

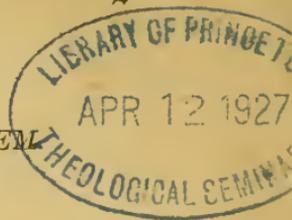
R.W. Sibthorp

The Saviour's Estimation
of the Writings of Moses.

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The Saviour's Estimation of the Writings
of Moses,

SHEWN IN HIS OWN USE OF THEM



A SERMON,

PREACHED AT ST. ANNE'S BEDEHOUSE CHAPEL, LINCOLN,

ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23rd, 1862,

BY

THE REV. R. WALDO SIBTHORP, B.D.,

Formerly Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.

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This Sermon was written and preached without the slightest idea of publication ; but some who heard it, having expressed an opinion that it might be useful at the present time, it is at once published, with prayer to God that it may, in however small a measure, prove so.

St. Anne's Lodge, Lincoln,

November 27th, 1862.

S E R M O N.

TITUS, ch. ii., v. 1.

“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.”

THIS admonition is one of very extensive application, and embraces a large range of subjects. The Apostle in the following context applies it practically, to the regulation of the conduct of Christians, of both sexes, of all ages, and of various conditions; of aged men and women, young men and women, and of servants towards their masters. I propose on this occasion to make another, but quite allowable application of it.

The subject of this discourse will be the use made by our Blessed Lord in His earthly ministry of the five Books of Moses, called the Pentateuch. I shall shew you that He frequently referred to them as authority of the highest kind, even as Divine Authority, both as to matters of fact or historical circumstances, and as to doctrine and morals; thus giving the fullest possible sanction to their Inspired Truth. He received them uniformly as the *Word of God*, thereby commending them to us, with that commendation which St. Paul afterwards wrote of Holy Scripture to Timothy: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* If He who was the Incarnate Word and Truth of God, so regarded the writings of Moses, with what obedience of faith should we receive them: with what entire confidence may we read them, and use them for our own direction in faith and godliness: and

with what decision should we reject every attempt to weaken their authority and lessen our wonted reverence for them! For, how truly may we say of them: "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path:*" making it our earnest prayer respecting them, "*Stablish thy word unto thy servant.*" It is of no slight consequence, but of first importance, that we have neither wavering nor hesitation of doubt respecting the Divine Authority of any portion of that Holy Book of Books, which we are privileged to call OUR BIBLE.

I. LET US LOOK AT OUR LORD'S USE OF THE WRITINGS OF MOSES, AS AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF FACT, OR HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

I preface the subject with four remarks.

FIRST, that when a person of unquestionable veracity, wisdom, and knowledge, quotes a writer as an authority of the highest kind in matters of fact, we are warranted to extend our reception of his testimony not only to the particular circumstances or events he speaks of, but generally to other statements of the same writer. For, who would think of quoting as an authority in matters of history, a writer who had written a great many falsehoods, as well as truths, and made almost as many mistakes as correct statements? Suppose a writing, containing mention of an hundred historical circumstances, in themselves of more or less weight, of which one half were true, but the other half untrue, or largely erroneous, who would bring forward that writing as an high authority, at least without some warning of its ambiguous character? How it would mislead to set forth such a writing as one to be fully relied on!

SECONDLY, which is closely connected with the former remark; when one, so incapable of error in speech or judgment as our Blessed Lord, refers generally to an author and his writings, as truth, to be received by us as such, it

is enough to prove his estimation of them that he brings forward certain leading events. We are not to require that he should mention all, or even very many minuter circumstances, but such as his discourse naturally led him to adduce. We are reasonably to accept these, as a sample of the genuineness of the whole of such author's writings.

THIRDLY, which is of considerable importance. Such testimony is especially weighty in favour of a writing, if the circumstances brought forward as truth, are such as we might naturally be most disposed to doubt of, from their unlikelihood or other causes. For, if these are testified to as truths, much more can we have no reason to doubt of circumstances and events, not at all in themselves unlikely or incredible.

FOURTHLY, that when our Blessed Saviour refers to a writing as Divine Truth, or, in other terms, *the Word of God*, this alone forbids us to entertain the notion that a considerable part of it, even if true, is only *the Word of Man*, a merely human composition. For, how derogatory is it to the wisdom of God, how inconsistent with a Revelation from Himself, to suppose Him to use a writer, and inspire him to be His penman, whom He would leave to mix up with His inspired communications, in one writing, his own human thoughts and conceptions; not to say, his own errors, inventions, and fables.

Now let us, keeping in mind the above remarks, look at Our Lord's use of the historical events and circumstances recorded by Moses.

1. The formation of Adam and Eve has something very singular about it as an historical record: that such a wonderful Being as Man, a creature of such capacities, and faculties, should be made *out of the dust of the earth*; and stranger perhaps still, that woman should be formed from *a rib taken out of man while he slept*. It seems very strange. It has a character of fable about it. Modern infidelity has strove to put it all on one side, and, besides other suppositions, to make the human race a result of the

lengthened gradual improvement of matter previously existing in much lower forms. According to a scientific writer of this day, Man might have been originally a mushroom gradually developed into what he is. Now observe our Lord's reference to Moses' account, and the authority He gives it. "*Jesus answered and said to the Pharisees: have ye never read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said: for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.*" Christ does not say (it is to be specially noted) "*Have ye never heard,*" or "*has it not been handed down to you as a tradition,*" but, "*have ye never read,*" referring to a known written document. And can there be any question as to our Lord's reference to Moses' account of the formation of Adam and Eve as given in the second chapter of Genesis? For He introduces, as a quotation from it, the identical words of Moses. Would He have done this, if that record was fabulous, or largely mixed up with fable?

2. The murder of Abel is stated by Him as an unquestionable fact; and the cause, the enmity of ungodly Cain, is not obscurely referred to in that solemn denunciation: "*That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the Altar and the Temple.*" The connection of these cases of persecution unto blood shews that Our Lord regarded and knew His hearers rightly to admit them both as historical facts. It is a testimony to the truth of the Mosaic record.

3. The destruction of the earth by Noah's flood, and the preservation of a few persons in a vessel called an Ark, has often been laid hold of as so incredible, that Moses has been affirmed to be delivering an amusing fable, a fiction, or writing according to popular belief; in other words, the historical record is not divine truth. And undoubtedly, as

it was a most awful, so it was a most marvellous event, referable only to the infinite power of God, in wrathful exercise. But how did Our Lord regard it? He thus refers to it: "*As in the days that were before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the Ark, and knew not until the Flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*" Does He intimate any doubt of, or give His hearers any reason to question the Mosaic record? *Grounding upon it also, as fact, another fact, yet to be revealed, and one of the weightiest in the Christian Dispensation, His own second coming?*—Who that receives Our Lord's words as truth, can question the truth of the record in Genesis? It was no great flood, but yet of limited extent; nor was there a deliverance of *some* portion of the human race in *some remote land*: *All* were swept away, except such as were in *the Ark*; and their preservation was through their being in a vessel—be it a great ship, or what not—called an *Ark*.

4. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, and that, if by natural causes, by these supernaturally set at work by God, is distinctly confirmed by these words of Christ, "*As it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded,*" (words conveying an idea of that prosperity and security which the brief reference in Genesis to the worldly advantages of these cities warrants us to suppose.) "*But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.*" Can any one reasonably doubt Our Lord's recognition of that catastrophe, as described by Moses, as most strictly true? How express is His reference to Moses' account?

5. A comparatively little circumstance is mentioned by Moses, as attending the larger destruction: *the turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt*. To human reasoning this seems a very strange occurrence, having as much the

character of a fable as any recorded in Holy Scripture, or in fabulous heathen writings. Yet Our Lord evidently esteemed it as Divine truth, when He enforced a solemn warning to His hearers to flee from the wrath to come, and to be ready against His own second coming, by the few words, "*Remember Lot's wife.*" Is it credible that He would so have introduced a popular error, or a poetic fable? Or may we suppose Him deceived or ignorant?

6. On more than one occasion Our Lord speaks of Abraham in terms which could leave no doubt in His hearers that He regarded as truth the records of that Patriarch. "*If ye were Abraham's seed, ye would do the deeds of Abraham.*" "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.*" "*Before Abraham was I am.*" Would He have thus spoken of an individual whose history was mixed up with fable, or thus referred to mere human writings? He refers also to Isaac and Jacob in a similar tone of recognition of their history.

7. In the life of Moses, as related in the commencement of Exodus, there occurs an event that to human reasoning has a fabulous character about it: the appearance of God, or an Angel, to him in a flame of fire in a bush, which yet was unconsumed by that flame. Who would credit such a marvel, if stated on human authority only? Yet Our Lord uses it to *confirm the great Christian doctrine of the Resurrection.* "*As touching the dead, that they rise, have ye not read in the Book of Moses (a distinct reference again to a written record) how in the Bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob?*" Would He have thus spoken of a fable—or would the truth of God have borne witness to a falsehood to establish a truth?

8. The feeding of the hosts of Israel for forty years in the wilderness with bread from Heaven called *Manna*, has an amazing character of incredibility about it. It sometimes staggers a Christian's faith. It has been re-

jected as a fable by infidels, and variously reasoned away by professed believers in Scripture. But Our Lord largely refers to it as truth. When the Jews—seeking to place Him in a lowering comparison with Moses, said: “*Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from Heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not (i.e. it was God’s gift) that bread from Heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from Heaven. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead: this (meaning Himself) is the Bread which cometh down from Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. He that eateth me shall live by me. Not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; He that eateth this bread shall live for ever.*” Would Jesus thus have spoken of a fable, or thus referred to an untruthful narrative, and in such connection with such great truth?

9. The elevation of a Serpent made of brass on a pole, that they who were bitten by serpents might, by looking on it, be healed, is a very strange circumstance to human reasoning. But it is thus distinctly declared to be a truth by Christ. “*As Moses lifted up the Serpent in the Wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*” Besides that He adduces it as an historical fact, is it credible that He would have made use of a fable, a poetic picture, an ideal representation, to confirm and illustrate the foundation truth of the Gospel—His own meritorious death and sacrifice?

10. The institution of the Sabbath, as of divine authority, is clearly recognised by our Lord. “*Have ye not read in the Law, how that on the Sabbath days, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless.*” Here Moses is referred to as an authority respecting more than one fact—the institution of the Sabbath by God, its sanctity, the necessity of sacrifices as the required worship, and the dispensation from the strict sabbatical observance

made requisite by the offering of the sacrifice on the seventh day, which the law of Moses enforced, as being in fact a dispensation of God Himself from guilt otherwise incurred. Could the divine authority of that writing of Moses, called the Law, be more strongly confirmed than by the various uses Our Lord here makes of it?

Such then, to close this part of my subject, is the use which the Lord from Heaven, the Incarnate Word, of whom it is declared "*He that came from God, speaketh the words of God,*" makes of the Books of Moses as an authority in matters of fact. And His use shews His estimation of them, for He refers to them as written records, then existing, well known, read, and believed in by His hearers: as unquestionable truth in several of the most unlikely, and therefore most reasonably to be questioned circumstances. And He uses them as the highest positive authority, without any the slightest intimation of any doubtfulness of character attaching to any portion of their narrative, but with—on the contrary—the strongest recognition of and sanction to, the contrary existing belief. He refers to them as the Word of God, and in proof of great Christian truths.

II. NOW, LET ME BRING BEFORE YOU, IN FURTHER PROOF OF HIS ESTIMATION OF THEM, OUR LORD'S USE OF THE WRITINGS OF MOSES, AS AN AUTHORITY OF THE HIGHEST KIND, EVEN AS THE WORD OF GOD, IN MATTERS OF DOCTRINE AND MORALS.

I shall again bring before you Our Lord's references to the Mosaic Writings, adding a few brief observations.

1. In His Temptation in the Wilderness, Christ repelled the Tempter on three separate occasions, by quotations from Holy Scripture. He used *the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*, prefacing each quotation by express reference to it as such. Thus, to mention only the first of these: "*It is written* (He said) *Man shall not*

“*live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” All the three quotations, it is very observable, were taken from that Book of Moses called *Deuteronomy*: which Book is a repetition of a great part of the three preceding Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. To quote from *Deuteronomy as the Word of God*, was in a great degree to confirm the authority of those other Books; and it is not only the moral and other enactments of the Law as given in those Books, but their history of the twelve Tribes in the Wilderness, which this fifth Book of Moses largely confirms. Can there be a question that Our Lord regarded, by these quotations, that writing as the Word of Inspiration, to which the Psalmist’s words were applicable: “*Thou, through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies, for they are ever with me?*”

2. In the Sermon on the Mount we find Our Lord thus speaking of the Law generally: “*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill.*” The chief matter of four out of five of the Books of Moses is this Law which Our Lord here puts on an equal footing with the writings of the Prophets. Surely, this is a strong confirmation of the divine authority of the Books which contained this Law.

3. In the same spirit, and to like purport, Christ speaks of certain portions of the Law; as thus: “*God commanded, saying, Honour thy Father and thy Mother;*” which He elsewhere expresses by “*Moses said, Honour thy Father and thy Mother,*” so declaring what Moses said to be the commandment of God. What a testimony to the divine truth of the writings of Moses, to Moses’ own inspiration, veracity, and high authority! Surely, no higher witness need be sought. Again, Christ says: “*Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery: Do not kill,* and so on, referring clearly to the written Law in the Books of Moses. What an awful error, then, what a presumption is that man guilty of, who allows himself to

lower, in any measure, the authority of these writings! It is something like the offence of Uzzah, but without Uzzah's apparent excuse. It is laying an unhallowed or irreverent hand on the Ark of God, not to steady it and keep it from shaking, but to shake it out of its existing steadiness.

4. There is a singularly strong testimony to the high authority of the Pentateuch generally in a discourse of Our Lord to the Jews, as recorded by St. John. "*Do not think that I will accuse you to my Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me: But if ye believe not his writings how shall ye believe my words?*" It is so difficult to convey, with any brevity, a just idea of the weight of this single testimony of Christ to Moses' writings, that I will content myself with observing that it may well be asked, *How shall any one believe Christ's words, who does not believe Moses' writings?* for it may be reverently said, that if Moses' writings are not to be believed, Christ's words may with some reason be doubted: such authoritative use of the former do we find in the latter. If Moses delivered fables, poetic fictions, and untruths, Christ rests the authority of much of His teaching on those fables, fictions, and untruths. If Moses' foundation is sand, Christ builds His house in no small degree on that sand, and both will be in much danger of giving way together. He shakes both who shakes one. (See Postscript.)

5. When the Jews excused themselves for seeking to stone our Lord, saying, "*we stoned thee for blasphemy, and because thou being a man makest thyself God; Jesus answered them: Is it not written in your law, I said ye are Gods!*" Though the reference here may primarily be to the 82nd Psalm, that Psalm in the expressions used in it (v. 6.), "*I have said,*" refers to the word of God in Exodus by Moses, "*Thou shall not revile the Gods, nor curse the Ruler of thy people.*" And our Lord's comment is observable; "*If he called them Gods, unto whom the*

word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken ; as containing a clear recognition of the command of Moses to and respecting magistrates (who are here designated by the term *Gods*) as the Word of God, and Holy Scripture.

6. In the close of the awful Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus there is testimony of the most definite character to the high and inspired authority of Moses' writings. Abraham replies to the Rich Man's prayer respecting his brethren : "*They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them ;*" and when the Rich Man piteously rejoined : "*Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent,*" Abraham is made by Our Lord to answer : "*If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*" Christ undoubtedly gives here, through Abraham, His own testimony to the inestimably weighty value of Moses' writings, representing them as not only equal in authority to those of the Prophets, but also as able to make *wise unto salvation* those who give heed to them. A messenger from the dead, He intimates, would fail to benefit the man who should lightly regard *them*.

7. I add but one more reference, but it is a very observable one. It occurs in the record of Our Lord's discourse to the two disciples going to Emmaus. "*Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" For it brings Our Lord before us as treating Moses' writings, and that generally, as the Scriptures of God, worthy of His own exposition ; a divine authority in what related to Himself and His salvation. What can we ask for more to confirm us in our believing, prayerful, obedient use of this portion of *our Bibles* ?

TO CONCLUDE then briefly. It must deeply pain every reflecting and earnest Christian that attempts should now be making to lower the authority of the Books of Moses, to represent their truth as questionable, and to throw doubt upon their inspiration. I have confined this dis-

course strictly to one proof of their divine authority, that drawn from the words of Christ, and the use made of them by the Saviour Himself. This is certainly the highest possible attestation to them, yet it is only a part of the proof in support of their credibility to be drawn from Holy Scripture. For, to these might be added the confirmatory testimony of the Acts of the Apostles, of the Epistles of the New Testament, and of the Psalms and Prophets. But I might almost say: "This is not needful;" for if our Lord Jesus Christ gives us that clear Testimony which, as I have now shewn you, He does give to their genuineness and inspired authority, both as regards historical facts and circumstances (wherein they are especially called in question), and as to doctrines and morals, such testimony is sufficient. For it is the witness of *God Himself* to these Books as *His own Word*. To myself it appears most satisfactory and altogether decisive, and it forbids me to entertain a question about them.

While ye believe, then, Christ's words, receive Moses' writings as the Truth of God, and let no one, be he who he may—professed Christian or avowed Infidel—lessen in the slightest degree your reverent, devout attachment to this most valuable portion of the Word of God, shake your full belief of it, weaken your respect for any of its records, or impede your obedient regard to every instruction it gives you. In the fullest sense of the words, we may apply to these five Books of Moses Our Lord's admonition: "*Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me.*"

POSTSCRIPT.

I had not intended, in publishing this Sermon, to refer at all to the Bishop of Natal's recent work on the Pentateuch, but generally to guard against the dangerous errors he has put forth, by what I believe "*sound doctrine*" concerning it. But, as the Bishop seeks to ward off the force of the conclusion to be drawn from Our Saviour's use of the Pentateuch, by the assumption that Himself might be under the influence of popular error regarding its facts, deficient "in full and accurate information on those points," and "without certain divine knowledge on this matter," I cannot omit to notice briefly a supposition so fearfully unsound. If the Saviour was deceived and ignorant on those points and this matter, why not on other? Where did this ignorance stop? and His perfect knowledge begin? What part of His words are we to receive as truth, and what to question?—what becomes of the divine authority of His instructions as they are delivered to us in the New Testament? Is not the Bishop of Natal sapping by this assumption the foundation of Christian faith, and exposing the Ark of God to the assaults of the foes of His Israel?

The writings of Moses and the Word of Christ stand fast, or come into question, together. What would Infidelity wish for more, than to have such doubt thrown on the teaching of the Saviour?



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The Saviour's estimation of the writings

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