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(p. 163)

A SAMARITAN BOOK OF JOSHUA.

Out of the darkness of 2,000 years there emerges now for the first time into the light of day the Book of Joshua according to the Samaritan recension. During all that period a ray of light has only once broken the darkness. It was towards the end of the sixteenth century, when Scaliger, engaged on his great work "De Emendatione Temporum," entered into communication with the Samaritans in Cairo and obtained from them some copies of their calendar and an Arabic chronicle composed in the twelfth century, afterwards called the Book of Joshua. Scaliger was anxious to obtain the Hebrew books of which mention was made in the letter accompanying the book. Years passed by, and in 1598 another letter came. The Samaritans had ascertained that their correspondent was a Gentile, and they point-blank refused to part with their books to Gentiles. Since then nothing had been heard of that Hebrew Book of Joshua. Scholars have spent their ingenuity to prove that a Hebrew text of the Book of Joshua had never existed, and that the reference in the Arabic chronicle was to some similar older compilation in the Samaritan Aramaic language, or that it was a pure fiction, the clear wording in the book and the letters notwithstanding.

But the book none the less did exist. Last year on a visit to the Samaritans in Nablus, it came into my hands, unknown at first by me, and without any importance being attached to it by the donor, the high priest of the Samaritans, Jakub ben Ahrun. He presented me among other writings also with a chronicle of the Samaritans from the times of the entry of the children of Israel into the land of Canaan to our own times, compiled by himself. I then purchased from the verger or keeper of the Sanctuary what also purported to be a copy of the Book of Joshua. Examining the MSS. more carefully in London, I found to my extreme surprise and delight that the book purchased from the verger was the very book hitherto considered either as lost or not to have existed at all. In the chronicle compiled by the high priest the same book formed the first part of the history of the Samaritans, and was absolutely identical with the other copy. It has no distinctive title, and is called "Dibrei Hayammim"—*i. e.*, "The Words of the Days," the chronicle, a consecutive narrative beginning with a full description of the events under Joshua and continued to our own days. It proved to be the source of the Arabic chronicle to which the author had rightly referred.

The great importance of this find lies in its relation to our canonical or Massoretic book of Joshua. It will be shown that the Samaritan recension dates at the latest from the second century B.C.

A short summary of the contents will best explain its character. The history begins with the death of Moses and proceeds on precisely the same lines as the Massoretic text in giving the narrative of the entry of the children of Israel into the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua and of the high priest Eleazar. The spies are sent to Jericho and are saved through Rahab. Preparations are made for the passing through the Jordan, the waters of which part at the approach of the sacred Ark. Then follows the description of the Pasah festival and the lifting of the cloud; the appearance of the angel of the Lord, the conquest of Jericho, and so on until the final conquest of the land; the narrative all the while running parallel with the narrative of the Massoretic text up to the end of chapter XIII. From here onwards the two texts differ radically. The division of the land among the nine and a half tribes, fully described by the Massoretic text in eight long chapters, is condensed in the Samaritan into one single. The history of the building of the altar by the two and a half tribes which returned beyond the Jordan is missing entirely in the Samaritan. Instead of these episodes the Samaritan has that of a war of the combined forces of the Syrian Kings under the leadership of a King Shobach against Joshua, and the help which he received from a King Nobah who ruled over the two and a half tribes beyond the Jordan. Wizards with their enchantments assist Shobach and they surround Joshua and his troops with seven iron walls, which are blown down by the trumpet sounded by Pinehas, the priest who accompanies Nobah. The book then concludes with the final address of Joshua to the assembled multitude in Shechem. Eleazar the high priest dies and is succeeded by Pinehas, and Abisha writes then, in the thirteenth year after the entry, the famous scroll of the law which is still the cherished treasure of the Samaritans.

The Samaritan differs from the Mas- (p. 165) soretic also on other though minor points. It omits repetitions and doubles. It knows nothing of the incident in Gilgal and the removal of the "reproach of Egypt." It knows nothing of the sun and the moon standing still. Precise dates are given when various events had happened. The high priest Eleazar plays an important role in the building of the altar in Shechem and in the curses and blessings on Mount Gerizim. Achan, according to the Samaritan, enters a heathen temple in Jericho and steals a golden idol. His guilt is discovered by means of the breastplate, the stones of which grow dim and lose their lustre when his name is mentioned. The allusion to the fathers who "served other gods" in the final address of Joshua to the assembled tribes is also omitted in the Samaritan. On the other hand, there are added from Deuteronomy and elsewhere some passages designed to emphasize the sanctity of Mount Gerizim. Hymns and prayers are also inserted recalling the "Song of the three children."

It is impossible to touch here, however briefly, on the numerous problems and questions arising out of this new recension. First and foremost stands the question whether its text is genuine, and secondly, if so, to what period does it belong? The comparison with the Hebrew of the Massoretic Bible must set every doubt at rest. For both recensions agree in a surprising manner in those chapters and verses which they have both in common. The Samaritan has retained all scarce forms, rare expressions, and peculiar syntactical constructions of the Massoretic. (An opportunity will soon be given to test this similarity, for the text, with introduction, translation, and notes, is appearing in the current issue of the Journal of the German Oriental Society.) But besides this internal evidence there is the fact that already in the twelfth century it served as the primary source to the Arabic chronicler. In the fifteenth, Abulfath, who wrote his chronicle of the

Samaritans under the eyes of the then High Priest, and at his command, made use of this very text. Moreover, the donor and the vendor of the manuscripts in question are even now unaware of the importance of the book obtained from them for a comparative trifle. In the isolation of the Mountains of Ephraim none of the problems of modern Biblical criticism have yet been heard, and in the twelfth century, when it was paraphrased into Arabic, no one dreamt of them. The authenticity cannot be gainsaid on the score that it had remained unknown for so long a time. The Samaritan Pentateuch itself, though preserved in a large number of manuscripts, and not unknown to the Fathers of the Church, still had remained unknown for upwards of 15 centuries or more, until the famous traveller Pietro della Valle discovered it in the year 1616 in Damascus. Nay, the Samaritans themselves were, so to say, rediscovered after a lapse of at least one thousand years, ever since the conquest of Palestine by the Arabs. Sir John Mandeville was probably the only Western traveller who mentioned the Samaritans, and Scaliger who discovered the Arabic Chronicle of Joshua was also the first to rediscover the Samaritans. But the last and most decisive argument which bears also on the date is furnished by Josephus.

The narrative in Josephus's "Antiquities of the Jews" shows a close acquaintance with the Samaritan recension. The High Priest Eleazar plays a prominent part; the incident in Gilgal is omitted. The allusion to the fathers who "served other gods" is also omitted. Of the miracle of the sun and moon standing still, Josephus speaks in the following terms:—"Now that the day was lengthened at this time, and (p. 166) was longer than ordinary, is expressed in the books laid up in the Temple." This incident was obviously missing in the original which Josephus followed, just like the Samaritan; he refers, therefore, to other copies "laid up in the Temple." A final and decisive proof is that the description of the division of the land among the nine and a half tribes in Josephus is a close copy of the Samaritan. Though he does not mention Shobah and Nobah he has other legends about the Judges not found in our Massoretic text, and found in other Jewish writings.

The Samaritan text must be older than Josephus, if he used it as a genuine and reliable source. The history of the Samaritans, and the internal evidence of the text, suffice to fix the date approximately. The schism between the Jews and the Samaritans took place about the middle of the fifth century (432 B.C.). Nothing is known of the relations between the two sects down to the second century, when the feud between the Jews and the Samaritans had grown in bitterness until King Hyrcan captured Shechem in the year 128 B.C. and destroyed the Samaritan Temple. Since then, in New Testament times and later, all through the ages, no further intercourse has taken place between Jews and Samaritans; only recently there has been a change for the better. If, therefore, any book of the Bible was adopted by the Samaritans it necessarily belongs to the period prior to the Maccabean period in the middle of the second century. A book of the Bible would only then be adopted by the Samaritans if it could serve their purpose and strengthen their claim to be the true representatives of Israel. As long as the cleavage between the two sects had not grown deep the support of ancient Scriptures, recognized by both as authoritative, would be utilized, but so soon as that cleavage had gone too far the appeal to the Scripture had lost its point. In the middle of the second century B.C. the break had become complete and irreparable, and the Samaritans would certainly no longer borrow anything from their hated rivals.

The Book of Joshua transports us back to the most obscure period of Jewish history, the period of literary activity with the Law as its centre, and, on the other hand, of Hellenizing influences, which produced an apologetic tendency. The sacred history should be without blemish. This is one of the peculiarities of the writings of Josephus, and it is equally pronounced in this Book of Joshua. Hence the omission of the incident in Gilgal and the "reproach of Egypt," and of the allusion to the fathers "who served other gods." It is also the period of the "additions" to Daniel, Esther, and to other historical books of the Bible. It is the epoch of legendary addition to the Bible, such as the Book of Jubilees, and, as we now learn, to Joshua and Judges.

One result stands out prominently from the study of this new text—that, at the time when the Book of Joshua was accepted by the Samaritans, it did not form part of a sacred canon. The only book then considered sacred by Jew and Samaritan was "The Law." They treat the Pentateuch with great sanctity and reverence. The historical books were then evidently not yet invested with any sanctity; they were merely chronicles of events. The text of these books was still in a fluid state. In all essential points both texts agree; Massoretic and Samaritan rest ultimately on one and the same foundation. But whilst the Massoretic becomes part of a sacred canon, is cared for and protected from deterioration by the love and veneration of millions, the other is left to its fate as a simple secular writing, an historical document supporting in a few instances the (p. 167) claims of the Samaritans, but treated with scant courtesy and little consideration. It has not even been preserved in old manuscripts. None were seen by me and, as the high priest writes, none are in existence. The marvel is that, in spite of these drawbacks, the Hebrew text of the Samaritan Book of Joshua should have been preserved in so perfect a manner. The isolation of the Samaritans from the world outside has had the compensating merit of making them faithful depositaries of an ancient trust, and if they had any message to deliver they have discharged their task with remarkable fidelity. After 2,000 years they have produced the Book of Joshua little changed from the form in which their ancestors received it. It is how the turn for modern Biblical science.

The Times. *M. Gaster.*

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

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