastisement and the LORD’s rejection of Saul as king, so it declares this passage of “later origin” (though, again, how that would resolve its invented contradiction is not apparent); and it says a few other verses are from a “primitive account” and out of sequence... though, again, all follows very logically as is.

It also finds a “remnant of an earlier tradition,” a “duplicate” and a verse that is “very doubtful”.... But it is the commentary that is very doubtful, lacking faith and reason and stumbling blindly along.

Regarding Ch. 15, the commentary states that in Saul’s rejection by YHWH for failing to follow the ban He had placed on Amalek, his previous rejection is not mentioned. One wants to say, “So what?” Again the commentary creates division without foundation. It then says this rejection is not “anti-royalist” because it only rejects Saul and not the monarchy as a whole... and so it must invent another source to maintain its illusory theory! (How shall it escape its solipsistic state? It only digs itself into deeper confusion.)

## **Samuel Seeing Saul**

The commentary terms a few more verses “additions,” again for no reason... but it does make a point that at least seems to have substance, that raises a valid question. The end of Ch. 15 states that “Samuel did not see Saul again to the day of his death” (35), but in Ch. 19 they seem to meet. How can this be? In Ch. 19 Saul is a completely changed man who “fell into an ecstasy in the presence of

Samuel” and “lay there naked all that day and night” (24). Since Saul is (for a second time) in this prophetic state, it is not clear that Samuel recognizes him – he is amongst many and is naked. At the very least Saul is, as mentioned, a completely “other” person.

But perhaps there is a simpler explanation: the text in Ch. 15 may mean that Samuel refuses to entertain Saul’s pleas for mercy or counsel any longer, that he never again gives him audience (when he might have sought Samuel’s wisdom). There is substantiation for this interpretation in the fact that Saul goes to such great length to gain the prophet’s counsel that he seeks out a sorceress to conjure him from the dead. So we likely just have a case of the commentary taking the text too literally.

## **David’s Anointing**

The created contradictions continue steadily throughout 1Sm., and in Ch. 16 the commentary declares David’s initial anointing by Samuel “unrelated to the subsequent history,” as if his later anointings at Hebron by Judah and then by all Israel somehow negate or make irrelevant this first, greatly inspired anointing. The commentary consistently assumes that if something is not mentioned again, it did not occur, as if one mention is not sufficient. (I think of the old saying: “A word to the wise is sufficient.” But to the unwise, no amount of words will help.)

It also invents contradiction by stating that “Eliab has no knowledge” of David’s anointing when David comes to the battle line before engaging Goliath. Does the commentary expect his eldest brother, who has been passed over for this little squirt, to bow down to David? Has it never heard of sibling rivalry? (Perhaps it should read the Bible.)

Also in 16 occurs the division of David’s encounter with Saul into “two traditions,” which we have addressed in the Introduction (pp. 6-7). Here it is too difficult for the commentary to accept that

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David was called into Saul's service but still returned to his father, as the text says.

## **Two Goliaths**

Ch. 17 invents separate traditions because it cannot believe that there could have been another Goliath of Gath defeated by another great warrior of Israel *much* later in history (when David had ceased going to war)... Actually, it believes that later one but not this Goliath, or at least that his name could have been Goliath. It simply cannot have two Goliaths, so David's has to go. Better to cast unwarranted aspersion on Sacred Scripture.

In. 17 the commentary also presumes a "verse has been added," and here we find the passage wherein Saul questions who David is, covered in the Introduction (pp. 7-8). Ch. 18, 19 and 20 have also been addressed in the Intro (pp. 8-9), along related lines.

## **Jonathon's Farewell to David**

Ch. 20 begins with an invented "editorial link," then declares that one passage (vv. 40-42) contradicts another, and so must be "added" (why one would add contradictory passages persists as a mystery). But there is no contradiction between Jonathon's surreptitiously shooting an arrow from a distance to inform David of his father's murderous intent (as previously decided) and then afterward meeting with him to say farewell. This is the last time the two will see each other and so Jonathon wishes intensely to say goodbye to David, for we have been told their love is greater than that for women. He therefore sends his servant home with the arrows so David and he can meet privately face to face. It is as simple as that. The message is one thing; the necessitated meeting another.

Ch. 21 ends with the commentary inventing another "independent tradition" and finding "humor," not wisdom, in David's feigning madness to avoid being killed by Achish, the king

of Gath. And in 23 the commentary imagines the relationship between David and Jonathon as coming from yet another separate tradition, and proposes these two have “conspired” against Saul, thus really allowing its diseased imagination free reign.

## **Sparing Saul**

In Ch. 24 the commentary designates a proverb from the mouth of David a “gloss,” as if the great king is not well able to proclaim proverbs; and it sees Saul’s recognition of David’s coming reign as an “addition,” implying Saul has neither the intelligence nor – in this instance when David has treated him with such divine mercy – the humility to declare what is obvious to all (save the commentary).

In Ch. 26, wherein David again spares the life of King Saul, the commentary sows doubt about both of these examples of David’s remarkable closeness to the heart of the LORD by regarding them as “ways of illustrating” David’s respect for the kingship rather than actual incidences in David’s life. (This undermining of David is, again, an undermining of Christ, for Jesus is his Son and David a blessed figure of the Messiah.)

In Ch. 28 the commentary calls the necromancer’s conjuring up Samuel for Saul a work of “trickery,” stating: “The narrative seems to share the popular belief in ghosts,” belying its doubt of anything supernatural... which is not surprising, though troubling.

In Ch. 31 a final invented “gloss”... and then the merciful end of 1 Samuel.

## **2 SAMUEL**

### **Saul's Death**

Immediately in 2 Sm. the commentary finds “a second tradition of Saul’s death,” itself a “composite.” (Where does it end? Clearly, it doesn’t.) As to the second matter, the commentary cannot reconcile David’s mourning Saul and then later killing the Amalekite who has declared his hand in Saul’s death: David first mourns, the more important matter; then he inflicts justice – very simple, no “composite.” The commentary also seems unable to reconcile how an Amalekite could fight for Israel, though the text states clearly he is a “resident alien” (1:13), which was not uncommon.

As for the account at the end of 1 Samuel and the one here: it is very possible for Saul to fall on his own sword, as both accounts state, and then in his prolonged agony beg this Amalekite to finish him off, as this account notes, giving greater detail.

### **David's Kingship**

In Ch. 2 the commentary again propounds a tradition in David’s anointing at Hebron separate from his anointing by Samuel – again seeing them as mutually exclusive. (I stop and wonder what tradition the commentary adheres to, since it is separate from the biblical one.)

In Ch. 3 the commentary makes the remarkable statement, re Abner’s declaring Yahweh’s promising the kingship of Israel to David: “We are not told on what occasion this promise was made.” The commentary remains completely blind to, or simply disbelieving of, Samuel’s anointing of David and his prophecy over him. Everyone else knows of this, from Abner to Jonathan (see

1Sm. 23:17) to the people of Gath (see 1Sm. 21:12) to anyone who reads the Bible... but the commentary is somehow ignorant. There really seems to be no end to its blindness.

In 3 it also declares verses to be from a “later editor,” again with no reason given, not even a vain one. There is no lack of integration or sequence in the text.

## **Order of Battles**

In Ch. 4 the commentary once more declares information “alien to the content,” insisting we should not be told here that Meribaal had crippled feet and how it happened. The commentary has spoken. It then declares that the battles presented are in reverse order. It does not say why, but why should it? Again, the commentary has spoken.

It goes on to say of the second battle (according to biblical order) that David’s stronghold at the time could not have been Jerusalem because it had “evidently not yet been captured,” even though its capture comes in the verses preceding (the first battle)! But of course it is not biblical order with which the commentary is concerned but with its own imagined order of things, in order to create contradictions.

## **Nothing Sacred**

In Ch. 6 the commentary speaks condescendingly of the idea that “the ark where Yahweh sits enthroned is sacred and may not be handled,” calling it a “primitive conception of the sacred”; and it finds Uzzah’s “crime” (v. 7) “very uncertain,” apparently because to its mind there was nothing wrong with his touching the ark.

In Ch. 7 the commentary does not hesitate to declare “additions” even in the prophecy of Nathan to David regarding the House the LORD shall build for him, which includes prophecy of the coming

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Christ. And it can't fathom David's humility in calling himself a "dog" (v. 21) before the grandeur of God.

In Ch. 10 the commentary finds another passage that "seems to come from a different source." As usual, no reason is given, and none can be discovered.

## **Nathan's Intervention**

In Ch. 12 the commentary propounds the particularly presumptuous idea that Nathan's intervention regarding David's sin is a later insertion, casting doubt on one of the most profound passages of the Old Testament, and all because in the passage in question Nathan prophesies the death of the child conceived in adultery with Bathsheba, yet David still prays for him. It implies there could be no purpose in praying for a "doomed" child. But while there is life, David rightly finds hope. Simple as that.

## **Absalom and Shimei**

In Ch. 15 the commentary does not see Absalom's ferocity and the king's unwillingness to fight against his own son (not to mention the recognition of his own guilt in all this mess) as reason enough for David's fleeing Jerusalem. Instead it imagines some unknown "northern and southern rebels" from whom he must withdraw.

In Ch. 16 the commentary does not believe Shimei's own declaration that he is cursing David because he has "usurped" the "sovereignty" (v. 8) of Saul – that he has taken his place as king – never considering the jealousy Saul's fellow Benjaminite might feel. Instead it presumes the reason to be a slaughter of Saul's descendants made much later, giving it a reason to say another passage is misplaced.

## “Detached” Chapters

Mercifully we are able to skip a few chapters, coming to 21, where the aforementioned slaughter is present, and where the commentary declares it “detached from its context,” apparently for the above (invented) reason. In fact, the commentary sees the four final chapters through this “detached” prism. It says, for instance, that the battles against the Philistines in 21:15-22 – which clearly occur at the *end* of David’s reign – should be transposed to the beginning, apparently because the other Goliath is mentioned here... whom it (again) confuses with the first. (I note that in 1Chr. 20:5 he is called Goliath’s “brother,” which could mean any sort of kinsman.)

## David’s Words

As for Ch. 22, it contains a psalm expressly attributed to David, but the commentary declares (in its presumed omniscience) that “it can hardly be attributed to the royal poet himself,” though, as usual, it offers no explanation at all – neither here nor at Ps. 18 (to which it correlates this psalm) – for this confident disputing of the Word of God.

The commentary also casts doubt on “the last words of David” in Ch. 23, saying the text has “suffered considerably” and what we have is “conjectural.” (How ironic – is it not the commentary that forces the text to suffer considerably by its vain conjecture?) And it claims that David’s *actual* last words are found in 1Kgs. 2:5-9, where he calls upon Solomon to take vengeance on his enemies. Aside from the fact that one does not preclude the other, it is clear that, to the commentary, David can be presented as a vengeful man but not a man of God. Apparently, it cannot be that “the spirit of Yahweh speaks through [David]...” (23:2). (There seems to be something demonic at work in this thinking.)

## **Stopping the Plague**

The commentary continues projecting additions and movement of text and inflated numbers till the end (Ch. 24); and presents one more declaration of “two traditions,” finding contradiction surrounding the LORD’s stopping of the plague (after the census) and David’s prayer and his building of the altar. It seems its confusion centers around an inability to understand how human prayer and God’s will interact; but any Christian knows these are not separate things requiring “two traditions.”

# **1 KINGS**

## **Solomon’s Ascendency**

In Ch. 1 the commentary states of Bathsheba’s reminding David of his oath regarding Solomon’s ascendency to the throne: “This oath has not hitherto been mentioned.” This note would prove no problem, would simply be a factual insertion, if the commentary had not spent much of its energy casting doubt upon the Word of God. In this context it comes across as another suggestion of contradiction, as the commentary focuses on this fact – which in itself is of no consequence – rather than on YHWH’s recognition of Solomon as the chosen successor as early as his birth, which even the commentary recognizes (see 2Sm.12:25).

## **David’s Words (again)**

In Ch. 2 the commentary reinforces what it implied toward the end of 2Sm.: it calls “an addition” David’s words encouraging Solomon to keep the commandments of YHWH, but does not give

such an appellation to his call for justice on his enemies. Again, in the eyes of the commentary David would be concerned with vengeance but not with the Law of God – as if he were a mere worldly man and not a spiritual one... not a king after God’s own heart.

## **Dreams**

In Ch. 3 the commentary states that “before the prophetic period, dreams were one of God’s main channels of communication with man,” implying they were not so afterward. But one must ask: what of St. Joseph (and Peter, and Paul...)? It also implies there were not more direct means before, though YHWH spoke to Moses (face to face), and to Adam, and to Noah, and to Abraham... when they were quite awake.

## **Priests**

In Ch. 4 the commentary calls a verse (4) declaring “Zadok and Abiathar, priests” a gloss because it says it contradicts a previous verse which calls Azariah a priest and another that says Abiathar was removed from the priesthood. It is unclear whether it thinks there cannot be more than one priest or that Abiathar shouldn’t be listed since he did not remain a priest.

## **Solomon’s Words**

In Ch. 5 the commentary says “part of Proverbs may possibly derive” from Solomon? Why only part? Why a double conditional? And why use the word “derive” rather than “compose”? Why is such doubt incessantly sown? Why does it come so naturally to the commentary (that it likely doesn’t even notice)?

Skipping 6 and 7, in Ch. 8 (after glossing things up again) the commentary says of Solomon’s prayer to YHWH in the Temple:

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“The author here develops” certain ideas, not recognizing Solomon as the author of his own prayer (or his own ideas), nor that it is a sincere, actual prayer at all but just the product of conceptual maneuverings of some “author.” (I should note here that, unfortunately, this kind of “imaginary” thinking is common among scholars; for instance, it is encountered frequently in the *Navarre* Old Testament commentary.)

## **Universal**

Later in the chapter, the commentary says a passage was “added after the return from exile” (1) because of its “universalism” – though it is a fact that all people have always been welcomed into the Judaic House; (2) because it mentions “the custom of praying with the face turned to Jerusalem” – though such practice was a very common one; and (3) because of “the concern for those still far from home” – as if the possibility of capture and exile cannot be contemplated at any time. (It then advances another “glossy” statement, which I suppose provides an appropriate bookend for the chapter.)

## **Hiram and Slave Labor**

In 9 the commentary calls a “clumsy addition” a parenthetical reminder of all Hiram provided to Solomon (including the 120 talents of gold mentioned in v. 14) before the text speaks of the cities Solomon gifted to him in return. Unable to see the obvious connection, it speaks of these being “different bargains” that apparently should not be mentioned together.

It then says the statement in v. 22, “Solomon did not impose slave-labor on the Israelites,” “does not square” with 5:27 and 11:28. But there seems to be a difference between those under “forced labor,” which provided for one month on and two months off (and

who are called “Solomon’s workmen” in 5:32), and the “slave-labor” of the foreigners specifically mentioned here.

## **Idolatry of Solomon and Jeroboam**

Regarding Solomon’s decline in Ch. 11, the commentary sees the shrines to foreign gods he set up as merely “political” acts done just for his wives, ignoring the fact that the text explicitly states that “Solomon became a follower of Astarte” (v. 5), et. al., and that “his heart had turned from Yahweh” (9). It calls the (just) punishment that follows such idolatry an “interpretation” of the “author” rather than the will of God.

Likewise, in 12 the commentary says that “Jeroboam’s intention was not to adopt another god” when he set up the two golden calves for worship (an infamous act of idolatry condemned throughout the generations), despite the fact that he declares: “Here are your gods, Israel; these brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (29). If nothing else, the commentary should pick up on the plural form – I don’t think Jeroboam was inaccurately referring to the Trinity. YHWH is *One God*. It repeats its statement in Ch. 14, though there at least it recognizes the obvious: “They were ‘false gods’ and no more.” And in Ch. 13 the commentary finds the prophecy that Josiah shall immolate Jeroboam’s false prophets upon his idolatrous altar too “precise” for its liking – and so it relegates it to the “added” bin.

## **Barbarism Condemned**

After creating a couple of more glosses, in 16 the commentary invents another addition regarding a verse that states Baasha was punished by the LORD not only for idolatry but also for his barbarous destruction of the House of Jeroboam. It says this second reason is “not consistent with the spirit of the book”; but the LORD

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consistently condemns butchery, even of the sinful, and so it fits very well.

### **High Numbers (again)**

The commentary posits a couple of more glosses, then (in Ch. 19) conjectures that the stories of Elijah and Elisha come from different “cycles” ... but is relatively untroubling until, in 20, it calls the number of Arameans killed by the Israelites in battle “fantastically high,” which is to say that nothing close to 100,000 soldiers could *ever* be killed in battle in a full day of fighting; in other words, the Israelite soldiers could not have killed 14 men apiece (on average), even with the express help of Yahweh (“I will put all this mighty host into your power” v. 28) – it is just not possible in the commentary’s world.

### **Ahab’s Punishment**

In a final “gloss” toward the end of the book (Ch. 22), the commentary confuses the punishment the LORD inflicts upon Ahab personally – his bloody death – with the utter destruction of his House, which the LORD reserves for his son’s days. They are two separate things and both come about as the LORD says... and so there is no gloss needing to be imagined.

<h2><b>2 KINGS</b></h2>
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### **Inglorious Moments**

After a couple of more wayward glosses and in the midst of supposing it has a better chronology than the Word of God, there is a

note in the commentary I must praise. In speaking about the recorded history of the Moabites (Ch. 3), it states that it contains events as they appear, “but it passes over the inglorious episode narrated here.” I commend the commentary for not presuming the episode did not happen because the Moabites did not record it, and especially for recognizing a clear reason why this is often the case: nations pass over their more “inglorious” moments. This is unlike the Israelites, unlike the Bible, which makes the Word of God unlike any other book and the Israelites unlike any other people – they seek the *truth* rather than the upbuilding of a nation’s fame, and so do not hide their shortcomings.

Unfortunately, this interlude of commendation is brief. (O that it would follow through on this understanding!)

### **Naaman’s Leprosy**

In Ch. 5 the commentary casts doubt on the leprosy of Naaman, saying, “Like that of Gehazi,” it is probably just “some lesser skin disease,” even though the text states Gehazi became “white as snow” (27), and though we can presume the author knows what leprosy is. And in 6 it states: “The order of all these narratives seems to be artificial.” (How artificial eyes see artificial realities.)

### **Elisha’s Prophecy Fulfilled**

In Ch. 7 the commentary twice declares the text redundant, though there is no cause in either case – one is a quote that simply states a fact; the other emphasizes that the word Elisha has spoken has come true just as he said. (Since prophecy is so doubted here, one would have hoped this emphasis might help the commentary trust in the Word... but it does not seem meant to be.)

## **Elisha's Messenger**

In Ch. 9 the commentary returns to a familiar refrain, saying here that verses have been “added by the author” because the text does not explicitly state that Elisha imparted them to his messenger sent to anoint Jehu. But whether instructed by Elisha or by the Spirit at the moment, the words are an integral part of the anointing, not an “addition.” (The commentary then finds “doubt” and a “gloss” where there is neither.)

## **Jehu**

In Ch. 10 the commentary declares that the account of the meeting between Jehu and Jehonadab (as Jehu is on his way to kill off all Ahab's family... and then all the prophets of Baal) is “certainly misplaced.” It gives no reason because there is no reason – it is, in fact, perfectly placed, if only for the reason the commentary itself notes, i.e. Jehonadab's shared zeal for YHWH.

Here the commentary also exhibits its inclination to grant the “author” too much power – in a manner bordering on blasphemy – together with its preoccupation of inventing multiple authors. It calls the fact that Jehu did not destroy the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, “The author's own verdict,” as if the “author” makes up this fact and places it as he wills in the Word of God. It defends this blasphemy by saying that “the sources he was following” gave only praise to Jehu's great zeal for YHWH, and so, presumably, this failure to destroy the calves doesn't fit. What “source” he was following is unknown of course, but the worse blindness is the commentary's inability to reason, to reconcile that Jehu could be very zealous and yet fall short... and that one author could record both facts. Regardless, it is *God* who gives “unstinted praise” to Jehu for his faithful destruction of the House of Ahab and of Baal, and it is *He* who is disappointed at the remaining calves, not the “author.”

And the chapter ends with a verse that is, in the opinion of the commentary, “heavily glossed,” though, as usual, no evidence of the glossing is offered. (Consistently we find its verdicts require no substantiation.)

### **Athaliah’s Demise**

In Ch. 11 the commentary continues its mystifying division of the text in the events surrounding the uprising against Athaliah. It is clearly one narrative, not two, for the uprising is clearly supported by all and so there is no reason to separate the role of the priesthood from that of the people (and so invent two authors). In a remarkable move to aid its arbitrary division, the commentary goes so far as to cut a phrase (“of the guard” (13)) that would have made the unity of the account even clearer... and then calls the phrase a “gloss.”

At the end of 11 the commentary exaggerates the “delight” of the country people at Athaliah’s fall, suggesting it is only they who support it and not the people in the city, basing this division on the line, “the city made no move” (20), which but means the few in Jerusalem who might have benefited from Athaliah’s reign did not rise up against her destruction. Its opinion also ignores the fact that everybody and his brother escort the new king into the Temple.

### **Joash’s Behavior**

The commentary does seem to have found a genuine point of potential contradiction at the beginning of Ch. 12, regarding the characterization of Joash’s behavior as king, since here it says Joash did what was “pleasing to Yahweh all his life” (v. 4) but in 2Chr. 24 it limits this goodness to Jehoida’s lifetime. But here it also adds, “having been instructed by Jehoida the priest.” This qualifier makes the verse not unlike that in 2Chr. (Perhaps a worse seeming contradiction – which the commentary does not note – might be 2Kgs. mentioning nothing of Joash ordering the death of Zechariah,

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Jehoida's son. But this is really an omission in a briefer account of his story rather than a contradiction,)

## **Saviors of Israel**

In Ch. 13 and 14 the commentary is completely confused regarding those who saved Israel from Aram. It says the unnamed "savior" that Yahweh gave Israel under Jehoahaz was not Jehoahaz or his son Joash (to whom the commentary mistakenly says the text attributes it) but Joash's son Jeroboam II. The commentary is utterly blind to the fact that three separate "saviors" are noted: the first is this unnamed one (which certainly could not be Jeroboam II, who came two generations later); then Joash as king had his victories... as did Jeroboam II in his reign.

The difference between the salvation under Jehoahaz and Joash is made very clear in 13:22-25, which speaks first of Yahweh taking pity on Israel in Jehoahaz's time, while Hazael was king of Aram; then proceeds to speak separately of Joash's victories, which took place when Hazael's son Benhadad was king of Aram. Later there was further protection by Yahweh under Jeroboam II. The commentary seems unable to conceive that a different "savior" could rise up in succeeding generations in an ongoing conflict with another nation. At any rate, it woefully conflates the three very separate incidences here. (And as a parting shot in Ch. 14, it casts doubt upon the authorship of the Book of Jonah.)

## **"Schism" and "Compromise"**

The commentary tosses around more doubt, as to "translations" and "sites" and "dates" in Ch. 15 (as well as 16); then in 17 it again proclaims the necessity of multiple sources... and again for remarkably arbitrary and unfounded reasons. It finds "religious schism" – turning away from YHWH (to worship the golden calves) – and "religious compromise" – turning to other gods – as

irreconcilably different and requiring more than one author to conceive and record. And it even splits a single verse (7) (not to mention splitting hairs) to do so. But it should be obvious that in both cases the Israelites are turning away from YHWH to worship false gods. (No need of two independent authors to record that.)

## **Repopulation of Samaria**

Still in 17, after inventing another gloss, the commentary says vv. 24-28 present a “simplified view” and “presuppose a wholesale deportation” of the Israelites in order for repopulation to occur. But it is the commentary that appears to be making the simple-minded assumption that every Israelite must be deported before other peoples can replace them.

The text continues speaking of these pagan nations till the end of the chapter, but the commentary repeatedly confuses them with the Israelites, saying 34-40 “reverts to the sins responsible for the ruin of Israel” (and so wishes to move it) when the passage merely relates what worship of YHWH requires in order to show that the nations who had come to Samaria and were presuming to worship YHWH, while still worshiping their own false gods, were in fact *not* worshiping YHWH at all. (How can a people who sacrifice their children in fire be worshiping YHWH?) As said, this confusion continues to the end of the chapter, where the commentary claims “faithless Israelites” are referred to when the text (and the context) makes clear it is in fact the pagan “nations” (41) it still addresses. (Here we find the origin of the hatred between Samaritans and Jews.)

## **Sennacherib’s Invasion**

In Ch. 18 the commentary finds the chronology “uncertain” (of course it could not simply be as the text says), and in 19 it calls an “oracle” a “poem,” not recognizing how one comes from God and

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the other more so from man (or maybe it does recognize the difference and wishes to demean the oracle). In 19 it also claims to know better than the Word of God that Sennacherib never invaded Egypt, and then exhibits confusion regarding a sign to Hezekiah. Unable to tabulate years properly, it concludes they are incorrect, and so calls into question the passage (29), asking how the ground can lie fallow for two years when Sennacherib was not even there for one full year. But the prophecy is clear: “this year” is nearing an end; the “next year” the ground lies fallow; and by the end of that year Sennacherib will be gone... and planting will begin the year following, when the time comes round again. It is not unlike the three days Jesus spends in the belly of the earth, which begin on Good Friday (actually, Holy Thursday in the evening), continue through Holy Saturday, and come to an end early on Easter Sunday. (But the commentary would likely cast doubt on this time frame, too, not comprehending how partial days can count as days.)

In Ch. 20 the commentary confidently declares that Hezekiah’s illness “certainly occurred before the campaign of Sennacherib,” though the text states it was *during* that time (“in those days” – v. 1), and despite the LORD’s words to Hezekiah promising deliverance “from the hands of the king of Assyria” (6), indicating he is oppressing Israel *at that time*.

In 21 the commentary suggests subtracting ten years from Manasseh’s reign; in 22 it invents another gloss; in 23 another “addition” (for no reason), as well as one more gloss... and mercifully we come rather quickly to the end of 2 Kings.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES, EZRA, AND NEHEMIAH**

### **“The Chronicler”**

In this Introduction begins what will be a nagging problem throughout (at least) the books of Chronicles: instead of the author being presented as one who dutifully records events (a chronicler), he is made to seem *in control* of events as he writes his own interpretation of them. So it is he who “contemplates the union of the twelve tribes” and he who “confidently awaits the ingathering of all the children of Israel” (p. 491), as if it is *his wish* and not God’s plan. This problem is expressed succinctly in one line: “These dominant ideas of the Chronicler account for the form his work has taken” (492). To the commentary this is indeed *his* work, his ideas, not God’s Word.

This is really the fulfillment of what we have seen all along – giving to the human authors inordinate influence – and it clearly breaks St. Peter’s eminent rule re prophecy: that it comes not by man’s willing it, but from God (see 2Pt.1:21-22).

We are to believe this is not a record of historical events. For the commentary declares of the author: “He is not a historian; he is a theologian,” implying theology can ignore or create its own history to suit its purpose, as it says “the Chronicler” has done here in order to present a “picture of the ideal kingdom.” Aside from the fact that it is difficult to see what is so ideal about the picture in Chronicles, it seems that the commentary has confused what ordinarily passes for history – the “idealization” of a nation – and the Bible, which presents the truth, warts and all.

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Then, speaking of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Introduction insists they were written later, despite its admittance that “they make use of, and quote verbatim, documents that are contemporary with the events recounted” (p. 493). But this is not proof enough for the commentary – things must be as it conceives them. Its own opinion continues to be sufficient proof.

The confusion it finds in these books – the product of its own lack of reason – we will address while discussing the books themselves. I will say that at least it relates the logical order of events presented in the text itself as accepted by many scholars (see 494) – but it does go on to give equal weight to its disputers. And I will also note that, similar to its treatment of “the Chronicler,” the Introduction exaggerates Ezra’s powers, stating that “the chosen race, the Temple, [and] the Law” are “his three dominant conceptions” (495), as if they are not essential themes of the Word of God going back to Abraham, David, and Moses.

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### **Genealogies Confused**

In its first note (on genealogies) the commentary seems unaware that clans and towns are most often named for people, as it remarks on the similarity of these names. Then in Ch. 2 it is quick to assume different traditions regarding Sheshan (vv. 31 & 34), since in one place the text lists the name of a son but later says he has no son. But it is not beyond possibility (if this is even the same Sheshan) that the son of Sheshan may have died and so not been able to continue the progeny (the focus of these genealogies), thus prompting Sheshan to give his daughter to one of his slaves, as the text states, to continue his name. (Or Ahlai could be Attai,

Sheshan's *grandson*, especially since the commentary says it does not note Hebrew name variations.)

## **Biblical Data**

In Ch. 5 it begins its intense attribution of motive and control of the text to the human author by stating that “the Chronicler harmonizes his faith” (re v. 2) rather than simply accepting that he chronicles events. And it finds the genealogical lists for Gad and Manassah “at variance with the biblical data,” demeaning the veracity of *this* biblical data as it defers to some data that goes unnamed and uncited.

## **Sacred Chant (and Benjamin)**

Continuing with its exaggeration of the role of the human author (which quickly becomes its constant habit), in Ch. 6 the commentary states re sacred chant in the Temple that the author “assigns its institution to David.” But “the Chronicler” has *no power* to assign anything – sacred chant *was* instituted by David (despite the unfounded doubts of the commentary), and Chronicles simply records this fact. Then in 7, not believing in Benjamin's independence as a tribe from the beginning, it arbitrarily conjectures its occurrence at this much later time, apparently giving itself the same power it grants the Bible's human authors.

## **David's Kingship**

In Ch. 9 the commentary states that the Levites (and the Temple) are not yet in Jerusalem, though the text tells us they are (33, 34). It seems generally confused about the time frame, saying the chapter “preludes the Davidic organization.” It seems unable to recognize that the text first speaks of the officers in the Tent of Meeting, and then relates how “these were confirmed in their office by David”

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(22) and took up their place in the Temple. It insists, despite repeated specific references to the fact, that it is not the Temple that is being spoken of but only the Tabernacle that preceded it.

Then in Ch. 11 it implies it was not David “who united all the tribes under Yahweh” – it is just that the Chronicler “wishes” to present it this way. But all Chronicles does is shorten the narrative, not separating out the seven years David was king only of Judah from the thirty-three he was king of all Israel. (Casting any doubt on David as the uniting figure of Israel casts doubt on Jesus’ own uniting of all sons of God under His reign, for, again, David is a preeminent figure of Christ.)

Also in 11 the commentary says “the Chronicler credits” David with building the wall around the city, again implying that what is stated in the Bible is not necessarily true but presented according to the whim of the human author.

## **Uzzah**

We may (again, mercifully) skip a few chapters, but in 15 the commentary states that David’s pronouncement about the reason Uzzah was killed (when he reached out to steady the cart holding the ark) does not actually reflect David’s understanding but is “the author’s interpretation” of the event. (This repeated offense against the Word of God is difficult to bear, and one wonders again how much of it to record, since it continues steadily throughout both books of Chronicles.)

## **A Psalm of Praise**

In 16, instead of recognizing that essential praise verses are presented in this psalm of David, the commentary finds its construction from “fragments” of three psalms, “with a few textual variants.” Why can it not let Scripture be? Why must it grasp at

straws? Has it nothing better to do than complicate (and dangerously) the Word of God?

And in 17 instead of recognizing that Chronicles presents well-known history, it presumes it is copying 2 Sm. (and later 1 Kgs.), though of course “with a few characteristic modifications.”

## **Priests**

In Ch. 18 the commentary tells us that according to 2 Sm., David’s sons “were priests,” and it quibbles with Chronicles for not naming them so, accusing the Chronicler of believing that “priests are of Levitical and not Judean descent.” But it is not “the Chronicler” that *thinks* this: it is biblical fact. And in the process of its unwarranted criticism it ignores its own well-placed note of explanation of why David’s sons are called “priests”: in 2 Sm. (8:18) it states this probably means “David’s sons assisted or deputized for him in those priestly functions for which the king was qualified.” So in the one instance (where the word is mentioned), in a commendable display of logic, it presents a valid explanation of a difficulty in the text; but in the other place (here) it ignores that logic to forward its particular characterization of “the Chronicler.”

## **Goliaths, Altars**

In Ch. 20 the commentary again casts doubt upon the story of David’s victory over Goliath, giving greater weight to a passing verse mentioning a Giant of the same name, as it again fails to see that this is a *much* later time (the end of David’s campaigns) and that there were a number of Giants in Gath. (And why wouldn’t a relative be named after the great Goliath?) Then, though there is no discernible difference, in 21 it finds a different description of the altar than in 2 Sm.; it sees this altar as “permanent” and the one in 2 Sm. as “temporary,” simply because here it specifically says it shall be and there it does not... as it waxes post-exilic again. (It repeats

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its irreconciling tendency in 22 by finding contradiction in the terms “from afar” and “from abroad.”)

## **Age of Levitical Service**

In Ch. 23 the commentary notes that Nm. 4:3 and v. 3 here state the age of Levitical service begins at thirty, but that twenty is the number mentioned later in the chapter (v. 24). This is explained in v. 26 as a change by David to create a more general level of service for those “no longer required to carry the tabernacle or any thing used in its service” (after the Temple replaced the Tent). We now have special services like gatekeepers, scribes, and cantors beginning at thirty, and general service of the Temple at twenty.

## **Ahimalechs**

Then in Ch. 24 the commentary confuses its Ahimalechs. It takes as the same person the Ahimalech that Saul had killed (after he gave aid to David) and the one who assists David here in setting up the order of priests, neglecting to ask how a dead man could help the new king. Its confusion arises because the names of this *grandfather* and *grandson* are the same... and it sees one listed as Abiathar (the middle man)’s father and the other as his son. It fails to read the text closely, necessitating my doing so to resolve its “contradiction.” They are two separate men.

## **Lists of Priests**

Also in 24 the commentary finds discrepancy and so cause for contradiction in the twenty-four priests listed, contrasting them with those listed in Neh. 12, where only twenty-two are mentioned. And so it concludes that Chronicles is of “a later date.” But it is Nehemiah that is of a later date, and the priests listed there are those *who came back with him from exile* – it is a *separate*, later list.

## Confusion Continues...

In 25 one wonders why in a verse telling of those who “sounded the trumpet to accompany God’s words” (5), we are informed by the commentary that the “meaning [is] uncertain.” And in 26 one does not understand why the commentary says the text “is deliberately picturing a past age,” as it troubles over listings of cantors and gatekeepers; and again it has problems with “insertions.” (One tires of tracing its confusion, and perhaps the reader tires of hearing it... so we will leave off.)

In 27 the commentary finds “the Chronicler” “imposing a scheme on the data,” declares a (contrived) “purpose” in facts that help him solve the text’s invented “difficulties,” and sees “variance” in a list that is again separate from the one to which it is compared (here the commentary is unable to understand that David is both “king” *and* “landowner”).

## Work of the Temple

In 28 the commentary breathes and breeds division again, calling vv. 9-10 a “moralizing passage” meant to offset the “section exclusively on the furniture of worship” that follows. It thus creates a disconnect between the heart and the work of the LORD one accomplishes. The two follow perfectly (and logically) here – v. 10 ends with David telling Solomon to “set to work” on the Temple, and v. 11 begins (and continues) with the plans he gives his son. The commentary also cannot reconcile how David could have plans for the Temple and yet attribute all to God, again showing little sense of how God and man work together.

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### Sacrifice and Worship

Throughout, the commentary attempts to set up a (false) contrast between “the deuteronomic author” and “Ezekiel.” At the beginning of 2Chr. (Ch. 1), it proposes contradiction between how the former views the necessity of sacrifice in the one Temple the LORD set up for such, and the latter’s supposed view that all that matters is the presence of God. (God is everywhere and can be worshipped anywhere.)

There is much that is deeply flawed and deeply disturbing about this thinking. First – as we have tried to convey throughout – we do not have separate “authors” with separate ideas who propose them at will. *This is God’s Word*. So it is not the “deuteronomic author” who instructs the people to sacrifice to the LORD in one place, i.e. the Temple at Jerusalem – this is *God’s will*. And this will is not changed but brought to perfection in John’s declaration (which the commentary foolishly cites as proof for its contrived contradiction) that the LORD is Spirit and is worshiped in spirit and truth and not on any particular “mountain.”

Second, despite what the commentary says, what is stated in 1Kgs. is the same as what is stated here in 2Chr., except that 1Kgs. makes explicit that the Temple is to be the one place of sacrifice. Because that is not specifically stated here in 2Chr. does not mean it contradicts what is there.

Third, again the commentary cannot conceive of how a person can do good in the eyes of God and yet not perfectly so, as Solomon does here in sacrificing at Gibeon. And even the idea that Gibeon is like the other (outlawed) high places is disputable because, as 2Chr. makes clear, the Tent of Meeting Moses set up is still in Gibeon, along with the bronze altar he built for sacrifice. So it is hardly an

unholy place like the pagan altars under every green tree. And both accounts have God coming to Solomon in dream after his sacrifices there and blessing him, so how bad can his actions have been?

The commentary's attempting to create contradiction between "authors" is particularly alarming in this instance because it is really leading souls astray in its confusion of respect for the place of sacrifice set up by the LORD (which today would be our Catholic churches) and the experience of the presence of God, which one can indeed have anywhere and at any time. Here it cites Ez. 1 as evidence for its theory. But Ez. 1 says *nothing* about sacrifice – it is therein the prophet has his first vision of the four living creatures and of the LORD. How this can be construed to mean that Ezekiel thinks one can sacrifice to God anywhere, unlike the more *rigid* "deuteronomical author," is another mystery of the commentary. To repeat, Ezekiel is not *sacrificing* by the river Chebar, so there is *no* contradiction of the Temple edict, and to create this confusion is both inexplicable and a dangerous encouragement to heresy.

## The Temple Veil

In Ch. 2 and 3 and elsewhere the commentary repeatedly infers (in its confusion) that Chronicles somehow confuses the Temple and the Tabernacle. Toward the end of 3 it says it was the Tabernacle – not the Temple, as the text states – that had a veil because in 1Kgs. "Solomon's Temple had a door instead," never considering the simple fact that it could have *both* a veil and a door, or that here we are given additional detail.

## Levitical Priests

In 5 it continues to seek to create contradiction by its insistence on separating priests and Levites, here quibbling with the fact that 1Kgs. says that "priests" brought the ark into the Temple but here it says "Levites," and in the process dismisses the verse (5) that says

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“levitical priests” immediately after. It seems unaware that Moses and Aaron were sons of Levi, Levites... and so *all* priests of Israel were also Levites. It never ceases straining out imaginary gnats and swallowing real camels.

## **The Psalmody**

In 6 it decides that the platform upon which Solomon knelt in prayer is an “insertion” rather than a further detail, again in order to fit its arbitrary characterization of “the Chronicler” as opposed to the “deuteronomic author.” And in 7 it says “the Chronicler” “makes the levitical performance of the psalmody ... go back to the days of David,” when, in fact, it actually *does* go back to David, the great Psalmist. (It repeatedly imagines things, and imagines that it is the Word of God that is imagining things.)

## **Solomon’s Sacrifices**

In Ch. 8 it accuses “the Chronicler” of “embellish[ing] Solomon’s reputation,” and confusing places... and even infers that things “absent from 1Kgs.” are his invention. It then says he “completely transforms 1Kgs. 9:25,” declaring that it is only in *his* eyes – not the eyes of God – that Solomon is carrying out Moses’ and David’s orders. But there is no substantial difference in the two verses: 1Kgs. says Solomon offered sacrifice three times a year and kept up the Temple. (Further detail is deleted from the verse, which the commentary calls “corrupted.”) And 2Chr. says the same but includes information about the daily sacrifice as well.

## **“The Chronicler” and Continued Confusion**

In Ch. 9 the commentary continues to theorize about “the Chronicler’s” “emphasis” and his “misgivings,” etc.; and in 11 it calls the Word of God his “opinion” (and continues its

psychoanalysis). In 13 it speaks of “the Chronicler’s favorite themes,” and in 14 presents him as giving “credit” to a king. All is apparently in the hands and mind of this “Chronicler.”

In 15 the commentary is unable to recognize the existence of two reforms years apart that required two separate repairs of the altar. It believes instead one negates the veracity of the other (since there just could not be two). And it again creates contradiction because of its mistaken reading of the text, saying the end of 15 does not “harmonize” with what is stated in 14:4. But in 14 the text says the high places of *Judah* were destroyed, whereas here it says those in *Israel* (not Judah) still existed.

In 16 it again misreads the text, saying Hanani’s prophecy shows he “could never tolerate civil war” when his chastisement has nothing to do with civil war but comes because Asa “relied on the King of Aram and not on Yahweh” (7). And in 17, instead of believing the text that “the terror of Yahweh fell on all the kingdoms” (10) that had the Book of the Law proclaimed to them (as it has elsewhere in the Word, not to mention the hearts of all believers), the commentary says this is but “the Chronicler’s” view and “no doubt this was also a military mission,” though there is no mention of one. (In its lack of faith, how the commentary sells short the power of God! For it, the sword is mightier than the Word.)

In 19 the commentary recognizes the LORD’s abhorrence for “Israel’s resorting to foreign alliance,” but does so in a place it is not relevant: here the “wicked” (2) to whom Judah should not give help is the king of Israel, not a foreign nation. Also, in 20 we are told “the Chronicler sees” as a prophet a man who clearly *is* a prophet – this is plain for *all* to see, except the commentary.

## Temple Collection

The commentary then says of the collection taken in Ch. 24: “The Chronicler puts this collection in place of the ordinary Temple offerings.” But Chronicles “puts” nothing, and in this case not “in

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the place” of anything – the text merely describes a collection taken to repair the Temple, one that is in keeping with Moses’ call for an offering for the Tabernacle.

## **Amaziah and Uzziah**

In Ch. 26 it says that v. 4 is “hardly reconcilable” with the previous chapter, which tells us that Amaziah, like his father, “did what is pleasing to Yawheh, though not wholeheartedly” (25:2). But all that is missing from v. 4 is the final disclaimer, and in the next verse is a similar disclaimer saying Uzziah sought God “throughout the lifetime of Zechariah” and that “as long as he sought Yahweh, God gave him prosperity” (5). So, obviously Uzziah’s goodness had similar limitations as his father’s and 26:4 is *very* reconcilable with Ch. 25.

## **Rituals**

In 29, aside from again telling us “the Chronicler” is concerned with “vindicating” the Levites, the commentary lets us know that he also “adds a second, levitical, ritual” and “justifies” it by reference to David. But this “second” ritual is just an extension of the “first.” And when the text says that “the order [for the ritual of levitical song] had in fact come from Yahweh through His prophets” (25), we are not to believe the veracity of this Word but yield again to the more knowledgeable commentary.

## **Hezekiah’s Reform**

In Ch. 30 the commentary continues to grant “the Chronicler” powers to “augment” and “react against” and give “prominence” and “accredit” (particularly regarding his pet Levites). Then in 31 it tells us he “adopts” qualities of Josiah’s reform and applies them to Hezekiah, as if Hezekiah had no reform of his own (*preceding*

Josiah's); and it also misinterprets Hezekiah's "question" about the large sum collected from the people (for the Temple), assuming it implies fear of "coercion" rather than being a simple inquiry. (And we hear more about "the Chronicler's mind...".)

## **Reading the Law Aloud**

In 34 the commentary finds contradiction in the order of events compared with 2Kgs., though no contradiction is present, only greater detail; and it imagines another contradiction regarding the reading aloud of the Law, which it declares "too long for a single reading." The commentary bases that presumption on the trivial fact that 2Kgs. 22:10 says Shaphan "read it" and here that he "read from it" (18), while ignoring the fact that in both cases he spoke "the contents" of the Law (v. 19 here), *not* every word. So there is no need to call the length into question anyway. And the chapter concludes with another confusion about information "the Chronicler" presents.

## **A Great Passover**

In 35 we continue to hear of "the Chronicler" and his "interests" and "wishes"; and then the commentary misinterprets v. 18: "No king of Israel had ever celebrated a Passover like the one celebrated by Josiah." Instead of simply reading "like" to mean "as great as" (as any reasonable person would), it calls this Passover "an innovation and a departure from the pre-Davidic practice," again showing its blindness to the obvious, as well as its ready inclination to create contradiction in Scripture.

## **Sabbath Observance**

In Ch. 36 the commentary again fails simply to recognize additional detail as additional detail (to 2Kgs.), inventing

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“transference” instead; casting doubt upon the historicity of Jehoiakim’s capture, it cites Dn.1:1-2, which says the *same* as what is here (!), as proof of this “transference.” It also continues unable to see that Chronicles is summarizing well-known history (and so not beholden to other, later writings); and it makes this remarkable statement: “In the Chronicler’s day sabbath observance was one of the basic principles of Judaism,” as if it has not *always* been so – even to this day – but that its mention here is just the will of “the Chronicler” at work again.

Thus ends a very trying commentary on Chronicles.

<b>EZRA</b>
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### **Numbers...**

At the start, the commentary tells us that the seventy years of exile “could be understood literally by making the subjection of Judah begin with the reign of Jehoiakim,” which would make sense. Still, the commentary calls seventy a “round number,” unable to resist the sowing of question and doubt. And in Ch. 2 it continues its repeated problem with numbers by calling the total who returned from exile a “considerable number,” suggesting it is unrealistic. (Also, in 1 it cites an uncanonical book to “correct” this canonical work, which is indicative of its respect for the inspired Word of God.)

### **Cantors**

Continuing in 2, the commentary also tells us that the cantors are “not reckoned among the Levites” here (unlike elsewhere); but a reasonable mind can easily see that this relation may be understood by the way the list is presented, with the cantors following

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immediately upon mention of Levites. At any rate, Asaph is a son of Gershom, a son of Levi, and so a Levite; so the commentary simply serves to muddy the waters. (And the commentary has a problem with only Asaph's sons being listed – but perhaps it was only they who returned with Ezra.)

## **Building the Wall**

The commentary continues its creation of contradiction in Ch. 3, unable to comprehend how Joshua and Zerubabab could be credited with beginning the work on the wall when it was Sheshbazzar who had been appointed high commissioner by Cyrus to do so (5:14), as if one could not oversee the others' actual work. (Perhaps the commentary expected Sheshbazzar to lay the bricks as well.)

And the commentary confuses matters re the timetable for the building of the wall as well: it tells us that it is later said to have begun under Darius although it actually started under Cyrus, seemingly unaware that progress on the wall was stopped for decades... until it was *resumed* under Darius. Even though it recognizes (in the same note) that under Cyrus the wall had "made little progress," it remains unable to reconcile these two beginnings.

At the beginning of 4, it seems unable to understand that the delay in building the wall could be attributable to *both* "the indifference of the Jews" *and* "Samaritan opposition" – again, to its limited mind it must be one or the other. Then it once more posits multiple sources, though there is direct continuation in the text and so no evidence for its arbitrary demarcation. (It's own note tells us the "they" in v. 6 refers to those spoken of in 4.) And it ends the chapter calling references to David and Solomon as "powerful kings" (v. 20) "deliberately exaggerated."

## **“Construction”**

In 7 (like the return of a bad dream), we hear more of “the Chronicler’s” “constructing” hand at work ... and the commentary continues to artificially divide the political and the religious, here subjecting Ezra to its inability to reconcile the two.

## **Foreign Marriages**

In 9 it characterizes Jonah (and Ruth) as coming from an “entirely different school of thought” than what is presented here with regard to foreigners and marriages with foreigners. It shows itself unable to differentiate two *entirely different situations*: here we have Israelites intermarrying with nations “steeped in abominations” (v. 1); thus the severe call for separation – it is a separation from *sin*. In Jonah, God displays His great mercy, which extends even to foreign nations when they *repent* of their sins, as the Ninevites do so dramatically. (And Ruth is a paragon of virtue who, though a foreigner, has vowed to follow Naomi’s God.)

## **Ezra’s Prayer**

Also in 9, the commentary says the “prayer of Ezra” is “inspired by Dt. and the prophets.” While I’m sure Ezra’s heart beat in time with the Word of God, here he needs no outside influence to express the desperation he experiences on seeing the Israelites return so soon to the very sin for which they had been so recently exiled, nor to recognize the importance of following the commandments of God. The prayer pours forth from his soul quite naturally. (But for the commentary everything is a mere construct which it feels obliged to deconstruct.)

## **Intermarrying Priests**

Finally, in 10 it notes that a list of priests “does not go back to Aaron as the Chronicler himself would have done.” But why in the world would any list of priests guilty of marrying with foreign wives after the return from exile go back to the time of Aaron (as Ezra’s lineage does)? And why does the commentary feel compelled to attribute such potential foolishness to “the Chronicler”?

# **NEHEMIAH**

## **Nehemiah’s Prayer**

In Ch. 1, as it did with Ezra’s prayer, the commentary attributes “the prayer of Nehemiah” to the influence of Dt., again casting doubt with regard to originality. But again we have the desperate plea of a man reduced to tears for the fate of his nation, one spoken after “several days” (4) of mourning and fasting and prayer. (How deaf the commentary is to the cry of the poor soul and his fear of God.)

## **Documents, and Enemies’ Imagination**

It then says Ch. 3 “reproduces a document taken from the Temple archives,” though the info therein is well-known generally and needs no such assistance to discover. (And the notes continue to speak of “glosses” and “stresses” it invents with great facility.)

In Ch. 6, despite the fact that the text makes clear that “nothing of the sort has occurred” and that the idea is a “figment” of the “imagination” of Judah’s enemies (v. 8), the commentary states that “it may have been true” that Nehemiah had designs on kingship. It

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thus shows that it thinks like the enemies of Judah rather than its prophets.

## **Levites' Explanation**

In 8 and 9 the commentary continues its accusations that “the Chronicler” adds and glosses to suit his fancy, especially as regards the Levites, whom the commentary cannot believe could have explained to the people the Word proclaimed by Ezra. For some reason it insists they would only have this “ceremonial importance... at a later date.”

## **Tents**

In 8 it also doubts the verse (17) stating the Feast of Tabernacles had not been celebrated by the whole assembly in tents from the time of Joshua till then. In doing so it misreads the citations it offers as proof: the one from Hosea refers to the tents in the desert during the Exodus (before “the days of Joshua”); and in 2 Chr. there is no mention of all the people going into the hills to gather material to make shelters.

## **Proper Order**

In 10 it again invents difficulties with the text, especially regarding order and placement of passages. But, in contrast to the commentary's (unfounded) theories, Ch. 10 follows well the petition expressed in 9 (serving as a renewal of what has been said), and there are no breaks or interruptions in the flow of the text. And in 11 it again mistakenly claims “the Chronicler interrupts the narrative” where verses directly follow... and it continues to pronounce arbitrarily about lists and their dating.

The commentary ends calling the description of the situation after the dedications “idealistic” (Ch. 12), terms Ezra's zeal

“severity” (Ch. 13), and again invents breaks where all follows logically along.

## **INTRODUCTION TO TOBIT, JUDITH, AND ESTHER**

### **Historical Accuracy**

As has become common among scholars and as is presented in many commentaries, here we find these three great books assumed to be generally fictitious because of their supposed “inaccuracies.” The usual line that “the important thing is to discover the exact purpose of each book and to extract the teaching contained in it” (p. 602) is trotted out, and so historical validity is proposed as inconsequential. But what this reasoning fails to comprehend is that when one casts doubt on the *veracity* of a text, the substance is also called into question. So the line should not be so blithely repeated.

The bigger problem, though, is that the doubt re historical accuracy that is echoed so readily by scholars lacks foundation. It is like the rest of the mistaken assumptions in this commentary: upon closer inspection, they are shown to be wanting; logical explanation can be found for each. I will try to take them one by one.

### **Tobit’s Age**

First, re Tobit: the commentary assumes the text is presenting Tobit as a young man at the time of Solomon’s death, which would mean he lived well over 200 years. It is not, and he did not. The mistake occurs because the commentary does not read properly the passage regarding the golden calves set up by Jeroboam after Solomon’s death. The repeated theme of the passage is that when all

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the House of Naphtali had broken away from true worship in Jerusalem, only Tobit remained faithful: he was “quite alone in making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem” (1:6). He wasn’t there when the calves were first set up but was present some time after all had turned away. (One should remember that the calves remained until the time of the Exile.)

## **Tobias’ Age**

The commentary has a similar problem with Tobias’ age. He had already been born at the time of his father’s exile – which for some reason the commentary gives as 734, though historians place it between 727 and 721 (the reign of Shalmaneser, whom Tobit speaks of as king at the time) – and he is said to have lived to see the fall of Nineveh in 612. The text tells us Tobias lived 117 years (the note in the commentary re 14:14 makes it as much as 127 years). So if we add 117 to 612, we get 729, which could not be more in line with historical dating.

## **Two Days’ Journey**

The commentary also frets over the impossibility of a two days’ journey from Rhages to Ecbatana, which we are told is nearly 200 miles. First, the commentary fails to recognize who gives the number of two (full) days: the Archangel Raphael. He is being queried (in Ch. 5) as to his abilities as a guide, and answers as an expert in travel. Leaving aside the fact that Raphael is an angel of God and could travel the distance in an instant – or quicken his camel as he pleased to soar across any rocky path – it is a fact that camels can travel up to 40 miles per hour. In order to travel 200 miles, it would thus take at least 5 hours. But we need not posit maximum speed. Two *full* days we can safely assume to be a good 24 hours of travel time (12 hours per day), so the camels would need

to travel less than ten miles per hour. What is the great problem with that, especially when an Archangel is the driver?

## **Sargon**

Finally, the commentary cannot understand why Tobit makes no mention of the reign of Sargon as king of Babylon. But a little research shows that Sargon took the throne by force from his brother Shalmaneser – who had granted Tobit and the Jewish exiles in Nineveh much favor. He was older, and was helped from the start by his son Sennacherib, who would succeed him and whom Tobit does speak of, as a violent and blasphemous man. As crown prince, he may well have had power in Nineveh from the beginning of his father's reign; thus Tobit would focus on him and his maltreatment of the Jews rather than on his father.

## **Massacre Decree**

The commentary is kind enough to say that the Book of Esther “is somewhat closer to history,” though not close enough for its liking. It finds it “strange” that a “tolerant” king would agree to the massacre of the Jews (“his own subjects”). Apparently the fact that the man whom the king orders all his officials to prostrate themselves before as if he were a god is the one who advises the king to do so, telling him the Jews do not obey royal edicts and offering him a sizable sum of silver to boot, could not be enough to sway such a paragon of virtue.

## **Vashti and Esther**

It also declares unequivocally that “history leaves no room for either Vashti or Esther,” since Xerxes' queen was Amestris. This ignores Josephus' belief that it is not Xerxes but his *son* that is referred to; and of course it ignores the fact that the tomb of Esther

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and Mordecai is a Jewish holy site and has been added to Iran's National Heritage List. As usual we are to believe that the commentary knows better, that its word is like that of God. (Ironically, the commentary does seem to put some weight on the Word of God, referencing 2Mac.15:36, which tells us that by 160 B.C. "the Palestinian Jews were celebrating a 'Day of Mordecai'" (p. 604)... but this does little to convince it of historicity it seems.)

## **Nebuchadnezzar**

As for the Book of Judith, we are told it shows "bland indifference to history and geography" (602). The commentary troubles over Nebuchadnezzar being called king over the Assyrians and over Nineveh when everyone knows he was king of Babylon. The Douay-Rheims Bible tells us this refers to a different Nebuchadnezzar, which is a simple explanation never considered by the commentary. But the commentary also never considers that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon ruled over Assyria as well, and so could rightfully be called "king over the Assyrians."

## **Bethulia**

Finally, the commentary says Bethulia "defies identification," and so relegates it to the category of fiction. However, though they cannot say exactly where it was, historians do now believe Bethulia was a *definite* place.

## TOBIT

Reading Tobit approached a pleasure; since the problems present in the Introduction are absent here, I hardly had to stop. But there are a couple of further notes.

### Simple History

The commentary calls the first verses a “stylized summary of the historical setting.” It is nice to hear the recognition of history, but there is nothing *stylized* about it – it contains simple, basic, straightforward facts.

### Mountains and Plains

And in Ch. 5 we are told the book is “not concerned with detail,” but from the opening verses it certainly is. (Tobit has the commission from the angel to write down what has happened, and this he takes very seriously.) It is just that, in typical fashion, the commentary doubts the detail presented, as it does in the passage speaking of mountains and plains in a way that does not meet with apparent facts. But would the author not have been aware of the topology? Why would he present it in an apparently contradictory fashion? The commentary does not consider these questions and so, again, fails to realize that these descriptions are given by the Archangel Raphael; to him who rises into the air and disappears in his return to the glory of God (12:20,21), mountains may well be plains, and vice-versa. He knows better than we of what he speaks. It may also simply be that he is being playful with Tobias, who admits his ignorance of the area. (He also says he has “often... stayed with Gabael” (8) – to whom Tobias must travel. Should we take his word at face value here, too?)

## JUDITH

As noted in the Introduction, we are only told that Nebuchadnezzar “reigned over the Assyrians” (1:1), which he did, or that he was “king of the Assyrians” (2:1), which he was – in fact, he could be called king of all the peoples of the many nations and provinces over which he ruled. He is never called “king of Assyria,” as the commentary mistakenly says in Ch. 1.

### **Achior’s Words**

In Ch. 5 the commentary disturbingly says that “the author” *puts words* into Achior’s mouth – as if he didn’t say them himself – and that his speaking of the history of Israel “in terms of the acts of God” is “a favorite O.T. theme,” again, as if the Israelites’ closeness to God and His acting amongst His chosen people is somehow fictionalized. Achior simply presents the facts, the actual history of Israel (despite the commentary’s doubts). Also in 5, it should be noted that the book does not demonstrate “Achior’s contention” but *God’s will*, which Achior recognizes.

### **Mistaken Presumptions**

In 6 the commentary accuses the book of being “particularly interested in the tribe of Simeon” simply because it speaks of a few Simeonite chiefs; in 8 it tells us Judith’s name has been “chosen by the author,” and also mistakenly says the elders of Bethulia “question God’s intentions” when in fact they test Him by setting a limit of days for Him to act; in 9 it (again) baselessly speaks of an “Elohistic” editor... and in 11 we’re told of how “the author exaggerates.”

Finally, at the end of 15 the commentary tells us a hymn is not a hymn but a “poem” – actually it says it is a “poem... in the form of a hymn” (whatever that is supposed to mean).

## ESTHER

As for Esther, again most problems with the commentary have been addressed in the Introduction, but there are a few notes still to be made.

### **Mordecai’s Exile**

We are told again that the Word of God “makes free with chronology” because Mordecai is said to have been exiled under Nebuchadnezzar but is serving under Ahasuerus over a hundred years later. First I would like to ask again why the text would make such an obvious mistake. Clearly the author would know the facts at least as well as we do today. Does the commentary ever stop to ask this question? Since it does not make sense, one should then ask – is there another explanation? But the commentary does not do this, here or elsewhere, and this is one of its principal flaws.

In this case it may be a different king that is referenced – as Josephus held – or perhaps what is meant by calling Mordecai “one of the captives” of Nebuchadnezzar is that his *ancestors* were among those captured, and he is still in exile. The commentary admits of differences in wording in the various versions of the book, so this is a very reasonable explanation for such an obvious contradiction. Or he could simply be over 100 years old.

## **Refusal to Prostrate**

In Ch. 3 the commentary declares that Mordecai's refusal to prostrate himself before Haman is not "a protest of fidelity to God," despite the fact that in his prayer in Ch. 4 Mordecai clearly says he did what he did "rather than place the glory of a man above the glory of God" (14). Not surprisingly, the commentary attempts to water down the veracity of the prayer by stating it "betray(s) an introspective interest and a concern with self-justification" – but it is the *commentary* that is expert at self-justification.

## **Other Means**

Also in 4, it mistakenly states that the text "avoids using the name of God" when Mordecai says other means will be found if Esther does not help the Jews; but what is meant is not God – who is understood to be behind whatever means is found – but that He will use a different person or event to effect His will.

## **“Wildly Exaggerated Numbers”**

Finally, in Ch. 9 the commentary declares the massacres "unhistorical" because of the "extravagance" of the situation and the "wildly exaggerated numbers" (again its problem with numbers). But what is so very unbelievable about 500-800 men killed throughout Susa (the capital of an empire) and another 75,000 (or 15,000, an alternate number the commentary notes) throughout the 127 provinces spanning the entirety of Ahasuerus' empire? That would be (at most) another 500-800 in each province. And the Jews "took no plunder" (v. 10), so the "extravagance" is lacking, too.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF MACCABEES**

On the whole the books of Maccabees are treated fairly well by the commentary, which generally confirms their historical accuracy and provides helpful information. If they were not set amongst the rest of the commentary, one could reasonably let them go without concern. But there are a few nagging shortcomings reflective of the commentary's general bent.

### **The Author's Imagination**

In this Introduction we find the author again given too much credit for the content, and God too little. We read that "for him [the author] the nation's distress is a punishment for sin" (p. 655), as if it is a creation of the author's imagination and that the Jews are not punished for their sins according to the will of God, as is evident throughout the Bible. (It frames the help they receive from the LORD in like manner.) It also states that "he perceives" the Jewish faith "to be at stake," implying that the persecutions and even torture the Jews suffer at the hands of the pagans somehow do not add up to a real threat to their existence. Repeated threats of extinction and attacks to achieve it are negligible, it seems.

In addition, I suppose the commentary has a right to its literary opinions, but terming the writing in the second book "turgid" and "pompous" seems to fall short of proper respect for the Word of God. And it continues to artificially oppose "religious intention" and "historical precision," creating an unnecessary divide.

## THE FIRST BOOK OF MACCABEES

One is able to turn page after page of the books themselves without having to question the commentary, and this blessing even more so inclines one to say nothing critical... but perhaps a couple of points in each book should be made.

### **Godless Alcimus**

The commentary seems to have a particular dislike for the Hasmonaeans, which colors its vision in several places. For instance, in Ch. 7 it states that “Alcimus is described as godless because he flirted with the Greeks and was an obstacle to Hasmonaeon ambitions.” But Alcimus was *in fact* “godless,” as the book tells us (v. 9), opposing Judas in his struggle to save the Jewish faith by siding with those in opposition. He never gains “the support” of the Hasidaeans, as the commentary wrongly says; they briefly trust his (false) proposals of peace but soon recognize Alcimus for the traitor he is. There is never any support. In fact, in the very next verse (16) we are told “he arrested sixty of them and put them to death in one day.”

### **Roman Help**

In Ch. 12 the commentary also unfairly states that “the Romans had done nothing to help Judas Maccabaeus.” The fact is that Judas never sought their help, as is stated later (vv. 14-15); he had all the help he needed in the LORD.

## **THE SECOND BOOK OF MACCABEES**

### **Historical Accuracy...**

The commentary in the second book has a few more problems, saying things like a letter presented in Ch. 1 “offers no guarantee of its historical accuracy,” implying that one cannot assume accuracy from the Word of God (though apparently one can assume such veracity from other sources) and that without explicit guarantees things in the text become doubtful... but such problems remain relatively minimal.

### **Sacrifices Purified**

Later in Ch. 1 it says what the king is told about the fire and the liquid is different than previously stated; but all that is added is that the “people had purified the materials of the sacrifice” (33), which can be easily understood from the pouring of the liquid over the wood as described earlier (in v. 21). So there really is no difference.

### **The Lost Ark**

In Ch. 2 it questions historical accuracy again, stating that “the ark disappeared when the Temple was destroyed.” But do we not have here a record of what happened to it? How can the commentary know this is not what happened?

## **Heavenly Apparitions**

In Ch. 5 the commentary terms the heavenly apparitions described in the book “a favorite literary device of the author,” suggesting they are works of his imagination and did not actually occur... thus making the Word a liar.

The commentary continues to speak overmuch of the “author” demonstrating “his thesis” (Ch. 9), and it invents *unconnectedness* (in 12) and “variance” (14) where there is just added detail. But overall things move along fairly smoothly, and so we will pass on to the Wisdom Books.

### **3. THE WISDOM BOOKS**

#### **INTRODUCTION TO THE WISDOM BOOKS**

This Introduction is generally fine, recognizing even the “essential superiority” of “the religion of Yahweh” over the “common wisdom of the East” (p. 723), but it does have at least two problems.

#### **The Nation and Great Themes**

First, it says these Wisdom Books do “not touch on the great themes of the Old Testament”; rather, “like their pagan counterparts they are absorbed in the individual and his destiny,” unconcerned for the nation as a whole. This is a false opposition of the individual against the nation and his concerns over greater themes. They should not be so arbitrarily divided, for the plight of the individual reveals and embodies the plight of the nation, and the great themes can be applied to his life.

Aside from this, the nation as a whole and the great themes *are* addressed directly in these books. In fact, the Introduction to the Psalms (pp. 780-81) specifically designates a category of “collective entreaties,” listing at least twelve psalms that are focused on the nation as a whole and in which “God is entreated to save and restore his people,” i.e. the nation (not the individual). It also tells us that some of the thanksgiving psalms are collective, wherein “the people as a whole thanks God”; that “universal renewal [is] foretold” in the psalms; and that Ps. 119 is “a hymn to the Law.” So, great themes like salvation and the law are substantially addressed, as is the nation. (And the commentary once again contradicts itself.)

## **The Afterlife**

The Introduction also grants decisive influence to Platonic philosophy over the Israelite religion, stating that “its doctrine of an immortal soul [broke] through the limitations of Hebrew thought” (724), when the reverse may well be true. It generally sells the O.T. short regarding its sense of the afterlife, unable to see that it develops this sense even from the first pages of Genesis.

### **INTRODUCTION TO JOB**

The Introduction to Job is likewise generally good, even very good. It is particularly refreshing to hear Job called “a famous figure in ancient history... believed to have lived in the patriarchal age” (726), with even the region in which he lived given. And it takes on directly the “questions” raised as to the book’s “authenticity” – saying one theory is “based on a misunderstanding” (727) and that another’s “arguments are not decisive, nor is the matter of great importance.” But then, though it recognizes its own dating of the work is “conjectural,” it declares that “the book is later than Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” giving no reason other than that they have “certain expressions and ideas in common.” And on such ephemeral notions it states unequivocally: “We are therefore in post-exilic times.” The same old refrain with no substantiation.

The Introduction also assumes, again without foundation, that the book (along with Ezekiel) “has only earthly retribution in mind” (728), again exhibiting blindness to the greater significance found throughout the Word of God.

## JOB

The commentary in Job is also refreshingly good (if this continues I may have to put down my pen), but it still falls into giving “the author” too much sway, saying he “seems to have allowed his own opinions to influence” his writing (Ch. 4) and that he “seems to accept” this or that (Ch. 7...). Also, in Ch. 5, when the text uses an ancient Name for God (Shaddai), instead of seeing this as indication of ancient origin, it calls it a “deliberate archaism” in order to safeguard its post-exilic theory.

### Resurrection

In Ch. 14 the commentary continues blind to resurrection themes in the text, stating: “The expectation of a resurrection at the end of time is apparently not yet within the scope of the author” (i.e. the text). But the commentary confuses not rising again *in this world* – not returning to life as it is here – with our rising in the next. The text specifically tells us, “The heavens will wear away before he wakes, before he rises from his sleep” (12). This clearly indicates that he *will wake*, he *will rise*, in the next life; it is perfectly in keeping with Christ’s teaching that heaven and earth will pass away before the final Day, before the resurrection of the dead.

### Moving Verses

Beginning in Ch. 24, the commentary shows more serious problems, as it speaks repeatedly of “additions” and starts to move passages around as it sees fit.

In 24 it says one passage is “possibly an independent poem inserted here by the author,” then moves other verses (18-24) to the end of Ch. 27. One asks why, and the commentary (in 27) admits it has done so “only conjecturally.” Aside from the fact that one

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should not take it upon oneself to alter Scripture (and especially not by conjecture), the verses fit very well where the text has them! Verses 16 and 17 speak of the sinner hiding from “daytime” and “morning,” and 18 continues right in line, saying, “Headlong he flees from the daylight.” So why move them?

### **And Changing Speakers...**

The commentary then not only changes the location of a passage, moving 26:1-4 to the end of 26, it changes the speaker as well, putting Job’s words (vv. 5-14) into Bildad’s mouth. Though at first glance v. 5 does not seem to follow v. 4 and it might appear 5-14 would go well as a continuation of Bildad’s speech, upon reflection they can rightly be seen as an affirmation of Bildad’s illustration of the greatness of God, Job thereby making clear that he already knows well (and better) what Bildad attempts to convey as if it were some new knowledge.

Before this, the commentary insinuates Ch. 25 has no connection to the dialogue. Though it grants a “possible” connection, that interpretation is invalid: 25 is Bildad’s reaction to the idea that *Job is clean*, not that “God is helpless,” and it thus follows well.

In 27 it again changes the speaker, attributing vv. 13-23 to Zophar since they “can hardly belong to Job.” It continues to shock the reader how blithely the Word of God is altered – at the commentary’s will and whim. Here it is particularly curious since the commentary itself earlier explains well what is happening in these verses: “Job repeats what Eliphaz has said about the punishment of the wicked,” thus demonstrating again that he knows all this and his friends’ words are vain. So they are not Zophar’s (or Eliphaz’) words but Job’s ready imitation of them.

The commentary then calls “the position and significance” of Ch. 28 “obscure” (perhaps because the wisdom of God is so obscure to the commentary); and since it has changed what has come before it, this chapter becomes a continuation of Zophar’s speech. But

## *Job*

these are clearly the words of Job. The profound mining imagery and his recognition of wisdom's depths as so much more profound – that our minds cannot approach the LORD – could only come from a soul suffering as is Job. Can one really imagine Zophar saying, “But tell me, where does wisdom come from? Where is understanding to be found?” (20). Such questioning is not in his character but is firmly in the character of Job.

That Ch. 28 is Job's words is clearly indicated in the first verse of 29, which states: “And Job continued his solemn discourse.” One cannot continue what one has not been saying. (It is surprising the commentary did not presume to edit this out to aid its theory.)

## **Elihu**

The commentary takes it upon itself to move verses again in Ch. 31 (vv. 38-40 to after v. 16), and because it finds the speech of Elihu (begun in Ch. 32) comes “unexpectedly,” it concludes it must be “added... by another author” just to “anticipate the speech of Yahweh.” To its mind, it is not an integral part of the dialogue... as if men cannot hint at the LORD's words or that foreshadowing cannot occur naturally. But one can readily see the speech of this young man as the voice of a child hailing the coming of the LORD and His answer. He is not referenced at the end, not chastised by the LORD, because there is not much to correct. And that his name is not mentioned earlier is specious proof – there must have been any number of people gathered around to listen to these wise men (including their assistants and servants).

The commentary finds another “gloss” in Ch. 42.... But I would like to say before I close that I found the translation here quite inspiring. I could imagine the book as a stage play (and took notes to this end).

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

### David the Psalmist

This Introduction exhibits several problems scholars create with regard to Psalms: minimizing the authorship of David, leaning toward later composition, and theorizing about multiple collections. The commentary does make a welcome admission regarding later composition, saying that “assigning a very late date to the majority of the psalms” was “an erroneous assessment” (p. 784); but, despite a lack of proof, it still leans toward later dating for many. It also makes positive points regarding David as the principal Psalmist... but is quick each time to call this conclusion into question with unfounded reasons, ending by granting that “some” are *probably* by him, at least “a few” serving as a “nucleus” for those attributed directly to him. Its concessions are less than edifying.

### Echoes

The commentary says that psalms speaking of the kingship of God “must have been written during the Exile” because they have “many echoes of earlier psalms and of the second part of Isaiah.” But it is difficult to see how a relation to *earlier* psalms is justification for their being *later* psalms... and could it not be just as likely that Isaiah was echoing the Psalms (or that both are just echoing the voice of the LORD)?

### Duplication

And the invention of sources and mixing and matching of them continues, too. For instance, the commentary finds “the way certain psalms duplicate each other” proof “that there were several

collections existing side by side.” But why would one need multiple sources to say the same thing? Is it not more likely that the inspiration is similar and that those similar verses emphasize the importance of the sentiment expressed... and so, that they might be particularly common or popular declarations?

But all of these questions will arise again as we make our way through the Psalms of David.

## THE PSALMS

I will try to be a bit more selective in noting problems, but first I must say that, overall, this translation of Psalms tends to be awkward and wordy, more inclined to prosaic explication than the poetic expression these great songs deserve. It should also be generally noted that the enemy spoken of so often by David, in such desperate and even violent terms, is primarily sin. Thus should we read it today. And though there is indeed an “eschatological theme... common in Psalms,” it is usually by extension; the more immediate meaning regards victory in battle (as in Ps. 9).

### **Resurrection**

The commentary continues to characterize the Israelites’ belief in resurrection as “vague” (Ps. 16) or otherwise undeveloped, but, though development may have occurred – and perhaps still occurs in the Church – the belief is much more present in Psalms (and the O.T. in general) than the commentary recognizes. For instance, it would do well to accept the interpretation of “on waking, to gaze my fill on your likeness” (17:15) as a “reference to the resurrection” and not diminish this significance, as it repeatedly does.

## **One Psalm**

In Ps. 24 the commentary does well to recognize that the latter verses could refer to “the translation of the ark in the days of David,” but does poorly to suggest (rather inexplicably) that the first part “seems to be of later date.” The first part introduces well the second: first, God’s glory is declared and the question is posed as to who can stand in His holy place; then is related the coming into His presence.

## **“Post-Exilic”**

Ps. 25 is one of many places the commentary forces a “post-exilic” interpretation on the text. It seems to think the Exile was the only time the Israelites suffered the violence of their enemies and fell into desperate straits... and the return the only time they found relief or received “land for their own” (13). This is, in fact, the constant theme of Judges (which of course precedes even David’s time). Only once (Ps. 137) is Babylon mentioned in Psalms, yet one would think it is spoken of throughout, as often as the Exile is read into the text.

## **Five Books**

In Ps. 36 the commentary proposes (again without explanation or basis) two parts that “may have existed separately.” And at the end of 41 we are told: “This doxology closes the first book of the Psalter.” Psalms is broken here into five books, with a doxology at the end of each. There is nothing necessarily wrong with such ordering... but it does seem very arbitrary and one fears it being taken in too absolute a fashion. (Again, it would pass relatively unnoticed if it weren’t set amongst so many other difficulties in the commentary.)

## **Destruction and Lament...**

In 44 the commentary continues its regular practice of dating psalms at a later time, particularly those which speak of destruction in battle, as this psalm does. But again, slaughter in battle and lament thereof is a constant throughout Israelite history, so there is no reason to change the dating to after the Exile. And suggesting destruction of Jerusalem in particular is especially without cause. (I note that v. 17 says, “We had not forgotten you”, but the people had forgotten the LORD long before the destruction of Jerusalem – or “the Maccabean period.”)

## **God is God**

The commentary then suggests Ps. 45 “may be a secular song to celebrate the marriage of an Israelite king.” But it is specifically addressed to *God*. To address this problem, the commentary makes the foolish statement: “In the Bible the title ‘God’ is given to the angels... to leaders and judges... to Moses... to the ghost of Samuel...”. This confusion of reference to the above as “gods” or “a god” and the title “God” is very disturbing, and very misleading.

## **Destruction and Lament...**

In 46 it calls the help God brings “at crack of dawn” (5) to defeat the roaring nations a “probable allusion to the withdrawal of Sennacherib’s forces.” How or why it makes this reach is only explained by its proclivity to date things after David’s time. Again (and again), destruction in battle and the lament of the people – and God’s help – are *constant* occurrences throughout the history of Israel (and, one supposes, many nations and peoples).

In 48 it again invents allusion to Sennacherib and dates the psalm to Nehemiah’s time... and one can only beg: *Let it be!* Please, stop the fantasies. Trust in the Word of God.

## **Resurrection...**

In 49 the commentary thrice recognizes reference to the triumph and the glorification of the righteous at the end of time, but insists nonetheless that “revelation of the resurrection of the dead” is not to come till “later” – and it leaves no room for reference to any sharing in being “taken up” to heaven like Enoch and Elijah. Ironically, implicit in this recognition of Enoch being lifted up is a belief in resurrection... and Enoch comes a *long* time before the Psalms. (So perhaps it is the commentary which has not yet come to faith in the resurrection.)

## **“Elohistic”**

In Ps. 51 the commentary leans into the Exile again and conjectures another addition; then it calls 53 an “‘Elohistic’ edition of 14,” even though 14 already uses “God” (“Elohim”) as well as “Yahweh” three times each, so it is already *half-Elohistic* (to employ the commentary’s absurd reasoning).

## **David is David**

It conjectures another addition in 56, and doesn’t acknowledge David as the composer of 57, nor of 59, where it says, “The author may have been a Jew of the Dispersion,” despite the fact that “the author” is stated as David at the head of the psalm and the specific context is given (“When Saul sent spies to his house to have him killed”)... and that this makes perfect sense regarding its content. As usual, the commentary has its own agenda to promote.

In 60 it again projects the destruction of Jerusalem upon one of many of Israel’s defeats. Here it also calls a rallying banner “a signal for retreat,” in the process ignoring a verse that tells us they continue to “fight like heroes” (12). And it says “a Levite” wrote Ps. 61, again contradicting the assignation presented, and so fails to

recognize David speaking of himself and his progeny in v. 6: “Let the king live on and on, prolong his years, generation on generation.”

## **Poetry**

In 65 the commentary does not realize the text speaks poetically of “the portals of morning and evening” (8), thinking it means literal “gates” through which the sun passes, and so, ironically, in its own blindness creates fertile ground for those who disdain the Word of God for its “ignorance.” It then *overly* poeticizes v. 11, imagining the text is saying, “The chariot of God... traverses the earth dispensing fertility,” when it merely reads, “Abundance flows wherever you pass” – apparently with the same intended implication of ignorance.

## **Projections...**

In 67 the commentary again suggests Psalms has been influenced by (the much-later) Isaiah; and in 68 it presumes to include Ahab and Hezekiah in the psalm’s outlined history of Israel – though neither of them is ever mentioned! (Again it needs no substantiation for promoting its post-exilic theories.) It reads its own specifics into general statements – projecting Ahab into a verse (23) wherein dogs lap up the blood of enemies; and it refuses to recognize obvious specifics – seeing Hezekiah instead of David in “my king’s procession to the sanctuary” (26).

After conjecturing another “added” line in 69, a gloss in 71, and an added prayer in 72... the commentary tells us the second book of the Psalter comes to a close. But the problems persist.

In 73 we are told that “in the end receive me into glory” (24) is “probably not a reference to heavenly glory”; in 74 that reference to Antiochus and Nebuchadnezzar is present... and again that the

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seventy years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah is only symbolic, not literal.

In 75 and 76 images are said to be “taken from the prophets” (or specifically from Jeremiah), and in 76 Sennacherib is conjured up again. In 77 we are in post-exilic times once more, and in 78 the commentary fails to see that “Ephraim” stands for all of Israel.

It then projects upon 80 the sacking of Jerusalem or of the Northern Kingdom when general malaise and lament alone is indicated. (It should be noted that the commentary never sees these projections as prophetic foreshadowing but as literal references.... Then again it couldn't, since it has no understanding of, much less faith in, prophecy.) And it doesn't care if a psalm is attributed to Asaph or David – it interprets as it pleases. Finally, in 80 it also sees “allusion to Zerubbabel” rather than David.

## **The Exile of Sin**

In 85, according to the commentary we again have “the returned exiles” being referenced, though, as usual, no mention is made of Babylon or Nebuchadnezzar and “captives” (1) could easily refer to those of any time. In fact, it does not appear the woes of war are spoken of at all – the focus is on sin and the “exile” produced by God's wrath against it. The text calls Israel to “renounce their folly” and “glory will live in [their] country” (8,9), indicating they are still *in* their country (just lacking the favor of God).

## **Citizenship in Heaven**

In 87 the commentary can see Isaiah foreshadowing the Church but not Psalms foreshadowing Isaiah, and so it again insists Isaiah precedes David (and Psalms). And the “roll of citizenship” spoken of re v. 6 can only be that of Heaven because all the varied peoples have already been clearly referenced regarding their earthly

citizenship. (The arbitrary termination of the third book comes at the end of Ps. 89.)

## **David the Psalmist!**

There is a very interesting, and very revealing, note to be made re Ps. 96. The commentary again (mistakenly) sees borrowing from Isaiah, and it references a version of this psalm in 1Chr. 16. In v. 7 of that chapter we read: “David, foremost in praising Yahweh, entrusted this song of praise to Asaph and his kinsmen.” This has greater significance than the obvious dating of the psalm to David’s time (before Isaiah) – it shows how a psalm could be attributed to *another person*, in this case Asaph, and yet have its origin in *David*. Thus not only the great number of psalms specifically attributed to David can be seen as his, but also those attributed to Asaph or anyone else of his time... or even those not attributed at all! Psalm 96 has *no* composer acknowledged yet we know from 1Chr. 16 that it is by David. This gives great support to the historical and theological understanding of David as the eminent Psalmist and composer of the Book of Psalms.

Much to the exasperation of the reader, however, the commentary continues full steam with its insistence on Isaiah’s influence, as it does again in Ps. 98.

## **One Psalm**

Ps. 102 it sees as combining “two poems,” though there is no break and all follows well. The “cry for help” (1), “the prayer of the abandoned” (17), is answered by Yahweh, who “hear[s] the sighing of the captive” (20). And the commentary repositions one verse (28) from a logical place to one where it does not fit.

## **History**

It is interesting, and, again, very revealing, to note that, as in Ps. 105, the history that is given throughout Psalms *always* ends by David's time – it never goes beyond it, never approaches or surpasses the Exile. Why would that be if Psalms were greatly composed post-exile?

Ps. 106 is equally revealing. As it goes through the history of Israel, v. 27 tells us how, in the time of the desert, God promised to cause “their descendants to fall to the heathen, and to disperse them throughout those countries.” Here the time frame is clearly *well before* the Exile – Phineas, for instance, comes afterward. And then speaking of the time of Judges, the text tells us, “He handed them over to the pagans” (41) and “time and again He rescued them” (43) and made their “captors” treat them less harshly (46). This clearly shows that captivity and dispersal were indeed present *before* the Exile (indeed, throughout Israelite history) and unmasks the arbitrary nature of the commentary's predisposition to ignore the Word of God and its time frame to push everything after the Exile. (And at the end of 106 is the arbitrary close of the fourth book.)

In 107 we again hear of Isaiah's influence and are told specifically that vv. 10-16 speak of “the return from exile,” again as if that was the only time souls were released from the “gloom and darkness” (10) of sin; and the same is said of the first stanza, simply because it speaks of coming “home from foreign countries” (3). But as was shown in the previous psalm, this could refer to virtually any time.

## **The Exile...**

In Ps. 108 the commentary again mistakes a common refrain of David for an editor's combination of verses from other psalms; and in 109 it continues to refuse to recognize David as “the psalmist.” Then we have a blessed break (with some informative notes) before

*Intro to The Proverbs*

revisiting our “return from exile” theme in 123... though there is not even a remote indication of a time beyond the Exile and the psalm is but an individual’s (David’s) cry of distress.

The word “captives” (4) is enough to project exile upon Ps. 126; and the commentary, unaware of how the praises of God always overflow, says 135 is composed entirely of borrowed material.

It is difficult to argue with the Exile theme in 137, since here, for the only time in Psalms, Babylon is mentioned. One might wonder if there could have been another, earlier time when Israelites sat beside the streams of Babylon and wept for their homeland, but the destruction of Jerusalem is pretty clear. However, if indeed this psalm was composed after the Exile, that would not give the commentary liberty to project the same time period upon the rest of Psalms, as it is so inclined to do. Ps. 137 would be the exception, not the rule.

On that note we shall end our arduous journey through the commentary on Psalms.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROVERBS**

### **Solomon**

The only real point of contention here is the inevitable discounting of Solomon as composer of Proverbs. Despite recognizing that the “collection as a whole dates from his time” (p. 931) and the fact that the book itself in its first verse declares that these are “the proverbs of Solomon son of David, King of Israel”... and regardless of his fame as the wisest man to have lived... still we encounter, on the shakiest grounds, repeated doubt of his authorship.

### *The Wisdom Books*

The Introduction tells us the prologue (despite the aforementioned attribution) must be later because of its “affinities with post-exilic writings” (p. 932), though it never says what these nebulous affinities are. It recognizes Egyptian influence upon many proverbs, but never considers the influence could have been the other way around, since souls came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

Even the short sections attributed to Arabian sages could have just been under their influence or, since the Intro tells us these names are fictitious, they could be titles for Solomon (like Qoheleth). At most there are minimal exceptions to Solomon’s authorship, but the commentary again makes the exception the rule.

Finally, let me note how one section is declared to be “proverbs of Solomon transcribed by Hezekiah” (25:1). This reveals clearly the oral tradition upon which the Word of God is founded (but is so greatly ignored or disparaged), here extending from Solomon to Hezekiah but indicating its further extension back in time. It shows how they are *Solomon’s* proverbs, though written down by another hand.

## **THE PROVERBS**

It is interesting that the commentary in the book proper does not really concern itself with doubting Solomon as composer. And there is generally not a lot to dispute.

### **Alien Women**

In 3 the commentary states that there is “only one allusion to prostitution” throughout the book... but it is difficult to tell who is meant by terms like “loose-living woman” and “alien” (as in 5:2,3). Seeing the word “alien” one is reminded of all the foreign women

with their foreign gods who were so much the source of Solomon's downfall; though in 7:19 the alien woman does seem to be another man's wife. But could the other man be another god, since idolatry is so often called adultery in the Bible? The commentary itself notes re 2:17 that "adultery is identified... with apostasy from the covenant of God."

## **The Height of Proverbs**

In 5 an addition is ascribed, and in 8 we are told the text is "overloaded." We are also told 8 and 9 "mark the height of Proverbial teaching." If this is so, then they (still part of the prologue) should certainly be attributed to Solomon who was, again, the wisest man in the world.

## **Moving Verses**

Ch. 8 displays another troubling problem that recurs in Proverbs: the moving of verses hither and yon. Here it puts 17 (and 13) before 15 even though 14 flows well into 15 as is – 14 speaks of the "sound judgment" and "strength" that belong to Wisdom, and 15 states: "By me monarchs rule" – and neither 17 (nor 13) seem to fit between. (One continues to wish the commentary would be circumspect about altering the Word of God.)

## **Folly**

Then in 9 it tells us six verses (7-12) have been "subsequently inserted," apparently because the word "folly" appears in the verses that immediately precede and follow the passage. (Would that it could see the sense in the previous chapter, and here allow the Word to be.)

## **Style Change**

Beginning with Ch. 10 we have a section the Introduction recognizes as possibly from Solomon, the previous nine chapters having been discounted. There is a change in style here – we go from a longer form to short, single-verse darts of wisdom – but the same author could certainly have written them both, as the text says is the case.

## **Confusion**

Then the commentary seems to misinterpret 13:8: “The poor man sees no threat,” presuming the threat regards his fortune rather than his life. It then says v. 23 seems “corrupt,” but if this is so, one wonders why it uses this version instead of the Greek, which it quotes in its notes and which is quite clear.

At the end of 16 it provides a helpful note regarding the presence of lots in ephods; but at the beginning of 18 it confuses the meaning of the one “who lives by himself,” thinking it refers to “solitude” rather than self-centeredness and pride. Clearly here is *condemnation* and not *commendation*.

## **Doubting Solomon**

In 19 and 20 it calls verses “doubtful,” in 20 (v. 30) betraying a lack of understanding for the benefit of discipline and chastisement (not surprising for a product of this age of pleasure). Then one wonders about the designation of a new section in the middle of Ch. 22. The form does change, but then why doesn’t the chapter number change with it? There again seems to be something of the discounting of Solomon in this. We are told in the note that the Hebrew lacks the heading which denotes the change; and it seems the Hebrew version of the first verse of the new section (v. 17) would indicate Solomon: “Give ear and listen to the words of the

wise,” since none is wiser than he. However, the heading it inserts (“Sayings of the sages”) appears an attempt to move away from him, as does its version of v. 17 (“Give ear to my words”).

It is curious, too, that in this section the text asks, “Have I not written for you thirty chapters?” (22:20), and this book is thirty chapters plus one.

## **Cuts**

In 26 it is a shame the editor cuts words from v. 6, since the versions it gives in its note – but which it calls “very doubtful” – tie in well with the following verse: we would have gone from the fool who “cuts off his feet” to the phrase, “unreliable as a lame man’s legs.” Wish it had seen this, and at any rate let things be.

## **Solomon**

In Ch. 30 we are told of those to whom it is attributed: “The Vulgate does not take these as proper names and translates ‘Words of him who gathers’,” which is one meaning of Qoheleth (the Gatherer)... so again we could have Solomon indicated. The commentary also calls the second part of the heading “very doubtful” and again notes the Vulgate version: “Vision told by the man with whom God is” – another nice reference to Solomon, with whom the LORD promised to remain and to grant the greatest of wisdom.

Ch. 31 might indeed be one not composed by Solomon – not part of the “thirty” – but it seems it is explicitly addressed *to* him: “Do not spend all your energy on women, nor your loins on these destroyers of kings” (3). And the predominant theme is the “perfect wife” (10). Does Sirach 47 not speak thus to Solomon: “You abandoned your body to women” (21); does Ben Sira not relate how thus “the sovereignty was split in two” (23)?

## INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES

### **Doubting Solomon, Again**

The fundamental problem with the commentary on Ecclesiastes is, not surprisingly, its failure to recognize Solomon as author, here calling the attribution to him “no more than a conventional literary device” (p. 978). Failing to recognize the king’s authorship, it thus misses the essence of the book – that it reflects the darkness into which Solomon’s sin cast him later in life. It is quite clear we have a soul who abandons wisdom, his great gift from the LORD, and so can no longer see God’s hand at work... for how his eyes are blinded! All he can see is “the emptiness of things human,” as the Introduction rightly states is the theme.

The Intro speaks of “foreign influence” (979) without realizing it is indeed the influence of the multitude of his foreign wives and concubines that has brought Solomon to this state. And it says “the last few verses... raise doubts even among those who maintain the unity of authorship,” but it does not indicate the verses to which it refers, and there is no corresponding note in the book itself! So one finds no reason for the statement.

It uses particularly vain reasoning to date the book in the “Greek period,” assuming that questioning and doubt (due especially to sin) could not have existed in another time or culture.

And it engages in an equally vain search for pat answers and explanations as it devises a model of Ecclesiastes as a book seeking a “new revelation,” and is unable to see that the maxim, “Blessed are the poor,” is echoed *throughout* the Old Testament, coming to fulfillment in Christ. (And in the process the commentary leaves out the determinant last words, “in spirit.”)

# **ECCLESIASTES**

I have notes all over these ten or eleven pages of Scripture. I will try to condense them as best I can.

## **Job and Aquinas**

First, the commentary compares Solomon unfavorably with Job, but another contrasting figure comes to mind: St. Thomas Aquinas, the great Doctor of the Church who recognized all the brilliant writing he had done was but straw for the fire. This would seem similar to Solomon's conclusion; however, Thomas in the end found something *greater*, the transcendent Silence of the LORD, whereas Solomon finds mere emptiness because he has lost God and wasted his great gift of wisdom.

## **Foolishness**

It is true he “acquired a greater stock of wisdom than any of [his] predecessors” (1:16), but, as he himself admits, he has foolishly “resolved to embrace folly” (2:3), thinking by this he might find wisdom. Only a fool would seek wisdom in its opposite, and so we see just how far Solomon has removed himself from the LORD.

## **Empty Vision**

He finds “nothing new under the sun” (1:9) and sees only the vanity of all things because the fresh vision of God has left his eyes and his mind. He tells us he has “amassed silver and gold” (2:8) – thus courting the mark of the devil – and recounts all the “great things” (2:5) he has done... but without any reference (much less thankfulness) to the LORD; he speaks only of “all that [his] hands had achieved” (2:11). He believes wisdom remains with him even

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as he boasts: “I denied my eyes nothing they desired” (2:10). The foolishness of Lot that leads to Sodom is heavy upon him, but he cannot see it. He cares only for money and power and fame... and how to maintain them even after death.

## **God’s Work**

He comes repeatedly to the understanding that “there is no happiness for man but to eat and drink and to be content with his work” (2:24) – work that is the performance of the duty assigned by God – but he repeatedly dismisses such humble insight. And so he becomes the sinner upon whom the LORD “lays the task of gathering and storing up” (26) in vain. It is remarkable that the commentary calls the maxim above “epicurean in flavor,” when it is its exact *opposite*. It is not pleasure that is extolled – that is Solomon’s mantra – but one’s natural reward for a job well done in God’s name.

## **God’s Time**

In Ch. 3 is the famous “a time for every occupation” (1) passage. It illustrates that all leads to God; but without God all is indeed vanity. Solomon continues to downplay “the task that God gives mankind to labor at” (9), as he selfishly continues to seek his own gain and despairs that he does not know what will happen “after his time” (22). He simply cannot leave this in the LORD’s hands.

## **Man and Beast**

It is true that “the fate of man and beast is identical” (3:19) when man acts like a beast, as does Solomon. The commentary is correct in saying that for him “moral considerations are irrelevant,” because he has lost all sense of morality in his gathering of the wind while forgetting God and His commandments. And in 4 the dark thoughts

continue as he asks: “For whom, then, do I work so hard?” (8), all in vain – never considering his work to be for the LORD. (Also in 3, to keep to its theory the commentary says of the verse, “God has set eternity in their heart” (its alternate for v. 11), that it is “not to be taken in the Christian sense.” But eternity is eternity.)

## **Money**

In Ch. 5 we have an echo of Job: “As naked as he came he will depart again” (14), but again the comparison is unfavorable to Solomon; for where Job was acceptant of this fate, putting all his trust in the LORD, Solomon sees it as a “grievous wrong” (15), since his concern is only for money, even after death.

This becomes very clear in 6 as he so greatly extols “riches, property, honors” that he declares the one who has these has “nothing at all left him to wish for” (2). These things are all that bring happiness for Solomon and, again, he desires to keep them even beyond the grave. In fact, he believes one to be better off dead or never having been born than to be without pleasure from riches. (The nihilistic philosophy espoused in this work may make some scholars in future millennia certain it was written in our own age.)

Getting back to the commentary itself, in 5 we are told that the passage about “he who loves money” (9) is not “on the wicked plutocrat but on money itself.” And in 7 it says the concept that “the prosperity of the wicked and the misfortunes of the virtuous are neither of them lasting” is refuted by Qoheleth in vv. 9-12; but one finds absolutely no sense of this in the passage, which just continues with good, clear wisdom. (Again the commentary pulls content out of thin air.)

## **Simplicity**

Though the last few chapters show more consistent wisdom, there is no sign that Solomon follows the wisdom he professes. At

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the end of 7 he says that “God made man simple; man’s complex problems are of his own devising” (30). This sums up Solomon’s problems (not to mention those of the commentary), for he cannot accept God’s simplicity, particularly when it comes to women.

## **Woman**

He says also in 7: “I find woman more bitter than death; she is a snare, her heart a net, her arms are chains” (27); and one does not doubt that it is so for Solomon (many times over), for he is the “sinner” held “captive” by the lust of which he speaks. He does not heed his own advice to “spend your life with the woman you love” (9:9), but does quite the opposite... and thus the vanity closes in upon him. Thus even death is empty for him, holding nothing of salvation or the glory of God.

## **Nothingness**

There is nothing more to say of the commentary except to note its very generous and positive spin in the last chapter, where it states of the book: “It incites the reader to disinterested religion and to that kind of prayer in which a creature, aware of its nothingness, adores the mystery of God.” One wishes this were so, and one might be able to make it so for oneself... but it is not so for Solomon as it was for Job (or St. John of the Cross).

“Fear God and keep His commandments, since this is the whole duty of man” (12:13) is the sage’s final word – but how Qoheleth has abandoned this wisdom.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SONGS OF SONGS**

Same story. Though we are told: “That Solomon was a writer of songs Hebrew tradition was aware,” of course, he did not write this “greatest of all songs.” Because of “historical allusions” (that can’t be found) and “vocabulary and style” (so subjectively interpreted), it was instead some imitator of his brilliance who lived (when else?) in “post-exilic” times. And so, though from the first verse the text tells us, “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s,” the commentary assures us it is not his at all.

## **THE SONG OF SONGS**

### **“King”**

In the first chapter the commentary begins its designation of the book as “post-exilic literature” because the LORD is called “king of Israel” (as He frequently was at that time, we are told)... then immediately cites similar references in Deuteronomy and Psalms, which are well before the Exile. So, though “king” may or may not have been common later, this is no reason to date the book “post-exilic.” The title is always appropriate and, as indicated, is used much earlier – and would seem quite appropriate during the reign of the great king.

### **“Post-Exilic” Dating**

In this same chapter the commentary speaks of “literary fiction,” Greek choruses, the Chaldean destruction of Jerusalem, “forced

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labor of the exile,” and coming “home from exile” – all vain attempts to date the book later. All are highly disputable and could easily refer to something other than that into which the commentary pigeonholes them. It continuously tries to force square pegs into round holes. It even suggests post-exilic dating by saying “joy” is a characteristic of the prophecies, as if it is not characteristic of the rest of the Bible, and, specifically, earlier times.

## **Green Beds**

It then states that the verse, “All green is our bed” (1:16), refers to “the miraculous fertility of Palestine after the restoration of the exiles,” as if green beds did not exist at other times, and especially during Solomon’s reign! Indeed, it recognizes regarding the very next verse that “cedar and cypress from Lebanon [were] precious materials of the Temple and palace of Solomon”; so why are green beds not as reflective of Solomon’s splendor? (The commentary would have done better to stick to its “eschatological” interpretation of the Song, which pops up here and there but is not sustained.)

## **Before Its Time**

The vain attempts to validate its preconceived “post-exilic” theory continue in several places in Ch. 2 (and throughout). Perhaps the biggest stretch is in reference to v. 7, where the Bridegroom tells the daughters of Jerusalem “not to stir my love, nor rouse it, until it please to awake.” This is a clear (and beautiful) reference to the need to give love time to blossom, not to force it before its time – a lesson much needed in our age. But the commentary’s interpretation is that “sleep symbolizes the ordeal of exile” and “restoration depends on the willing conversion of the Bride.” The commentary really is relentless in seeing things as it wants to see them.

## **Exile Ever Present**

At the end of 2 it notes that “Yahweh gave Abraham His promise that the captives would return” in Gn. 15, many centuries before the Exile occurred, thereby making clear that the Exile was known to Israel throughout its entire existence, and so its literature could refer to it at *any* time (including the time of Solomon). Then in 3 it insightfully speaks of our need to “seek” the LORD, telling us of the “change of heart” required to find Him... but it does not hold to such insights. Instead, it continues to imagine references to the Exile, and considers them proof of late authorship.

In one note it states that Solomon “is here the messianic king who brings the eschatological peace,” but it cannot resist adding, “so long desired by the exiles.” *All* hearts desire such peace! And always have.

## ***From Lebanon***

It is noteworthy that in Ch. 4 the Bridegroom calls out: “Come from Lebanon, my promised bride” (8), not from Babylon. But the commentary, instead of recognizing this contradiction of its theory, doubles down on its stretching of the text by saying, “From this same mountain road the returning exiles gaze down on the land of their ancestors.” It doesn’t matter that the text repeatedly says come *from* Lebanon, not pass *through* Lebanon. Nothing is permitted to stand in the way of its theory.

Continuing in 5, the commentary tells us there are (pre-exilic) allusions to the Temple of Solomon and the Holy of Holies, but still it does not stop to question its theory, insisting on exilic references where it can force them through.

## **Returning Hearts**

In 6 it tells us the name of “the second capital, Samaria, is deliberately suppressed,” never considering it may not yet have been so designated. And in 7, though again recognizing that “hearts must ‘return’ to God” and continuing to speak of the “eschatological Dawn,” the commentary repeatedly insists all refers to post-exilic times.

## **John Hyrcanus**

Then in 8, in the passage referring to the little sister whose breasts are not yet formed (vv. 7-9), it inexplicably finds “bitter criticism,” and foolishly says it is pointed at the commentary’s favorite target, John Hyrcanus (of the Maccabean period)! Later it says a reference to Solomon is probably again a reference to Hyrcanus.

In 8 it also returns to another of its favorite themes, finding a “different author” for v. 14. Why? No one could tell.

And so ends the Song of Songs.

# **INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF WISDOM**

## **Greek Leanings**

Once again we are told a book attributed to Solomon is not by Solomon: the Wisdom of Solomon is not the Wisdom of Solomon. The title is just a “literary device” (p. 1004). And the Introduction proves this by stating unequivocally that the “whole book is written in Greek,” declaring others have “wrongly supposed” at least the

## *Wisdom*

first section was originally in Hebrew, for it cannot be the commentary that “wrongly supposes” (despite its ingrained habit of doing just that). It tells us Scripture quotes in the book are from the Greek Septuagint version... but perhaps it is simply that the Greek version quotes the Greek version and there *was* an older version preceding – is this not possible?

The commentary discerns several suggestions of the “cultural life of Alexandria,” but as one reads the text itself, one again finds references built on very shaky ground. And in its praise of Hellenic wisdom it sells short, as usual, the wisdom of Solomon, which may well have influenced Hellenic thought, particularly as Jews were dispersed among the nations.

It speaks of Sirach coming *before* Wisdom; then one must ask why Sirach does not appear before Wisdom in this Bible. We are also told “imaginative elements” (1005) have been added to the history of Israel... but it is noteworthy that the history recounted here extends only to the Exodus. Why, if it were written centuries after the time of Solomon, is there no further historical recounting?

## **THE BOOK OF WISDOM**

O that the commentary would heed the wisdom in this book: “He is to be found by those who do not put Him to the test” (1:2)! For I fear its declaring things like, “By a literary fiction the author poses as Solomon,” reveals its movement away from the LORD and the glory of His Word.

## **Judges**

From the first verse, we are told that Solomon’s exhortation to “love virtue, you who are judges on earth,” is not a word to judges at all but that “the author” is “admonishing his Jewish compatriots

### *The Wisdom Books*

threatened by their pagan surroundings.” And this becomes a constant theme, a pet theory, as still in Ch.1 we hear that “the godless’ here are primarily renegade and profligate Jews,” rather than simply any souls who turn from the LORD.

## **The Poor Man**

In the passage in 2 that speaks of the oppressors of the “poor” man (v. 10), the commentary reads into this “the faithful Jew.” Jesus (the most faithful Jew) is indeed indicated as the passage moves along, but here it is clear from references also to “the widow,” the elderly, and all who are weak, that it simply means those who are easily oppressed. (As a side note, one wonders why, upon reading: “Let our strength be the yardstick of virtue” (11), the commentary does not date the book post-19<sup>th</sup> century, since this sounds so much like “the survival of the fittest.” Perhaps its descendants shall do so in coming centuries.)

## **Resurrection**

In 3 the commentary continues its insistence that “the resurrection of the body... is not envisaged here,” even though later in the same chapter it notes that the favor of “a most desirable portion in the Temple of the Lord” (14) set aside for the loyal soul means “in heaven”; and in the next chapter we hear of the virtuous man being “taken up,” “carried off” (4:10,11) in death: after a “long life, his soul being pleasing to the LORD, He has taken him quickly” (13-14).

## **Pre-Prophets**

Also in Ch. 4, verse 6 sounds a lot like children are being punished for the sins of their parents – “children begotten of unlawful intercourse witness, when God judges them, to the wrong

their parents did” – which would seem to date the book pre-prophets, especially Ezekiel.

## **History Curtailed**

Ch. 5 makes repeated reference to the “Exodus period” and “the crossing of the Reed Sea” (according to the commentary itself) but no reference to the Exile. This concurs with the history of Israel recounted from Ch. 10 on, which also ends with the Exodus. So again I ask: Why is there no mention of anything beyond this time (Babylon, etc.) if this book were written well after the return from exile?

## **Solomon’s Wisdom**

In 7 we are told that “to describe... Solomon’s exhaustive knowledge... the author credits him with mastery of the problems investigated by the hellenistic schools of the author’s own day.” But Solomon needs no “crediting” from anyone: his wisdom was in fact “exhaustive” – if the LORD and His Word are to be trusted – and could have encompassed the matters at hand. There is nothing listed in the text Solomon could not have known about... or even brought to light for the Hellenists to discover.

Also, we are told that we find in Ch. 7 “the peak of O.T. speculation on Wisdom”; and who is the paragon of wisdom in the O.T. but Solomon? (Should we look for another?) Then we are told of the “maxims” and “riddles” present in 8: “Solomon was a master of this art.” Yet we are not to believe he composed them but that they are by an unknown imitator who exceeded him.

## **Solomon’s Prayer**

The commentary tells us of the prayer in 9 that it has “elements taken from the historic prayer of Solomon” mixed with “the author’s

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own reflections.” Would this not be the height of presumption, to take perhaps the greatest prayer of the O.T. by the wisest man of the O.T. and do with it as one pleases, adding to it as one sees fit? (I suppose it should not be surprising the commentary suggests such, since this is what it does throughout the Bible.) Or maybe it really is Solomon who wrote, “You yourself have chosen me to be king over your people” (7), who spoke his own words with his own voice. Maybe it is as God’s Word says it is, and is to anyone with eyes and a brain not weighed down by its own imaginings. (Imagine that.) The commentary recognizes “my father’s throne” (12) refers to David, but does not recognize the son who sits there.

## **Greek Reminiscences**

Still in 9, the commentary says that “terms are reminiscent of Plato,” though it admits “the metaphor is no less biblical.” Throughout the commentary here we are told that this or another term is “reminiscent” of Greek thought or vocabulary. This is, of course, very shaky basis upon which to date the book, especially – if such “reminiscences” are genuine – that this could simply be the result of later Greek translation, since we know this is a Greek version of Wisdom.

## **Israel’s Infidelity**

With Ch. 10 begins the history that starts with Adam and ends with the Exodus, never nearing post-exilic times. Along the way, the commentary tells us that “the author chooses to disregard Israel’s acts of infidelity,” not realizing, apparently, that at that point in the text we are still in a time before the Exodus. Likewise, in 11 it says, “The author does not mention the ‘grumbling’ of the people.” But verse 10 declares of their “ordeals”: “They learned what tortures a sentence of wrath inflicts on the godless.” Though the passage also emphasizes God’s mercy – since they, unlike others, do turn from

their sins – the punishment for their sins in the desert could not be clearer.

## **Wonders**

Also in 11: the commentary can't see that the waters turning to blood could be *both* "to constrain Pharaoh to let the Israelites go" *and* to serve as a punishment for the killing of Hebrew boys, suggesting "the author" adds the latter; it then says "the author" "supposes" the Egyptians knew about the wonders in the desert, though elsewhere the Bible indicates the surrounding nations had indeed heard; and it calls a "Platonic expression" a verse almost identical to Gn.1:1: "The hand that from formless matter created the world" (18).

## **Wicked Practices**

In 12 the commentary tells us that "there is no evidence of cannibalism in Canaan," clearly not acceptant of the evidence here and elsewhere in God's Word. And it says the book "borrows characteristics of the hellenistic mystery religions," as if the wicked practices recounted did not exist before (and were not, in fact, the reason for the ban against the nations in Canaan). It also tells us, "The author elaborates the ancient explanations" for God's delay in destroying Canaan, thus characteristically casting doubt where it will.

## **Greek Touches**

In 13 and 14 we repeatedly hear more about Greek "touches" and references, though they continue with little foundation and could easily speak of Canaanite practices and ideas, perhaps in the words of a Greek translator. It ever reads into the text that which is not really there. (And one wonders why the quote, "However foul the

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means,' [the potter] says 'a man must make a living'" (15:12), does not give the commentary reason to date the book much, much later... since its sentiment is so characteristic of our own day.)

## **The Bronze Serpent**

In 16 we hear again of how the next few chapters "add a number of details to the narrative" of Israel's time in the desert, and again of how the text is "minimizing Israel's faults and their punishment," though v. 5, for instance, tells us that "they were perishing from the bites of writhing snakes" because of their sin. We are also informed that "the author interprets" the LORD's provision of the bronze serpent "as an act of divine mercy," as if it is not really that at all; and that he "asserts" the serpent "had no power of itself," as if that isn't perfectly obvious. And the commentary woefully misinterprets the text, inexplicably suggesting it says the bronze serpent was given *before* the deadly serpents appeared (thus radically undermining its well-known symbolism as a remedy for sin).

## **Jewish Legend**

In 17 the commentary speaks of "Jewish legend" and the "imagination... of the author" and the "Greek mind" and "literary elaboration"... instead of simply accepting the marvelous composition as it is (as a reflection of Solomon's brilliance). And then in 18 we are told, in remarkably presumptuous fashion, that the wise insight into the horrors of the destruction of Egypt's first-born "has no relation to the narrative of the Exodus." *No relation*. Made entirely of whole cloth by the imagination of this imitator of Solomon. Remarkable, though not surprising, since the commentary itself so often has no relation to the text.

## **The Sins of Egypt**

In 19 we hear of how the text is trying to “exculpate the people of Sodom,” getting the (obvious) point of the comparison exactly backward: saying Egypt’s sins are greater *even* than those of Sodom is meant to emphasize the sins of Egypt, not diminish the sins of Sodom – to do that would work directly against the purpose of the comparison. That the commentary cannot see this is, again, remarkable, since it is so very obvious.

And so ends the history of Israel, again, going *no further* than the Exodus.

# **INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTICUS**

There are not a lot of problems in the Book of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) itself, but here in the Introduction several problems are evident. Generally what it says is not incorrect, but the way it presents things indicates a prejudicial view that lacks faith in and understanding of Scripture, and egregiously serves to divide the Law from the Spirit, which is a perennial shortcoming of the commentary.

## **Devotion**

It states that Sirach “is devoted to the Temple with its liturgy and has a high regard for the priestly office” (p. 1034), as if that is not the attitude every devout Jew should have; it then betrays its prejudice by continuing: “But the sacred books, too, are his spiritual nourishment,” again, as if that should be unexpected in one devoted to the liturgy. It goes on to tell us, “The doctrine, too, is traditional”

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(1035), as if the Word of God could contain something else; and it also says that Sirach's wisdom "comes from God," which begs the question – where else would the Word of God come from?

## **Wisdom and the Law**

Then it tells us, "Ben Sira's original contribution is to identify wisdom with the Law of Moses," revealing just how blind it is to the fact that the Law and Wisdom have always been one, since the time of Moses himself, and that this was in particularly sharp focus in Psalms, Wisdom, etc. (One again wonders what book the commentary reads.)

## **The Verdict**

The Introduction also relates, re Sirach, that "his verdict" regarding Solomon, Rehoboam, and Jeroboam is "severe," as if it is Sirach who judges evildoing and not God... and as if the severity is not justified.

## **Just Deserts**

Finally, it continues to question the O.T. presentation and understanding of "how God can reward every man as his activities deserve," saying Sirach expresses the same "uncertainty" it has perceived in Job and Ecclesiastes. This blind spot is evident especially in its stating that Sirach "does not look forward to a messianic deliverance," though in the next breath it admits it is indicated in 36:1-17... not to mention that it is wrought throughout Scripture in a gradual revelation (and is certainly present here in one of the latest writings of the Old Testament).

# ECCLESIASTICUS

## **Cut and Scrambled Verses**

There are two particular problems with Ecclesiasticus, though they are not in the commentary itself but in the editing: first, verses are repeatedly cut from the text throughout (e.g. vv. 5, 7, and 21 in Ch. 1; vv. 7a and 19 in Ch. 2, etc.); in addition, the verses that remain are more often scrambled into a new order than presented in standard sequence. Why this is done and whence the editor derives the right to do this, I do not know. But it is troubling (and has occurred previously).

Otherwise the commentary is relatively clean and clear, though not without need of notation.

## **False Dichotomy**

There is a false dichotomy made in Ch. 1, where it states that “fear of the Lord” is not “physical fear” any longer but only a “reverence” for God. The two should not be arbitrarily separated. Also, in 1, and as noted re the Introduction, we hear that “for Ben Sira wisdom and observance of the Law go together.” Again, they cannot be separated and so this is true for *all* believers, not just Ben Sira.

## **Faint Hearts**

There is a misinterpretation of v. 14 in Ch. 2 (which appears between vv. 12 and 13): “Woe to faint hearts and listless hands” is a chastisement of a lack of faith in God and the resolve to walk in His ways, not a condemnation of “an external show of surrender.” This is made clear in the next verse: “Woe to the listless heart that has no faith.”

## **Liturgy, Retribution, Cuts...**

Inordinate mention of Sirach's reverence for "the liturgy and its ministers" (Ch. 7) as well as his uncertainty regarding "retribution after death" (also in 7) – both of which were discussed re the Intro – are peppered throughout the commentary. And the prevalence of cutting verses reaches a peak in Ch. 17 (vv. 5, 9, 16-17a, 18 and 21...); but problems do remain sporadic otherwise.

## **Oral Tradition**

There is one very positive note in Ch. 8, from which the commentary and Scripture scholarship in general could learn much: "Most books of the Bible formed part of the oral tradition before being committed to writing." This is a fact not well understood, and certainly not respected as valid and reliable by a people coming from cultures so immersed (if not drowned) in the written word. The Word was constantly remembered as it was constantly spoken, heard, and understood through the centuries.

## **Just Deserts, Corrected**

And in Ch. 12 the commentary states: "Ben Sira... expects a judgment and an apportioning of deserts on the day of death," which again seems to directly contradict (correctly) the Introduction's characterization of Sirach as "uncertain" "how God can reward every man as his activities deserve" (p. 1035).

## **God's Instructive Mercy**

But unfortunately in Ch. 18 it makes the mystifying statement, "God's all-embracing mercy in its instructive aspect... appears for the first time in the O.T. at this point." Has the LORD not been "rebuking, correcting and teaching, bringing [His people] back as a

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shepherd brings his flock” (13) all along, since the first pages of Scripture? Where has the commentary been (and what book *has* it been reading)?

## **Hell Is Hell**

In 21 it also gives a limiting interpretation of wisdom and tells us that a verse (11), which in its notes it translates, “but at the end are hell...”, “suggests the punishment of hell” to “the Christian mind.” It reads “hell” – this should be plain to *any* soul with eyes and a mind. But there is nothing further with which to contend, only further notes to commend.

## **In Due Time**

In 40 it says: “The sage who studies will understand ‘in due time.’” O that the commentary would cherish this lesson (and not jump to erroneous conclusions about Scripture itself)! In 47 it directly attributes “the Psalms” to David (Alleluia!), rightly interpreting his “words of glory” in v. 9. And in 48 it finds another “clear expression of the hope of immortality.” And so ends a very pleasing second half plus of the book indeed. (Praise God!)

## **4. THE PROPHETS**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS**

#### **Commendation...**

There is much to commend in this Introduction, though much to question as well. It shows brilliance in its general exposition of the prophets and prophecy, along with related matters; however, in addressing the individual books it falls short of such faithful understanding of the Word of God spoken by His prophets.

But how wonderful to read clear explanation of the “irresistible divine call” upon the prophet’s soul, of the Word that “compels [him] to speak and [he] must speak” (p. 1116). We are told in a very straightforward manner the prophet’s words “are not his own,” that he is “an instrument of God and no more” (1117).

#### **Not a “Poet”**

One could offer any number of excellent quotes so sorely lacking elsewhere, but one which is especially refreshing is the recognition that the prophet is much more than a “poet.” In speaking of the divine inspiration upon the prophet, the Intro states: “To deny this would be to reduce the prophet to the rank of poet.” The great disappointment, though, is that the prophets are repeatedly referred to as “poets” and their prophecies as “poems” throughout the commentary, including, sadly, later in this Introduction.

However, Moses is here respected as father of all the prophets, “for he spoke with God face to face” (1118); there is blessed

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discussion of morality and messianism... but, again, once the prophets are addressed individually and we move from recognition of the oral origins of the prophecies to consideration of their written state... things begin to break down.

## **“Similar Words”**

The first real problem arises while still in the section titled “The books of the prophets.” After a very reasonable (and faithful) presentation of Jeremiah – recognizing how “the prophet has dictated to Baruch... all the words that he has uttered in God’s name over a period of twenty-three years” (1123), and conjecturing well that Baruch likely provided biographical material – it then makes too much of the phrase “with many similar words in addition” (Jr.36:32), referring to the second version of the book, required after the first was burned by the king. The phrase simply means more recollections from Jeremiah were included, not that the additions were used “to adapt the books to the spiritual needs of a new generation” (if for no other reason than both versions were written at virtually the same time) or “to improve them” – God’s Word needs no improving upon. It also ignores the fact that Baruch again wrote “at the dictation of Jeremiah” (ibid.); the commentary repeatedly asserts the words were “added by Baruch.”

## **Isaiah’s Work**

The Introduction then falls off the cliff in its discussion of Isaiah. After calling certain passages “poems” (contradicting its own earlier insight), it does well to quote the PBC statement regarding what is termed “the second part of the book” (1125), wherein it “warned Catholic exegetes against [the] view” that it is not Isaiah’s work, “opposed as [this view] is to ancient traditional opinion.” But it then takes the commission’s “not forbidding further inquiry” as license to

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refute its declaration... and proceeds to cast doubt on Isaiah's authorship.

## **No Schizophrenia**

Where it seemed to understand prophecy well before, it now comes up well short. And it really loses its mind in stating what acceptance of Isaiah's prophecy would entail: "Almighty God could, of course, have conveyed the prophet into the distant future, severing him from his own time...", which it says would mean "a duplication of the author's personality and a disregard for his contemporaries." It is simply *prophecy*, proof that the LORD can foretell future events through his prophets – as He repeatedly reiterates throughout the book itself. It doesn't require schizophrenia or disdain for one's contemporaries – it just requires the Word of God upon his soul!

## **God's Doctrine**

Then in discussing Jeremiah individually, the Introduction calls the "new covenant written in the heart" "his doctrine" and subject to "his influence" (1127) – but this is, of course, *God's Doctrine*, which the prophet simply conveys. And "the primacy of the things of the spirit" and more "intimate... contact with God," though emphasized well by Jeremiah, are essential themes present throughout the Old Testament, even from its first pages.

## **Jeremiah's Authorship**

The commentary then presumes to suggest that certain passages "do not seem to have all been written by Jeremiah," and declares that the book is in "a state of disorder." And so we must suffer under the disordered imagination of the commentary once again. As this Intro again clearly states: "In 605 Jeremiah dictated to Baruch the oracles he had made since the beginning of his ministry." How it

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can say that “we can do no more than conjecture” what the first scroll contained when the second is simply a rewrite of the first (and we have the second), is beyond comprehension... unless it is recognized that the commentary is more concerned with its own (vain) suppositions than the matter before its eyes.

## **“Prophecy Was Silenced”**

Next, because of its misinterpretation of the text (along with continued presupposition of a very subjective nature), the Introduction cannot recognize Jeremiah as author of Lamentations, despite the fact that, as it says, this tradition is supported elsewhere in the Word of God and in the book itself. It tells us Jeremiah “could never have said that the voice of prophecy was silenced” (1128), not realizing he is simply presenting the state of affairs as it is – that the *people* silence this voice by their rebellion; nor does it see that he speaks in the voice of the people when he praises Zedekiah. It also (wrongly) says he “put his trust in Egyptian help” even though the verse it quotes (4:17) states clearly: “[They] could not save us anyway”! (One wonders if there was a separate author for the initial pages of this Introduction – and if we could get him back again.)

## **Dates**

Of sections of Baruch it says, “Their date is hard to fix,” but of course it proposes a late period. And of the Letter of Jeremiah it does not hesitate to say it is “of the Greek period,” though, of course, Jeremiah died well before that time.

## ***Of Israel***

Doubt of authorship continues to be sown regarding Ezekiel, and vain theories continue to be propounded.... One blatant

### *The Prophets*

misinterpretation (which serves to aid its unfounded hypotheses) is its idea that Ezekiel “gives the impression that he is actually present in the capital” (1129) and not in exile. As proof it cites 11:13, which says (after Benaiah drops dead): “Ah, Lord Yahweh, are you going to wipe out all that is left of Israel?” The commentary seems to read *in* Israel rather than *of* Israel, not realizing the prophet is speaking of the *House* of Israel, its people, who, though in exile, are still part of Israel. It is made clear in the verses following that the LORD has indeed “sent them far away among the nations” (16). And so by failing to read the text properly, it is led astray in its thinking.

### **Ezekiel’s “Style”**

The Intro also tells us Ezekiel has a “lively imagination,” and that his “style is monotonous and without color, frigid, feeble, astonishingly poor” (1130). (Could it not think of anything worse to say?) I have always found the book clear and riveting ... but what do I know? And it is not his imagination at work but God’s inspiration.

### **“Later Work...”**

As for Daniel, the Intro does well to conclude against those who “have deduced two distinct documents of different periods combined by an editor” (1131), stating that Ch. 7 “links the book’s two sections and proves that it is in fact an integral composition” (1132). But it decides that, though it may be one book, it is nevertheless (what else?) “a much later work.” And so it is not Daniel who composes but some unknown “author” of a much later time. (How one tires of this refrain.)

It then makes supposition about the order of the twelve minor prophets, and continues to project its post-exilic obsession upon the text. It sows doubt regarding Amos’ composition (and supports its “later period” ideas) by employing such solid expressions as “may

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have been added” and “possibly from a different author” (1134). But how things could be or how they seem to the commentary are hardly grounds for overturning historical understanding. (But that, of course, does not stop the commentary from doing so.)

## **Sober Conclusions**

As for Hosea, the Introduction says of the fact that “for some time scholars tried to remove from Hosea all prophecies of happiness and all that concerned Judah” (1135): “More sober conclusions are being urged today.” Which gives us hope of increasingly sober conclusions to weed out remaining heresies. But unfortunately it can’t help suggesting “the possibility of brief additions.”

## **Promises and Threats**

The commentary cannot reconcile the existence of both promises and threats in Micah – as if God could not use both – so it imagines “editorial work” (1136) and ends up dating the book... need I say when? It is most generous, however, in not excising the future promises, so there is still hope Jesus shall be born.

## **Doubtful Exegesis**

Then we hear that Zephaniah (and Haggai) is post-exilic; Nahum is a great poet, and in his book is “no anticipation of the gospel whatever” (1137) (since the commentary can only discern “hatred” of enemies); and the history in Habakkuk is “doubtful” (1138), as the commentary fails to understand its cry of despair. In Zechariah there are names substituted later, and though there is “no doubt about the authorship” of an “amply dated” (1139) section, another “disorderly collection” “cannot have taken final form before the conquest of Alexander,” according to the commentary’s tea leaves.

### *The Prophets*

We are told Malachi is “probably anonymous,” and there is an addition; the proposed dating of Obadiah, which ranges over 700 years, shows the terrible confusion scholars suffer (and make us all suffer); and instead of simply accepting Obadiah’s “passionate appeal for national vengeance” as “a tribute to the terrible justice and power of Yahweh” (1140), as it itself suggests, the commentary can only find it irreconcilable with the “internationalism” of Isaiah’s later chapters, and so calls it a “fleeting moment” of prophecy and particularly “old-fashioned.”

### **Nothing Funny**

Re Joel we hear of the possibility of added chapters; and as for Jonah, the commentary (not unusually) entirely misses the gravity of the book. It says it reads “like a succession of practical jokes played by God on His prophet” (1141), completely blind to the seriousness of Jonah’s sin (which even the pagan mariners can see) in disobeying the call of the LORD. There is nothing funny about being in the belly of a whale three days, or being thrown into the sea for that matter. Perhaps when the Ninevites arise on the last day and condemn this generation for its lack of faith, the grin will be wiped from the face of those who think Jesus would declare fictional characters destined to judge us (see Mt.12:41, Lk.11:32). These are the thoughts of those who do not believe in the inspired Word; why they are foisted upon the reader with such troubling regularity can only be attributed to the need for the justice of the LORD to act upon our own poor souls.

# ISAIAH

## Continuation...

In Ch. 1 the commentary conjectures that the initial verse “must have been added” because it does not specifically mention Samaria and Assyria (only Judah). It suggests verses 2-3 are an “independent passage,” though they flow directly into those following. And it unfortunately terms Isaiah’s oracle a “poem,” as it will do throughout the book despite the Introduction’s clear-eyed warning against such reductionism. It also fails to recognize that vv. 29-31 are a continuation of the preceding lament, and so, that it is Jerusalem engaging in the “pagan practice” Isaiah “attacks.”

## Beauty and Filth

In 2 it questions Isaiah’s authorship and conjectures insertions and glosses. In 4 it calls vv. 2-3 a “poem” that should be placed elsewhere, though it fits perfectly where it is. It fails to note how the “beauty” and “adornment” of Yahweh contrast well with the vain beauty of the women at the end of Ch. 3, and how “the filth of the daughter of Zion” is “washed away” by Yahweh in the verses following (which are *not* a post-exilic addition).

## “Poems”, “Out of Place”

In 5 we hear repeated references to “poems” (perhaps I should cease to mention this, since, as I say, it recurs constantly), and it finds two more sections – vv. 14-16 and v. 25 – “out of place,” though, again, both fit well where they are, the latter continuing to address God’s judgment of the wicked.

## **No Dawn**

It then says the vision at the beginning of Ch. 6 would be better placed earlier, though it admits it is “apt” here. Skipping over a “gloss” and an “error,” in 8 it says the interpretation of “there is no dawn for them” (20) is “uncertain,” when it clearly refers to the lack of light in the minds of the people who are thus without hope.... And it states the verses following are “out of context,” though they describe perfectly the man without the light of God.

## **Continued Oracle**

Skipping more references to “poems” and “interpolations,” in 10 the commentary does not recognize the continued oracle against Assyria. It says one part may address Judah, though it speaks of the same “stout warriors” (16), the Assyrians, whom it addresses earlier as “the rod of my anger” (5) and as His “axe” (15); and it says another passage of the same *continued* oracle may date to other times.

## **Limited Vision**

In 11 it blindly limits Isaiah’s remarkable vision of a universal restoration under Christ to “the return from Babylonian exile,” even though *many* nations are specifically named as the LORD brings back His people “from the four corners of the earth” (12), not just Babylon. Christ is the signal to *all nations* to return home, but indeed how tragically limited is the vision of the commentary.

Then the commentary tries to make Ch. 12 (short as it is) into two psalms, though all has clear integrity, celebrating the joy of seeing an enemy (Assyria) conquered; and it tries to remove Isaiah from authorship of Ch. 13 – though we are told this oracle was “seen by Isaiah” (1), that, of course, must be contrived.

## What He Has Planned

It speaks more of “poems” and tries to move Ch. 14 elsewhere, designating it post-exilic (again), blind to the obvious fact that this is *prophecy* of the return, that it has not actually occurred yet (much as John prophesies the fall of the whore of Babylon in Revelation). Editorials and other things would not be so easily invented if the commentary would realize that, indeed, “It is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks,” and as He says: “What I have planned shall happen, what I have decided shall be fulfilled” (23, 24).

## Terror

The commentary is limited in its interpretation of the beginning of Ch. 17, not recognizing it speaks of a time when Damascus will be “abandoned for ever” (2); and it doesn’t seem to see that the prophecy that the Nile “will dry up” in Ch. 19 (v. 7) means more than just “the ruin of fishing.” Also in 19 it attempts to date a passage (16-25) to a later time, even though there is direct continuation from what precedes it: going from the image of Egyptians slithering like a drunkard to comparing them to terrified women, the terror upon Egypt is clear throughout.

## Beyond Immediate Events

We will skip over more “poems” and imaginary dating, and note how (in 24) the commentary recognizes “Ch. 24-27 see beyond the immediate events to the final judgment of God.” Well said, but the thing is these chapters are just a continuation – the commentary has, at least up till now, been unable to see beyond immediate events... and has thus also been blind to the immediate events themselves! Failing to acknowledge the power of prophecy, it changes the dating of accounts to fit its small (human) mind. And one must ask: If Isaiah can see to the final judgment (in a most powerful way here),

*The Prophets*

why would he be unable to see decades or hundreds of years beyond his time? Which is easier, to see to the end, or to see some point along the way?

## **Heaven and Hell**

In 25 the commentary again views verses (10-12) as an addition, here apparently because, as we have seen before, it cannot comprehend that there is a Heaven... *and* a Hell – it thinks that a passage regarding the “messianic banquet” precludes verses on those who do not come to the table. And in 28 it finds verses (16-17) “inserted” (into the “poem”), though the destruction of the wicked (in 15) by the “cornerstone” mentioned in these verses is clear.

## **“Poems” of “Exile”...**

In 29, verses are moved and additions and glosses conjectured... It calls verses in 30 “Isaiah’s complaints against his compatriots,” though they are, of course, *God’s* complaints (Isaiah is just His prophet); and it sees only Jerusalem prophesied against, even though the oracle says, “He comes to sift the nations” (v. 28). Then in 32 and 33 (and 34 and 35...) we hear repeatedly of “poems” about “the return from exile,” without any recognition of this as prophecy (as usual). In the process it fails to really grasp the “apocalyptic” nature of the prophecies it mentions in 34.

We continue to hear of insertions and additions, and in 38 are told the Canticle of Hezekiah is “alien to the present context” and so – no surprise – must be of “the post-exilic period.” This is the commentary’s constant context, which it never hesitates to impose upon the text; but the canticle is, in fact, *perfectly in context* as is – these are clearly the words of a man at the point of death, as is the case with Hezekiah. (Will the LORD not save us from such vain conjecture?)

## Consolation

Separating out Ch. 40 and following as “The Book of Consolation,” again, seems very arbitrary, since it follows directly from Ch. 39 – where we are told everything will be “carried off to Babylon” (6) – and since consolation is present *throughout* the Book of Isaiah. But I guess exegetes need something to keep themselves busy.

## Worthless Sacrifices

We continue to hear about “interpolations” and “insertions” and “glosses” in 40, 41 and 42... but there is also much to be commended about the commentary here (and elsewhere). However, it tells us the end of 43 is “in conflict with Is. 1:11ff,” again exhibiting an inability to reconcile apparent contradictions. In Is. 1 there are offerings brought, but clearly they are “worthless” (13) – and so as if not brought at all; and in 43 the LORD complains of Israel: “You have not... honored me with sacrifices” (23). In both cases no real worship occurs. And of course it is certainly possible that at one time they offered worthless sacrifices and at another no sacrifices at all.

## Mercy and Punishment

Another interpolation is proposed in 44, but the connection to what precedes it is so obvious it is difficult to understand how the commentary could make such a suggestion. The previous section ends by saying, “I know of none” (8) – i.e. there are no other gods but God – and the one in question begins by saying of the makers of idols: “They are nothing” (9). The problem is that the commentary insists on keeping to its preconceived idea that these chapters should contain only words of consolation, and so whenever more “negative” verses appear, they *must* be a later addition. (Though that again begs

### *The Prophets*

the question as to how that solves its problem – why would they be thus added?) The fact is that throughout this section of Isaiah the text goes back and forth in proclaiming the mercy of the one true God and the punishment upon those who do not follow Him. This is not contradiction – it is perfectly in keeping with the LORD and His way.

## **Encouraging Note**

There seems to be an encouraging note in Ch. 45, one that appears to counteract the commentary's failure to understand or accept prophecy. It says of one section: "This world-view, foreseeing a future gathering of the nations round Jerusalem... reappears after the Exile." Thus it implies it is present, and here spoken of, *before* the Exile. That this acknowledgment occurs in a chapter wherein Cyrus is prophesied is especially hopeful, though I suppose it can hardly remedy the great weight of doubt displayed throughout.

Though the commentary does continue to speak about "poems" and "glosses" and occasionally to limit its vision to after the Exile, remarkably it does not question the prophecies regarding Cyrus, which is indeed a blessing.

## **No Interruptions**

And so I will move in my notes to Ch. 51 and 52, where we hear repeatedly of "interruptions" in what is continuous prophecy (and not a "poem"). It says 51:11 is followed by two "interruptions," apparently focusing on the fact that the refrain "Awake, awake!" reappears in v. 17 after having appeared in 9. But what comes between is perfectly in keeping with the theme of the passage: after we hear of Zion's "everlasting joy" (11), the first "interruption" calls the LORD our "consoler" (12), and the second tells us "the captive

is soon to be set free” (14). (And then Jerusalem is called again to “Awake!”)

It also considers 52:3-6 an interruption, even though the verses go from speaking of a Jerusalem in “fetters” (2) to declaration that she “will be redeemed” (3), and then from Yahweh stating, “I am here” (6) to a verse (7) on the beautiful feet of the one bringing the good news that “Your God is King!” The sense of continuation could not be clearer.

### **Consolation Continues...**

The commentary designates the end of “The Book of Consolation” at the end of 55... but in the very first verse of 56 Yahweh assures us, “Soon my salvation will come,” and such reference to “consolation” continues throughout the succeeding chapters. It should be clear to all this break in the text is arbitrary, that all is indeed continuous.

It then tries to date 56 post-exile, saying it is “not narrow.” But one must ask what about the preceding has been “narrow”; is any more universal than Isaiah? The commentary just cannot let go of its presumed narrative.

The continuing consolation is very evident in 57, the end of which the commentary itself terms “A poem of consolation”; and it continues to create breaks in the flow of the text, on the one hand still unable to reconcile the back and forth style of the text – which speaks alternatively of the peace Yahweh’s people find and the lack of peace for the wicked – and on the other hand remaining blind to the clear continuation from verse to verse. Both of these problems are present in going from Ch. 57 to 58. Though most of the end of 57 speaks of consolation, its last verse (21) reads: “‘No peace’ says my God ‘for the wicked’”; and then in the first and following verses of 58 the prophet is exhorted to “proclaim [the] faults” of the people.

## **Blindness...**

In 58 there is also a perfect example of the commentary's shortsightedness regarding prophecy; it calls an "allusion" the prophecy of Isaiah that the LORD "will rebuild the ancient ruins" (12), insisting it must have been composed *after* the destruction of Jerusalem, essentially denying that Isaiah could have foreseen this.

And the commentary in Ch. 59 is particularly mystifying. It says the chapter begins with "a psalm, of fairly late date," though the *prophecy* is continued from 58; it calls the first four verses "an act of faith in Yahweh," when they are clearly a denunciation of *Jacob's sin...* and it says the next several verses are "a polemic against the enemies of post-exilic Judaism," even though the same denunciation (of Israel) continues, with their punishment. It then calls vv. 15-20 a "fragment" that should "presumably" be moved elsewhere, though, and in even more obvious fashion, it is undeniably a direct continuation of what precedes it: v. 14 speaks of the people's lack of "integrity" and that "sincerity is brought to its knees"; 15 says "sincerity is missing," and tells of Yahweh's indignation; and 16 declares that He finds "no one to intervene," and so proclaims "His own integrity." (Whence does this blindness come? Really. What is its source?)

60 and 61 are called "poems" by this or that author (not Isaiah of course) belonging elsewhere, and the commentary continues to think all verses referencing punishment are "glosses." 63 is yet another "poem" which "must" be post-exilic, even though it titles the chapter "apocalyptic."

## **Heaven Can't Contain Him**

65 is termed another post-exilic apocalyptic chapter (I thought the apocalypse had no particular date known to man); and we are told 66 "must have been delivered after the Temple had been rebuilt" because it "warns against an unduly materialistic notion of

*Jeremiah*

the presence of God in the Holy of Holies,” blind to the fact this warning has *always* been in place and that the words here are virtually the same as in Solomon’s Prayer in 2Chr. There it says, “The heavens... cannot contain you! How much less this house that I have built!” (6:18), and here we read: “What house could you build me, what place could you make for my rest?” (1).

## **The Saved and the Damned**

We are told there is a “consolatory section” to 66, though (again) consolation has been a *constant* refrain; and the chapter and book end on the theme that has been present throughout (to which the commentary has been so blind): proclamation of the fate of those saved, and those condemned. Those who “bow down in [Yahweh’s] presence” will pass “the corpses of men who have rebelled against [Him]. Their worm will not die nor their fire go out” (23, 24).

# **JEREMIAH**

## **No Words**

Right from the first verse, a problem arises: the commentary says these are not “the words of Jeremiah” (as the text states) but that “words” indicates “the ‘story’ of Jeremiah.” And so the Word of the LORD is taken from the mouth of the prophet. (And where can we go from there?)

## **No False Gods**

In 2 we are told that Ch. 2-6 contain Jeremiah’s “earliest preaching,” which seems a statement of the obvious (since they are the first chapters of the book), but common sense does not come

### *The Prophets*

readily for the commentary. Also in 2 it states that for “the early prophets” alien gods were “vanity,” “emptiness,” etc., as if they are not this in and of themselves but only in the view of these prophets (as if it is not written in the Law of God from the beginning, *Thou shall not have false gods*), and that these appellations are somehow more “explicit” “after the Exile.”

## **No Prophecy**

In 3 we continue to hear of “poems” and “interruptions.” The commentary wants to change the date for one section (6-13), even though it remains precisely on the topic of the preceding passage – how Israel “prostituted herself” (6). And it says another passage (14-18) “presupposes” later events. That is, of course, very indicative of the commentary’s view of the Word of God and prophecy in particular: it assumes events cannot be foreshadowed or prophesied ahead of time but must have taken place already in order for the prophet to speak of them. It reflects a particularly secularist mindset. (One that is out of place in Catholic commentary on the Word of God.)

## **Inward Devotion**

In 4 we are told “symbol is meaningless without inward devotion” “for Jeremiah”; but, though the LORD may place emphasis on this need through Jeremiah, the above wording obscures the fact that this need has *always* existed, always been necessary (even from the first sacrifices of Cain and Abel).

## **Passing Time**

As we move along there is meritorious commentary, but in 7 and 8 we hear more of “poems,” and discourses “pieced together,” and even a “fragment” that “does not seem to be authentic.” (How

### *Jeremiah*

arbitrarily the commentary judges the Word of God.) Also in 8, because of one oblique reference (at best): “The harvest is over, summer at an end, and we have not been saved!” (v. 20), it designates an entire passage a lamentation “during a famine.” (Actually, the above has *no reference* to famine at all – I was being too kind. It just refers to the passing of time.)

## **No Other God**

We are then told 10:1-16 is “presumably not authentic” (what presumption!), that it is “overloaded” and that it “elaborates on themes in the second part of Is.,” including “the nothingness of false gods” and “the majesty of Yahweh the creator.” But these are *constant* themes *throughout* the Word of God; continually we hear warnings against false gods and extolment of the LORD. (And so one again wonders if the commentary reads the Bible.) And in 10 it moves verses around as well.

## **Words of the Covenant**

In 11 the commentary continues to speak arbitrarily of additions, and presumptuously moves verses and misplaces them... and it calls the opening Hebrew words (of the LORD): “Hear the words of this covenant...”, “meaningless,” despite the fact that the word “covenant” is specifically mentioned in several following verses (3, 6, 8, 10...), as well as the “land” the LORD has promised (in 5). Is Jeremiah not to hear what he is to speak to the people of the LORD’s covenant – or is it presumed these are just the words of Jeremiah (or some other author) and so he would have no need to listen to the LORD?

## **Real Loincloth**

In 12 it calls v. 4 “a gloss alien to the context” – preoccupied with the idea of “drought” again – even though we read of the wicked before it and after it and in it. (Again, it could not be more consistent.) And in 13 it calls the passage wherein the LORD instructs Jeremiah to bury and later retrieve his (then-corrupted) loincloth, “not an action performed but a symbolic vision,” which is an interpretation with no foundation. It is plain that it is a real event, not a dream or figure. One wonders how the commentary comes up with its idea: is it that it cannot believe Jeremiah would do such a thing; does it not like the thought of it... is it just too personal? Or does the commentary simply invent theories out of whole cloth (pun intended)?

## **By Jeremiah...**

Moving along, in 15 we hear again of verses (12-14) “alien to the context”; and in 16 the commentary now speaks of “symbolic actions” and a symbolic life where there is neither – Jeremiah is simply instructed not to take a wife in Judah. Also in 16 we are told a passage is “probably not by Jeremiah,” and in 17 that two verses (12-13) “do not seem to be by Jeremiah.” All one can say is that it is probably wiser to trust the Word of God than the commentary’s arbitrary assumptions.

Also in 17 the commentary tells us “most commentators deny the authority” of a passage regarding the Sabbath because the Sabbath “is not mentioned elsewhere in Jeremiah.” The temple is repeatedly mentioned... but I suppose the question is – do these commentators have a particular quota for the number of a times a subject must be mentioned to be “authentic”? Or do they just not like the mention of Sabbath rules? Then in 18 it includes the loincloth passage in a list of “symbolic actions,” but is quick to note: “This seems only to have been enacted in vision.”

## Single Narrative

In 19 we are told a passage “appears to be composite” and find that this composition is made by a ridiculous scissoring of the text, the commentary playing hopscotch with the verses again. It is, in fact, a *single narrative*. In 20 it continues unable to reconcile the LORD’s salvation and His condemnation, and so it says a verse (12) “does not seem to have belonged here originally.” In 21 we again hear of a “collection” and the placing of verses at will; and in 23 of “a composite booklet, its text overloaded.”

## Universal Judgment

Among other things, in 25 the commentary states two verses (30-31) are “probably post-exilic,” saying they refer to “the universal judgment.” But the *whole section* is an indictment of all the nations (as the commentary’s own heading says and as is quite obvious), so why these verses are singled out is inexplicable, as is the question why this would make them (or anything) post-exilic. And we are inexplicably told in 26 that v. 8 “seems to contradict vv. 11 and 16”; and so, though no contradiction can be found, it cuts “and all the people” from the verse. But all is quite straightforward: in 8 everyone seizes Jeremiah; in 11 the priests and prophets declare to all that he should die; and then in 16 the people decide, after Jeremiah’s stirring defense, that he does not deserve to die.

## Submit to Nebuchadnezzar

The commentary calls Ch. 27-29 “a distinct entity” separate from the chapters around it, but the same theme continues to be echoed: Judah refuses to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, and so for its disobedience to this command from the LORD it will be carried off to Babylon. And their (seventy-year) exile shall not be shortened.

### *The Prophets*

Also in 29, the reader is again frustrated to see the commentary move verses (8-9) from a place they fit perfectly well.

## **Continuing Consolation**

As it did in Isaiah, the commentary invents another “Book of Consolation,” starting with Ch. 30. But we have here a direct continuation of what has preceded, not a separate work. We even hear (in v. 8) the LORD explicitly state: “I will break the yoke on their necks” after having heard earlier of Jeremiah’s confrontation with Hananiah over the yoke Jeremiah wore around his neck to symbolize Judah’s captivity. Here we simply have prophecy of the restoration of Israel, which includes Judah.

## **All Israel**

For some reason the commentary insists on separating Judah from Israel in this prophecy, though the text clearly and repeatedly refers to both as *one*: Israel = all Israel. This is made explicit in Ch. 31, where we read, “I will be the God of all the clans of Israel” (1) and “Let us go up to Zion” (6), which signifies, as the commentary correctly states, “religious unity recovered round the unique sanctuary of Zion.” And in v. 27 (and 31), there is specific mention of “the House of Israel and... the House of Judah” as one.

## **Pieces...**

In 32 the commentary continues breaking the text into pieces rather than accepting it as one narrative; and in 33 it calls “not authentic” a passage which contains prophecy of the Christ! It switches another verse in 36 and suggests a gloss in 38, but this section is relatively clean and clear.

However, in 39 it says a section “is composed of disparate, ill-assorted elements,” including additions; and in 40 it displays a petty

### *Lamentations*

focus on minor details that do not amount to a contradiction in order to propose “gaps” in the text regarding the story of Jeremiah’s release. What difference does it make if he was set free in Jerusalem itself or 6 miles to the north? 40:1 simply gives more detail of the release mentioned in 39:14. There is no contradiction.

The commentary actually places an entire section of Ch. 43 (with the chapter number) within Ch. 42, adding words to help the transposition along... again despite the fact the passage fit fine where it was.

## **Clear Ending**

Aside from the usual mention of “additions” and “glosses” and “poems,” the remainder of the book is remarkably clear... and so we will end our notes here.

# **LAMENTATIONS**

We rejoice to say the only problem with Lamentations is that the commentary calls the author “the poet” and not “Jeremiah.” It also unfortunately cuts an introductory verse which reads in part: “The prophet Jeremiah sat down in tears: he uttered this lamentation over Jerusalem,” again failing to recognize the great prophet as author.

(I note that the commentary in Ch. 5 contains an interesting statement relevant to its earlier judgment against the authenticity of the Book of Judith: “‘Assyria’ here signifies Babylon.” For in Judith it found particularly significant division between these two regarding Nebuchadnezzar’s kingship.)

## BARUCH

Baruch is likewise clear, though again the author is called “the poet.” Also, in Ch. 1 it attempts to contrast this book with “the historical books” which “speak only of a return of the sacred vessels under Cyrus.” This work speaks of these, too; it simply adds further detail.

## EZEKIEL

### Third Person

The commentary breaks the beginning of the book into “two distinct introductions” because in part of it Ezekiel refers to himself in the third person. But this practice is common among the prophets, and with Jesus Himself. It shows the objective truth of what they say and how the prophet (as with us) is a kind of spectator – he has given himself over to God and is, in a sense, not himself anymore... and so can speak of himself in the third person.

### “It” Is Clear

The commentary also unfortunately says the vision in 1 is “interrupted” by the vision in Ch. 2, which it proposes “was probably Ezekiel’s first vision.” But Ch. 1 ends with the words, “I heard a voice speaking,” and Ch. 2 begins: “It said...”. The pronoun “it” refers directly to the preceding “voice” – the continuation *could not be more obvious!* And if continuous, there is no reason for conjecturing about the order of the visions. They should be accepted as they are.

## **Eating the Scroll**

In 3 the commentary terms Ezekiel's eating of the scroll (along with Isaiah's mouth being touched by the angel and Yahweh putting words into Jeremiah's mouth) an "idea." This is not an "idea"! It is a real occurrence, one for which the commentary should glorify God. It shows just how really the prophets speak for the LORD, that these are indeed *His* words.

## **Important Themes**

Also in 3, since the same theme (prophet as sentry) is also found in Ch. 33, the commentary conjectures that here "it may have been reproduced," not recognizing how repetition signals importance and that important themes may simply be inspired multiple times.

## **Bonds**

And of the "bonds" spoken of toward the end of the third chapter, 4:8 makes clear what is meant: it is not a "paralysis" but a command from the LORD not to move or speak. In fact, none of the references to Ezekiel being "dumb" are to be taken literally, as if he were physically unable to speak, but as his being obedient to the LORD's command not to speak to those who will not listen – the rebellious House of Israel.

## **The Fate of All**

The commentary then says the second half of Ch. 7 is "a sequel" to the end of 6, implying 7:1-14 is another interruption; but 7:14 tells us the LORD's "anger rages against all alike," and v. 15 states: "Outside, the sword; inside, plague and famine," continuing the emphasis on the terrible fate all will suffer, that "the end is coming for the four quarters of the land" (7:2).

## **King**

Also in 7, it considers reference to the king “a later addition” since, it says, Ezekiel does not often make such reference, which seems a silly reason. (Again, how many times must it be done for it to be genuine?) And in 8 it makes a petty distinction between the “glory of Yahweh” and “Yahweh Himself” appearing to the prophet.

## **Continuing Vision**

The commentary creates further division in 11, desiring to move vv. 1-21 to after Ch. 8... when there is no need. Ch. 11 continues the vision narrative, as now Ezekiel is called to prophesy against those in the temple who will be subject to the destruction he has seen in the intervening visions of 9 and 10. Thus all follows well.

## **Taken by the Spirit**

In 11 it also cannot comprehend that Ezekiel is taken to Jerusalem and back (to Babylon) by the Spirit, assuming he must be in one place or the other and so couldn't be in Babylon (8:24-25) if in Jerusalem. Such shortsightedness (and lack of faith).

## **More Confusion...**

In 14 there are a few minor confusions: the commentary says that it is “in the legislation of Ezekiel” that foreigners receive legal status like an Israelite; but this is *God's* legislation, and it has been apparent throughout the O.T. It also exaggerates the LORD's focus on individual responsibility as something new, a “decisive advance,” in Ezekiel. Along the way it misinterprets Abraham's prayer: he does not ask that the few good somehow save the many evil – he is asking in gradual, humble fashion that Lot and his family be saved... a prayer the LORD answers for His blessed servant (even as He

*Ezekiel*

destroys the many evil). That even in this time, as always, the LORD does not kill “virtuous and sinner alike” is obvious in Abraham’s petition invoking God’s justice.

## **Poems... and Order**

I will refrain from noting every little problem (as I have begun again to do), and there is not a lot to question as we progress through the rest of the book anyway... but we do read of “poems” in 19, 21, 23, 27 (in 27 the “poem” here supposedly being “interrupted,” though only the form of the text has changed), 28 and 33; and in 35 one must again beg the commentary to seek to understand the passage order as it is rather than presuming to alter it according to its own vision or understanding.

In 38 it again speaks of a “poem” and tells us that the earlier prophets “only occasionally looked ahead to a more glorious future,” which again seems an overstatement considering, at least, Isaiah’s glorious vision of the mountain of the LORD.

## **God’s Mouthpiece**

Finally, I don’t understand why the commentary says in 40 (re Ch. 40-48) that Ezekiel is “inspired by his profound knowledge of past history” and that he “does his best to adapt the earlier legislation to new conditions” when all of 40-48 comes to him in vision and it is simply the instructions given him by the LORD that he relates. The LORD is his inspiration and he is His mouthpiece. Likewise, the commentary speaks of the division of the land of Israel according to tribes (in 45) as “Ezekiel’s plan.” Once more, this is *God’s* plan, which Ezekiel relates. He is a prophet of the LORD.

## **DANIEL**

### **Original Inspiration**

There are a few minor problems in Daniel: the order of verses is questioned in 10; then Bar. 1 and 2 are said to be “modeled” on Daniel’s prayer in 9, and Habakkuk’s transportation to Daniel in the lion’s den in 14 is conjectured to “have been suggested by Ez. 8:3,” showing in both of these cases a lack of faith in the individual (and genuine) inspiration of the passages... but overall the commentary is very good, very edifying.

### **Kings and Clarity**

The only real problem is its disavowing certain kings as presented. It says, for instance, that Belshazzar was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar and was not a king (Ch. 5), and that “‘Darius the Mede’ is unknown to history” (Ch. 6). This contrasts with the commentary in 11 regarding (seemingly enigmatic) visions of Daniel, which shows in great detail how they display remarkable historical accuracy. That visions could be proven to have predicted future events with such astounding clarity is perhaps the greatest edification the commentary provides regarding faith in the prophets and in the Word of God.

## **HOSEA**

### **Two Wives**

In Ch. 1 the commentary presumes to know better than the Word of God when Hosea received his prophecy; and it conflates Hosea’s

## *Hosea*

first wife and his second – assuming later (in 3) that they are the same woman – and so proposes Gomer not to be a prostitute at the time of her marriage to Hosea (as the text clearly states) but “later became one” after Hosea, it imagines, sent her away.

### **Transposition**

It then suggests (also in 1) that 2:1-3, which it transposes to the end of 3, “should not be attributed to Hosea.” Why? One cannot say. Nor can one say why it is transposed, since it speaks about the reversal of the names of Gomer’s children, which are given at the end of Ch. 1. (Again one wonders why things are not just left as they are.)

### **Face of Whoring**

In 2 the commentary also seems a bit too literal (or not literal enough perhaps) in interpreting “face” of “whoring” and “breasts” of “adultery” (v. 2) as tattoos and other markings of a prostitute when one thinks more of her brazen look and the many that have fondled her. (It also transposes a couple of more verses.)

### **Invented Betrayal**

As mentioned, in 3 it does not simply accept that Hosea takes a “second” wife, for some reason interpreting “give your love to a woman, loved by her husband but an adulteress in spite of it” (1) as referring to Gomer and her “betrayal” of Hosea, though there is no mention of this in the text. It even imagines Hosea buying her back from a pagan shrine. (Again, why it thinks this is a mystery.)

## **Direct Continuation**

In 4 the commentary posits “an isolated proverb... taken out of its original context,” though it (v. 11) fits well where it is; in 6 it construes a “later addition”; and in 8 it says a passage (vv. 8-10) “must be later,” though again there is direct continuation from what precedes it (“foreigners will swallow it” (7) to “Israel himself has been swallowed” (8)) and the general context is the same, speaking still of “their anointing kings and leaders” (10).

## **Jacob’s Trust**

“Elohistic tradition” rears its head in 11; in 12 another “later addition” is created (as the commentary desires to eschew any mention of Judah), and a passage that speaks of Jacob’s history (3-6) is misinterpreted. Instead of seeing Jacob as a model of faith, the commentary says “these episodes [present Jacob] unfavorably.” But the people of Israel are being called to “Turn again, then, to your God” (6), as did Jacob in the past. (Should also be noted that this is God’s Word not Hosea’s “interpretation.”) And it ends (in 14) presuming another “later addition.”

# **JOEL**

## **Locusts**

In Ch. 1 (and continuing) the commentary seems to place undue and overly literal emphasis on “an invasion of locusts,” which appears to be more of a metaphor for “a nation [that] has invaded” Israel with “the teeth of lions” (6). It also unnecessarily juxtaposes “formal observance and the liturgy” against “inward conversion” again.

*Amos*

The commentary continues its focus on locusts in Ch. 2, here overshadowing prophecy of the “Day of Yahweh” (which is spoken of throughout), continually seeing them as the “invading army” rather than recognizing metaphorical use.

Otherwise, there are just a couple of glosses posited, along with an assignation.

## AMOS

### Reference to Judah

The commentary has difficulty accepting reference to judgment against Judah in Ch. 2, assuming therefore any reference to her must be “of later date.” It also says the two verses, 4 and 5, are “general in tone”... but not keeping the Law and having false gods is a “crime” particular to Judah.

### Prophecy

In Ch. 3 it calls v. 7 a “gloss,” though it expresses the *whole point* of the passage: “No more does the Lord Yahweh do anything without revealing His plans to His servants the prophets.” (This oversight seems to reflect its inability to understand prophecy as the Word of God.)

### No Enigma

In 4 it terms a passage “a short poem” – but “it is Yahweh who speaks” (8), not a poet. And it then calls: “Israel, prepare to meet your God!” (12) “enigmatic” (and a gloss). I can think of nothing *less* enigmatic than this proclamation.

## **Inward Sentiment**

In 5 it moves a verse, but it also makes an edifying statement about Psalms and Chronicles. In contrast to what it said earlier, it tells us Psalms places “emphasis on the inner dispositions that must lie behind acceptable sacrifice”; and that the Books of Chronicles, too, “insist” on such “inward sentiments.” Previously we had been told this was new to Jeremiah (p.166). It is a welcome contradiction.

## **No Awkwardness**

In 8 it speaks of an interruption in Ch. 7 and says a series of oracles “separate somewhat awkwardly” two visions. But the oracles speak of the “destruction” spoken of in the first vision; and in the following vision that destruction is fulfilled, beginning at the sanctuary. There is no awkwardness. Then in 9 it tries again, twice, to alter the date of passages.

## **OBADIAH**

No notes!

## **JONAH**

## **Serious Lesson**

Though it does mention “prodigies, of which the author is fond” in Ch. 1 and refers us to the Introduction (which has egregious errors), the commentary here is relatively clean and seems at times to confirm the historicity of Jonah. But one shouldn’t (in Ch. 4) call

*Micah*

the LORD's words to His prophet "irony," whether "gentle" or not – this is a very serious lesson Jonah (and Israel) must learn.

## MICAH

### **The Power of Prophecy**

In Ch. 2 the commentary says "the attribution to Micah" of promises of restoration is "debated" – essentially a doubt of the power of prophecy; in 3 it declares a "gloss"; and in 4 it finds "a liturgical addition" and says "the source" of an oracle that "recurs" in Isaiah is "doubtful," as if prophecies cannot be confirmed with similar words. It also tells us "mention of Babylon... must be a later elucidation," again failing to grasp the power and purpose of prophecy.

### **Confidence, not Arrogance**

In 5, after declaring another gloss, it suggests a passage "expresses the presumptuous self-assurance" of the Israelites; but the passage follows *directly* from the verses before (and leads to what follows after), speaking of how the *Messiah* will deliver Israel from Assyria. The commentary unfortunately confuses confidence in the Lord with arrogance. Then with regard to v. 7 it says Israel might not be the "dew" (as clearly stated) but the "grass." The grass is the world; Israel falls gently upon it (soon disappearing), "putting no hope in men."

## **Transpositions, Etc.**

Also in 5 it cannot see that the Lord is speaking of chastisement of the pagans, not Israel, *throughout* the final passage (not just two of the verses). And in 6 it transposes verses a couple of more times.

One gets exasperated as it does so again in 7 – is the commentary just looking for something to do? And it tries to end the work early, though, again, what follows its suggested end continues directly (from “hope... in God” (7) to “I shall rise” and “Yahweh is my light” (8)). Finally, it says an oracle “foretells” Jerusalem’s restoration, but wants to move its date anyway; and for some unknown reason it seeks to take a verse (13) in isolation.

### **NAHUM**

In 1 the commentary calls four lines “a later commentary,” though they fit well with all else, and it refers to the author as “the poet”; and in 2 it transposes verses. Otherwise, it leaves undisturbed this powerful prophecy.

### **HABBAKKUK**

In 1 the commentary cannot simply accept obvious reference to the Chaldeans but must provide the unsubstantiated opinions of “others” who speak of the betrayal of Jehoiakim; in 2 it invents a gloss and transposes a couple of more verses best left in right order; and in 3 it serves to undermine Habbakkuk’s authorship at the beginning and posits another gloss toward the end (17), unable to see the marvelous way it emphasizes the emptiness revealed on the last day (much like Ecclesiastes).

## ZEPHANIAH

In 1 the commentary again calls prophecy a “poem”; and in 2 it suggests an oracle is “incomplete.” Then in 3 it says one passage “is probably not authentic” and presumes a previously earlier end to the book, though what follows this “ending” continues along the same lines. This gives it another opportunity to conjecture dating “from the exilic period.”

## HAGGAI

In 2 the commentary conjectures a couple of more glosses; it says one passage (10-14) may be “directed against the Samaritans” (because it does not like its “severity”), when the entire context makes it eminently clear the LORD is speaking to the Jews, whose past sin and futility is pointed out in order to demarcate it from their future blessing; and it also tries to project a later date and so move another passage (15-19) that must be read where it is, for it follows necessarily from what precedes. Even the *date* is given, along with the fact that the foundation stone of the Temple has already been laid (18) – but of course it covers itself by calling this an “inaccurate gloss.”

## ZECHARIAH

### “Mythology”

In 1 the commentary suggests a gloss, moves a verse, and says the origins of a vision “seem to be mythological.” In 4 it moves

### *The Prophets*

another verse; in 6 it says an image “is borrowed from Babylonian mythology,” and tries to substitute Zerubbabel for Joshua; and in 7 it says an oracle has been “arbitrarily attached” in a place where it addresses the question previously asked regarding fasting. It is the LORD’s preface to His answer.

## **Third Person**

Ch. 8 it calls “a collection of short, independent oracles,” though all follows and flows well; in 9 it finds a gloss; and in 10 “a mixture of fragments,” because at times Yahweh speaks in the first person and at times in the third. This is not a problem – it remains one Word. (Please see the beginning of Ezekiel, p. 177, for explanation re use of the third person by the prophets and the Lord.) Then it declares a “double gloss” in Ch. 12.

## **Words of the Prophet**

In 13 the commentary tells us that a prophet “defends himself by claiming that [his] wounds were inflicted in a brawl with his companions.” I have no idea where it sees a “brawl” indicated; the wounds *are* in fact inflicted by family – the LORD has just told the parents of anyone who dares to prophesy to “run him through” (3). Thus the wounds. (A fascinating, ironic reference to Jesus, who was a prophet run through by His own people, that is, all of us.)

Finally, Ch. 14 is called a “tissue of elaborations,” and another verse is moved.

## **MALACHI**

In Ch. 1 is found a “gloss,” and in 3 the movement of a passage is unnecessarily suggested... and so ends the book, the Prophets, the Old Testament – and this work.

May God bless all who read here.

And may this writing serve the renewal in Bible commentary so desperately needed for the faith of the Church.

## **A Final Note**

I have tried to be as fair and as clear as I can in addressing what I have perceived to be a commentary rife with errors. I have checked and rechecked the text and the notes in the commentary to minimize as much as possible my own oversights and errors. I have no illusions that the book is free of them – this is not the Bible, after all. But I pray they are indeed at a minimum, and I am open to any correction of my own blindness.

Peace of Christ.

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