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Please read all literature alongside your bible, so that you can see the accuracy and truth of the message for yourself

This Pamphlet reproduces the fifth of a course of twelve addresses arranged for the first Sunday of each month during 1949, by the

CHRISTADELPHIAN (CENTRAL) ECCLESIA,  
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To show that it is not only possible but reasonable to believe those foundation truths of Christianity upon which doubt has been cast by some modern writers.

Dare we believe?

## BIBLICAL CRITICISM

ALL who profess Christianity, and believe, as the Christian Church professes to believe, that the Bible is the supreme source of knowledge in matters of religion; who believe that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation" (*Sixth Article of Religion*), all who accept that standpoint will agree that the study of the Bible is something to be pursued with all diligence, in order that our knowledge of the great truths of religion may grow.

Such believers will also have been taught by Jesus Christ himself that truth is not a thing to trifle with. His teaching, he said, was not his own, but was the Word of God (John 14 v 24). Evidence, when it was presented to a man, was to be accepted if it was, beyond doubt. Those who saw his mighty works, and dishonestly ascribed his powers to a working arrangement with Beelzebub, were told bluntly that they were blasphemers, and in such a frame of mind could not hope for forgiveness (Mark 3 v 29).

But believers in Christ will also recall a further duty entrusted to them, the duty to "[contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints](#)" (Jude 3 R.V.). They will know how often their Master, and his Apostles after him; used the Jewish Scriptures, our Old Testament, to demonstrate the meaning and the way of salvation. They will recall that that appeal was made, not in doubt, but with assurance. Moses wrote of Christ; David called him "[Lord](#)"; his gospel could be found in Isaiah; Daniel predicted the overthrow of Jerusalem; the unchangeable covenant of God was recorded by Jeremiah; and for an example of godly patience, and the mercy and

compassion of God, Job was cited (John 5 v 46, Luke 20 v 44, Acts 8 v 35, Matt 24 v 15, Jer 31 v 33, Jas 5 v 11).

## **EVIDENCE OF THE BIBLE'S DIVINE ORIGIN**

There is about the Bible a unity of thought and changeless purpose which, in a series of revelations spread over some 1,600 years, is, in itself a powerful evidence of its divine origin. How else could its thirty-six books have such cohesion? How could Abraham rejoice to see the day of Christ, except some supernatural power had given him vision? (John 8 v 56) Why did Jesus, after his resurrection, open the understanding of his disciples, that they might understand the Scriptures, and so be equipped to go into all the world and preach the gospel? (Luke 24 v 27) Are we to believe that he, who had been "[declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead](#)", was mistaken in his teaching? (Rom 1 v 4) Well, in spite of the protestations of the critics, criticism has persuaded some that Christ was mistaken. It has widely undermined faith in the Word of God. For not one man in a thousand goes to the trouble of checking the impressions he picks up in everyday talk, and, like insidious seed, ideas have been disseminated and have taken root in men's minds. "The Bible is unreliable." "The Bible is unscientific." "The Bible is composed of myth and legend and folk-lore." As a result, the Bible is not read, as once it was read daily in thousands of pious homes, bringing, if nothing more, at least a moral basis for living, and often something of much greater endurance.

## **WHAT IS CRITICISM?**

Let us define what is meant by Biblical criticism. This is not the criticism which implies fault-finding and a censorious attitude to the behaviour of ourselves by our fellows, or vice versa. It is a particular application of the word. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines it as "The critical science which deals with the text, character, composition and origin of literary documents". Before we finish, we shall dispute the claim of the word "science" to be in that definition.

There are three main divisions of criticism, Textual (Lower), Higher, and Historical, with some other less important branches in addition.

## **TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

Textual criticism is that branch of study which aims at restoring the original text of a book. It is well known that we do not possess the original documents of the Bible, but only copies and translations, produced at various periods, but none of them as old as the originals. In the course of the frequent copying which took place, over long periods, certain small mistakes crept in, as is only natural. Hence there is a continual search for older manuscripts; for the nearer we get to the originals the fewer are likely to be the copyist's errors. The fruits of such research are to be found for the English reader in such publications as the Variorum Bible, which, in addition to the text of our Authorized Version, gives in footnotes any different renderings which are suggested by the more important manuscripts which have been discovered.

No one will wish to minimize the value of such work, provided it is carried out by competent scholars who have spent long years in the painstaking study of the original languages. But all of us are, in a degree, critics in this sense if we express a preference for the Revised Version instead of the Authorized for purposes of study. When the Revised Version was prepared, manuscripts were available which were 200 years older than some used for the Authorized Version. They were, therefore, 200 years nearer to the originals, and so much less liable to contain copyists' errors and amendments.

## UNITY OF PURPOSE A GROUND FOR BELIEF

But, on the other hand, we should not go to the opposite extreme and exaggerate the importance of the different readings of certain passages of Scripture in different manuscripts. For what we as believers in Jesus Christ are seeking is a knowledge of the way of salvation; and when we have read the Bible through many times and become familiar with it, one fact will stand out prominently in our minds, namely, the way in which essential truths are reiterated, not once or twice, but dozens, and in some cases, hundreds of times. And it is only when we come to the Bible wearing blinkers, resulting from preconceived ideas as to the impossibility of miracles, as to the inherent immortality of the human soul, and so on, that we can fail to see that Christ has promised, and his Apostles have preached, that he will return to this earth to establish the kingdom of God with power. Only then can we be blind to the fact that early Christians were taught not to fear death because it is for them but a temporary sleep, with the certainty of resurrection from the dead to die no more (Luke 20 v 35-6). Only then can we fail to grasp the teaching that unless during this present probationary life, a figurative and spiritual resurrection "to newness of life" (Rom 6 v 4) takes place as a result of belief and baptism, the conditions for participation in the life of the kingdom are not fulfilled. Only by persuading ourselves, against the evidence, that the Bible is a merely human book, can we fail to see that that same hope which followers of Christ have espoused was the hope of the patriarchs of Israel and the prophets; the hope of Noah, who preached righteousness for, 520 years to an unheeding world; (2 Pet 2 v 5) the hope of Abraham, who, had he not been prevented by the intervention of an angel, would obediently have offered up his only son, "accounting that God was able to raise him even from the dead" (Heb 11 v 19) The same hope was shared by David, who wrote, "My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king" (Psa 45 v 1); the hope of Isaiah, who saw that vision of future glory, "Arise; shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen Upon, thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee" (Isa 60 v 1-2).

Our faith in the Bible as the Word of God rests on more than mere language and the comparison of texts and versions. It rests on the unity of plan and purpose which God has revealed through His servants, and which we see still working out towards its predetermined end. But we must pass on to more controversial ground.

## THE HIGHER CRITICISM

The higher criticism, so called to distinguish it from the "lower" or textual criticism, is of a very different type. This is based on a study of the language of Scripture in order to determine when and by whom various sections of it were written. This branch is very closely tied to historical criticism, which attempts to assess the reliability of narratives and the dates of their production by relating them to the findings of historical research. This branch of criticism had its beginnings as a serious study in the 18th century, and was so well established by about 75 years ago that it was the main bulwark of the Biblical articles written for the ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published in 1875. Its principal exponents then were Wellhausen in Germany, and in our own country, Prof. W. Robertson Smith, Prof. Cheyne, and later, Prof. Driver. These dealt mainly with the Old Testament, while a group of scholars known as the Tubingen school, through their association with the university of that German town, concentrated their efforts on the study of the New Testament.

But these have not been without their opponents, among whom are many scholars of equal eminence. Sayce and Orr stand high among defenders of the Old Testament. To Sayce is

attributed the gibe regarding the higher critics, "in whose heights there is nothing critical, and in whose criticisms there is nothing high". And he spoke with some authority, for he had at one time espoused their views, but felt compelled to renounce them later on account of his own researches into the history and language of many of the early peoples referred to in the Old Testament—the Assyrians, the Hittites, and so on. Sayce was finally convinced of the unsoundness of the critical methods when the evidences of archaeology became clearer.

## **THE BEGINNINGS OF CRITICISM**

The first storm centre of the Old Testament critics was the Pentateuch, the five Books of Moses; and later the Book of Joshua was included in the group, making it a Hexateuch. In this group of books, in which is recorded the story of creation, the rise of the patriarchs, and the development of the nation of Israel up to their establishment in the Promised Land, scholars thought they could detect the work of two authors or editors, the earlier designating God by the word "Jehovah" (Yahweh), and the later by the word "Elohim". Hence we have the notations "J" and "E". Then came the supposed identification of the Book of Deuteronomy with the Book of the Law which was discovered in the days of King Josiah (2 Kings 22 v 8) and is alleged by the critics to have been written at about that period, the seventh century B.C. The writings of this Deuteronomic editor are designated "D". A still later school of editors, thought to have possessed advanced knowledge of priestly ritual, is distinguished by the letter "P".

But this was a mere beginning, and each of those supposed sections has since been divided and subdivided to give a most bewildering hotchpotch.

## **A FUNDAMENTAL CRITICAL TENET**

One of the principles underlying the higher critical approach to the Bible is that it is a product of the human mind. Religion develops, we are assured, as man progresses. The monotheism of the Old Testament is an evolution from earlier polytheism (a thesis supported by scarcely a critic today). This theory carries with it, as Bishop Barnes emphasizes in *The Rise of Christianity*, a disbelief in miracles. Robertson Smith wrote thus of the Tübingen theories: "Philosophically, the Tübingen school starts from the position. . . that a miraculous interruption of the laws of nature stamps the narrative in which it occurs as unhistorical, or at least, as more cautious writers put the case, hampers the narrative with such extreme improbability, that the positive evidence in favour of its truth would require to be much stronger than it is in the case of the New Testament history. The application of this proposition makes a great part of the narrative of the Gospels and the Acts appear as unhistorical, and therefore late" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 9th Edn., Art. "Bible"). On this basis rests the theory that the New Testament is the outcome, in the second century, of a long antagonism between Paul and the older Apostles; and after outlining this view Robertson Smith concludes: "This general position . . . is supported by a vast mass of speculation and research" (Ibid). So there is the "scientific basis" on which we are asked to reject as unhistorical the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles,— "a vast mass of speculation ". By what process of mental gymnastics those who hold that view can also claim belief in the resurrection of Christ, remains a mystery (*The Rise of Christianity*, p. 166).

## **IS THE HIGHER CRITICISM SCIENTIFIC?**

This claim that criticism is "scientific" is so constantly reiterated by its followers that it must be examined. To quote only one example, Welhausen writes of the origin of Deuteronomy: "In all circles where appreciation of scientific results can be looked for at all, it is recognized that it was

composed in the same age as that in which it was discovered" (i.e., the age of Josiah) (Quoted by Orr: *Problem of the Old Testament*)

Now science is exact knowledge, based on the careful observation of facts and ability to measure or assess them with accuracy. This, we venture to suggest, bears no relation to the methods and conclusions of the higher critics. Orr quotes their use without any supporting evidence of such words as "demonstrably", "conclusively", and to "facts which no scholars have ventured to dispute" (in spite of published views to the contrary by competent authorities), as instances of "the omnipotence which resides in the ink of a German scholar" (*Ibid*). Yet, even Driver, after expressing his conviction as to the identification of the "P" sections of the Hexateuch, writes, "On the other hand, in the remainder of the narrative of Genesis—Numbers, and of Joshua, though there are facts which satisfy me that this also is not homogeneous, I believe that the analysis. . . is frequently uncertain, and will, perhaps always continue so" (Driver: *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*).

A scientific method must be capable of demonstration, and in this respect the higher criticism has signally failed. Several instances are on record of tests which have been made with modern literature, to separate the work of one writer from that of another by using higher critical methods. They have failed signally. One instance, in which Mr. H. G. Wells was the defendant in an action alleging plagiarism, went through the courts right up to the Privy Council. One of the learned Judges described the "higher critical" evidence offered as fantastic" (Marston: *The Bible is True*).

#### **WHERE CRITICISM HAS BEEN PROVED WRONG**

During the present century, many of the speculations of the critics have been disproved by the discoveries of archaeologists and the finding of previously unknown manuscripts. Such discoveries relate to both the Old Testament and the New, and we must refer to some of them.

The exposure is strenuously denied. Thus Driver writes in the Preface to the eighth edition of his book quoted above, "It is an error to suppose, as appears sometimes to be done, that topographical exploration, or the testimony of inscriptions, supplies a refutation of critical conclusions respecting the books of the Old Testament ". But the fact is that not only the Old, but also the New Testament has been confirmed in a striking degree by modern knowledge, and the basis of many higher, critical conclusions has been discredited.

For example, Wellhausen placed the writing of the Hexateuch as not earlier than the seventh century B.C., on the assumption that writing was an unknown art before that period. This contrasts with the traditional view that Moses wrote the Pentateuch some 1,500 years before Christ. There is now, of course, a vast mass of evidence proving that the art of writing as well established at the time of Moses. What do the critics do, in the face of such a positive discovery? Driver naively denies that the late development of writing "was a premiss upon which the criticism of the Pentateuch depends", and points out that he himself does not use it as an argument in his book (*Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*. Preface to 8th Edn.) But why did the critics postulate an oral tradition until about the eighth or ninth century B.C. unless it was to throw doubt on the accuracy of the narrative? By way of contrast, Garstang, backed by archaeological evidence, writes "In view of the remarkable accuracy and fulness of topographical detail in the earlier portion of the Book of Joshua, and the parallelism of certain passages in the Book of Judges with contemporary Egyptian archives, it is difficult to believe that these records were not written down in any form until the ninth or eighth century B.C., to which

period the early documents, J. and E., are attributed, that is from 300 to 500 years after the events described" (Garstang: *Joshua Judges*; see also Caiger: *Bible and Spade*).

The "argument from silence" has also been used. Because, up to the date of a critic's writing, no evidence outside the Bible has witnessed to the existence of certain ancient peoples, it has been assumed that they never had any existence, or at least that the Bible record is unreliable.

Two instances of this may be quoted. There is recorded in Genesis 14 the story of "the battle of the kings". It was stated with complete assurance in 1869 by Prof. Nöldeke that criticism had forever disproved the claim of this chapter to be historical. The names of the kings there mentioned were "etymological inventions" and the whole story was based on the much later Assyrian conquest of Palestine (Sayce : *Monumental Facts and Higher Critical Fancies*).

No critic would make such statements today. Thanks to the labours of archaeologists at about the close of the nineteenth century, contemporary Babylonian monuments and inscribed bricks have been discovered, bearing the names of the kings there mentioned. One of them, Amraphel, has been identified as the famous Hammurabi (It must in fairness be stated that some modern scholars question this identification), the author of the code of laws which bears his name. The monument on which is inscribed the code itself was discovered by a French archaeologist, de Morgan, working in Persia (Kenyon: *The Bible and Archaeology*). Here was an "advanced" code drawn up and in force both in Babylon and Canaan some hundreds of years before the time of Moses. Yet before this discovery, the critical view was that the Law of Moses was far too elaborate in its provisions to have been compiled at so early a period as Moses' day, and on these grounds, the "Priestly code" was dated in the period ninth to seventh centuries B.C.

The occurrence of the names of the other kings of Genesis 14 established the truth of a Biblical narrative which the critics, had with such confidence declared to be fictitious. Further, on some of the tablets discovered, there were recorded the times of the rising and setting of the planet Venus, from which data astronomers have been able to calculate the period of the reign of Amnizaduga, one of the successors of Hammurabi, and thence the dates of the reign of Hammurabi himself (2067-2025 B.C.). This has confirmed the Biblical dating of Abraham. Lastly, this series of discoveries provided another nail for the coffin of the "no-writing-before-the-exile" school of thought.

Among other spectacular discoveries of recent times which have served to undermine the theories of the critics and sceptics, and to establish beyond all cavil the truth of the Bible narratives, are the evidences of the flood, unearthed at Ur by Sir Leonard Woolley in 1927-29 (Woolley: *Ur of the Chaldees*), and the laying bare of the walls of Jericho by Prof. Garstang, who found the most striking confirmation of the story in the Book of Joshua, in which is recorded the destruction of the city by the "falling down flat" of its walls and the subsequent destruction by burning of the ruins. The charred remains of grain were still in evidence when Garstang laid bare the site (Garstang : *Joshua Judges*).

So much for the Old Testament. Space forbids reference to the prophets, and we must now pass on to consider matters of even more direct interest to Christians.

## **CRITICISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT**

In considering criticism in relation to the New Testament, two, major points call for consideration. The first is the attitude of Christ and the Apostles to the Old Testament, and the second, the

reliability of the New Testament as a contemporary account of the mission of Jesus and the founding of the church.

Earlier, we quoted several instances of the cohesion existing between the various parts of Scripture, and suggested that we have in that a strong ground for believing it to be of divine origin. Now we have to face the question, Can Christ have been mistaken when he said, "[Moses wrote of me](#)", or when he quoted Psalm 110 as a writing of David? (John 5 v 46; Matt. 22 v 43) We are also faced with another decision which must be made. Christ quoted from the prophets in a way which obviously implied his belief that their message had come from God and was as authoritative as his own preaching. The Tübingen school postulates that miracles do not happen. But it may be recalled that in the early days of his ministry, Christ in the synagogue at Nazareth read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, and then began his discourse by saying, "[Today hath this Scripture been fulfilled in your ears](#)" (Luke 4 v 21). Isaiah had prophesied some 700 years previously. Clearly, he had foreseen the coming of Christ, and that constitutes a miracle. Then according to the Tübingen school, the narrative is suspect, and was probably written long after it purports to have been, when myth and legend had had time to accumulate. But not even the most determined critic would dare to suggest that Isaiah was written during the Christian era. There remains, therefore, no logical explanation of the facts other than that Isaiah was enabled by divine inspiration to foresee the future, or else the Gospel narrative was written late, having been "constructed" from the prophecy.

But let us quote the view of the late Bishop Gore as to the relation in which Christ stood to the Old Testament, and his estimate of it: "There can be no question that (Jesus) took his stand on the Old Testament revelation as the real utterance of God, and preserved it. . . Is it true that the prophets, and Jesus Christ the successor of the prophets, were, as they claimed to be, in such close contact with the eternal Reality that they could, in speaking as they did of God and, communicating His word to men, 'speak that they did know and testify that they had seen' or 'heard'? For my own part, having studied the prophets and the Gospels all my life long, and asked myself this crucial question more times than I could enumerate, I can give but one answer. . . I believe their claim is true" (Gore: *Reconstruction of Belief*)

There you have a conviction wrought by the study of scripture. Have we any evidence that the implications of that conviction are tenable? Are the New Testament records reliable—including their miraculous elements? And if they are reliable as historical records, does not that provide grounds for belief in the Old Testament? We cannot allow the Tübingen school and its modern successors to escape the repercussions of their own teaching. They claim that the record of miracle in a narrative is evidence that it was written long after the events, because the truth of miracle cannot be accepted. But if miracles are on record and we also have indisputable evidence that the narrative was written very soon after the events, we must believe that the records of the miraculous are true, and the Tübingen thesis is disproved.

That indisputable evidence has been found. The Gospels are virtually contemporary records. Let us look at the course taken by the critics and its exposure by archaeological discovery.

We referred earlier to the theory that the New Testament was the outcome of a conflict between Peter and Paul which only after a long period died down, and the conflicting views became harmonized (Kenyon: *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*). Any New Testament books which fitted in with this theory were accepted as genuine, that is, they were allowed to have been written at about the period of the first century to which tradition assigns them. The remainder were rejected as unauthentic. What was the result? Not one of the Gospels remained. The Gospel of John, regarded as the last to be written, was assigned to the period 150-200 A.D. The Acts of the

Apostles was rejected. Out of thirteen Pauline epistles, nine were rejected, leaving only Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. This leaves very little of the New Testament, but it was not the end. As Sir Frederick Kenyon writes: "The game of disintegration is an easy one to play; and the process did not cease till, in the Dutch school of van Manen, all the Pauline epistles were declared to be pseudepigraphs (i.e., writings ascribed to another than the true author) emanating from a Pauline school far on in the second century. It is a besetting sin of much 'advanced' criticism to form a theory first, and then to declare spurious any evidence that does not agree with it" ( Kenyon: *The Bible and Archaeology*). It will be recalled that this is the theory said by Robertson Smith to be "supported by a vast mass of speculation and research". It is to be feared that the speculation far outweighed the research.

But just before the turn of the century, Adolph Harnack, a German theologian, showed that the New Testament books were "trustworthy and dependable" and that their chronology was in the main to be accepted. And Kenyon, in his book quoted above (published in 1940), goes on to say: In the forty years since Harnack's pronouncement the trend of discovery has been entirely to support his view. This is especially so with regard to the dating of the Gospels. If there was one point on which the advanced school felt more confident than another it was the late date of the Fourth Gospel. Even after Hartiaek's expression of opinion, Schmiedel in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* refused to place it earlier than A.D. 132. It is, therefore, satisfactory to find that it is precisely in the case of the Fourth Gospel that the new evidence for a first century date is the most convincing". The picture as it stands today, on the basis of discoveries of and about early manuscripts, is that the Gospel of John was probably written before the end of the first century, the other three Gospels and Acts before A.D. 70, and that the text as we have it is reliable.

## CONCLUSION

Let us now review the ground which has been covered. The higher criticism was established on a number of theories which at the time they were propounded could not be tested; as Robertson Smith called it, on "a vast mass of speculation and research". On this basis, wrongly described as "scientific scholarship", criticism concluded that writing was an unknown art until about 900-700 B.C. Therefore writings purporting to describe much earlier events, and alleged by Christ to be the work of Moses, were in reality (so the critics contended) based on tradition, myth and legend, handed down by word of mouth from father to son for hundreds of years; they could not be regarded as reliable history. The critics were wrong. Archaeologists proved that writing was practised long before Moses' day. Criticism scoffed at the story of the flood. The critics were wrong, and the evidences of the flood have even been photographed. Criticism asserted that Genesis 14 was pure literary invention with no basis of fact. The critics were wrong. Archaeologists demonstrated that that record was historical. Criticism asserted that the Law of Moses was too advanced for Moses' time, and therefore must be ascribed to a later age. The critics were wrong, and the equally "advanced" Code of Hammurabi was discovered, dating from hundreds of years before Moses. Criticism asserted that the record of the overthrow of Jericho was literary invention. The critics were wrong, and the archaeologist demonstrated the truth in detail of the Joshua account. Criticism rejected nearly the whole of the New Testament as not being a contemporary record. The critics were wrong, and the evidence of the manuscripts goes to show that the New Testament was produced in the first century, much of it before A.D. 70. Criticism claimed to distinguish in Pentateuch and prophets the hands of many contributors where one is indicated by the Scriptures. The highest court in the British Empire has rejected the critical method, and pronounced its evidence to be "fantastic".

To what conclusion are we driven? That this self-styled "scientific" learning is "falsely so called"; that it has been proved to be unsound speculation, discredited by the facts brought to light by

archaeological discovery; that the Bible has nothing to fear from any study and investigation to which it may be subjected; that the trend today is "Back to the Bible", the results of research having served only to re-establish its authority and substantiate its claim to be the Word of God.

As such, then, let us turn to it in faith, and with hearts willing to receive its message of hope, and its promise of deliverance from "this present evil world".

N. L. Evans.

#### DARE WE BELIEVE?

Twelve addresses designed for those who feel that there is a conflict between modern knowledge and religious belief.

The Need for Belief  
The Scientific Outlook and the Christian Faith  
Christianity and Evolution  
Miracles  
Biblical Criticism  
Revelation and Reason  
The Meaning of Inspiration  
The Virgin Birth and Divine Sonship  
Sacrifice and the Blood of Christ  
Physical Resurrection  
The Exclusive Element in Christianity