2 Kings - Commentaries by John Nelson Darby

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Apologetic 1, Book of the Law Found by Josiah

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The next point maintained by Mr. N., namely, that the book of the law was not found in Josiah's reign, but "evidently then first compiled, or, at least, then first produced and made authoritative to the nation" (Phases, p. 137), is too monstrous, I may say, audacious, a disregard of all evidence to bear the light for a moment. All history, all existing testimony, concurs in authenticating these books. They were held in honor as sacred books, watched with jealous care. But this is not all. We have prophecies undoubtedly of the reign of Hezekiah.1

Now I have no pretension to be anything of a Hebraist; but if we may trust those certainly the best informed in the language, the character of the Hebrew of the Pentateuch leaves no doubt as to its being of far greater antiquity than the prophetic writings. Even usages of grammar are different. The use of Hu, as being a common gender for the feminine Hi, is popularly known as marking the antiquity of the Pentateuch, as is the same grammatical peculiarity as to Nahar, a young person.2

1. "They do not arise from the forgery of any one individual. Whoever is endowed with adequate knowledge and investigates with impartiality the question-whether the writings of the Old Testament are genuine-must surely answer it in the affirmative. No one deceiver can have forged them all. This every page of the Old Testament proclaims. What a variety in language and expression! Isaiah does not write like Moses; nor Jeremiah like Ezekiel; and between these and every one of the minor prophets a great gulf is fixed. The grammatical edifice of language in Moses has much that is peculiar; in the book of Judges occur provincialisms and barbarisms. Isaiah pours forth words already formed in a new shape; Jeremiah and Ezekiel are full of Chaldaisms. In a word, when one proceeds from writers who are to be assigned to early periods of time to those who are later, he finds in the language a gradual decline, until at last it sinks down into mere Chaldaic terms of expression.

"Then come next the discrepancies in the circle of ideas and of images. The stringed instruments sound aloud when touched by Moses and Isaiah; soft is the tone when David handles them. Solomon's muse shines forth in all the splendor of a most luxurious court; but her sister, in simple attire, wanders, with David, by the brooks and the river-banks, in the fields and among the herds. One poet is original, like Isaiah, Joel, Habakkuk; another copies, like Ezekiel. One roams in the untrodden path of genius; another glides along the way which his predecessors have trodden. From one issue rays of learning, whilst his neighbor has not been caught by one spark of literature. In the oldest writers strong Egyptian colors glimmer through and through; in their successors they become fainter and fainter, until at last they disappear.

"Finally, there is, in manners and customs, the finest gradation. At first all is simple and natural, like to what one sees in Homer, and among the Bedouin Arabs even at the present time; but this noble simplicity gradually loses itself in luxury and effeminacy, and vanishes at last in the splendid court of Solomon.

"Nowhere is there a sudden leap; everywhere the progress is gradual. None but ignorant and thoughtless doubters can suppose the Old Testament to have been forged by one deceiver.

2. "They are not the forgery of many deceivers.

"But, perhaps, some one may reply, 'Perhaps many forgers have made common cause, and, at the same time, in some later period, have got up the books in question.' But how could they forge in a way so entirely conformed to the progress of the human understanding? And was it possible, in later times, to create the language of Moses? This surpasses all human powers. Finally, one writer supposes the existence of another. They could not then all have arisen at the same time; they must have existed successively.

" 'Perhaps, then,' it may be further said; 'such forgers arose at different times, who continued onward, in the introduction of supposititious writings, from the place where their deceitful predecessors had stopped. In this way may all the references to preceding writers be explained; in this way may we explain the striking gradation that exists in all its parts.'

"But, first, how was it possible that no one should have discovered the trick, exposed ít, and put a brand upon the deceiver, in order that posterity might be secured against injury? How could a whole nation be often deceived, and at different periods? Secondly, what design could such a deceiver have had in view? Did he aim at eulogizing the Hebrew nation? Then are his eulogies the severest satires; for, according to the Old Testament, the Hebrew nation have acted a very degrading part. Or did he mean to degrade them? In this case, how could he force his books upon the very people whom they defamed, and the story of whose being trodden under foot by foreign nations is told in plain blunt words?")

This has led Gesenius (rationalist enough not to be anxious to maintain any theory as to the Old Testament, and hence a better witness here) to say, "The point of time at which we should date the commencement of this period, and of Hebrew literature in general, is certainly as early as Moses, even if the Pentateuch did not proceed from him in its present form." And then he refers to different forms in the Pentateuch as proving it.