

MUSLIM FATE - PART IV

BIBLICAL VALIDITY

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MELCHIZEDEK REVELATIONS

We were told of the general flow of events that would take place at the termination of the planetary age. Biblical prophecy contains those revelations. It was intended to enable us to make decisions concerning our physical survival, and the salvation of our world.

From the Urantia Papers:

Page 1024 - This same Melchizedek continued to collaborate throughout the nineteen succeeding centuries with the many prophets and seers, thus endeavoring to keep alive the truths of Salem until the fullness of the time for Michael's appearance on earth.

The context is Melchizedek's work at Salem with Abraham and the people of Israel. The prophets and seers must be those of Israel; they could not be any others. Further, they must be those which produced written works that have come down to us in the Bible; they would not be prophets and seers unknown to us.

The absurd notion of Melchizedek using "prophets and seers" other than those whose writings are contained in the Bible would mean that those with whom Melchizedek collaborated remained anonymous, while we have the works of men with whom Melchizedek did not collaborate. Such suggestion would invalidate his work, and would violate reality.

Such view is denied by further remarks:

Page 853 - . . . no comprehensive plan for far-reaching world welfare was promulgated to the mortals of earth until the arrival of Machiventa Melchizedek, in the times of Abraham, who, with the power, patience, and authority of a Son of God, did lay the foundations for the further uplift and spiritual rehabilitation of unfortunate Urantia.

Thus we can see that Melchizedek declared to us a comprehensive plan for far-reaching world welfare, and did then and there lay the foundations for the uplift and spiritual rehabilitation of our planet. This declaration became the "truths of Salem."

Following this chain of thought we can see that the truths of Salem were the teachings of Melchizedek at that time. Hence, those far-reaching plans must be preserved in the writings of the prophets and seers of our Bible.

The fact that the prophets and seers did not create the revelations out of their own minds is contained in the remark about collaboration. To collaborate means to cooperate or affiliate with one another. Pervasive throughout the prophecies are remarks that the "word of Yahweh" came to those men. See Isa 38:4, Jer 1:2, Jer 11:1, Ezek 3:16, Hos 1:1, Joel 1:1, and many others.

This conclusion is confirmed by another remark.

Page 1033: About six hundred years before the arrival of Michael, it seemed to Melchizedek, long since departed from the flesh, that the purity of his teaching on earth was being unduly jeopardized by general absorption into the older Urantia beliefs. It appeared for a time that his mission as a forerunner of Michael might be in danger of failing. And in the sixth century before Christ, through an unusual co-ordination of spiritual agencies, not all of which are understood even by the planetary supervisors, Urantia witnessed a most unusual presentation of manifold religious truth. Through the agency of several human teachers the Salem gospel was restated and revitalized, and as it was then presented, much has persisted to the times of this writing.

To repeat, the agency of several human teachers about 600 years before Jesus had to include the prophets and seers of Israel. They would be Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the minor prophets. Those men would be the several human teachers who restated and revitalized the gospel of Salem. Much of this "most unusual presentation of manifold religious truth" persisted to the times of the presentation of the Urantia Papers in 1934 and 1935. This means that great truths are available to us in our historical religious documents. We neglect them at our temporal and eternal peril.

Since the Salem gospel was manifold religious truths presented to us through Melchizedek, identified as the Third Epochal Revelation, the writings of the prophets and seers of Israel retain the essential content of that Revelation. The Third Epochal Revelation was preserved for us through the "unusual presentation" of biblical prophecy.

We are then told:

Page 1023: The teaching of Melchizedek was full and replete, but the records of these days seemed impossible and fantastic to the later Hebrew priests, although many had some understanding of these transactions, at least up to the times of the en masse editing of the Old Testament records in Babylon.

This statement offers a cautionary note. The social disruptions at the time of the Babylonian conquest may have caused a discontinuity in the understanding of the Hebrew priests. Hence we may not have a "full and replete" record of Melchizedek's teachings preserved in the prophecies.

Since many of the great prophetic truths were presented shortly before, or in the context of the Babylonian conquests, such truths might have been modified by later Hebrew priests.

Study of the prophecies shows that some modification, indeed, took place. Hence we must be alert to the possibility of contamination of those great revelations.

INTEGRITY OF THE BIBLE TEXT

The task then before us is to recognize the truths of those revelations, as they have been preserved, and to detect those elements which may detract from those truths.

Thorough Bible study over the past two hundred years has given us a valuable review of possible corruptions. Unfortunately, many of these studies are by godless scholars. They engage in textual evaluations but do not believe in revelation, nor the hand of God in preserving those great truths for us. Hence we have the burden to determine for ourselves the validity of those works.

The following discussion is a short review of the problems we face.

The Old Testament (OT) as we have it in general use today, depends upon the Masoretic text (MT). The Masoretes were a group of Jewish scholars living in Spain in the eighth and ninth century who decided to standardize on a common text. (The word masorete means "transmitter." They took it upon themselves to faithfully transmit the old texts.) The problem arose because many Jews had forgotten how to pronounce the ancient Hebrew scripts which contained only consonants and no vowels. This led to diverse forms of the text. In a desire to preserve the pronunciations, and also standardize the text, they created a method of marking the vowels. This method is used yet today in Hebrew printings of the Old Testament.

Unfortunately, the original writings did not come to us pure; they were edited, and interpretive expansions were added, by Jewish scribes (Hebrew priests) some centuries before Jesus.

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) in 1947 we have a rich source for textual comparisons because the Scrolls predate the Masoretic text by nearly one thousand years. This has permitted us to discover and examine many of the MT editorial changes.

Another source for textual studies is the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. The word *septuagint* means 70 (LXX) and was used because 72 Jewish scholars were employed by Pharaoh Ptolemy Soter in Alexandria, Egypt prior to 285 BC to translate the Hebrew scriptures into Greek. Three reasons motivated this work. First, Ptolemy Soter desired to include the written works of all other known people in his building of a great library in Alexandria. Second, The widespread use of Greek in the Ptolemaic period caused most Jews to forget how to read Hebrew. Third, a Gentile desire to read the

Hebrew scriptures was also expressed throughout the Mediterranean. Therefore, Ptolemy Soter deemed it useful to bring those written works into this common vernacular. The project covered considerable time but by the reign of his son Ptolemy Philadelphus, a major portion of the old Hebrew manuscripts had been translated.

Scholars have noted that some portions of the Greek Septuagint were faithful translations from the Hebrew, while other portions were careless, and sometimes not much more than paraphrase. Subsequent work corrected some of these defects to provide our current version of the LXX. This history somewhat reduces the merit of the text, but it still was a highly important document in our religious legacy.

Since Hebrew manuscripts were mostly relegated to educated Jews by the time of Jesus, and Greek was so widely used as a second language, his apostles quoted mostly from the Septuagint rather than from the Hebrew. The Old Testament quotations in the New Testament have been exhaustively studied to show this fact, although some quotations are from the Hebrew.

THE ISAIAH EXAMPLE

The discovery of the famous intact Isaiah scroll from the Dead Sea showed us how well the Jewish scribes could preserve old text. The differences between the DSS and MT of Isaiah were only a dozen minor words. This greatly supported the notion that all Old Testament books had been preserved with similar integrity. Unfortunately this conclusion was false.

In discussion of editorial changes and evolution of the Bible text I wrote the following to a biblical scholar at the University of Syracuse:

"The DSS Isaiah scroll took the academic community by surprise. I counted a dozen minor differences between DSS and MT. Using new radiocarbon techniques a team at the University of Arizona dated the famous scroll at between 335 BCE and 122 BCE. This means that from approximately 200 BC, until the Masoretes, no essential evolution in the document took place. The integrity of the text was still maintained to the time of our earliest MT manuscript evidence in the 11th century (AD). RSV today contains the translated text of a document that was created two centuries or more before Jesus. RSV has footnotes showing the differences.

"This tells me something: The generations respected the text. They preserved it essentially intact, through countless copies and recopy.

"Most of us who have examined Isaiah are willing to admit to two, perhaps three, different authors of the text (Isa I, II and III). This means that the separate texts were coalesced into one sometime before 200 BC. I would not call that an evolutionary process; I would call that an editorial process.

"Next I turned to LXX (of Isaiah). Judging from a hasty scan, (I know only English) it likewise shows very little difference with the MT. I noted that 2:22 is missing in LXX; 10:23 and 28:20 are slightly reduced; 42:1 uses the words Jacob and Israel not in MT; 48:16 reverses the last phrase; 56:12 is missing; the word Jerusalem was added in 60:1. There may be others I did not see. If we accept that the LXX Isaiah was translated before 200 BC, this shows also no essential evolution from that time.

"I would call the LXX evidence showing slightly different Isaiah text sources. The changes seem to have worked both ways, with "interpretive expansions" of (very few) verses in the MT, and "interpretive insertion" of (very few) formal names in the LXX. (This is only a suggestion on my part. I do not want to take the time to more rigorously define these differences.)

"Otherwise there is no available evidence to show evolution in the Isaiah text."

The context of Isa 2:22 is:

Isa 2:19-21

And men shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. In that day men will cast forth their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

Clearly the meaning is the shelter men will seek to escape nuclear destructions. Little will their idols of gold and silver help them in the time of God's great judgment.

Then this verse 22 was added:

Turn away from man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?

This verse has nothing to do with the context of the preceding verses, except as the scribe(s) saw fit to interpret them.

Consider the other added verse:

Isa 56:10-11

His watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. The shepherds also have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all.

To which verse 12 is added:

"Come," they say, "let us get wine, let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure."

The watchmen and the shepherds are the theologians of every sort, from the scholars of our godless seminaries to fundamentalist preachers, who do not understand. One cannot study the works of the theologians and the TV preachers without recognition of the great appetite they have for publishing, for fame or for money. Of course we could understand the dogs as those of our commercial world who cannot ever have enough in their bank accounts. Thus we can see the temptation of a scribe(s) to elaborate on the text.

THE JEREMIAH EXAMPLE

Turning now to other examples, we know from the Dead Sea texts that some Old Testament books saw different versions in circulation up to the time of Jesus. This was especially true for the writings of Jeremiah. There were at least two different versions of his text. Scholars believe these difference were due to variations in manuscripts carried by different groups of Jewish people who were scattered when Jerusalem was seized by Nebuchadnezzar. Some Jews were deported to Babylon, while others fled to Egypt or other places. The different versions may have been due to the fluid state of Jeremiah's composition. He did not have time to crystallize his text into a complete or final version.

In contrast to other LXX books, the Jeremiah differences from the MT are too major to simply be errors in copying. The oracles against the nations (OAN) from Chapter 25 to the end are in a different order between the versions, and portions are missing. The LXX of Jeremiah is 60 verses (1/8) shorter than the MT. The missing portions are not concentrated in one section but are spread throughout those chapters. The DSS identified as "Jer-b" found in Cave 4 supports the fact that some of these absences were due to different Hebrew manuscript versions, and not merely neglect or editing by the LXX scribes. Two DSS fragments of Hebrew Jeremiah followed the verse order of the LXX; others followed the MT. Hence, the shorter Hebrew versions also had to be in circulation up to the time of Jesus and were not due merely to lazy LXX translators. This fact also shows that the differences were not due to later Masoretic editing

Discussions of these problems may be found, for example, in *The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah, Doublets and Recurring Phrases*, by Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, Number 51. Atlanta, GA.

See also *The Septuagint After Qumran*, Ralph W. Klein, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1974, who shows that the MT was an expansionist modification of earlier manuscripts, designed around the peculiar Hebrew view coming out of Babylonian captivity.

As I also wrote to that biblical scholar:

"If the generations respected the Isaiah text, did they less respect Jeremiah? Or is it possible that Jeremiah did not have time to crystallize his text into a complete document

because of the disruptions at Jerusalem, and thus we have two different redactions from his original compositions?

"If I understand correctly, Ralph Klein took the same position as I. He stated that the (DSS) 4QJer-a scroll shows that the full, developed text of Jeremiah existed already about 200 BC in Palestine. Unfortunately, the DSS Jeremiah scraps are too fragmentary to be published in English translation. Klein stated that our textual decisions therefore revert to MT and LXX. Exactly where I am. He asks directly: "Which text of Jeremiah is the more original, the longer MT or the shorter LXX?" He then gives his reason why he believes the LXX. He illustrates with six conflations, expansion of the divine name, use of the name Johanan, the cases where Nebuchdrezzar is spelled with "n," and how the MT expansions compare to "regular features of expansion" in other texts. He then goes on to the Deuteronomistic additions. All of this evidence suggests that LXX was the original, and that the MT saw expansions.

"One other point: The internal disorder of the OAN suggests that neither of the Jeremiah redactions reflect a final composition; they show a manuscript in the stage of evolution. Not evolution in changes by later persons, but evolution in Jeremiah's mind as to how best handle his material. I believe this process caused two different source documents to be carried with the different groups in their haste to depart from Jerusalem.

"Since the MT saw such integrity in preservation of the Isaiah scroll should we expect less in the other documents? I say no. We should expect the same attempt to preserve. To repeat, the generations respected the documents and took care to preserve them.

"When I did my tabulation of Chap 25 it became immediately clear that MT was the expanded text. But it was expanded to interpret the meaning to a sense that would be understood by Hebrew people living in Babylon. The cosmic and global nature of the statements were reduced to a provincial environment. Having lived through the captivity they had a great emotional and psychic desire to interpret Jeremiah's work from that experience. I believe the scribe(s) were not only convincing their audience of that situation, but also convincing themselves.

"Many scholars believe the MT OT came from Babylon, while the LXX came from Egypt. This is what tradition tells us. As Klein showed the MT is consistently expansionist. The scribes who had the texts under their care did not mind emending to suit their notions. This did not take place in Egypt. Therefore the LXX reflects non-expanded text, but from manuscripts that were local, and not imported from Babylon or Babylon-tradition sources for the translation. Otherwise they would reflect the expansions.

"I hope this better explains to you my position. I believe we have reliable documents, reflecting the original writings of the authors, but that we must assess them according to their composition history, not a supposed (later) textual evolution. And I believe that the MT text really must be taken with great care for all the expansions it contains. It could greatly mislead people."

The work by Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor showing numerous doublet passages also confirms that the Jeremiah text was in a fluid state when Jeremiah fled to Egypt. Although Parke-Taylor would ascribe those duplications to later editors, we should look to the more simple explanation of Jeremiah's uncertainty. In fact, Jeremiah may have been in the predicament that he regarded his revealed material so sacred he was at a loss exactly how to handle it. This may have produced many repetitive passages because he did not want to fail in emphasizing the individual revelations.

EDITORIAL CHANGES BY THE MASORETES

Other OT differences suggest later editing. These changes may have occurred any time after the DSS to the time of the work of the Masoretes. An example may be found in Deuteronomy 32:43.

QUMRAN: *Rejoice, O ye heavens, with him and let all the angels of God worship him.*

SEPTUAGINT: *Rejoice, O ye heavens, with him and let all the angels of Gods worship him. Rejoice, O ye nations with his people, and let all the sons of God accord him strength.*

MASORETIC: *Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people . . .*

We can easily see that the Deuteronomy text was different among these three versions. We can also see how the Masoretic text was edited, either by the Masoretes or earlier scribes, to delete entire phrases that were disturbing. A thousand or more years ago the scribes were reluctant to support ideas about celestial sons of God engaging in worship. To do so made the heavenly realms active by intelligence foreign to common notions.

Going on now to some of the Jeremiah differences, the following offer examples in the Revised Standard translation of the MT.

Jer 25:8-9

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, says the LORD, and for Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about; I will utterly destroy them, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting reproach.

The LXX version of the same text is:

Therefore, thus says the Lord; since you believed not my words, behold I will send and take a family from the north, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants of it, and against all the nations round about, and I will make them utterly waste, and make them a desolation and a hissing and an everlasting reproach.

Clearly, someone inserted the phrase *and for Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant*.

But what difference does this make? Prophecies about Nebuchadrezzar are repeated throughout Jeremiah.

It makes all the difference in the world. Other prophecies on Nebuchadrezzar pertain to the historical situation. This passage deals with the terminal judgment at the end of the age.

I tabulated all the changes to Jeremiah 25. The tabulation clearly shows that the MT emendations were intended to make the prophecy apply to the historical context. They were interpretive elaborations or interpretive expansions where the scribes or their audience did not envision a future world judgment. The scribes turned the text into provincial statements of historical prophecy, not global predictions of the far future.

This is the root cause of so many people from so many generations believing the prophecies pertained to the historical context.

For these reasons I shall use the LXX text of Jer 25, rather than the MT, to show the unfolding of current events. In some cases I use the RSV phrasing, since it better captures the intent of Jeremiah's Hebrew language. I also follow the MT order of the verses, which are separated into two different sections in the LXX.

For those who may be interested I shall send a copy of the tabulation of Chapter 25 under separate cover upon request.

TO BE CONTINUED