

Chapter 7

IS THE HISTORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ACCURATE?

by

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What one thinks about the accuracy of Old Testament history will be influenced by what he thinks about some larger questions. Old Testament history is one miracle after another. To the aged and barren, children are born. Angels appear and walk the rugged terrain of Palestine. Coming events are foretold. The finger of God inscribes divine law on tables of stone. A miraculous glory-cloud leads Israel through the wilderness. Without this supernatural strand, Old Testament history would not be Old Testament history at all.

Consequently, even if enough evidence were available from archaeology and related sciences to vouch for all the ordinary data (chronological, political, etc.), the history in the Old Testament would still appear radically distorted to those who regard the idea of divine intervention in human affairs as nonsense. Similarly, the *view* of history embedded in the Old Testament is not the sort of thing archaeology is able to verify. The Old Testament's interpretation of the movement of history will call forth agreement or disagreement according to the reader's total life and world view. For example, when the Old Testament interprets the events of the Exodus and Conquest in terms of God's showing favor to Israel at the expense of other people, such as the Egyptians and Canaanites, some readers might judge that interpretation to be a distasteful display of Israelite arrogance. It is, therefore, futile to tackle the defense of the various external details without first facing tip to the deeper issues of Christian

supernaturalism - of God, His creation and redemptive revelation - and of truth, what it is and how it can be known.

These fundamental issues cannot be dealt with, however, within the limits of this chapter. It must suffice to state here that apart from the God of the infallible Word, truth would be lost in meaningless darkness through which there would never resound the creative word, "Let there be light," separating the light from the darkness and assigning to each its definition as "Day" or "Night." And apart from the infallible, absolutely authoritative Word of God, man's quest for truth would be a hopeless writhing to escape the coils of subjectivism and historical relativism. The necessary presupposition for the writing of this book or for predication of any kind is the God of the infallible Word.

When we affirm the perfect historical accuracy of the Old Testament, we are not claiming that our favorite English version of it or even our best critical Hebrew text is infallible. Our claim is only that the original manuscripts were without error. But while it is useful to realize that we do not possess the original infallible text down to the last detail, it is unwarranted to conclude that it is unimportant whether there ever was a completely accurate text, as though a generally trustworthy Bible would suffice.

The point has been illustrated this way: Suppose we try to drive over a river when its flooding waters have risen above the level of the bridge. A drive across the bridge we must drive through a few inches of water. Not ideal conditions; we can manage, however. But if the bridge were non-existent, crossing the river would be utterly impossible. "What the idea of general trustworthiness without infallible inspiration does in effect is to say that it really makes no difference whether there is a solid bottom under us, inasmuch as we have to drive through water in any case. But we have seen

that man needs absolutely authoritative interpretation.”¹

Furthermore, the available evidence - not least that of the Dead Sea Scrolls - confirms the verdict of the Westminster Assembly theologians, who confessed that the inspired Scriptures were by God’s “singular care and providence kept pure in all ages.”² The most prominent Biblical archaeologist of our day writes: “We may rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near-Eastern literature.”³ You might say that so far as the historical accuracy of the Old Testament is concerned, that bridge across the river has only a few small puddles on it. Unfortunately, rationalistic scholars, like little boys, delight in getting the biggest and muddiest splash possible out of small puddles.

To take our stand humbly with those whose eyes God has opened to recognize the perfect truthfulness of the Word He has spoken, does not mean that we are committed to all the woodenly literalistic interpretation that has been imposed on the Old Testament. But great caution is necessary at this point lest warning against one error, a far worse error be encouraged. The “worse error” we refer to is found in the dominant theological movement of our day, Barthianism, which denies the real, literal historicity of the key events recorded in Scripture.

Take in particular their treatment of the history in Genesis. It is assumed with negative higher criticism in general that Genesis as we know it is the product of

late Israelite editors who pieced together various older sources. But the distinctive feature of the new approach is that these editors are supposed to have infused a new meaning into the ancient stories. As incorporated into Genesis, the purpose of such stories, it is said, is not to portray specific past events of history on this earth, such as the Fall of a real Adam and Eve in an actual garden in Eden, but only to point to some suprahistorical aspect of the experience of Everyman. The practical consequence is that the reins of Barthian interpretation are let loose and it runs amuck over the sacred records, dissolving Biblical history in the acid of theological allegorization - allegorization as unwarranted and undisciplined as its older, less sophisticated cousins.⁴

Archaeology’s Role in Demonstrating Bible Accuracy

What now of archaeology’s contribution to our subject? How has it influenced the climate of scholarly opinion concerning the accuracy of Old Testament history? Evangelicals usually and most effectively answer this question by pointing out how archaeological discoveries have compelled even negative critics to repudiate the radical theories of the nineteenth century leader of higher criticism,

¹ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (unpublished class syllabus), 1951, p. 148. For all the broader apologetic issues mentioned above, see C. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1955).

² The Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 1, sec. 8.

³ W. F. Albright in *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, ed. H.H. Rowley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 25, citing W. F. Albright.

⁴ The best, critical analysis of Barthianism is C. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1962). On the vital issue of the genuine historicity of redemptive history see J. G. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1923), and E. J. Young, *The Study of Old Testament Theology Today* (London: James Clarke and Co., 1958), pp. 13ff.

Julius Wellhausen. His attack on the reliability of the Old Testament was not confined to details here and there, but was directed against the over-all structure of its history of Israel. That is seen plainly in his suggested reconstruction along evolutionary lines of the development of the Old Testament literature itself. In place of the Biblical sequence of Mosaic Law and Prophets, Wellhausen

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substituted the new order of Prophet's followed by non-Mosaic Law. That of course, involved the most drastic rejection of the Bible's picture. of the, Mosaic age and obviously also of the still earlier patriarchal age. The Bible's description of those times was regarded as totally inaccurate, a product of first millennium B.C. authors, who imaginatively projected the conditions of their own day back into the dim, prehistoric second millennium B.C.

The story of twentieth century Biblical archaeology is the story of the silencing of the clamorous voice of the modern western Wellhausen by the voiceless witnesses emerging from ancient eastern mounds. The plot of the story would be clearer were it not for the reluctance of critical scholar's to part with their traditional teachings. But all are now obliged to admit that far from the Biblical narratives of patriarchal and Mosaic days being alien to the second millennium B.C. where the Biblical chronology locates them, they would be completely out of place in the first millennium B.C. The Biblical sequence of Law and Prophets has been vindicated.⁵

The pull of archaeology in the opposite polar direction from Wellhausen criticism is evident in the tensions that exist in current critical views of the Pentateuch. It is allowed by critical scholars that the supposed Pentateuchal documents are based on very old sources, and it is admitted that these preserved accurately the ancient historical background (a confession archaeology demands). But it is still maintained that the final editing of the documents is the work of late editors of approximately the same dates as Wellhausen assigned to them (a concession to the pontifical utterances of pre-archaeological higher criticism). Again, there is stress on the astonishing accuracy of

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oral tradition, to which criticism traces the earliest origins of the Biblical narratives. But over against this a continuing radical wing is still so negative that all it acknowledges to be known for certain about so recent a figure as Moses is that he died - which, as someone has remarked, would seem to be a reasonable assumption.

Illustrations may now be given of particular archaeological evidence which increases our appreciation of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. We will focus upon the history of the second millennium B.C. because that has been the object of the most severe criticism (except for the still earlier history recorded in Gen. 1-11).⁶ Moreover, a general evaluation has already been given

⁵ For a comprehensive and masterly critique of the higher criticism of the Pentateuch see *O. T. Allis, The Five Books of Moses* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., second edition, 1949).

⁶ The author of this chapter has dealt in published articles with two of the major problems in the early part of Genesis. See the *Westminster Theological Journal*, May 1958 (XX, 2, pp. 146-157) and May 1962 (XXIV, 2, pp. 187-204) for discussions of the chronology of creation and the alleged myth of the sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4. Limitations of space allow for only a comment or two here. As for Genesis I, the traditional types of exegesis are guilty of laying a man-made stumbling block in the path of modern students for it is exegetically demonstrable that the *chronological data of* Genesis 1:1-2:3 are to be interpreted figuratively rather than as a literal description of either the duration or

concerning the relevance of archaeology for that period and it would be well to cite some substantiating facts. Even with the limits reduced to the second millennium, only a few highlights can be mentioned here.

Archaeological Support for Biblical Dates

Since man is a creature of time, the student of his history is plagued with dates - dates to be memorized, dates to be discovered too. Determining the dates of

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Moses and the patriarchs would seem fairly simple, for there is in the Old Testament an abundance of precise chronological data covering the period from Abraham to Solomon (for whose date there is a scholarly agreement within about a decade). That period lasted a little over a millennium, according to the Biblical chronology. But radical scholars would shrink it to half a millennium! Even some more moderate critics have insisted that the Biblical figures are a century or two off. They allow Abraham no earlier a date than the nineteenth or twentieth century B.C. whereas the Bible places his birth at Ur, in the twenty-second century B.C. and the sojourning of the three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in Canaan in the twenty-first to nineteenth centuries. Likewise, the Bible's fifteenth-century date for Moses and the Exodus is almost universally rejected in favor of a thirteenth century date.

It would be an easy solution to assume that the chronological figures given in the Bible are no more than round numbers never intended to be taken literally. Unfortunately the matter is more complicated than that. For example, if one dates the Exodus in the thirteenth century, he must synchronize the Biblical narrative with the history of the nineteenth dynasty of Egyptian pharaohs. In doing so he finds it necessary to reject fact after fact in the Mosaic account as unhistorical. Moses' life span must at best be cut in half and then there is no room left for the whole long episode of the Exodus-generation of Israelites wandering and perishing in the wilderness.

It is all the more significant, then, that archaeological confirmation of the Biblical dates is accumulating. Exploration in the Negeb (the southern part of Canaan which was the major center of patriarchal life) reveals that the residence of the patriarchs there could have occurred only in the twenty-first to the nineteenth centuries B.C. An agricultural population had settlements in the Negeb during that period, but from the eighteenth century onward the area was occupied

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by wild Bedouin.⁷ Now, if the Biblical chronology is found to be so precisely accurate for the Middle Bronze Age (roughly 2000-1500 B.C.), even scholars without the presuppositions of consistent Christian theism should be ready to respect the Biblical chronology of the Late Bronze Age (about 1500-1200 B.C.) and the, concluding phases of the second millennium B.C.

Vindication of the Bible's fifteenth-century date for Israel's journeying under Moses comes from Amman, capital of modern Jordan. One of the persistent objections to the Biblical dating was that

sequence of the creation history. Neither should the question of the antiquity of man disturb anyone's confidence in the Scriptures, for the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 are manifestly not intended to be complete. The Biblical data provide only a minimum, not maximum possible date for both the Flood and the creation of man.

⁷ See N. Glueck, "The Seventh Season of Archaeological Exploration in the Negeb," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 152 (Dec. 1958), pp. 18ff.

allegedly, organized kingdoms with a settled culture did not exist in the Transjordan area from the eighteenth to the thirteenth century B.C. and accordingly the resistance which Israel encountered as Moses led them through the territory of Edom, Moab, and Ammon could have been no earlier than the thirteenth century. As a result, however, of an accidental discovery made by bulldozers preparing an airfield at Amman, an excavation was recently undertaken which indicated there was a settled occupation in Ammon, at least, from *circa* 1550 onward.⁸

The fact that tribal Semites such as modern Arab nomads memorize long personal genealogies but keep no track of birthdays and are poor at reckoning years (a fact sometimes cited as a reason for mistrusting the Biblical chronological data), only makes the Bible's demonstrable accuracy the more remarkable.

The period during which the patriarchs passed their lives in Canaan was no pre-historic era unacquainted with the accomplishments of a mature settled culture. Nor is it unknowable to us except through the mists of legend. In the ever deepening perspective of modern research, that age now stands in the full light of well documented historical day. Near Eastern kingdoms

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with magnificent cultural achievements had risen and fallen and Palestine itself had become the crossroads of Near Eastern trade long before Abraham arrived there. Indeed, the evidence shows that walled cities existed in Palestine as long before Abraham as Abraham lived before us!

It is not, however, the bare fact that advanced civilization existed in Canaan at 2000 B.C. that has been confirmed by archaeology. Rather, the closest correspondence in detail has been discovered between the setting of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as presented in Genesis and the particular Near Eastern social and political pattern of the, Middle Bronze Age, during which the Bible locates the patriarchs. W. F. Albright acknowledges that "by and large there is astonishing similarity between the background provided by archaeology and that presupposed in Genesis."⁹

More specifically, the same writer has observed that excavations already conducted have demonstrated the existence during the Middle Bronze Age of practically every town mentioned in the patriarchal narratives; that there was in that age constant intercourse between Palestine and Egypt and, indeed, a general freedom of movement in the Near East, just as depicted in Genesis. Furthermore, the names of individual men and women found in the Biblical history of the patriarchs fit squarely with the collection of names gathered from sources from the first half of the second millennium B.C. and, moreover, not with the names of any later period.¹⁰

Various peoples mentioned in Genesis and once regarded as legendary by negative critics have been discovered by archaeology to be the flesh and blood

⁸ See the report of G. Lankester Harding in the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, Jan.-June, 1958, pp. 10-12.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 6

¹⁰ Similar confirmation is available for the names of Moses' time. For example, the names of both midwives in Exodus 1, Shiphrah and Puah, declared fictitious by some scholars, have been found as Northwest-Semitic women's names in the second millennium B.C.

people the Bible indicates they were. The Hittites are a famous example; so too are the Horities, now identified with the Hurrians who played a vital role in Mesopotamian history in this period. And more recently still, mention of the Rephaim has been found in administrative texts from Canaan. The earliest non-Biblical reference to the covenant family continues to be the name of the people Israel on the thirteenth century stele of Pharaoh Merneptah of Egypt.

Archaeological Support for Biblical Culture

The authenticity of the often strange social, legal, and economic practices attributed to the patriarchs in Genesis has also been corroborated. As is frequently the case, the light which archaeology throws on the sacred page is of even more interest in this area than its confirmation of Scripture.

The most helpful single site for the enlargement of our understanding of patriarchal culture has proved to be ancient Nuzu, situated east of the Tigris River. Excavations at the site were begun in 1925. Thousands of fifteenth century B.C. Babylonian legal documents were discovered there and the practices of Nuzu's Hurrian population which are disclosed therein are seen to be the framework of custom within which the Biblical patriarchs operated.¹¹ Although these documents come from a time several centuries after the patriarchs, the social practices they reflect are obviously older than the documents. Parallels found in old Babylonian texts from Ur attest to the existence of such practices in patriarchal times.

Elderly Nuzian couples without a male heir might adopt a man to manage their estate for them in their old age and he would become their heir, so preserving the family estate under the family name. That is what childless Abraham and Sarah did with Eliezer. The

promise God afterward made to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:4) reflects another stipulation of Nuzian adoption, that if a natural heir were born after the adoption, the natural heir had the right of precedence. Thus Isaac replaced Eliezer.

Similarly, it appears that when Jacob wandered north to Haran, Laban adopted him. There are adoption tablets where a daughter is given in marriage to the adopted son, as were Leah and Rachel to Jacob. Also in accordance with the rules of adoption, Laban insisted that since he was still alive, all the possessions of Jacob, the fugitive adopted heir, were still his (Laban's) (cf. Gen. 31:43).

Moreover, Rachel's theft of Laban's gods and Laban's anxiety to regain them (cf. Gen. 31:19ff.) are explained by another feature of Nuzian adoption contracts. It was provided that these household gods, possession of which apparently guaranteed family headship, should go to a natural son subsequently born. By the time Jacob left Laban's household, we read of certain natural sons of Laban not mentioned at Jacob's arrival.

Other features of Nuzian legal procedure, such as the sale of birthright to one's brother, the unalterable validity of oral deathbed testaments (the oral blessing), the requirement in marriage contracts that a barren wife provide a handmaid for her husband to bear him children - all recall, illuminate, and confirm various incidents in Genesis.

¹¹ The Nezu parallels were pointed out by C. H. Gordon in his article "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets," *Biblical Archaeologist*, III (1940), 1, pp. 1-12.

From other ancient sites, such as Mari on the Middle Euphrates and Ugarit and Alalakh in Syria, comes similar information. Hittite sources, too, make an important contribution; and from them we take a final illustration concerning the background of the patriarchal narratives. Comparison of Hittite law with the account of Abraham's purchase of the field and cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite shows that Genesis 23 benefits from a most intimate acquaintance with Hittite taxation technicalities in connection with the sale of real estate.¹² The bargaining, it turns out, revolved not around the price but around Abraham's unsuccessful effort to avoid purchasing the entire property unit, field as well as cave, which carried with it the burden of civil obligations. Such knowledge of Hittite legal subtleties is of particular significance for literary criticism, since these Hittite laws fell into oblivion about 1200 B.C. - long before the earliest of modern criticism's fictitious documentary sources of the Pentateuch.

Archaeological Support for Biblical Records of the Days of Moses and Joshua

Leaving the patriarchs, what now is the witness of the ancient sites and sources to the historical accuracy of Biblical records of the Mosaic-Joshuan age, the age of exodus from Egypt and settlement in Canaan?

Archaeology speaks decisively against Wellhausen's notion that Pentateuchal legislation is too complex and its cultic provisions too elaborate for so early a time as that of Moses, to whom the authorship of the Pentateuch is attributed in both Old and New Testaments. As evidence of the antiquity of codified law, there are Assyrian and Hittite law codes from approximately the time of Moses, the Code of Hammurabi some three centuries before Moses, and the more recently discovered fragments of other Babylonian and Sumerian predecessors of Hammurabi's Code, dating back to Abraham's day.

Furthermore, the religious ritual required by the Pentateuchal laws is now seen to be similar in outward form to that in the cults of Israel's neighbors in the mid-second millennium B.C. The pattern of the tabernacle and its furnishings corresponds strikingly with that of contemporary non-Israelite sanctuaries. There

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is, for example, the fourteenth century Canaanite temple uncovered at Hazor, with its court, main hall, and holy of holies. This sanctuary design is seen from excavations at Byblos to be at least as old as 2000 B.C.

A flood of new knowledge concerning Canaanite gods and ritual has flowed from the mound of the north Syrian seaport of Ras Shamra, anciently called Ugarit, where excavations were begun in 1929. Best known of the Ugaritic texts are the fourteenth century B.C. poetic legends and myths. There are also certain texts relating directly to cultic rites. Comparison of Ugaritic and Mosaic ritual reveals such similarities in terminology, sacrificial procedure, and sacred personnel as to render Wellhausen's viewpoint obsolete. Indeed, with the varieties of ceremonial symbolism found in the Mosaic legislation being traced in the pagan world to even pre-Mosaic times, the strategic situation in the modern debate is radically changing. The question of the historical genuineness of the Mosaic ceremonial system is yielding to the more basic question of the spiritual genuineness, that is, the divine origin, of the religion which the Mosaic ritual enshrined. It is becoming increasingly

¹² This was first observed by M. R. Lehmann, Cf. "Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 129 (Feb. 1953), pp. 15ff.

important to see clearly that the similarities of the Israelite worship to contemporary pagan worship are only on the superficial level of external forms and symbols. Israel's God was the Creator; Israel's neighbors worshiped idols. The Canaanites worshiped according to the dictates of their self-inflicted superstitions. Israel worshiped the living God according to a pattern actually made known by God to Moses on the mount. Archaeology, however, cannot bestow the heavenly gift of perception whereby a man recognizes the absolute uniqueness, the absolute authority and truthfulness of the revelation of God which came in and through the Mosaic sanctuary.

The story of the Israelite conquest of Canaan and settlement there can be read in the archaeological remains of the Late Bronze age (1500-1200 B.C.).

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Some historians, rejecting the Biblical representation, have suggested that Israel's settlement in Canaan came about by gradual infiltration and peaceful expansion. But the evidence of the repeated violent destruction of Canaanite cities during this period agrees well with the Biblical picture of a continuing work of conquest by Israel over a period of several generations, following the initial decisive campaigns of Joshua.

Incidentally, there is confirmation of the earlier (fourteenth century) date assigned to Joshua by the Biblical chronology in the discovery that sites like Bethel, Lachish, and Debir were destroyed by *fire* in the thirteenth century. For such destruction, being contrary to Joshua's regular policy not to destroy by fire,¹³ must belong to a post-Joshuan phase of the Israelite conquest. Israel's settlement was chiefly in the central hill country of Canaan, and archaeological investigation has disclosed that that area had been wooded and only sparsely populated, but from about 1200 B.C. onward it became dotted with towns whose remains indicate a culture different from that of the surrounding Canaanites.

Many scholars have thought that in certain letters sent early in the fourteenth century by Canaanite city kings to Egyptian pharaohs and found at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt, there was a Canaanite version of the Biblical narrative of the Conquest. These Amarna letters refer to troubles in Canaan caused by the presence of Apiru (Habiru) warriors, whom many scholars identify with the Hebrews. The fact is that the Biblical and Amarna sources harmonize very well in such matters as the identity of the cities which the Canaanites lost in the early phases of the Conquest; but the Apiru activity referred to in the Amarna letters belongs to a time about a generation after Joshua and is to be related not to Israel's assault on

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Canaan, but, it would seem, to the oppression of Israel by her Syrian neighbors.¹⁴

Our final archaeological illustration concerns the covenant pattern which according to the Pentateuchal records, God adopted in formalizing His relationship to Israel. Sinai is the scene of the ratification of the covenant. There God binds Israel in allegiance to Himself by oath and imposes His

¹³ Apparently only Jericho and Ai among the southern cities were burned by Joshua and only Hazor in his northern campaign. See Joshua 11:13.

¹⁴ Judges 3:8ff. See the author's articles on "The Ha-BI-ru - Kin or Foe of Israel?" *Westminster Theological Journal*, XIX (Nov. 1956) 1, pp. 1ff.; XIX (May, 1957), 2, pp. 170ff.; XX (Nov. 1957), 1, pp. 46ff.

covenant law upon them. Recent studies¹⁵ have revealed how remarkably similar the formal proceedings at Sinai were to the standard procedure followed in international diplomacy of the second millennium B.C. for solemnizing treaties with vassals as is seen in texts of Hittite covenants.

The parallels embrace the ceremony of ratification and the contents (even the very outline) of the covenant document. Like the Biblical Decalogue (Exod. 20:1ff.), ancient vassal treaties began with a preamble identifying the lord of the covenant and a historical prologue recalling his previous benefits to the vassal or dependent prince, and then moved on to the particular obligations imposed upon the vassal. Prominent also in both Biblical and Hittite covenants were the invocation of witnesses, the proclaiming of the curses and blessings of the covenant, and the requirement that the covenant document be deposited in a sanctuary and periodically read to the vassal people. The genuine historical ring of the Biblical narrative and legislation should be clear to all.

A further principle in the administration of vassal treaties was that they were renewed from time to time, as when the covenant lord's death seemed near and he desired to confirm the dynastic succession of his son.

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The subject people was then required to take an oath of allegiance to the royal heir and a new covenant document was prepared, the old historical prologue and the stipulations being brought up to date.

It is clear that the book of Deuteronomy is precisely such a document. With the death of Moses imminent, it was necessary to renew the covenant with the now generation from the wilderness, confronting them with the demand to pledge their obedience to Joshua, the divinely appointed successor to Moses. Examination shows that the structure of Deuteronomy follows precisely the pattern of the ancient vassal treaties. The critical importance of this is that the whole Wellhausen scheme rested on the dating of Deuteronomy in the seventh century B.C. For rationalistic higher critics to continue to accept that untenable date must strike men who are concerned to do justice to all the facts as obscurantism. In continuing to hold the late date, the critics ignore the decisive evidence of the Hittite treaties for the authenticity of Deuteronomy as a product of the Mosaic age.

Archaeological research has, of course, also posed some new problems with respect to the accuracy of Biblical history in points of detail. But this need cause no undue concern for the Bible student. On the Biblical side, allowance must be made for various possibilities of interpretation and, as we have seen, for a measure of textual variation. On the archaeological side, allowance must be made for the fragmentary nature of the evidence (only a few score of some 25,000 sites in Biblical lands have been excavated) and for the differences and uncertainties in the interpretation of the evidence available, due in part to the relative youth of this science.

Those who recognize the Word of God for what it is can with the patience of faith await the final vindication of the perfect truthfulness of that Word. Those who lack such perception will meanwhile continue to sing the favorite hymn of the critical cult, "It Ain't Necessarily So," seizing upon the apparent conflicts in

¹⁵ See especially G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East, The Biblical Colloquium*, 1955.

detail between archaeological data and the Biblical history as an excuse. Nevertheless, every generation of negative critics will find itself in perpetual strategic retreat, as advancing archaeology relentlessly contradicts the examples of alleged Biblical error most confidently publicized by their fathers. It is not, however, the ever increasing witness of archaeology but the self-witness of the divine Word which leaves all negative criticism of that Word without acceptable excuse in the sight of its Author.