

TRINITY COLLEGE OF THE BIBLE AND SEMINARY

ANCIENT ORIENT AND OLD TESTAMENT

A PAPER SUBMITTED TO INSTRUCTOR RODNEY TUCKER

BS 490 BIBLE BACKGROUNDS

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Introduction

In regards to the work of *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, penned by K.A Kitchen, who is often known for his lecturer abilities at Liverpool University. In September of 1962 Kitchen gave two lectures at the International Student Conferences in Switzerland. This present text is the revised and up-dated version of the original lectures completed in the late summer of 1965. The essence of this book, is seeing the Old Testament in its proper Ancient Near Eastern context. Kitchen masterfully explains the significance of permitting Near Eastern studies to shed light on some of the historical difficulties of the Old Testament. When one studies the content of this work, one might agree with Kitchen, “Today, more than ever before, the Ancient Near East offers rich resources for study of the Old Testament in fresh perspectives.”¹

The nature and purpose of this paper, is to explain and restate the author’s main points and the supporting points of the *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*. This paper will seek to follow the author’s subsequent paragraphs and his two various sections. The paper will conclude with a concluding paragraph stating the author’s final thoughts and the main thesis of the overall work.

Part One: Problems and Solutions

Chapters 1-8

The author informs his readers of the dynamic work that has taken place in regards to two major fields of scholarship, (1) Old Testament studies (2) Ancient Near Eastern Studies. One of the problems that has occurred in regards to skepticism and the historical reliability of the Old

¹ Kitchen, K.A., *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, Preface, Copyright 1966, Fifth American Printing by K. A. Kitchen, pg. x

Testament is higher criticism. Along with this, the writer makes it very clear that evolutionary philosophies are not cohesive with the Old Testament. It inevitably leads forth with many contradictions. The author will make the case throughout that these supposed discrepancies will all be alleged. In regards to the problem, the author concludes that critics are viewing the Bible from a liberal position of mere myth, rather than objective historical truth that corresponds to reality.

Early and Late Hebrew Chronology

One of the solutions the author brings forth is early Hebrew chronology for the foundation of viewing the Bible through an objective lens, rather than mere myth. The Ancient Near Eastern data reveals Biblical chronology, and the date of the Patriarchal age. He does this by proving the major events and external history. The major events namely being: studying their names, religion, Patriarchal customs, and their inheritance. Coming to a concluded date for the Patriarchs to the 20th and 18th century.

In regards to the Exodus and Israelite invasion in Canaan, the author engages in Biblical evidence along with Ancient Near Eastern historical truths to refute contradictions. Including: (1) Egyptian evidence (2) Duration of wilderness journeyings (3) and recent excavations. coming to a concluded date of the Israelite conquest beginning during the 2nd half of the 13th century B. C. In regards to the time and chronology, the author makes distinctions between the united monarchy and the divided monarchy of Israel. He informs his readers that the Biblical account of such dates, can not only be historically verified but historically trusted as objective truth.

Hebrew Contacts with Near Eastern Religions

The writer speaks of hundreds of flood stories that abound throughout the world in their various cultures and are therefore evidence not merely of the historicity of the flood but of its universal magnitude, since the people having these stories presumably have them because of their descent from the flood's survivors. The author makes the case that the stories began to drift away from the original the further one moves away from the Middle East. The further one moves from the Middle East the more local color, and cultural elements creep in. The author makes it clear that the flood traditions could have only come from one common source.

The Question of Literary Criticism

The author speaks of the fact that the Old Testament has received such hard treatment from the hands of the so-called higher critics. They have broken up different chapters into parts, discredited it as history, and generally relegated it to the realm of pious mythology-all in the name of scholarship. The author traces this attempt back to the year 1753. The fruit of this has led to the four-stage attack upon the Old Testament referred to as documentary hypothesis (JEPD theory). The author makes it very clear that this evolution view of Scripture is a fallacy. He concludes literary criticism and documentary hypotheses as going against Scripture and objective truth.

Further Aspects of Biblical and Oriental Studies

After the writer speaks of employing sound principles by modern linguistic study when dealing with the languages of the Bible, he encourages us to consider further studies such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, which inform us of the greatest proof for the Hebrew Bible. He informs his

readers of two types of Law. (1) *The Ancient Law*, which has benefited from the discovery of several ancient collections of Laws. He makes a distinction between case laws, which are Canaanite and materialistic. (2) *The apodictic Law*, which is Israelite and therefore, valuing all human life within a religious context. Not only does ancient Laws make a great case for Ancient Orient within the Old Testament but also the topography of the Bible lands does as well. The author makes a diligent case for topography being vital within the Near Eastern studies. Along with a great deal of work that has been done by scholars in Israel.

Part Two: Illumination and Illustration

Chapters 9 - 10

The author explains illumination and illustration as the remedy for understanding the Biblical text. One of the ways he does this is by explaining the legal customs of the Patriarch's. He defends the Laws of land tenure along with the Laws of inheritance. These Laws were illumined from archeology finds on the cuneiform tablets found at Ur and especially Nuzi², in Mesopotamia.

Examples From Later Hebrew History

The author describes how everything from instituting a king for Israel in 1 Samuel 8 to Geshem the Arabian who helped Nehemiah re-build the walls (Neh. 2:19, 6:1, 2, 6) has all been revealed according to Biblical archeology. Ancient Near East history reveals to us according to the author that Geshem, "was in fact the paramount Arab chief in control of the land-routes from Western Asia into Egypt."³ The author confirming the historical reliability of the Word of God.

² D.J Wiseman, JTVI 88 (1956), p. 124 and C.H Gordon, BA 2 (1940), pp. 1-12: Kitchen, K.A., *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, Preface, Copyright 1966, Fifth American Printing by K. A. Kitchen, pg. 154

³ : Kitchen, K.A., *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, Preface, Copyright 1966, Fifth American Printing by K. A. Kitchen, pg. 160

The author responds to the historical data that the ancient West Semitic language and literature has been convalesced from clay tablets dated back to the 14th or 13th centuries. It presents many similarities with the language and literary forms of the Old Testament. The author makes very clear that the grammar and syntax are very similar. According to the author this brings Illumination to the text.

The Old Testament Illustrated

In regards to the Illustration of the Old Testament the writer describes that this comes in two different ways. (1) The natural environment (2) Ancient Oriental studies proper. First the monuments in Egypt and Assyria portray the historical events the author explains. Along with these details of dress, religious practices, furniture, and much else can all be reinforced by the Bible. Secondly, the actual objects and buildings correspond to objective truth as well, the author explains. Even such things as pottery found in Palestinian excavations that can only be explained by an understanding of the Old Testament.

Conclusion

The author makes very clear the Old Testament is not just a collection of good little moral stories. It is a grand, life-encompassing narrative of God's work of redemption in the world. However, for many the Bible is often referred to as a book of "stories," stories that speak of moral precepts and platitudes but not a book to be taken seriously with respect to history. In this work by K. A. Kitchen '*Ancient Orient and The Old Testament*', he has diligently shown how Ancient Oriental studies have given us a deep understanding of immediate context and historical context of our Old Testament. In regards to our study of Scripture and our evangelism,

as students of the Bible we must be concerned with stimulating our intellect and have a sound-based investigation of Scripture. The author makes it very clear that anything less than this, is not honoring to Him who is the way, the truth, and the life (John:14:6). That namely our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus the Son of the Living God.

Bibliography

1. Kitchen, K.A., *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, Preface, Copyright 1966, Fifth American Printing by K. A. Kitchen, pg. 160