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VOLTAIRE'S CRITICAL NOTES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

PORTION OF LA BIBLE ENFIN EXPLIQUEE

DISSERATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Arnold Ages, B. A., M. A.

The Ohio State University
1963

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of Romance Languages
To My Wife
Rose of Sharon and
Lily of the valleys

Song of Songs 2:1
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to Dr. George R. Havens who first interested me in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* and under whose expert guidance the idea for this dissertation was formulated. I would also express my thanks to Dr. Hugh Davidson for his patient and devoted assistance in the completion of this work. His careful readings and cogent comments were of inestimable help in bringing this study to its fruition.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. WHY A COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE TECHNIQUE OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM: An Inquiry into Voltaire's Satirical Approach</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE INFLUENCE OF DOM CALMET</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calmet and the non-pentateuchal portions of the Old Testament</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unacknowledged borrowings from Calmet</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. LA BIBLE ENFIN EXPLIQUEE AS THE SUMMA OF VOLTAIRE'S BIBLICAL CRITICISM: A Study in Thematic Repetitions</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUTOBIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

WHY A COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE?

In 1777 Frederick the Great made the following remarks in a letter to d'Alembert:

Voltaire n'a fait que recueillir les sentiments de quelques Anglais et leurs critiques de la Bible. ... Les commentaires sur la Bible sont moins forts qu'une infinité d'autres ouvrages qui font crouler tout l'édifice, en sorte qu'on aura de la peine à le relever.¹

The work in question, which appeared in two editions in 1776, was entitled La Bible Enfin Expliquée, and contained as it were, Voltaire's definitive views on the Bible. In spite of the inflammatory nature of the work it was not condemned by the parlement. It was not until 1782, four years after Voltaire's death, that official notice of this book was made in the form of a refutation by M. l'abbe Clemence in his L'Authenticité des livres tant du Nouveau que de l'Ancien Testament démontrée, et leur véridicité défendue, ou Réfutation de la Bible enfin expliquée de y***.

That Voltaire's commentary should have called forth a semi-official church repudiation attests to the power and the influence of the document. Even a cursory reading of La Bible Enfin Expliquée shows Voltaire to have been a vigorous polemicist, a master stylist and the possessor of an inordinate amount of erudition bearing upon Biblical matters. The Moland edition has three hundred and thirteen pages filled

with Voltaire's critical notes on both the Old and New Testaments.¹ Prominently displayed are citations of a most scholarly nature from the Church Fathers, Rabbinic sources and contemporary Bible scholars such as Calmet, Huet, Simon, and Leclerc.

Yet few people even inside the field of Romance Languages realize that Voltaire wrote a Bible commentary. Perhaps this derives from the late date of publication or the rather specialized subject matter. Also, the format of the work, quite unusual for Voltaire, does not lend itself to easy reading. The Biblical text is presented in large clear type; Voltaire's critical notes are relegated to small letters. Despite these factors, this writer considers La Bible Enfin Expliquée to be one of Voltaire's most scintillating satirical productions and a striking example of the prodigious extent of Voltaire's learning and interest.²

Why did Voltaire undertake the writing of a Bible commentary? Many times in his career he had alluded to Biblical figures. The Dictionnaire philosophique is replete with critical observations on Moses, David, Solomon, and Ezekiel. His Examen important de milord Bolingbroke is a scathing attack on Biblical morality. Yet, in these

¹In the Moland edition the Biblical text appears at the top of the page while Voltaire's critical notes appear at the bottom in smaller print. In later sections such as Moses, Daniel, and Ezekiel he incorporates his critical comments in a combination of narrative and criticism without citing the text except in excerpts.

²Voltaire's interest in the Bible was also seen in works such as: La Princesse de Babylone, Conseils raisonnables a M. Bergier, Le Diner du conte de Bouainvilliers, Un Chrétien contre six Juifs, Catéchisme de l'honnête homme, La Défense de mon oncle, Dieu et les hommes, Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations, Histoire de l'établissement du Christianisme, to name a few. Appendix A provides a list of works in which Voltaire discusses the Bible.
and other works, the approach was that of a pamphleteer. Perhaps Voltaire decided to give vent to his feelings about the Bible in complete form, not merely through impertinent *boutades* in the body of an article in his dictionary or through a sarcastic reference to a Biblical figure in a letter to a friend.

A second consideration is in order. By 1776 Voltaire had distinguished himself as a gifted poet. From the publication of the *Henriade* (1728) to the *Epître à Horace* (1772) Voltaire maintained his skill as a creator in verse form. As a *philosophe* Voltaire attempted to disseminate knowledge about life and virtue throughout such works as the *Lettres philosophiques*, *Traité de la tolérance*, *Le Mondain*, and *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*. As an historian, Voltaire was one of the precursors of our modern approach. His *Siècle de Louis XIV* and the *Charles XIII* are outstanding examples of Voltaire's pioneering in the field of historical research. Voltaire was an amateur scientist and a popularizer of Newtonian physics. Moreover he excelled in the *conte* and the *roman*. His *Candide* is today perhaps his most widely read work. Voltaire was the foremost letter-writer of his time. Bestermann's edition of Voltaire's letters is eloquent testimony not only to the mass of written documents but also to the fervor and wit of Voltaire. In the eighteenth century Voltaire was if not the most important literary critic at least the most original. In spite of his misunderstanding of Shakespeare he was still the first to introduce him to France. His comments on the *Querelle* in the article "Anciens et modernes" of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* show him to be judicious and fair, yet frank and unafraid to state his own predilection. Finally, Voltaire was recognized during
his lifetime as the eighteenth century's greatest dramatist. Indeed his death was precipitated by his appearance at the performance of *Irène* in 1778.

Having therefore distinguished himself in every literary genre save one, Voltaire might have decided to exercise his talents on the composition of a Bible commentary. Not only would this provide him with a format which was new for him but it would also give him an opportunity to express in definitive form his highly controversial views on the Bible and on Jewish history.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all was the polemical motivation behind the desire to write a critical appraisal of the Bible. To appreciate this approach by Voltaire one must take into consideration the role which the Bible occupied in seventeenth and eighteenth century France. Moreover, the position of the Catholic Church must be examined in order to understand Voltaire's bitter antipathy towards that institution, an antipathy which he translated into the medium of a critique of the Bible.

In the France of Voltaire's day the basic approach to the Bible was the fundamentalist. This acceptance of the Bible as a divinely inspired document was part of Church doctrine as indeed it still is today in fundamentalist circles. While today "inspired" can be interpreted in myriad ways, then, it meant the literal and plenary inspiration of Scripture by the direct hand of God. Moreover, the Catholic Church felt that this repository of sacred words was its responsibility to disseminate and to elucidate. The Bible was after all one of the most important ingredients in the development of Christianity. The Hebrew
Bible, which contained the prophecies allegedly related to the coming of the Messiah, was all important as a type of forecourt. The New Testament, which contained the account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, was the fulfillment of the Old Testament and hence the inner sanctuary. Moreover, the Catholic Church found it... raison d'être as an institution in the admonition of Jesus to Peter to found his Church upon his name.

Working from these premises it is not surprising that Catholic Bible commentators interpreted the Biblical text in accordance with their theological commitments. Although this often led to inspirational maxims and beautiful allegories it did not make always for sound or logical explanation. The efforts of the orthodox critics to account for every Biblical phenomenon as being literally true forced them into absurd conclusions, compromising affirmations and incredible naivete.

Lanson says:

> On n'imagine pas aujourd'hui la naïveté, la puérilité, l'absurdité où pouvaient atteindre en France les commentateurs de la Bible, dans leur effort pour justifier le sens littéral du texte sacré et l'infaillibilité absolue des narrateurs inspirés. Il faut lire dom Calmet pour s'expliquer Voltaire: il faut le voir rendre compte de la métamorphose de la femme de Lot et de l'avarie de Job.

> It was this sense of perfect certainty that annoyed Voltaire as he perused the numerous commentaries and religious books of the day. If people could believe with perfect faith everything recorded in the Bible this meant that all manner of injustices had to be accepted. The

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1 The special relationship between Voltaire and Dom Calmet is treated in a separate chapter.

annihilation of entire peoples, the massacres of innocent tribes, incest, regicide and fratricide—all these things had to be condoned because there were Biblical precedents for all these occurrences. For Voltaire subscribing completely to the authenticity and perfect truth of the Bible was fanaticism. And Voltaire was the sworn enemy of fanaticism. Gay says:

The most striking symptom of the religious malady is a sense of certainty, doctrinaire yet uneasy. Voltaire did not make the mistake of dismissing fanatics as hypocrites; their danger lay precisely in their sincerity. The fanatic is sure that he knows what in fact he does not know, cannot know, and does not need to know. But his certainty—and that is what makes it so vicious—masks a disturbing sense of uncertainty. . . . Anticipating Nietzsche by over a century, Voltaire saw that cruelty is a symptom of weakness rather than strength.¹

Before examining the genesis and development of Voltaire's specific approach to the Bible it would be well to consider the general atmosphere of the period during which he lived.

In addition to the orthodox defenders of the faith such as Huet,² bishop of Avranches and the prestigious dom Calmet eighteenth century France also saw the emergence of several Bible critics whose position vis-a-vis the sacred text was if not ambivalent then hostile. According


²In Huet's *De la situation du Paradis terrestre* (1691) the author demonstrated the exact location of the garden of Eden. His *Demonstratio evangelica* (1672) purported to show that all pagan theology could be traced to Moses, that the gods of Phenicia, Egypt and Rome originate with Hebrew thought. He continued this line of reasoning in his *Quaestiones alnetanae et concordis rationis et fidei*. The Christian viewpoint in France was also strongly defended by Abbadie and his *Traite de la religion chretienne*. Claude Fleury's *Histoire ecclésiastique* drew warm accolades from Bossuet who was France's most eloquent defender of the Bible and the Church.
to Andrew Morehouse the critical attack against the Bible and
Christianity began in the seventeenth century.

The seventeenth century founded, and the eighteenth century
developed, the critical attack against Christianity when it
examined the text of the Bible to extract its meaning. The
meaning was soon discovered to be abhorrent not only to the
reason but to the moral instinct.¹

What began as merely a ripple of opposition to traditional view-
points became in a relatively short time a tide of criticism and vehement
hostility. The Baron de Lahontan typifies the new and bold attitude
towards the Bible.

Comment veux-tu que je croie la sincérité de ces Bible écrites
depuis tant de siècles, traduites de plusieurs langues par des
ignorants qui n'en auront pas connu le véritable sens, ou par des
menteurs qui en auraient changé, augmenté ou diminué les paroles
qui s'y trouvent aujourd'hui.²

Less blatant but equally devastating in its impact was the contri-
bution of reputable Biblical scholars in France. Nicolas Fréret,³ for
example, brought out nine memoirs in 1707 dealing with Biblical chronology
and came up with the startling theory that the history of Egypt antedated
that of Israel. His Chronologie des Chaldeens, des Egyptiens, des
peuples d'Inde . . . was vigorously denounced by Church authorities.
But perhaps the most vicious of all anti-Bible documents in France was
the Testament of Jean Meslier which appeared in manuscript form in 1729.

¹Andrew Morehouse, Voltaire and Jean Meslier, Yale University

²Quoted in Paul Hazard, La crise de la conscience européenne,

³Fréret is quoted by name many times in La Bible Enfin Expliquée.
In a story which Voltaire is fond of quoting, Meslier is alleged to have confessed on the death bed that his only regret was to have preached Christianity.

Meslier appears to have exercised a great deal of influence over Voltaire. In *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, there are fourteen citations in which Meslier is mentioned by name. His name is associated with comments on Saul's conduct, his enormous armies, Samson's parents, Samson's slaughter of the Philistines, his capture of three hundred foxes, his finding of honey, his passion for a Philistine maiden, Gideon's victory against the Midianites, and Abimelech's usurpation of the throne. Many of these citations are enclosed in quotation marks, giving the impression that they were direct citations. According to Professor Morehouse not one of these citations in a broad sense is true.

In other notes of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* occur numerous criticisms of Old Testament figures, for the most part minor, which Meslier was supposed to have inspired. Unimportant in themselves, these attributions are interesting examples of the manner in which Voltaire concocted many of the notes found therein, and present additional evidence of the impression that Meslier's work left on Voltaire. It would be an exaggeration to say that, of all the attributions and quotations from *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, not one is legitimate. But in a broad sense this is true. Elsewhere Professor Morehouse says that Voltaire's citations from Meslier, although textually false, represent his true spirit.

It is easy to understand why Meslier should have exerted such a strong influence on Voltaire. Meslier said in print for the first time

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1 Mol., XXX, pp. 137, 139, 145, 174, 182.
2 Morehouse, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
3 Ibid., pp. 80-81.
many of the things which Voltaire had in fact thought about in connection with Christianity. The utter boldness of Meslier's attack must have impressed Voltaire.

The testament was in point of time the first complete attack in France against Christianity. Others had written with the same purpose in view, but none in the eighteenth century except Voltaire, had composed such a fiery polemic against religion and its gods as had Meslier in the early part of the century.¹

One of the most revolutionary of all positions vis-à-vis the Bible was that taken by Richard Simon whose Histoire critique du Vieux Testament (1678) showed the influence of Spinoza's Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus (1670) in that they both suggested that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch. But what was even more daring was Simon's affirmation that it was not composed until hundreds of years after the events had taken place, probably in the time of Ezra.

The wall of reverence and respect which had surrounded the study of the Bible was slowly being corroded by those who felt that Biblical morality and Biblical history were unworthy of respect and indeed warranted extreme censure. This censure was manifested in numerous manuscripts which circulated clandestinely in France. Some of these were acknowledged; many were anonymous. Ira Wade's The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophical Material . . . shows the tremendous vogue which these bitterly anti-Biblical pamphlets enjoyed. Clifford Crist's The Dictionnaire philosophique portatif and the Early French Deists illustrates how writers such as Lévesque de Burigny,

¹Ibid., p. 11.
d'Holbach, Dumarsais and Boulainvilliers helped disseminate critical attitudes towards the Bible.

Perhaps the most brazen assault against the Bible and Christianity came from English sources. Mr. Torrey's *Voltaire and the English Deists* points out the important role played by Toland, Woolston, Tindal and Collins in shaping and formulating the arguments against revealed religion in general and Christianity in particular.

One of the English writers who is conspicuously absent in Professor Torrey's book is Lord Bolingbroke. This is at first glance somewhat peculiar since Bolingbroke's name appears thirty-three times in Voltaire's *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*. His name is always prominent in any citation which censures the barbaric behaviour of the people of Israel. He is mentioned in several passages where the authorship of various Biblical works is being contested.¹ Voltaire offers Bolingbroke as an authority for his charge that the Jews were simply Arab tribesmen.² Again Bolingbroke is quoted in order to prove that the priesthood in Israel was occupied by charlatans.³ When Voltaire rebukes David for his sinful life Bolingbroke is cited as concurring.⁴ In his remarks on Josaphat, king of Judea, Voltaire includes in quotation marks fifty-two lines which he attributes to Bolingbroke.⁵ Voltaire attributes to Bolingbroke some of the strongest criticisms of Scripture. Speaking of Elijah we find:

*Milord Bolingbroke continue ainsi: ... On pouvait dire de même à Elie: Tu viens de tuer deux capitaines et deux compagnies de

The most petulant censure of Biblical stories seems to originate with Bolingbroke. Commenting on Elisha's curse of the forty-two children recorded in 2 Kings 2, we find:

Yet in spite of the numerous direct citations from Bolingbroke it has been established that Voltaire's quotations are false. Not only is the textual borrowing false but even the borrowing of ideas and themes is false. Torrey says:

In his thesis, *Voltaire et Bolingbroke: étude comparative sur leurs idées philosophiques et religieuses*, (A. S. Hurn, These pour le Doctorat d'université, Paris, 1915) Hurn has shown what he did not intend and what he did not adequately admit, even in his conclusion, that Voltaire borrowed nothing textually from Bolingbroke and that a direct borrowing of ideas was problematical or nil. 3

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The idea that Voltaire owed a great deal to Bolingbroke is an old one.

From Villemain to Aldington, one finds the practically unanimous opinion that Voltaire borrowed much from and gave little thanks to his English acquaintance. Churton Collins writes: "Most probably Voltaire owed infinitely more to Bolingbroke than to all the other English deists put together", . . . .1

While scholarly opinion admits that Bolingbroke might have had a general influence on Voltaire in his youth2 it is certain that Voltaire's mature allusions to Bolingbroke are pure fabrications. The question then arises, why the attributions to Bolingbroke? According to Professor Torrey, under the name of Bolingbroke Voltaire felt free to attack the established religion more rabidly than he had before dared.3 According to Dedeyan, Voltaire uses Bolingbroke as a mannequin on which he can arrange his own ideas.

On ne trouve pas cependant ..., des emprunts textuels. En fait Bolingbroke corrobo re un fond d'idées déistes devenues voltairiennes ... Voltaire utilise le nom de Bolingbroke, il lui sert comme Toland de mannequin pour draper ses idées; il lui fait endosser l'Examen important, des passages de Dieu et les hommes, de la Bible enfin expliquée, et il le traite de "théiste le plus déclaré dans l'Histoire de l'établissement du christianisme."4

Thus in spite of massive citations from Bolingbroke which figure prominently in La Bible Enfin Expliquée, the influence of this English

1Ibid., p. 791.
2Pomeau suggests that Bolingbroke initiated Voltaire in his philosophic studies. Torrey feels that Bolingbroke might have been a stimulus to Voltaire's inquiries into the question of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.
3Ibid., p. 796.
writer appears to be restricted to an area of general inspiration, not specific information. Moreover, his name is employed by Voltaire merely as an aid to impressing the reader with attributions which have a scholarly and authoritative ring to them.

When Voltaire published his *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* in 1776 it was more than a hundred years after Spinoza had denied miracles and questioned Mosaic authorship. One hundred and fifty years before, Grotius had stated that the doctrine of immortality was not to be found in Jewish sources. In 1685 Leclerc advanced the theory that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch. At the same time Richard Simon was popularizing his ideas about the redaction of the Bible. The early years of the eighteenth century saw the frontal attack of the English deists. The French deists as well filled these years with equally vehement attacks against the Bible. Thus Voltaire must have been exposed to the critical view of the Bible in the beginning of his literary career.¹

But what indications are there of Voltaire's interest in Biblical themes?

According to Pomeau, Voltaire's interest in the Bible was first stimulated by his research into historical questions. He was very disturbed with the apparently un-historical view that Jewish history was not only the most ancient but also the most important. He was especially perturbed by works such as Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* in which Jewish history was assigned the major role. He reasoned that

¹ Morehouse, op. cit., p. 2, writes "In the welter of the breakdown in religion that characterized the Regency, Voltaire breathed and absorbed the atmosphere of religious skepticism, which expressed itself in the last years of his life in as violent and bitter an attack against Christianity as has perhaps ever been launched."
it was unjust to neglect the rich and venerable traditions of the 
oriental world. As early as 1739 in a short work entitled De la Gloire 
ou Entretien avec un Chinois Voltaire attempts to place Jewish history 
in a proper perspective and show the importance of Chinese civilization. 
This attempt reflected Voltaire's concern with a comparative study of 
religious cultures. Pomeau says:

Car c'est à cette enquête que se rattachent les recherches 
bibliques de Voltaire. Elles commencent vers le moment 
ou il conçoit le projet d'une histoire de l'esprit humain.
Les notes des Carnets s'efforcent de comparer le peuple saint 
aux autres peuples de l'Orient ancien. (OEuvres inédites, p. 
103), ou les Juifs sont rangés dans une énumération de peuples 
anciens, Chinois, Egyptiens, Arabes, etc. avec cette mention: 
"usages communs aux Juifs, Syriens, Egyptiens."\(^1\)

This historical approach is all important in grasping Voltaire's 
nascent concern with Biblical history. Whereas people like Calmet came 
to the Bible simply with blind faith, or a deist like Woolston who came 
with hostile unbelief for the sole purpose of destroying it, Voltaire 
came to the Bible as an historian who wished to place it in historical 
perspective.

Voltaire's critique of the history of religions is found in 
numerous works. The Henriade, for example, contained a series of notes 
which were to be an historical essay on the wars of religion. The 
Lettres philosophiques delineate a history of English groupings. The 
Siècle de Louis XIV deals in several chapters with ecclesiastical quarrels. 
And of course, the Dictionnaire philosophique is a veritable mine of 
information about Voltaire's concern for Bible history and the Church.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Rene Pomeau, La Religion de Voltaire, Nizet (Paris, 1956), 
p. 179.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 356.
But if Voltaire's interest in the Bible was initiated by his historical orientation, his sojourn at Cirey with Mme du Châtelet caused him to probe far more deeply into deep technical questions bearing upon not only the history of the Jews but the redaction of the Bible, its authenticity and its alleged divine inspiration. It was probably during that period that Voltaire began to study the Bible more systematically. His daily sessions of Bible study doubtless permitted him to acquire a knowledge of the Bible which heretofore had been only superficial.

According to Pomeau, during this sojourn at Cirey, Voltaire greatly surpassed Mme du Châtelet in the breadth of his references and erudition. Speaking of the intellectual activity of the period he says:

Bayle, Calmet, l'Examen de la religion, les Discours de Woolston, deux chapitres de Tindal, mais non Grotius, ni Richard Simon, ni Spinoza, ni Basnage, ni Fabricius: la documentation biblique de Mme du Châtelet est limitée aux ouvrages courts ou faciles à consulter. Occupée simultanément de travaux scientifiques et métaphysiques, Mme du Châtelet n'a pas le temps de se plonger dans la lecture des œuvres solides mais touffues de spécialistes; Dom Calmet supplée à tout. Faut-il ajouter que, celui-ci excepté, elle ne lit que des ennemis de la religion? Mme du Châtelet a choisi les auteurs chez lesquels elle retrouve sa propre hostilité à l'endroit de la Bible.  

In his excellent study Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet Professor Wade presents an analysis of the Examen de la Genèse showing the common

\[1\] Mol., XXX, p. 2.

\[2\] Pomeau, op. cit., p. 170.
source which Voltaire and Mme du Chatelet employed in their respective interpretations of the book of Genesis. While both depend heavily on Calmet, Voltaire ranges far and wide in his additional sources.

In addition to the specific facts which Voltaire obtained about the Bible while at Cirey he also took away from his daily Bible discussions an attitude which will be henceforth expressed every time he takes pen in hand to dissect a Biblical verse or a Biblical figure.

This attitude was not, of course, new but was a manifestation of the skepticism to which he had been exposed during his youthful encounters with the society of the Temple and later during his English experience. It was a viewpoint which derived from his historical insights and which refused to accept events in human history which were not comprehensible to his mind. Finally, it was an attitude which emerged as a reaction to the orthodox pontifications on religion from people like Bossuet, Calmet, Abbadie and Houteville. While this feeling is original with Voltaire it was nurtured by Bayle, the English deists, Spinoza and a host of other freethinking Europeans. Pomeau calls this attitude the *affaiblissement du sacré*.

En même temps que les exigences du sens moral, les textes de Cirey accusent le déperissement du sacré, au siècle des lumières. Les religions supérieures établissent un compromis entre un tres ancien héritage magique et la spéculations philosophique. Elles ont des tabous et une théologie. Mais l'habitude de la pensée rationnelle a, peu à peu, affaibli le sens du sacré. L'horreur de la transgression a disparu, et la science des religions primitives n'a pas encore restitué à cette notion prélogique et illogique, son importance historique. Chaque fois que Voltaire et Mme du Châtelet se heurtent, dans l'Écriture, aux manifesta-
tions du sacré, ils s'étonnent de ses mystères. L'efficacité magique du nom ou de la formule, la participation des animaux à la culpabilité, la puissance préservatrice des marques de sang sur les portes des Hébreux, le dévouement des victimes humains, l'exorcisme des possédés, l'interdiction des viandes impures, sont considérés comme des "extravagances inouïes". L'ironie de
Thus Voltaire's interest in the Bible, dating from the 1720's, was stimulated through his association with the English deists, French free-thinkers and Mme du Chatelet. He sought to examine Scripture without the constraint of dogma.

Before illustrating Voltaire's general critique of the Bible it should be pointed out that his opinions were not entirely one-sided. There are many places, for example, where Voltaire shows that he has a genuine love and respect for Bible narratives.

The very fact that he spent so much time reading the Bible illustrates an affection for the text. In a letter to the marquis du Deffant he writes:

Non, madame, je n'aime des Anglais que leurs livres de philosophie, quelques-unes de leurs poésies hardies; et, à l'égard du genre dont vous me parlez, je vous avouerai que je ne lis que l'Ancien Testament, trois ou quatre chants de Virgile, ...  

Of course, one might interpret this interest not as a positive love of the Bible but merely the attempt of a hostile observer to familiarize himself with the enemies' arsenal and positions.

M. de Jaucour voyant qu'il y a quelque temps la Bible sur la table de Voltaire en marqua sa surprise, et Voltaire lui

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2 Mol., XL, p. 171.
dit: Quand on est en procès avec quelqu'un, il faut lire son factum.¹

In the same way one might interpret the enthusiastic remarks which Voltaire makes about the Pentateuch in a letter to Thieriot in 1760.

Oui, j'ai mon Moïse complet. Il a fait le Pentateuque comme vous et moi; mais qu'importe? ce livre est cent fois plus amusant qu'Homère, et je le relis sans cesse avec un ébahissement nouveau.²

Traditionalists certainly would not be impressed by Voltaire's comparison of the Pentateuch to Homer. Elsewhere Voltaire compares his reading of Bible to Corneille's Cinna. It is interesting to note that Pomeau in reflecting on this passage fails to mention the comparison and therefore suggests that there is a positive element involved. Pomeau says:

Voltaire esprit decisionnaire, écarte le fatras des commentateurs et interprétations. Il lit la Bible, et "assidûment".³

But the reference which Pomeau gives shows that he has used only one part of the citation. What Voltaire said was:

Il faut en revenir, madame, au siècle de Louis XIV en tous genres: cela me perce le coeur au pied des Alpes; et, de dépit, je fais faire un baldaquin, et je lis assidûment l'Ecriture sainte, quoique j'aime encore mieux Cinna.⁴

Yet in spite of the malicious allusions to the Bible the reader still gets the impression that Voltaire held some affection for the Biblical text. His appraisal of the story of Joseph, for example, shows a rare spirit in the understanding of Biblical simplicity and pathos.

¹Quoted in Pomeau, op. cit., p. 365.
²Mol., XL, p. 504.
³Pomeau, op. cit., p. 365.
⁴Mol., XII, p. 373.
Enfin le prêtre et les frères de Joseph eurent aussi besoin de blé, car "la famine désolait alors toute la terre". Ce n'est pas la peine de raconter ici comment Joseph reçut ses frères, comment il leur pardonna et les enrichit. On trouve dans cette histoire tout ce qui constitue un poème épique intéressant; exposition, nœud, reconnaissance, péripétie, et merveilleux; rien n'est plus marqué au coin du génie oriental.  

Voltaire also appears to have been impressed by the story of the patriarchs recorded in the Hebrew Bible.

Voltaire reconnaît "la voix naïve de la nature" dans les discours des patriarches: "leurs vertus et leurs vices étaient simples comme eux, aisément aperçus et fortement exprimés."

His attitude towards the prophetic works just like the rest of the Old Testament is quite ambivalent. The negative side will be illustrated later. But it must be stated that if he saw barbarity in the customs of the Israelite people he saw sublime things in the prophets.

Étonnant Voltaire! Il a répandu sur l'Ancien Testament ses façons indécentes. Vingt fois il a tendu à Esaüiel ses dégoutantes "tartines"; vingt fois, il s'est étonné des dévergondages d'Oulla et d'Oliba. Et pourtant il aimait le Livre ... Mais jamais cet homme n'a su respecter ce qu'il aimait.

In discussing the prophets Voltaire saw the acme of religious spirit and compared them favorably to the Greek genius.

La multitude des idées fortes et grandes qu'on rencontre dans les prophètes est étonnante. Les Grecs seuls peuvent leur être comparés à cet égard, car les Romains sont plutôt purs, élégants, et corrects, que sublimes, et, excepté dans la satire, ils n'ont été que les imitateurs des Grecs. Israël, par la variété et la richesse des images, par la majesté des pensées, par la douceur et l'abondance jointe à l'élévation et à la simplicité, peut être regardé comme l'Homère des Hébreux.

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1 Mol., XIX, p. 510.
2 Pomeau, op. cit., p. 365.
3 Ibid., p. 366.
4 Mol., XXV, p. 208.
Voltaire's analysis of the major prophets shows a sympathetic understanding of their genius and may explain in part why he refrained from discussing them more fully in the polemical *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*.

Jérémie a de la hardiesse dans les figures et dans le style, mais il est supérieur dans l'art d'émuvoir les passions. Isaïe inspire la terreur, et Jérémie la pitié; le premier brise et déchire l'âme; le second l'attendrit et la pénètre de tous les sentiments dont il est plein lui-même ... Ezéchiel est hardi, vigoureux, et vénéreux, mais troublé et sauvage. Sa marche est si irrégulière et si rapide qu'il est difficile de la suivre ... Il revient sans cesse sur les mêmes objets avec un nouveau feu et une nouvelle imagination. ... ¹

Pomeau feels also that with respect to Voltaire's treatment of the Jews that he grudgingly conceded their vast influence on humanity.

L'audace de commencer une histoire universelle par la Chine et par l'Inde déstituait le peuple juif de ses privilèges. Pourtant Voltaire ne peut faire que le peuple de Dieu n'ait puissamment influé sur le destin de l'humanité; dans le corpus voltarien, Israël est la nation dont l'histoire est le plus longuement commentée.²

In *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* there are very few passages where Voltaire shows admiration for Biblical stories. Of course, in a work designed to expose the Bible one should not anticipate laudatory comments. Yet Voltaire's love of certain stories cannot prevent his affection from emerging. His love of the Joseph episode warrants the following comment.

Ce morceau d'histoire a toujours passé pour un des plus beaux de l'antiquité. Nous n'avons rien dans Homère de si touchant. C'est la première de toutes les reconnaissances dans quelque langue que ce puisse être. Il n'ya guère de théâtre en Europe où cette histoire n'ait été présenté. ... Presque tous les

¹ Mol., XXV, p. 208.

² Pomeau, op. cit., p. 361.
romans que nous avons eus, soit anciens, soit modernes, et une infinie d'ouvrages dramatiques, ont été fondés sur des reconnaissances. Rien n'est plus naïf que celle de Joseph et de ses frères.1

When Joseph asks his unrecognizing father Jacob how old he is, the latter replies that in his thirty years he has not had one good day. In this straightforward reply Voltaire sees a wealth of meaning.

Cette réponse qu'on met dans la bouche de Jacob est d'une triste vérité; elle est commune à tous les hommes; ... et il n'a peut-être point de passage, dans aucun auteur, plus capable de nous faire rentrer en nous-mêmes avec amertume. Si on veut bien y faire réflexion, on verra que tous les pharaons du monde, et tous les Jacobs, et tous les Joseph, et tous ceux qui ont des biais et des troupeaux, et surtout ceux qui n'en ont pas, une des années très-malheureuses, dans lesquelles on goûte à peine quelque moments de consolation et de vrais plaisirs.2

Again one senses a great deal of affection in Voltaire's tone when he relates a legend about Moses' youth. As a child Moses was about to be killed by the Egyptian authorities when the angel Gabriel interceded by suggesting to Pharaoh that the young Moses be offered the choice of a pearl or a burning coal. If the child took the pearl this meant that he had designs upon the throne. When the objects were offered Moses took the burning coal and brought it to his lips. Henceforth he had difficulty in speech. In his retelling of this midrashic3 legend, Voltaire uncharacteristically refrains from satire or irony. He recognized its beauty and power.4

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1Mol., XXX, pp. 63-64.
2Ibid., p. 66.
3The Midrash is a homiletical commentary on the Hebrew Bible.
4Mol., XXX, p. 72.
Voltaire's commentary on the book of Ruth is equally sympathetic. He sees in this work a beauty comparable with the Greek genius. Moreover, it is a relief from the bloodshed chronicled in books like Joshua and Judges.

Aside from these four enthusiastic and admiring passages there is not one other place in the Old Testament portion of La Bible Enfin Expliquée where Voltaire sees greatness. He dismisses the achievements of Deborah and Gideon. Joshua is the chief of a band of barbaric thieves. The kings of Israel are immoral. Murder is a way of life in the books of Samuel. Voltaire has nary a good word to offer in behalf of David, Solomon, Saul, or any of the prophets he discusses. It is apparent, therefore, that Voltaire's approach is largely negative.

What are the basic components of this negativism? First and foremost is Voltaire's antipathy toward the God which he purported to see in the Old Testament. This God did not act in conformity with Voltaire's ideas of how the Lord of the universe should have acted. Instead of being a purely ethereal being, the epitome of justice and ethics, the God of the Hebrew Bible appeared to Voltaire to be arbitrary,

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 155.
unethical and unjust. Pomeau makes the interesting comment that in the Old Testament Voltaire found the angry and stern God of the Jansenists.

Il retrouve dans l'Ancien Testament ce dont il a la plus grande horreur: le Dieu courroucé des jansénistes.

But what Voltaire objected to the most, and this criticism appears with such frequency in his writing that it is almost a leitmotif, is the anthropomorphism associated with God in the Hebrew Bible. Sakmann expresses it thus:

Die biblische Gottesvorstellung ist niedrig weil sie grob anthropomorph ist. Die Juden stellten sich mit dem gesamten vorplänsischen Alterum und mit den ersten Kirchenvater Gott körperlich vor; erst Plato hat Gott eine Feine, fast unkorperliche Substanz zum Wesen gegeben.²

On almost every occasion in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* where God is mentioned Voltaire rebukes his corporeality. In his commentary on the relationship between Adam and God in the garden of Eden, Voltaire says:

Le Seigneur se promène; le Seigneur parle; le Seigneur souffle; le Seigneur agit toujours comme s'il était corporel. L'antiquité n'eut point d'autre idée de la divinité. Platon passe pour le premier qui ait fait Dieu d'une substance déliée, qui n'était pas tout à fait corps. Les critiques demandent sous quelle forme Dieu se montrait à Adam, à Eve, à Cain, à tous les patriarches, à tous les prophètes, à tous ceux qu'auxquels il parla de sa propre bouche. Les Pères répondent qu'il avait une forme humaine.³

When God is about to destroy all of mankind save Noah's family, He states that he repents at having created man in the first place. Voltaire under the guise of his ubiquitous critiques finds this incomprehensible.

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¹Pomeau, op. cit., p. 371.


³Mol., XXX, p. 10.
Les critiques ont trouvé mauvais que Dieu se repentit; mais le texte appuie si énergiquement sur ce repentir de Dieu, et sur la douleur dont ce cœur fut saisi. ...  

The various commands given by God to annihilate entire peoples drew Voltaire's ire. When God threatens to destroy the first-born of the Egyptians, Voltaire affirms:

Les critiques sont encore plus hardis sur cette partie de l'histoire sacrée que sur toutes les autres. Ils ne peuvent souffrir que Dieu recommande si souvent et si expressément de commencer par voler tous les vases d'or et d'argent; ... et ensuite que Dieu, selon la lettre du texte, égorge, de sa propre main, tous les premiers-nés des hommes et des animaux, depuis le fils aîné du roi jusqu'au premier-né de plus vil des animaux. Pourquoi cette exécrable boucherie exécutée par la main du Dieu du ciel et de la terre?  

To Voltaire the God of the Hebrew Bible is a cruel, frivolous deity. He promises the Israelites untold greatness and they receive nothing. Several times God promises the Jews that they will be the possessors of all the land from the Tigris to the Euphrates and yet all this is unaccomplished. The God of the Bible inflicts barbarous fates upon the indigenous peoples of Palestine. Why was it necessary to massacre every living inhabitant of Jericho? But what is perhaps the most reprehensible of all of God's acts is his demand for human sacrifice. Referring to the episode between Jephthah and his daughter Voltaire says:

Nous sommes donc obligés malgré nous de convenir que, selon le texte indisputable des livres sacrés, Dieu, maître absolu de la vie et de la mort, permit les sacrifices de sang humain. Il les ordonna même. Il commanda à Abraham de Sacrifier son fils unique, et il reçut le sang de la fille unique de Jephté.

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 16.  
2 Ibid., p. 78.  
3 Ibid., p. 120.  
4 Ibid., p. 121.  
5 Ibid., p. 142.
But Voltaire also objects to less violent actions by God. The idea that the creator of the universe would call Samuel four times during the night is summarily rejected as not being consonant with the God idea.\(^1\) Equally disturbing to Voltaire was the idea advanced by the crédules that God sends hemorrhoids to punish those who defeat the Israelites.\(^2\) The fact that God does chide David for his role in the slaying of Uriah elicits Voltaire's censure.\(^3\) In spite of Solomon's many crimes God still offers him untold riches and glory.\(^4\) Voltaire winces at God's command to Hosea to marry a prostitute. He emphasizes the fact that this is not the language of a visionary but real facts.\(^5\)

These examples liberally drawn from _La Bible Enfin Expliquée_ bear witness to one of Voltaire’s general criticisms of the Bible. If the God of the Bible acts and behaves like an ordinary mortal, if he experiences jealousy, hate, anger and compassion, then this is not consonant with the role which Voltaire imagines God to partake of. Since this God is a human God then the Bible is a human document and hence amenable to the same errors and deficiencies which are part of life. Stendhal reflecting on the Memoirs of Saint-Simon illustrates how effective Voltaire's characterization of the Biblical God has become.

Les Mémoires de Saint-Simon m'ont gâté Fénelon; mais enfin un vrai prêtre. ... Alors les âmes tendres auraient un point de réunion dans le monde. ... Nous ne serions pas isolés. ... Ce bon prêtre nous parlerait de Dieu. Mais quel Dieu? Non celui de la Bible, petit despote cruel et plein de la soif de se venger ... mais le Dieu de Voltaire, juste, bon, infini. ...\(^6\)

A second component of Voltaire's negativism is closely allied to the first. If the God of Israel is a barbaric deity, then the people of Israel are a barbaric people. Of course, it is possible that in Voltaire's mind the converse was true. In any case his perception of the Bible is without doubt conditioned by his view of the Jewish people. This view derives not only from his observation of them in the Bible but also from personal experiences with Jews in the eighteenth century. Two dealings with Jewish merchants, one in London and one in the court of Frederick the Great tended to prejudice Voltaire against the entire Jewish people.¹

In his pronouncements on the Jews certain leitmotifs dominate. The Jews, at least in Bible times, were a cruel unmerciful people. They had no appreciation for science or art. They were primitive idol worshiper who practiced the most debased form of popular religion. They engaged in human sacrifice and slaughtered thousands of innocent peoples.

As early as 1734 in the Remarques premières sur les pensées de Pascal Voltaire indicates his aversion for the Jews. He denies their antiquity. The Chinese system of jurisprudence antedates the Hebrew.²

¹When Voltaire was in England and in need of money he went to the counting house of a London Jew named Medina, on whom he held a letter of credit. When Medina went bankrupt Voltaire was unable to recoup his loss. While at Potsdam Voltaire commissioned a Jewish banker named Hirsch to buy some Saxon bonds. Although Frederick had forbidden the purchase of these bonds in order to prevent speculation, Hirsch acting as a Frenchman's agent was permitted to purchase them. When Hirsch was eventually brought to trial Voltaire's name naturally was mentioned. Although Voltaire was never directly implicated in the transaction, Frederick was indignant. This affair was one of the factors which caused the rupture between Voltaire and Frederick.

²Mol., XXIX, p. 35.
By the time of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* Voltaire's opposition to
the Jews has become crystallized. In the article "Juifs" his vehemence
is clearly noted. The Jews, he argues, were a primitive uncultured
people. They had no books, physicians or astronomers. They had no
schools. Even the Indian tribes in Peru had a better calendar. ¹ In the
article "Ciel des Anciens" Voltaire argues that the Jews had no under-
standing of geometry, not even having a word in Hebrew for it. ²

So primitive and unoriginal were the Jews that they had to borrow
even the major customs and ceremonies which are chronicled in the Bible.
The names of the angels Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael come from the Baby-
lonians. The doctrine of immortality is a copy of the beliefs of
surrounding peoples. Circumcision was an Egyptian custom. The Jewish
dietary laws are imitations of other Egyptian practices. ³

The very language of the Bible reflects the limited understanding
of the Jews. Their crudeness required crude explanations. Voltaire
goes so far as to indict God for descending to the level of this people:

L'auteur inspiré dainait descendre aux préjugés vagues et
grossiers de la nation. Dieu ne prétendait enseigner la
philosophie aux Juifs. Il pouvait élever leur esprit jusqu'à
la vérité; mais il aimait mieux descendre jusqu'aux. On ne
peut trop répéter cette solution.⁴

In the article "Moïse" of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* Voltaire cites
the favorite argument of those who try to explain the simple sometimes
naive style of the Biblical narrative. Then he says:

Quelle misérable réponse! C'était à Dieu à élever les Juifs
jusqu'aux connaissance nécessaire, ce n'était pas à lui à
se rabaisser à eux.⁵

Sakmann describes Voltaire’s criticism of the primitivism in the Bible in the following manner.

Einen besonderen Trumpf glaubt Voltaire auszusprechen, wenn er endlich noch auf die Ruckstandigkeit der biblische Welt in Hinsicht der materiellen Cultur aufmerksam macht. Besonders das Leben der Patriarchen, dieser "Schaf und Ziegenherren", sieht er vornehmlich in diesem Licht: Das patriarchalische Leben ware für uns rein nicht zum Aushalten. ... Rebekka trägt Nasebringe, wie das ja in heissen Landen wie Afrika und Indien immer noch der Brauch ist, da man sich fast ni schneuzeug.

The sexual mores of the Jews also "scandalized" Voltaire. Ezekiel sitting in his own excrements is mentioned by Voltaire at least twenty times in his collected works. The prostitutes Oholah and Oholiba play a prominent role in Voltaire’s delineation of Hebrew customs. Frequently Voltaire alludes to the incestuous relationship between Thamar and Amnon. The Biblical injunction against sleeping with animals evinces from Voltaire the automatic conclusion that the Jews often performed this act. Lot’s daughters sleeping with their father draws many caustic comments from Voltaire. Sakmann says:


But Voltaire’s major objection to the Jews revolves around their responsibility in the brutal slaying of countless peoples. The penta-
teuchal portion of La Bible Enfin Expliquée provides numerous examples

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1 Sakmann, op. cit. p. 529. 2 Ibid., p. 516.
of this general criticism. Jewish barbarity is best seen in the annihila
tion of the Shechemites. Because Shechem, the son of Hamor, attacked
Dina, Jacob's daughter, every living member of the Shechemite tribe was
destroyed. In reflecting upon this "outrageous" act Voltaire excoriates
the Jewish people.

Il n'a personne qui ne souhaite que deux patriarches n'aient
pas assassiné tout un peuple, et que les autres patriarches
n'aient pas fait un désert d'une ville qui les avait reçus avec
tant de bonté. ... Si l'atrocité des Hébreux révolte le lecteur
dans l'histoire de Dina, nous lui verrons commettre d'autres
horreurs, qui rendent celle-ci vraisemblable ... le Saint-Esprit
décirae qu'ils mirent à feu et à sang toute une ville où ils
avaient été reçus comme frères ... que jamais assassins ne
furent ni plus perfides, ni plus voleurs, ni plus sanguinaires,
ni plus sacrilèges. ¹

Another instance where Voltaire waxes eloquent in his condemnation of
Jewish practices is in reference to Moses' command to the Levites to
kill brother, friend and neighbour (for having built and worshiped the
golden calf).

Jamais un peuple entier ne s'est laissé égorger sans se
defendre; il n'est point dit que les lévites fussent exempts
de la faute de tout le peuple; il n'est point dit qu'ils
eussent un ordre exprès de Dieu de massacrer ses frères; et un
ordre exprès de Dieu semble nécessaire pour justifier cette
boucherie incroyable. ... Adorons humblement les voies du
Seigneur, mais gardons-nous de louer la fureur abominable de
ces lévites, qui ne doit jamais être imitée, pour quelque
cause que ce puisse être. ²

Voltaire sums up his feelings about the Jews in his final pentateuchal
comment when he discusses the latrine mentioned in Deuteronomy.

Tout ce que nous pouvons dire, c'est que le peuple juif était si
grossier, et que de nos jours même la populace de cette nation
est si malpropre et si puante que ses législateurs furent obligés
de descendre dans les plus vils détails: la police ne néglige
pas les latrines dans les grandes villes. ³

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 51. ² Ibid., p. 89. ³ Ibid., p. 119.
From his pentateuchal comments we see that Voltaire considered the Jews an ignorant clannish people. Ignorant of even the basic sciences and arts their writers had to express themselves in the simplest ways in order to conform to the mentality of their audience. Their customs and beliefs are taken from different civilizations. Their sexual mores are debased, engaging as they do in sodomy, incest and relations with animals. They excell in only one domain, cruelty, to wit; they kill not only strangers but as in the case of the levites members of their own group. Their merciless destruction of the Shechemites, the Midianites and other peoples bear witness to their savagery!

Is there a change in Voltaire's attitude toward the Jews in the Pentateuch portion as compared with the rest of the Old Testament commentary? The nature of the other books which Voltaire comments upon lends itself to further criticism of the Jews. The book of Joshua, for example, recounts the occupation of the Holy Land by Moses' brother. Judges narrates the vicissitudes in the bloody struggle between the Israelites and the Philistines. The books of Samuel describe the political chicanery involved in the Hebrew kingdom. Kings chronicles the numerous assassinations of Hebrew monarchs. In these works the Jews are once again seen by Voltaire to be a lawless people, guilty of the vilest crimes against humanity.

The general tenor of Voltaire's attitude on this question can be seen in his comment on Judges, chapter 18, where the 600 levites extirpate the inhabitants of Laish.

_Il est étrange, dit l'abbé de Tilladet, que la horde juive, dès qu'elle prend une ville ou un village, mette tout à feu et à sang, massacre tous les hommes, toutes les femmes mariées, tous les bestiaux, et brûle tout ce qui pouvait leur servir dans un_
pays dont ils étaient sûr d'être un jour les maîtres, puisque
le leur avait promis par serment. Il y a non-seulement une
barbarie abominable à tout égorger, mais une folie incompré-
hensible à se priver d'un butin dont ils avaient un besoin
extrême.1

In a sarcastic rejoinder Voltaire suggests that the Jews burnt only those
things that they could not carry away with them.2

But it is the destruction of the city of Jericho which elicits
Voltaire's strongest and most mordant criticism.

Est-il possible que Dieu, le père de tous les hommes, ait
conduit lui-même un barbare a qui le cannibale le plus feroce
ne voudrait pas ressembler? Grand Dieu! venir d'un désert
inconnu pour massacrer toute une ville inconnue! égorger les
femmes et les enfants, contre toutes les lois de la nature!
égorger tous les animaux! brûler les maisons et les meubles,
ne pardonner qu'à une ville pitain digne du dernier supplice!
Si ce conte n'était pas le plus absurde de tous, il serait le
plus abominable. ... C'est offenser Dieu et les hommes que de
fables dans lesquelles il n'y a pas un mot qui ne soit ou le
comble du ridicule, ou celui de l'horreur.3

It is interesting to note the unrestrained language which Voltaire
employs. In the two preceding passages the vocabulary is, to say the
least, inflammatory. The word massacre appears twice, égorger three
times, barbare twice, brûler twice. Voltaire leaves no doubt as to his
feelings for the behavior of the Israelites.

One of the themes which Voltaire alludes to frequently in con-
nection with the Jews was that they were simply part of the Arab peoples,
a horde arabe as he calls them. In referring to Joshua's success at
Jericho Voltaire calls the Hebrew leader a captain of a group of Arab
thieves.4

This theme is elaborated upon in Voltaire's discussion of the
alleged sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter recorded in the book of Judges.

1Mol., XXX, p. 149. 2Ibid., p. 149. 3Ibid., p. 125.
4Ibid., p. 127.
With his customary attribution to Bolingbroke and the English deists to give his own views more respectability, Voltaire comments:

Que les Hébreux n'étaient que des Arabes voleurs, sans foi, sans loi, sans principe d'humanité, dont la seule demeure était dans des cavernes dont ce pays est rempli, et qu'ils en sortaient quelquefois pour aller piller; et que les peuples voisins 'es poursuivirent comme des bêtes sauvages, tantôt les punissent par le dernier duplice, tantôt les mettant en esclavage. Les juifs mêmes avouent, dans les livres composés par aux si longtemps après, que Jephté n'était qu'un chef de voleurs, Abimélech un autre chef de voleurs, souillé du sang de toute sa famille.¹

The comparison of the Israelites to the Arabs is not new with Voltaire. In his commentary on Genesis he mentions that the Jews were originally a colony of Arab Bedouins.² However, in the latter part of his Bible commentary Voltaire infers from this that the Israelites allegedly had the same low moral and ethical standards as those nomadic tribesmen.

One of Voltaire's strongest indictments against the Jews was that they were idol-worshippers. And certainly on the popular level of the early Israelitish religion this was the case. But Voltaire makes no differentiation between the ideals of the religion expounded by its best teachers and the practice of that religion by the common people. Thus Voltaire mocks the action of Michol when she 'laces a theraphim in bed with her husband David.

Michol sauve son mari en mettant une figure dans son lit, coiffé d'une peau de chevre; cette peau de chevre était-elle le bonnet de nuit ordinaire de David? C'était un théraphim, mais un têraphim était, dit-on une idole. Michol faisait-elle coucher des idoles avec elle? Voulait-elle que les satellites envoyés par Saul prißen cette idole pour son mari? Voulait-elle que la peau de chèvre fut prise pour la chevelure rousse de David?³

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 140. ² Ibid., p. 65. ³ Ibid., p. 181.
The practices of Micah, the Ephramite also provides Voltaire with evidence that the Hebrews were idol-worshipers. Micah fashions his own idols and also employs a private Levite priest. Micah's idols and priest are ultimately taken by the Danites who are searching for land.

Voltaire says:

Nous ne nous arrêtons point à concilier les petites contradictions du texte, mais nous remarquerons, avec l'abbé Tilladet, que Michas et sa mère font des dieux, des idoles sculptées, et tombent précisément dans le même péché qu'Aaron et les Israélites, sans que Dieu d'Israel y fasse la moindre attention.¹

Voltaire feels that until the time of the kings of Israel idolatry was a way of life for the Jews.

Woolston prétend que les Juifs étaient alors idolâtres, et sa raison est que l'olivier dit que son jus plait aux dieux et aux hommes. Il veut prouver, d'après les prophètes et d'après saint Étienne, qu'ils furent toujours idolâtres dans le désert, où ils n'adorèrent que les dieux Remphan et Kium; et il conclut de là que la religion juive ne fut véritablement formée qu'après la dispersion des dix tribus et après la captivité de Babylone. Il est vrai que les Juifs, de leur propre aveu, furent-âtres souvent idolâtres; mais aussi c'est pour cela sans doute qu'ils furent si malheureux.²

One of the reasons for which the Jews behaved in such a primitive manner and which explains their barbarism, is the fact that they had no laws. This critique is perhaps Voltaire's strangest comment on Jewish history. For no people in antiquity had a body of religious and moral law which was more developed than Jewish law. Yet in the face of this involved system of jurisprudence Voltaire claims the Jews like all other primitive people, had no laws.³ He makes this charge especially in

¹Mol., XXX, p. 147. ²Ibid., p. 139.

³While it is true that the Jews had no formal written code of laws in the early stages of their religious development there was a tremendous body of oral law which covered every phase of ritual and moral law. When these laws were later compiled and redacted in written form they became known as the Talmud.
reference to the consequences of the various battles in which the
Israelites engaged.

Nous osons dire à dom Calmet qu'il n'y avait point de lois de
la guerre; que les Juifs en avaient moins qu'aucun peuple, et
que chacun suivait ce que sa cruauté ou son intérêt lui dictait.
On ne voit pas même que jamais des peuples ennemis des Juifs
les aient traités avec une barbarie qui approche de la barbarie
juive. ...

Voltaire extends his censure of the Jews to all sections of their
society. Their kings are murderers, their conquerors are barbarous
savages, their common folk are idol-worshipers, their prophets are
deranged and their priests are simple charlatans. The idea that the
Jews are God's chosen people is rejected by Voltaire who suggests that
if they are chosen it is by the devil.

Les critiques disent qu'il ne profita point aux Hébreux d'être
le peuple de Dieu et que, s'ils avaient été expressément le
peuple du diable, ils n'auraient jamais pu être plus méchants ni
plus malheureux. Il est vrai que ce peuple est d'autant plus
couplable que Dieu ne cesse jamais d'être avec lui, soit pour le
favoriser, soit pour le punir. Les autres nations, et jusqu'aux
Romains même, se vantèrent aussi d'avoir leurs dieux présents
parmi elles, mais de loin à loin, et rarement en personne; mais
depuis presque toujours avec les Hébreux, leur parlant de la
bouche, les conduisant par sa main: de sorte que le plus grand
des prodiges opérés sur cette petite nation, c'est qu'elle ait
pris, presque sans relâche, dans l'apostasie et dans le
crime.

Between the pentateuchal and non-pentateuchal portions of La
Bible Enfin Expliquée there is little difference in Voltaire's treatment
of the Jews. The same vehemence of approach is noted in each. But
while in the first part he stresses Jewish backwardness in cultural
matters, the critique shifts in the second part to an elaboration of the
various crimes committed by the Jews. In this section their cruelty is

1Mol., XXX, p. 191. 2Ibid., p. 164. 3Ibid., p. 235.
stressed. That they engaged in human sacrifice is taken for granted by Voltaire. The Jews, according to Voltaire, practice sexual debauchery. In short they were a debased, barbaric and immoral people.

We have shown that Voltaire's two general objections to the Bible were his antipathy to the God represented therein, and the people allegedly chosen by Him. In the Old Testament portion of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* Voltaire tries to expose the cruel and frivolous deity which he feels is portrayed in Scripture. This bold frontal attack was designed to show that the God of the Hebrew Bible is unworthy of our reverence. And once this has been accepted our faith in the entire fabric of the Old Testament becomes weakened. Can we say in all fairness that the cruel deity of the Old Testament is the same God of the New? If not, then the foundation of Christianity is destroyed. If we accept that they are one and the same how do we reconcile them?

It is in a similar light that Voltaire's attack against the Jews must be examined. Speaking of Voltaire's boldness in Biblical criticism, Professor Havens says:

His very violence was necessary in order to get him a hearing. Who would have listened then to a calm, reverent, balanced treatment of these questions, free from the spirit of wit and mockery with which Voltaire compelled an audience, even when he roused the most violent antagonisms.¹

But Voltaire's audacity in attacking the chosen people goes beyond this statement of the reason for Voltaire's boldness. How can one, for example, speak of Voltaire as the eighteenth century apostle of tolerance

in light of his blatantly anti-Jewish remarks? How can one reconcile
the ardent defender of Calas with the vicious persecutor of the people
of Israel? The answer to this question involves not only Voltaire's
personal feelings towards the Jews but also concerns the way in which he
considered them in scheme of his assault against religion in general and
Christianity in particular.

There is no doubt that Voltaire's dealings with Medina and Hirsch
had an adverse effect upon him. But it would be ludicrous to suggest
that his tirades against the Jews in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* are mani-
festations of his scorn for these two gentlemen. In addition, we would
be seriously underestimating the brilliance of Voltaire.

The critique of the Jews must be seen in the general background
of his censure of the Bible. We must remember that in 1776 he publishes
a Bible commentary. Heretofore all commentaries of the Bible were
designed either to elucidate ambiguous points of Scripture or to provide
moral lessons. Yet Voltaire chooses this genre to unleash a vicious
attack against the traditional God-idea, against the Jewish people, and
against the whole idea of the infallibility of the Bible. Yet in *La
Bible Enfin Expliquée* the Old Testament commentary occupies 300 pages
while the New Testament section has a bare 16 pages. Moreover, the Old
Testament section abounds in passages of a most vituperative nature
directed against Biblical customs, the cruel God, and the Jews. The New
Testament portion while bearing the same ironical and satirical imprint
does not contain the same harshness nor vehemence in its critical notes.
Why?
It must be remembered that in spite of his immense reputation Voltaire was not immune to the law. This alone might have induced some temperance on his part in his discussion of the Bible. Yet his criticism of the Christianity is as harsh elsewhere as his treatment of Judaism is in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*. In his *Testament de Jean Meslier*, Voltaire had paraphrased the apostate priest in his blasphemous renunciation of Christianity.

It would appear that Voltaire's approach to the Jews was dictated by a subtle stylistic and polemical consideration. What better way was there to attack Christianity than by striking at the mother religion, namely Judaism? And what better way to attack Judaism than by exposing its crude God-idea? Again what could be more effective in questioning the validity of Judaism than the description of bearers of Judaism as a degenerate, cruel and savage people? In this way Voltaire could cunningly pick away at the foundations of Christianity. And what is more, he could do all this with impunity. For after all, he was not speaking about contemporary Christianity, but merely about the habits and customs of a people who lived 1700 years before!

Voltaire's choice of a Bible commentary as a vehicle for his anti-religious views was a stroke of genius. Using a form of writing which previously had been used uniquely to defend the Bible, he succeeds in presenting a work with all the superficial trappings of Biblical scholarship but which contains an insidious message.

His reasons for writing a work on the Bible are manifold. Basic, however, was his desire to destroy the hold which the Church had on the minds of men. By showing the primitive God presented in the Old
Testament and by exposing the barbarism of the Jews, he hoped to question the validity and even the authenticity of the Old Testament and hence by implication, the New.
CHAPTER II

THE TECHNIQUE OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM

AN INQUIRY INTO VOLTAIRE'S SATIRICAL APPROACH

In France the science of Biblical criticism as we know it today was fairly late in its development. It was not until the eighteenth century that this intellectual genre really began and flourished. It was the Commentaire littéraux, inséré dans la traduction française (1701) of Louis de Carrières which marked an important innovation in the study of Bible in France. Previous to Carrière's work, critical comments on the Bible were found within the text of Scripture. In Carrière's commentary there is a separate section outside of the text itself which discusses the Biblical verses. His comments appeared in italics so that one could readily distinguish between Bible and Carrière.

But it was with Dom Augustin Calmet that Biblical criticism reached its âpogée in France. His Commentaire littéraux sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament which appeared in the French edition in 1724 (a Latin edition was published in 1707) was acclaimed as the most scholarly and comprehensive study ever made of the Bible. His exhaustive commentary evoked the praise of both Protestants and Catholics. Adam Clarke, the noted English Bible critic, said of Calmet's work:

His illustrations of many different texts referring to idolatrous customs, rites, ceremonies & c., from the Greek and Roman classics, are abundant, appropriate and successful. His tables, maps, plans &c., are very judiciously constructed,
and consequently very useful. This is without exception the best comment ever published on the sacred writings, either by Catholics or Protestants, and has left little to be desired for the completion of such a work. . . .

While Biblical criticism was a relatively recent innovation in Christian France it had been widely practiced for centuries before. The oldest commentaries on the Bible predate the Christian era. The Targum of Onkelos, for example, is a commentary in the sense that it is an Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible. This was necessitated by the cultural incursions and linguistic influences of surrounding peoples. When Jews no longer understood the Hebrew text it became necessary to translate it into the vernacular, which was Aramaic. To this day the Targum of Onkelos is contained in modern editions of the Hebrew Bible side by side with the text.

Around the same period Josephus, the great Hebrew historian, devoted the first twelve books of his Antiquities of the Jews to a running account of the Biblical narrative. Written about 80 A.D., Josephus supplied the contemporary reader with information about ancient Hebrew customs. The format of Josephus' contribution was more of a paraphrase and an elaboration of the Hebrew text than that of an explanatory nature. Josephus, for example, does not make reference to philological or linguistic problems in his remarks.

Adam Clarke, The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with a Commentary and Critical Notes, Abington-Cokesbury Press (Nashville, n.d.), p. 7. Adam Clarke was a close friend of Wesley. During his lifetime he was the unparalleled master of oriental languages. His Bible commentary (1810-1826) was a product of years of painful research. Other works by Clarke include Clavis biblica (1820), Memoirs of the Wesley Family and Baxter's Christian Directory abridged (1804).
It was not until the twelfth century that Jewish Bible commentators reached their full flowering. Solomon Jarchi, known to the Jews as "Rashi" produced among other scholarly works a complete commentary of the Hebrew Bible. This commentary was praised for its simplicity and honesty not only by fellow Jews but by Christian scholars as well. For the Jews, Rashi's commentary became the standard work.

The Commentary on the Pentateuch, in particular, became in time the most popular and widely used, and ever after the sum of lay education for a Jew consisted in his ability to read his Humash (Pentateuch) with Rashi. What is most appealing... is the touching modesty of the man, who does not scruple to say, "This I do not understand," or "Concerning this I have no tradition." With the same modesty he incorporated many a suggestion which came to him from his hearers, whom he apparently drew into his work, making them feel that they were participants rather than recipients.

Other renowned Jewish Bible commentators included Ibn Ezra, a Spanish Jew who composed, around 1160, an entire commentary on the Hebrew Bible. In terms of his approach to Scripture, we find in Ibn Ezra an emphasis on the rational appreciation of the Bible. Moreover, he was interested in the linguistic aspect, insisting that a knowledge of Hebrew grammar was indispensable for a comprehension of the text. He also advanced theories about the origin and redaction of certain Biblical books.

He was a thorough rationalist and believed that a knowledge of grammar was indispensable for an understanding of Holy Writ. He excerpted his predecessors freely, especially Ibn Janah, on whom he was unduly severe for his pointing out corrupt readings in the received form of the Scriptural text. He had freer

notions himself as to the exilic origin of the Second Isaiah (an opinion, he tells us, advanced by Moses Ibn Chiquitilla) and the post-Mosaic date of passages in the Pentateuch. These views he presented guardedly almost enigmatically.¹

David Kimhi, the son of an illustrious father was another of those Jewish exegetes who strove to make the Hebrew Bible more easily understood through his painstaking elucidation and elaboration of the text. A thorough going grammarian, David Kimhi interpreted the greater part of the Hebrew Bible with reference to linguistic peculiarities of the Semitic language known as Hebrew. Known by his initials RDK (pronounced Radak), David Kimhi became so popular in his day that he was second in prominence only to Rashi. Scholars attribute his research into the complexities of Hebrew grammar as an important influence on the Anglican version of the Bible published in 1611 (King James Bible, Authorized Version).²

Mention should also be made of several Jewish scholars who commented on the Bible but in varying degrees. Saadias Gaon, for example, writing about 930 A.D. wrote a fine commentary on the book of Daniel. Moses Maimonides, the greatest Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, spent many pages in his Guide to the Perplexed explaining many difficult passages in Scripture by means of a strictly rational approach. On the other hand Moses Nachmanides, an ardent foe of Maimonides' reliance on philosophy, wrote commentaries on various Scriptural works in which he showed an approach to Scripture which was

¹Margolis and Marx, op. cit., pp. 333-334.
²Ibid., p. 395.
not dictated by necessity of showing that everything contained therein was amenable to human understanding.

Yet in spite of the various approaches to the Bible employed by Jewish commentators, the literal, the linguistic, the homiletical, the rationalist, there was one factor which bound and united the disparate elements in their orientation; that was a profound respect and honor for the sanctity of the Biblical text. While these commentators engaged in critical appreciations, pointing out linguistic, grammatical and occasionally, historical problems, their ultimate faith in the veracity of Scripture never wavered.¹

A similar approach to Biblical criticism was also evident in the various Christian commentators who appeared on the scene with the arrival of Christianity. The earliest Christian commentators were the Church Fathers such as Jerome, Origen, Ambrose and Augustine. In addition to the clarification of the text the Church Fathers and especially Augustine engaged in much homiletical interpretation, that is, deducing moral and spiritual lessons from Scripture. To understand the importance of the Church Fathers in traditional Christian exposition of the Bible one has only to leaf through the pages of Calmet’s Commentaire littéral. There on almost every page is the reference either to Jerome or Ambrose or both. Indeed before Calmet presents an opinion of his own he always respectfully quotes the opinions of the Church Fathers before either corroborating, elaborating, or suggesting an alternate viewpoint. He never contradicts the interpretation of any of the Fathers. In any

case, Calmet as an Orthodox interpreter would rarely have found anything to disagree with in the remarks of the Fathers. Just as the Rabbinical commentators viewed Scripture as a divine work and hence deserving of the greatest reverence, so also did the Church Fathers approach and interpret Scripture with respect and reverence.

This does mean, however, that the common doctrinal position of the Church Fathers, forced them into identical patterns of interpretation. A perusal of Calmet's massive citations from the Fathers shows that on many points they disagreed. In addition one finds in Saint Augustine, for example, far more emphasis on the allegorical interpretation of Scripture than on questions of philology or history.

This allegorical approach, best exemplified by Augustine, marks one of the major differences between Jewish and Christian exegesis. Ever since Moses Nachmanides it has been established that the allegorical interpretation of Scripture had no binding effect either on Jewish theology or ritual practice. For Jews, allegorizing was considered legitimate only in so far as it pointed out the moral lesson involved in a given text. Allegory was assigned to the same province as myth and legend. Thus while a legend may not be true literally it can contain a beautiful guide for living. For Christians, on the other hand, allegorizing assumed a different role. In an effort to substantiate the claim that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament writers such as Augustine sought to show that many parts of the Hebrew Bible, even the historical sections, can be understood only as they relate to events in the New Testament. Thus the poignant picture of the "suffering servant" chronicled in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah does not represent the
people of Israel but is an allegory based on the anguished last moments of Jesus. It was this kind of Biblical exegesis which Voltaire was to exploit so mercilessly in his *Bible Enfin Expliquée*.

A different type of approach to the Bible was employed by such great Christian scholars as Joseph Scaliger and Hughes de Groot (better known as Grotius). The former was alleged to have mastered while still a youth, Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, Persian and most of the languages of Europe. In his attitude toward the Bible which he expressed in *Opus de emendatione temporum*, Scaliger revealed an independent mind which strove to uncover Biblical truths free from the restraints of dogmatic assumptions. His theories on the chronological inconsistencies of the Bible were considered revolutionary in the 16th century. Yet while he was quick to point out these alleged incongruities, Scaliger nevertheless demanded a reverent and respectful approach to the text. In a similar manner Grotius' *Commentaries* on the Scriptures show the imprint of a scholar who seeks to understand the text of the Bible through the aid of grammatical principles. He tried to divest himself of doctrinal loyalties in his attempt to elucidate difficult passages. Yet for both Scaliger and Grotius the Bible was no mere human document. It was a divine work whose possible corruptions could be explained by reference to errors incurred through transmission by men in the course of centuries. In this way one could object to the failings of Scripture all the while holding to its total inspiration.

We have shown briefly that as a genre Biblical criticism has a long tradition. Furthermore its practitioners for the most part, Christians and Jews have engaged in this genre in order to defend the
Bible, clarify and elaborate upon it. There are several means of
criticism ranging from the literal to the allegorical. But in all their
criticism of the Holy Writ those who have undertaken systematic reviews
of the Bible have done so with reverence and respect.

Does this mean that Voltaire's *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* was a
completely original document? After all, it was a complete commentary
on the Bible. In addition it is the first such document to use the
guise of this genre not to defend Scripture but to attack it!

Voltaire's approach is novel and highly original. While the
approach had its predecessors among French and English deists, the format
was certainly new. The English deists, for example, had engaged in
ridicule and irony in their comments on Scripture. In 1707 John Toland
wrote a work entitled *Origines Judaicae* in which he ridiculed the
concept that Jewish history deserved special consideration. Thomas
Woolston, another English critic, gave expression to his ideas on the
Bible in a book published in 1725 entitled *The Moderator between an
Infidel and an Apostate*. Here Woolston satirizes the Bible by advancing
allegorical interpretation which are so preposterous that they cannot
but evoke laughter. Torrey says of Woolston's technique:

> He explains even the most insignificant details of the Old
> Testament as types or allegories. His authorities are the
> allegorizing Fathers. When these authorities fail him, he
> appeals to plain reason, which means to him the wildest fancy
> he can invent to support his thesis. . . . Moreover his
> allegories and types are so far fetched and so unreasonable,
> even in comparison with a serious Dom Calmet, that they put
> the allegorical method of interpretation to ridicule. ¹

¹Norman L. Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists*, Yale University

Press (New Haven, 1930), p. 64.
In a like manner Anthony Collins pointed out the ridiculous inconsistencies of Scripture especially as it relates to the numerous prophecies found in the Old Testament. Collins showed that most of these prophecies had never been fulfilled. Thus while God promises the Jews on many occasions that they will inherit the land from the Tigris to the Euphrates they end up inheriting nothing! But while people like Toland, Collins and Woolston engaged in satirizing the Bible before Voltaire (indeed their influence can be seen in the *Bible Enfin Expliquée*) their vehicle was in the form of essays or critical observations in book form. Voltaire was the first to use the exact same format as the defenders of the Bible but to destroy it.

Wherein lies the satirical art of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*? It lies in the form of criticism and the content of criticism. Although the line of demarcation between form and content is not always clearly defined in Voltaire's Bible commentary there are certain general characteristics which lend themselves to this division. In many instances the two elements are inextricably intertwined. When Voltaire adopts an attitude of feigned credulity in discussing, let us say, miracles, he is engaging in a form of criticism which derives its humor from the particular stylistic approach. On the other hand, in the same section he may present an intelligent critique of the whole idea of miracles. Thus in this area it is a combination of form and content which produces the incomparable Voltairean satire.

Certainly the most common satirical technique employed by Voltaire in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* is the veneer of orthodoxy with which he seeks to invest his Bible commentary. This simulated orthodoxy is an
obvious parody of Calmet's sincere faith and belief in the Bible. Just as Calmet attempts to resolve irreconcilable contradictions in Scripture by taking refuge in the official interpretations sanctioned by the Church so also must Voltaire pretend that he likewise accepts the authority of the Church as the final arbitrator in all matters of Biblical criticism.

In the pentateuchal portion of La Bible Enfin Expliquée the feigned credulity is usually seen at the end of a passage in which Voltaire has brazenly contradicted the traditional interpretation. Speaking of Noah and the multiplicity of languages which evolved from the desecration at Babel, Voltaire says:

Cela semble contredire l'histoire qui va suivre des nouvelles langues formées tout d'un coup à Babylone. Ce sont toujours des obscurités à chaque page. Ces nuages ne peuvent être dissipés que par une soumission parfaite à la Bible et à l'Eglise.\(^1\)

When commenting on how Moses made the people of Israel drink the gold dust produced from the smelting of the golden calf Voltaire adds a bitter satirical note through his apparent orthodox position.

Si donc on demande par quel art Mose fit cette opération, on doit répondre que c'est par un nouveau miracle que Dieu daigna faire, comme il en fit tant d'autres.\(^2\)

It should be noted that this technique of Voltaire to act more Catholic than the Pope when interpreting the Bible is not used for the first time in La Bible Enfin Expliquée. Eleven years before in the article Genèse of the Dictionnaire philosophique Voltaire had written:

Mais il suffit que tout cela soit dans L'Ecriture sainte pour que nous le réversons, sans chercher à voir dans ce livre autre

\(^1\) Mol., XXX, p. 19.  \(^2\) Ibid., p. 89.
chose que ce qui est écrit par l'Esprit saint. Souvenons-nous toujours que ces temps-là ne sont pas les nôtres; et ne manquons pas de répéter, après tant de grands hommes, que l'Ancien Testament est une histoire véritable, et que tout ce qui a été inventé par le reste de l'univers est fabuleux.

One of the favorite techniques of Voltaire in the pentateuchal portion is to dismiss Biblical incongruities or contradictions by maliciously suggesting that the Biblical world operated under principles and rules of life which are totally different from today. After analyzing the enigmatic reference to the kings who reigned in Edom before the children of Israel had a king (Gen. 36:31) Voltaire comments:

Nous ne pouvons nous empêcher d'avouer que si la Bible était un livre ordinaire, écrit par des hommes avec cette scrupuleuse exactitude qu'on exige aujourd'hui, ce passage aurait été tourné autrement. ... Le Saint-Esprit ne se règle pas sur de pareilles critiques; il s'élève audessus des temps et des lois de l'histoire; il parle par anticipation; il mêle le présent et le passé avec le futur. En un mot ce livre ne ressemble à aucun autre livre, et les faits qui y sont contenus ne ressemblent à aucun des autres événements qui se sont passés sur la terre.2

The non-pentateuchal portions of La Bible Enfin Expliquée reflect the same satirical approach as the first part. Chief among the techniques which Voltaire employs is the feigned credulity. After quoting the alleged opinions of hostile critics such as Collins and Boullanger, Voltaire adds words of apology on the mere act of even quoting such people. To Collins' suggestion that Joshua mistrusted God because he sent spies to see Rahab, Voltaire retorts indignantly:

Nous citons à regret ces discours des incrédules; mais il faut faire voir jusqu'où va la témérité de l'esprit humain.3

1 Mol., XIX, p. 239.  2 Mol., XXX, p. 54. Italics are mine.
3 Ibid., p. 122.
To Boullanger's argument that Joshua was no more than the leader of a
band of errant Arab thieves, Voltaire retorts in a way in which the
rebuke strengthens rather than diminishes the force of Boullanger's
point.

Ces discours blasphématoires, ces dérisions de M. Boulanger,
pourraient faire quelque impression s'il s'agissait d'une
histoire ordinaire arrivée et écrite de nos jours, mais ne
peuvent rien contre un livre sacré miraculeusement écrit et
miraculeusement conservé pendant tant de siècles.1

Expressing outrageous indignation at the opinions of the critiques
is a favorite Voltairean means for showing an alleged sympathy with the
traditional position vis-à-vis the Bible. In commenting on the episode
in Judges where Aimelech slays his brothers and the reference in chapter
8 to the temple of Baal-Berith, Voltaire says:

Les critiques reprochent encore au peuple de Dieu de n'avoir
point eu de temple, lorsque les Phéniciens en avaient à Baal
Berith, à Sidon, à Tyr, à Gaza. ... Ils demandent toujours
compte à Dieu de ses actions, et nous nous bornons à les
révéler.2

There is little doubt that Voltaire's genuine sympathy usually lies with
the critiques he so vehemently contradicts. The very thoroughness with
which he cites the arguments of these who attack the Bible indicates the
real position which he had espoused. In the book of Judges the residents
of Laish are spied upon by five (chapter 18) Danites and are subsequently
massacred by these Danites. Voltaire quotes Freret to explain this
"barbaric" action:

Les Hebreux errèrent très-longtemps dans la Palestine. Ils
furent manoeuvres, régisseurs, fermiers, courtiers, possesseurs
de terres mainmortables, brigands, tantôt cachés dans des

1 Mol., XXX, p. 126. 2 Ibid., pp. 138-139. Italics are mine.
cavernes, tantôt occupant des défilés de montagnes; et enfin cette vie dure leur ayant donné un tempérament plus robuste qu'à leurs voisins, ils acquièrent en propre, par la révolte et par le carnage, le pays où ils n'avaient été d'abord reçus comme les Savoyards qui vont en France, et comme les Limousins et les Auvergnats qui vont faire les moissons en Espagne.

Cette explication du docte Fréret serait très-plausible si elle n'était pas contraire aux livres saints. L'Écriture n'est pas un ouvrage qui puisse être soumis à la raison humaine.\(^1\)

Voltaire gives the same prominence to Huet's comments on Abasalom and Joab. The reader should not be mislead by Voltaire's pious statement of faith at the end of the quotation. The event in question concerns the burning of Joab's harvest by Abasalom (I Samuel 14).

M. Huet dit que cette conduite d'Abasalon avec Joab est moins horrible que tout le reste, mais qu'elle est excessivement ridicule; que jamais on ne s'est avisé de brûler les orges d'un général d'armée, d'un secrétaire d'État, pour avoir une conversation avec lui; que ce n'est pas le moyen d'avoir des audiances. Il ya jusqu'à la raillerie; il dit que le capitaine Joab ne fit pas ses orges avec Abasalom. Cette plaisanterie est froide; il ne faut pas tourner la sainte Ecriture en raillerie.\(^2\)

The comments of the critics on the reference to Isaiah found in the second book of Kings evince from Voltaire his severest reprobation, and at the same time his bitterest irony.

Ézéchias est représenté comme un prince lâche et pusillanime, qui se met à pleurer et à sangloter quand un inconnu à l'indiscrétion de lui dire qu'il est en danger; et à peine cet Isaïe est-il sorti de la chambre du roi que Dieu lui-même vient dire au prophète: Le roi vivra encore quinze ans. Sous quelle forme était Dieu quand il vint annoncer à Isaie son changement dans l'antichambre? Ces incrédules ne se lassent point de censurer toute cette histoire; il faut combattre contre eux depuis le premier verset de la Bible jusqu'au dernier.\(^3\)

\(^1\) Mol., XXX, p. 148. Italics are mine. \(^2\) Ibid., p. 195.

\(^3\) Ibid., pp. 241-242.
The technique of quoting profusely from the arguments of the incrédules and then silencing these arguments with a satirical but ineffective rejoinder, is seen especially well in Voltaire's thirty odd references to Bolingbroke, the English lord whose name is supposed to represent in Voltaire's lexicon, the arch critic of the Bible. When commenting on the story of Rahab contained in the book of Joshua Voltaire introduces his quotation from Bolingbroke by insisting:

C'est avec douleur que nous rapportons, sur cet événement, les réflexions du lord Bolingbroke, lesquelles M. Mallet fit imprimer après la mort de ce lord.

Then after quoting a violent indictment of Biblical morality as it is seen in Joshua's destruction of Palestine's indigenous peoples, Voltaire adds in mitigation:

Milord était bien échauffé quand il écrivit ce morceau violent. On doit plus de respect à un livre sacré. ... Mais n'est-il pas précisément la manière dont on en usa envers les Américains au commencement de notre XVI siècle? Josuë fut-il plus cruel que les dévastateurs du Mexique et du Perou? Et si l'histoire des barbaries européennes est vraie, pourquoi celle des cruautés de Josué ne le serait-elle pas? Tout ce qu'on peut dire, c'est que Dieu commanda et opéra lui-même la ruine de Chanaan, et qu'il n'ordonna pas la ruine de l'Amérique.

What is supposed to be a criticism of Bolingbroke's views actually emerges as support for his position. The comparison with the conquest of the New World is a clever ruse, for while it provides an historical parallel it shows the same lack of moral concern in the question of massacres of entire peoples.

Voltaire admits that no writer held the people in more contempt than Bolingbroke. Yet Voltaire claims that presenting the latter's views

\[1\text{Mol., XXX, p. 125.} \quad 2\text{Ibid., p. 125.}\]
does not in any way diminish the authority of the Bible. Referring to the by now notorious case of Jephthah and his daughter Voltaire says:

Il faut avouer que nul homme n'a parlé avec plus d'horreur et de mépris pour la nation juive que M. Boulanger, excepté peut-être milord Bolingbroke. Nous nous sommes fait une loi de rapporter toutes les objections, sans en rien diminuer, parce que nous sommes sûrs qu'elles ne peuvent faire aucun tort au texte.¹

In reference to the first pages of the book of Samuel Voltaire quotes Bolingbroke’s criticism and then adds the usual pious but ineffectual rejoinder.

Mlord Bolingbroke traite le lévite auteur de la Vie de Samuel, avec le même mépris qu'il traite les derniers de nos moines, et que nous traitons nous-mêmes les auteurs de la Légende dorée et de la Fleur des saints; c'est continuellement la même critique, la même objection; et nous sommes obligés d'y opposer la même réponse.²

In presenting Bolingbroke’s comments on the destruction of Dagon’s temple recorded in I Samuel 5, Voltaire characterizes the former’s remarks as des réflexions trop critiques.³ The subsequent quotation by Bolingbroke he calls une critique beaucoup plus insultante.⁴ To answer the Englishman’s charge that while the people of Ashkelon, Tyre and Sidon had a temple, the God of Israel had only a coffre, Voltaire argues that divine Providence controls the fate of the Jews.

Nous avons déjà réfuté cette critique blasphématoire, en faisant voir que le temple du Seigneur devait être bâti à Jérusalem dans le temps marqué par la Providence, et que c'est par un autre dessein de la Providence qu'il fut détruit par les Romains; et que les Mahométans ont enfin élevé une mosquée sur la même plate-forme et sur les mêmes fondements construits par l’Iduméen Hérode.⁵

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 143-144. ² Ibid., p. 160. ³ Ibid., p. 162. ⁴ Ibid. ⁵ Ibid.
Thus by dint of "refutation" Voltaire has shown how the temple of the God of Israel has been ravaged, desecrated and defiled by Babylonians, Romans and Muslims!

Bolingbroke's name appears inevitably among the names which Voltaire generally gathers together when he wishes to present the combined force of the incrédules. In discussing the thirty thousand chariots which were assembled by the Philistines (1 Samuel 13) Voltaire mentions Bolingbroke along with Leclerc, Boullanger, Mallet and Middleton in an effort to question the number involved. After citing the argument against the probability of such a number Voltaire adds his word of "clarification."

Quand nous mettrions trois mille chariots au lieu de trente mille, nous ne contenterions les incrédules. Nous ne connaissons point de manière d'expliquer cet endroit. Nous pourrions hasarder de dire que le texte est corrompu; mais alors on nous répondrait que le Seigneur, qui a dicté ce texte, doit en avoir empêché l'altération. Alors nous répondrions qu'il a prévenu en effet les fautes de copistes dans les choses essentielles, mais non pas dans les détails de guerre, qui ne sont point nécessaires au salut.¹

Once again Voltaire's refutation merely adds more strength to the cause of the incrédules. The latter part of his comment is a reflection and a mockery of Calmet's pronouncements on the fautes de copistes.

Voltaire employs Bolingbroke's name for an extremely sharp censure of the behavior of the Israelites towards the Amalekites. The passage under discussion concerns the statement by Samuel (1 Samuel 11:5) by which God is said to demand of the people of Israel that they destroy

¹ Mol., XXX, pp. 170-171.
the Amalekites because of the treatment which the latter accorded the Jews when they came out of Egypt.

After presenting this scathing attack on the Biblical story Voltaire answers Bolingbroke by ironically invoking the authority of God.

Bolingbroke's name is invoked again in reference to David's leading the Gittites and other peoples out of Jerusalem (11 Samuel 15). The former tells of a certain general Widers who is supposed to have said to his chaplain that David's actions were ridiculous. Voltaire adds:

Apparently Voltaire almost forgot himself here. For the first time he corroborates the criticism of the incrédules finding fault only with the irreverent attitude.

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2Ibid., p. 174.  
3Ibid., p. 196.  
4Ibid., p. 196.
The longest reference to Bolingbroke found in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* appears in the commentary on 1 Kings 22 where Josaphat, king of Judah, asks Achab if there are no more prophets, to which Achab replies that the only one left is Micaiah, the son of Jemla. But Micaiah never prophecies anything good. In fifty-three lines of direct quotation from Bolingbroke, we find the latter objecting to the presence of prophets, to the royal attire, to the iron horns which Sedekias placed on his head, to Micaiah's alleged vision, to the idea of the *esprit malin*, to the obvious imitation of Greek legend and to the primitive superstitious level of the Jews.¹

Voltaire's "refutation" of Bolingbroke's arguments requires a meager 19 lines. Most of them are concerned with denying the dependence of the Bible on Greek traditions.² Moreover, Voltaire excuses the luxury and extravagance of the king's court by saying:

A l'égard du luxe d'Achab et de sa maison d'ivoire, ou ornée d'ivoire, cela prouve que les caravans arabes apportaient depuis longtemps des marchandises des Indes et de l'Afrique. ... Quoique les commentateurs reprochent aux écrivains hébreux des hyperboles et de l'exagération, cependant il faut bien que les chefs de la nation hébraïque eussent quelque sorte de décoration.³

Bolingbroke's criticism of Elijah centers around the prophet's miraculous powers; yet he could not employ these powers against Jezabel.⁴ To this argument Voltaire responds with the comments:

*Ces invectives seraient à leur place contre les prêtres des faux dieux, mais non pas contre un prophète du Seigneur, qui

parle et n'agit jamais de lui-même qui n'est que l'instrument du Seigneur. Il n'a point fait son marché avec Dieu, comme les sorciers prétendaient en avoir fait un avec le diable.¹

There is a very humorous allusion to Bolingbroke in Voltaire's remarks on 2 Kings 3, where Jehoram, king of Samaria, Jehoshaphat, king of Jerusalem and the kings of Edom search out Elijah for advice on combatting the Moabites.

C'est toujours milord Bolingbroke qui parle: "Si on voyait trois rois, l'un papiste, et les deux autres protestants, aller chez un capucin pour obtenir de lui de la pluie, que dirait-on d'une pareille imbécilité? Et si un frère capucin écrivait un pareil conte dans les annales de son ordre, ne conviendrait-on pas de la vérité du proverbe: Orgueilleux comme un capucin?²

Voltaire's response to Bolingbroke's challenge is witty but hardly an answer.

Ces paroles du lord Bolingbroke ne peuvent faire aucun tort à Élisée. On peut dire qu'Élisée entendait qu'un orthodoxe ne doit parler à un hérétique que pour tâcher de le convertir.³

We have shown in an earlier chapter that Voltaire's use of Bolingbroke's name even in direct quotation is false. While both Bolingbroke and Voltaire had common views, for example, on the question of Mosaic authorship and the alleged divine inspiration of the Bible, there were important differences in other areas. Bolingbroke was critical of the Bible but he revered it. He was also ready to accept certain miracles as recorded in the Bible. While in many cases Voltaire has captured the spirit of Bolinbroke in the remarks attributed to him, the citations as such are false. This, however, does not detract from the comical effect which Voltaire derives from using Bolingbroke's name as the symbol of the critique of the incrédules. Indeed the name is

not really important in so far as it adds a scholarly atmosphere to Voltaire's Bible commentary. The important factor is the prominence which he gives to these views and the ineffectual replies which he inevitably furnishes as refutations.

The use of the names of prominent people, living or dead, is another of the satirical techniques which Voltaire uses in his attempt to compose a Bible commentary in the tradition of those that preceded him. If Calmet, for example, fills his scholarly tomes with references to Biblical experts ancient and modern so too must Voltaire add to his remarks the weight of the opinion of scholars equally versed in Scripture. The difference of course is obvious. While Calmet's sources are accurate and the citations carefully documented with footnotes, Voltaire's sources are on the whole (exception for the attributions to Calmet) either fictitious or only partially responsible for an opinion which Voltaire attributes to them. Thus the numerous references and citations to and from Meslier have been seen to be false in fact but true in spirit. Pomeau feels that the enumeration of scholarly names lends an impressive air to La Bible Enfin Expliquée.

Il faut donc faire la part du jeu prodigue dans les énumérations de sources que prodigue Voltaire. Sur Dina, violée à l'âge de six ans, sont allégués Maimonide, Aben Ezra, Alphonse, évêque d'Avila, le cardinal Cajetan, et Astruc. Cette impressionnante liste d'autorités n'est-elle pas bien dans la savante manière de Dom Calmet? Le lecteur ingénu admire l'érudition d'un exégète qui fait l'historique de la question, à travers les siècles, familier qu'il est avec l'érudition rabbinique: "Maimonide fut le premier qui remarqua (...) depuis ce temps Aben Ezra, et ensuite Alphonse (...). Au vrai, Voltaire n'a lu que le commentaire des Preuves et les Conjectures d'Astruc, qui s'inspire de ce commentaire; il nomme Alphonse, évêque
d'Avila, et le cardinal Cajetan, parce qu'ils sont cités dans les notes des Conjectures, où d'ailleurs ils disent tout autre chose; et, de sa pleine autorité, il ajoute Maimonide et Aben Ezra, contingent exotique.  

The way in which Voltaire himself enters the Bible Enfin Expliquée and other works critical of the Bible is another facet of his exploitation of big names. Pomeau sees the various disguises which he adopts as an example of his malicious wit.

Les bizarreries qui ne manquent pas dans l'Ancien Testament et la candeur des "interprètes" n'excitent que trop sa malice. Il raffole de jouer cet excellent rôle comique de "l'interprète": il se déguise en licencié espagnol, en père capucin, en érudit allemand, en milord Bolingbroke, en aumônier du roi de Prusse.  

The use of impressive names by Voltaire is not merely a reflection of his by which he can dazzle the reader, but also a manifestation of Voltaire's love of play and mischief. Thus the title page of La Bible Enfin Expliquée (and could there be a more presumptuous title?) reads Par Plusieurs Aumoniers De S. M. L. R. D. P., which according to Moland was erroneously interpreted as Sa Majesté Le Roi De Prusse instead of Le Roi De Pologne. But whether the king in question is from Poland or Prussia one is constrained to confess admiration for the seemingly scholarly aura about the work.

The nature and scope of Voltaire's "sources" warrants comment. We shall show later that the non-pentateuchal portions of Voltaire's commentary bear the indelible imprint of Dom Augustine Calmet and his

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1Pomeau, op. cit., pp. 361-362. The contingent exotique which Pomeau mentioned was not simply plucked out of the air by Voltaire. He was using the information on good authority for Calmet's Commentaire littéral provides both names under the pertinent passage. See chapter three.

2Ibid., p. 361.
scholarship. Indeed, his name appears forty-five times in the work. After Calmet, the man for whom Voltaire shows a definite predilection is Bolingbroke. His name appears thirty-three times. Third in terms of the prominence of the name displayed is a M. Hut or Huet, reported by Voltaire to be the petit-neveu of Pierre Daniel Huet, bishop of Avranches, but who was actually the Englishman Peter Annet. Annet was the author of the celebrated David, the history of the Man after God’s own Heart (1761). Voltaire quotes freely from “Hut’s” opinions on David at least twenty-five times. Boullanger, the author of L’Antiquité devoilée par ses usages (1776) and the articles “Deluge” and “Langue Hébraïque” for the Encyclopédie appears by name twenty times in La Bible Enfin Expliquée. Nicolas Fréret who according to Crist,¹ was a sceptique outré and the author of Lettre de Thrasybule à Leucippe, is mentioned eighteen times by name. The only other figures whose names appear more than ten times are the Greek-Jewish historian Josephus who is called to mind sixteen times by Voltaire, and Jean Meslier, the apostate priest who merits fourteen references.

Voltaire’s use of Boullanger is very similar to that of Bolingbroke. Their two names are often joined in a denunciation of one Biblical practice or another. Voltaire uses Boullanger to deliver the most violent attacks against Biblical morality, although Boullanger himself in his writings never blatantly attacked Scripture. Commenting

on Achan's stealing the spoils at Jericho (Joshua 7:18) Voltaire makes Boullanger say:

Non-seulement on nous représente Josué comme un capitaine de voleurs arabes, qui vient tout ravager et tout mettre à sang dans un pays qu'il ne connaît pas; mais ayant, dit-on, six cent mille hommes de troupes régées, il trouve le secret d'être battue par deux ou trois cents paysans à l'attaque d'un village. ... Achan n'est pas heureux à ce jeu. On le brûle, vif, lui, ses fils, ses filles, ses boeufs, ses ânes, ses brebis; ...

To this bitter criticism attributed to Boullanger, Voltaire indignantly adds:

Ce discours blasphématoire, ces dérisions de M. Boullanger, pourraient faire quelque impression s'il s'agissait d'une histoire ordinaire arrivée et écrite de nos jours, mais ne peuvent rien contre un livre sacré miraculeusement écrit et miraculeusement conservé pendant tant de siècles.

Of course Voltaire does not always need a full paragraph to give vent to his injured dignity. When discussing the stopping of the sun recorded in Joshua he introduces Boullanger's comment by saying M. Boullanger ose dire, then quotes him as saying that the sun stopped in horror as it watched the behavior of Joshua. Yet after displaying this manifestly scurrilous interpretation of the Joshua story, Voltaire is strangely silent in the place where a rebuttal is "customary."

Voltaire quotes Boullanger extensively in his discussion of Jephthah and his daughter. According to Boullanger Jephthah was not a Hebrew. Furthermore, the massacre of forty-two thousand men for their inability to pronounce the word shibboleth is une des plus grandes

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 126. Although Voltaire spells his name Boullanger the name appears as Boullanger in his OEuvres complètes.
2 Mol., XXX, p. 126. 3 Ibid., p. 128.
extravagances qu'on ait jamais écrites. Finally the tribe of Ephraim could never have mobilised forty-two thousand men.\footnote{Mol., XXX, p. 143.} Voltaire then adds his refutation to Boullanger's alleged comments by saying:

Nous ne décidons point dans quel temps l'histoire sacré de Jephté fut écrite; il suffit qu'elle soit reconnue pour canonique.\footnote{Ibid., p. 144.}

But Voltaire's remark on the composition of the book has no relevance to the critical objections which are attributed to Boullanger.

Boullanger is cited by Voltaire in connection with the comparison between the literature of antiquity and the Hebrew Bible. Speaking of the first chapters of the book of Samuel and the dialogue between Samuel and God we find the following comments.

Boullanger en tire une preuve que les Juifs ont toujours fait Dieu corporel, et qu'ils ne le regardèrent que comme un homme d'une espèce supérieure, demeurant d'ordinaire dans une nuée, venant sur la terre visiter ses favoris, tantôt prenant leur parti, tantôt les abandonnant, tantôt vainqueur, tantôt vaincu, tel, en un mot, que les dieux d'Homère. Il ne nie pas que l'Ecriture ne donne souvent des idées sublimes de la puissance divine; mais il prétend qu'Homère en donne de plus sublimes encore, qu'on en trouve de plus belles dans l'ancien Orphée, et même dans les mystères d'Isis et de Cérès.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 160-161.}

There is little doubt that Voltaire sympathized with Boullanger's alleged views on validity of ancient literature. Indeed, elsewhere Voltaire commented in a letter to a friend that he preferred reading Cinna to the Old Testament. Notice how Voltaire counters this theory.

Ce système monstrueux est suivi par Fréret, par Dumarsais, et même par le savant abbé de Longuerue; mais c'est abuser de son érudition, et vouloir se tromper soi-même, que d'égaler les vers d'Homère aux psaumes des Juifs, et la fable à la Bible.\footnote{Ibid., p. 162.}
One of the most common rebuttal techniques employed by Voltaire in his refutation of Boullanger is the argument that God controls the fate of all men. Thus in commenting on Samuel’s throwing of the dice mentioned in 1 Samuel 10, Voltaire quotes Boullanger to the effect that throwing dice is a ridiculous thing and that to place the destiny of the kingdom of this game of chance is not a serious or sane action. The only retort which Voltaire is able to muster is,

"La réponse déjà faite à cette critique est que Dieu conduisait le sort, et qu’il disposait non-seulement du tirage, mais aussi de la volonté du peuple."  

One of the most humorous references to Boullanger comes in the comments on the anointing of David by Samuel (1 Samuel 16). Boullanger says that no Italian comedy ever had a scene that was as comical as that of a village priest going to a peasant, anointing him and then making a revolution. Voltaire merely adds by way of refutation, *Nous laissons ces blasphèmes pour ce qu’ils valent.*

Boullanger’s name is employed by Voltaire to be the vehicle by which Calmet is satirized. When discussing the pythoness of Endor (1 Samuel 28) Voltaire says:

"Le R. P. dom Calmet prouve la vérité de l’histoire par l’exemple d’un Anglais qui avait le secret de parler du ventre. M. Boullanger dit que Calmet devait s’en tenir à ses vampires."  

Thus Boullanger, sometimes referred to by Voltaire as *malintentionné* and *obstinée*, serves actually as a prestigious ambassador of

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 169.  
2 Ibid., p. 169.  
3 Ibid., pp. 176-177.  
4 Ibid., p. 177.  
5 Ibid., p. 195.
Voltaire's own views. The so-called quotations are largely false\(^1\) although possibly true in spirit. Voltaire's technique with Boullanger is the same as with Bolingbroke. After citing a bitter criticism of a Biblical event Voltaire adopts the guise of the orthodox defender who is scandalized by such outrageous interpretations and therefore refutes them. The refutations, however, are by their nature more prone to support the heretical interpretation than to confound it.

It must be pointed out, however, that while Voltaire's direct citations from Boullanger are not genuine, they are consonant with the statements which he made on the Biblical world. Reading the *Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages*, one is struck by the scholarly yet polemical tone of the criticism which Boullanger directs against the Bible. In his *Le Christianisme dévoilé* he makes some comments which are worthy of the type which are attributed to him in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*. When Voltaire cites Boullanger as one who condemned Joshua as the leader of a horde of cutthroats he was doing so out of good authority. This is what Boullanger says about the Jews.

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\text{Fiers de la protection de Jéhovah, les Hébreux marchèrent à la victoire; le ciel autorisa pour eux la fourberie et la cruauté; la religion, unique à l'avidité, étouffa chez eux les cris de la nature, et sous la conduite de leurs chefs inhumains, ils détruisirent les nations Chananéennes avec une barbarie qui révolte tout homme en qui la superstition n'a pas totalement ansanti la raison.}
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\(^1\) I have consulted Boullanger's *Oeuvres complètes* (Amsterdam, 1794), 6 volumes, and have found none of the citations attributed to him by Voltaire.

M. Huet or Hute reported by Voltaire to be the petit-neveu of Pierre Daniel Huet,¹ the celebrated bishop of Avranches, is actually one Peter Annet, one of the most virulent of the English deists. Torrey says of Annet:

If Middleton had the last word and settled the deist controversy with a compromise, there were naturally many bitter-enders on both sides who were not satisfied. Among these was the radical Peter Annet, the last and most thorough of the deists, whose writings were a connecting link between the early part of the eighteenth century and the more aggressive and outspoken deism of Paine and the revolutionary period.²

The twenty-five references to Huet or Annet in the non-pentateuchal portions of the Bible Enfin Expliquée are different from those attributed to Bolingbroke and Boullanger because in Annet's case the citations which accompany the name are generally correct. Voltaire's information from Annet come from the latter's book, published in 1761 entitled David, the history of the Man after God's own Heart. According to Torrey, Voltaire's private library at Leningrad contains the original 1761 edition of Annet's work,³ published by "R. Freeman" of "Pater-Noster-row." Torrey feels that Voltaire used Annet quite faithfully in La Bible Enfin Expliquée.

His twenty-five page account of Saul and David in his Bible enfin expliquée, published the year before his death, follows Annet's account even more closely than his drama. Many direct

¹Why Voltaire chose the name Huet for Annet is not ascertainable. Perhaps he wished to ridicule the orthodox Huet by attributing to a fictitious relative views which doubtless would have scandalized him.


³Ibid., p. 189.
borrowings and several translations are here attributed directly to "M. Hueh," and the material appears on practically every page, with Dom Calmet often employed to set it off.¹

The drama referred to is Saul, one of the cleverest of Voltaire's plays which is to a great extent inspired by Annet's vilification of Saul in David . . . the Man after God's own Heart. But Voltaire had used Annet before in another genre. In his article "David" of the Dictionnaire philosophique, written in 1767, Voltaire wrote:

M. Hueh a la justice de ne point insister sur l'adultère avec Bethsabee et sur le meurtre d'Urée, puisque ce crime fut pardonné à David lorsqu'il se repentit. Le crime est horrible, abominable; mais enfin le Seigneur transféra son péché, l'auteur anglais le transfère aussi.²

Although the attributions to Annet are far more trustworthy than those directed to Bolingbroke and Boullanger, Voltaire adopts the same satirical technique in an effort to bolster the heretical view. The very first reference to Annet in the non-pentateuchal portion shows that his manipulation of the radical theories expounded by him or others has not changed. First comes the bold criticism of the Bible and then a feeble attempt to exonerate the Holy Writ. Speaking of the desire of the Israelites to have a king (1 Samuel 3) Voltaire quotes Annet to say:

M. Hueh, petit-neveu de l'évêque d'Avranches, que nous connaissons sous le nom de Hut, établi en Angleterre, dit, dans son livre intitulé The Man after God's own heart, qu'il est évident que Samuel voulait toujours gouverner; qu'il fut très fâché de voir que le peuple voulait un roi; que toute sa conduite dénote un fourbe ambitieux et méchant.³

Then after this customary attack on the Bible by Voltaire's spokesman we find the rebuttal:

Il n'est pas permis d'avoir cette idée d'un prophète, d'un homme de Dieu. M. Huet juge selon nos lois modernes; il le faut juger selon les lois juives, ou plutôt ne le point juger. Nous en parlerons ailleurs.¹

The invitation which Voltaire extends, either to judge in terms of Jewish law or not to judge at all, is in reality, a censure of this law.

Annet is called in to criticize the behavior of Samuel towards Saul when the latter offered a sacrifice to help in battle against the Philistines at Machmans (1 Samuel 13). According to Annet, Samuel's reproachful attitude merely shows his mauvaise volonté. Samuel had no more rights than Saul. He just wanted to make Saul appear odious in the eyes of the people.² To this criticism Voltaire replies felicitously:

Nous ne voyons pas que Samuel mérite cette accusation. Huet peut lui reprocher un peu de dureté, mais non de la fourberie. Cela serait bon s'il avait été prêtre partout ailleurs que chez les Juifs.³

In one reference to Annet, Voltaire displays one of the rare instances in his critique of the Bible where he almost accidentally happens upon an approach to the text which is free from the bias of his usual veiled calumnies. This occurs in his commentary on the episode in 1 Samuel 25, where David asks from Nabal all that he can give him. The following is the censure by Annet.

M. Huet de Londres déclare la conduite de David insoutenable; il ose le comparer à un capitaine de bandits qui a ramassé six cents coupe-jarrets, et qui court les champs avec cette

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 165. ² Ibid., p. 171. ³ Ibid., p. 171.
troupe de coquins, ne distinguant ni amis ni ennemis, rançonnant, pillant tout ce qu'il rencontre.  

At this point Voltaire injects this consideration:

Mais cette expédition n'est pas approuvée dans la sainte Ecriture: l'auteur sacré ne lui donne ni louange ni blâme; il raconte le fait simplement.  

Although one might interpret this statement as meaning that there should have been blame assigned there is also room for a more charitable evaluation of the idea. Perhaps Voltaire glimpsed, even imperfectly, the genius of the Bible. As an historical record it truthfully reported the weaknesses and strengths, the grandeur and the misère of its heroes. The Bible does not skip over the unpleasant aspects of the life of Samuel or David or Saul or for that matter of Moses. The Biblical world was a real world in which there were no perfect men. Moreover, communication with God or inspiration emanating from the deity did not guarantee that the possessor of this gift would be a faultless human being. While the Bible, in many places, praises and exalts virtue and in others condemns sin and vice, it does not whitewash the sinful activities in which many of its heroes participated.

Voltaire's task, however, was not to write an apologia for the Bible in La Bible Enfin Expliquée. We must keep in mind that in an epoch when Scripture was considered wholly divine it would have been rather difficult to accept the interpretation which I have previously expounded. For the 18th century religious person the Bible was a divine work manifesting on every page the divine hand. To excuse the behavior

\[1\] Mol., XXX, p. 182.  
\[2\] Ibid.
of a David or a Saul on the grounds that the Bible was trying to present an accurate historical record is not consonant with that view of the Bible. For the majority of people David and Saul were divinely inspired and hence semi-perfect beings. Immoral acts which could be traced to people of this nature were either glossed over by orthodox interpreters or explained in terms of the omniscience of God in all matters. Only on rare occasions does one find real criticism of Biblical figures in traditional Bible commentary. One of Voltaire's aims, therefore, was to stress that part of Biblical heroes which are not ordinarily discussed. This he inevitably does with the deftness for which he is celebrated. When Nabal finally dies after his confrontation with David Voltaire quotes Annet as saying:

M. Huet continue, et dit que si on avait voulu écrire l'histoire d'un brigand, d'un voleur de grand chemin, on ne s'y serait pas pris autrement; que ce Nabal, qui, après avoir été pille, meurt au bout de peu de jours, et David, qui épouse sur-le champs-sa veuve, laissent de violents souffrons. Si David, dit-il, a été selon le coeur de Dieu, ce n'est pas dans cette occasion.¹

Voltaire tries to excuse David's conduct by suggesting that he was not an impeccable man.

Nous confessons qu'aujourd'hui une telle conduite ne serait point approuvée dans un oint du Seigneur. Nous pouvons dire que David fit pénitence, et que cette aventure fut comprise dans les sept psaumes pénitentiaux implicitement. Nous n'osons prétendre que David fut impeccable.

Once again by means of understatement Voltaire achieves his goal, that of denigrating the character of David.

David's participation in the wars against the Philistines and his treatment of Achish (1 Samuel 27) also draws Annet's ire. How could

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 183. ² Ibid.
Achish have been so duped by David. He must have been more stupid than
David even pretended to be! Voltaire sums up Annet's ideas by saying:

M. Huet déclare David et Achis également fous, et David le
plus scélérat de tous les hommes. Il aurait dû, dit-il,
pour de cette action abominable dans ses psaumes. 1

Voltaire, with his customary skill, feigns sympathy with David by attempt-
ing to explain the murder of the allies because of their being infideles.

On peut répondre à M. Huet que David, dans cette guerre civile,
ne portait pas au moins le ravage chez ses compatriotes; qu'il
n'égorgeait que ses alliés, lequels étaient des infideles. 2

Annet is quoted by Voltaire in connection with David's actions
against the people of Rabbath (2 Samuel 12). After removing the precious
crown from their king, Samuel uses saws to cut these people in half, has
iron chariots pass over them and finally throws them into a furnace.
Annet pointedly asks if David can really be called the man after God's
heart in the light of his barbaric deed.3 In this instance Voltaire's
rebuttal consists of a denial of the basic facts.

Nous croyons outrager la nature si nous prétendions que Dieu
agreu cette action affreuse de David; nous aimons mieux douter
qu'elle ait été commise. 4

The most powerful statement made by Annet in La Bible Enfin
Expliquee comes in the discussion of David's treatment of the seven chil-
don who were handed over to the Gibeonites to be hanged (2 Samuel 21).

David, dit M. Huet, cherche un infâme prétexte pour détruire,
par un supplice infâme, toute la race de son roi et de son
beau-père; il fait pendre jusqu'aux enfants que sa propre femme
Michol eut d'un autre mari, lorsqu'il la répudia; il les livre,
pour être pendus, entre les mains d'un petit peuple qui ne devait

1_Mol., XXX, p. 183. 2_Ibid., pp. 183-184.
3_Ibid., p. 193. 4_Ibid.
nullement être à craindre, puisqu'alors David est supposé être vainqueur de tous ses ennemis. Il y a dans cette action non-seulement une barbarie qui ferait horreur aux sauvages, mais un lâcheté dont le plus vil de tous les hommes ne serait pas capable. A cette lâcheté et à cette fureur, David joint encore le parjure: car il avait juré à Saül de ne jamais ôter la vie à aucun de ses enfants.¹

After citing this massive and bitter indictment of David, Voltaire's only reply to Annet is "Ces reproches sanglants font dresser les cheveux à la tête."²

Voltaire makes a similar response to Annet's many objections to the court intrigues chronicled in 1 Kings 1. The picture of Nathan, according to Annet, represents the leader of a political party rather than a prophet inspired by God. In addition Annet asks how there could be two head priests at the same time. Was there not some infraction of the law involved?³ Voltaire's answer to these troubling questions is,

Nous ne pouvons nous empêcher de voir qu'il y avait en effet une grande cabale pour Salomon contre Adonias; mais enfin le doigt de Dieu est partout: il se sert des moyens humains comme des plus divins.⁴

Voltaire's general treatment of Annet as a source for his anti-Biblical views differs considerably from his approach to Bolingbroke, Boullanger and for that matter Calmet. With Calmet, Voltaire often resorted to deliberate manipulation of the latter's Commentaire litteral in his attempt to satirize the unflinching orthodoxy of the priest. Bolingbroke's numerous citations are simply false although the spirit is genuine. The same may be said of Voltaire's utilization of Boullanger.

The factor which unites these authors in the scheme of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* is the method by which Voltaire exploits the ideas of these men by his witty rejoinders to their statements criticizing the Bible.

Nicholas Freret is quoted by name eighteen times in the non-pentateuchal section of Voltaire's commentary. An attempt to establish the validity of Voltaire's attributions has shown that there is not a single citation which is true. Voltaire uses Freret as he uses Bolingbroke and Boullanger; that is, a name to which he affixes his own opinions. But Voltaire's opinions are certainly in the same spirit as those he falsely attributes to Freret.

The dedicatory page of Freret's *Œuvres complètes*, published in Paris in 1792 eloquently expresses the parallelisms in the life of Voltaire and Freret.

> A Nicolas Fréret, Victime du despotisme dès son début littéraire, dont tous les ouvrages tendent à détruire des préjugés qui engendrent La Superstition et le Fanatisme, sources de l'ignorance et de la Barbarie parmi les hommes. Cette édition a été dédiée par un Philanthrope L'AN 1792.¹

Although Freret's approach to the Bible was far more scholarly than Voltaire's, or perhaps because of it (he knew practically all the languages of Europe and most of the oriental ones as well) he looked upon it with the eye of the discriminating critic applying to its study grammatical, linguistic and logical considerations. And in works such as *Lettre à Eugénie, Examen critique des apologistes de la religion*

¹Nicholas Freret, *Œuvres complètes*, Jean Servière (Paris, 1792).
christiennne, Lettres de Thrasybule à Leucippe and Examen critique du
nouveau testament he leaves no doubt as to his opinions on the authen-
ticity and validity of the Bible. Take for example his characterization
of the God of the Old Testament.

Les livres qui contiennent la révélation sur laquelle le
christianisme se fonde, vous montreront par-tout un Dieu bon
qui commet des mechancétés, un Dieu tout-puissant dont les
projets échouent sans cesse: un Dieu immuable qui change
perpétuellement de conduite et de maximes; un Dieu prévoyant
qui se trouve à chaque instant pris au dépouvu; un Dieu sage
dont les mesures ne réussissent jamais; un Dieu grand qui ne
s'occupe que de minuties puériles; un Dieu qui se suffit à lui
même et qui pourtant est jaloux, un Dieu fort qui est soup-
çonneux vindicatif et cruel; un Dieu juste qui commet ou
précrit les iniquités les plus atroces; en un mot, un Dieu
parfait qui nous montre des imperfections et des vices propres
à faire rougir les plus mechans des hommes.¹

It is understandable that Fréret's scepticism would have attracted
Voltaire's attention. But as a source for specific arguments against
Biblical passages Fréret was not used. For one thing, Fréret has no
systematic study of the Old Testament. He makes scattered references to
it in Lettre à Eugenie and Lettres de Thrasybule à Leucippe. In the
latter work, for example, he devotes ten pages to discussing the life of
David. Samuel receives three pages in the same work. Joshua is accorded
several passing references. What Voltaire drew upon from Fréret was his
prestigious name since he was a member of the Academy of Inscriptions
and also his ironical censures of the Bible framed as they were in
subtle understatement. After chronicling the indecent and sometimes
brutal activities of David, Fréret remarks:

Il paroit que les enfans des rois et des sacrificateurs
étoient les plus mal élevés dans tout Israël. On sait les
forfaits des enfans du sacrificateur Héli et les abominations

¹Fréret, op. cit., 1, pp. 57-58.
qu'ils commirent dans le temple même. Ceux du roi David, sans en excepter Salomon, n'en étaient pas plus sages; et la sainte Ecriture aurait fort bien pu nous épargner le scandale de leur conduite.¹

When Voltaire utilizes Freret's name, he does so with the same purpose and format which he employs with the other prominent names. The purpose is to present a very strong criticism of a Biblical event and to cloak this censure with the reputation of a famous figure. Then as before, Voltaire will "refute" this "outrageous" interpretation.

Referring to Rahab, Voltaire quotes Freret as objecting to her action in hiding Joshua's spies. Moreover, Rahab, the woman who betrayed her own people, is counted as a part of the lineal pedigree of Jesus.²

In answer to this criticism Voltaire says:

Nous citons à regret ces discours des incrédules; mais il faut faire voir jusqu'ou va la témérité de l'esprit humain.³

Voltaire also quotes Freret to the effect that the text of the book of Judges has been corrupted especially in so far as chronology is concerned. Moreover, the book of Judges directly contradicts Joshua as to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.⁴ Voltaire's comment on this inconsistency is a plea for blind faith.

Il a paru plus prudent de laisser l'ivraie avec le bon grain que de s'exposer à perdre l'un et l'autre à la fois. Il ne reste aux fidèles qu'a se défier de ce qui est intelligible, et à ne point chercher l'explication de ce qui est trop obscur.⁵

Fréret's name is evoked in connection with interpretation of the story of Micah and his private levite priest (Judges 17). According to Fréret this story suggests that the book of Judges was written around

¹Freret, op. cit., II, p. 388. ²Mol., XXX, p. 121.
³Ibid., p. 122. ⁴Ibid., p. 133. ⁵Ibid., p. 133.
the same time as Genesis or Exodus since there are many parallels between the customs of idolatry which are described in these books. In replying to this rather carefully thoughtout criticism, Voltaire reproaches Freret by saying:

Ce sentiment du docte Fréret nous semble trop teméraire; but after this usual display of injured faith, Voltaire elaborates in such a way that Freret's theory is considerably bolstered;

mail il est très vraisemblable que la horde juive, qui erra longtemps dans les déserts et dans les rochers, se fit de petits dieux et de petites idoles mal sculptées avec des instruments grossiers, et que chaque famille avait ses idoles dans sa maison, comme Rachel avait les siennes. Ce fut l'usage de presque tous les peuples, comme nous l'avons déjà observé.

As if to correct the impression that he has supported Freret's stand, Voltaire reverts to his former method of commentary the very next time he quotes him. Referring to the destruction of Laish by the Levites, Voltaire calls in Fréret to excoriate the nomadic Hebrew tribes for their brutal, savage, rape of innocent peoples. Then Voltaire states:

Cette explication du docte Fréret serait très-plausible si elle n'était pas contraire aux livres saints. L'Ecriture n'est pas un ouvrage qui puisse être soumis à la raison humaine.

The reference to the ark of the covenant mentioned in Judges 12 provides Voltaire with the opportunity of indulging in one of the most humorous sallies of La Bible Enfin Expliquée. First the alleged quotation from Freret:

Il faut donc que les Hébreux, esclaves alors, eussent obtenu des maîtres du pays la permission de mettre leur arche dans un

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 147. 2 Ibid. 3 Ibid., p. 148. 4 Ibid.
de leurs villages. Cette permission même, dit M. Fréret, serait le comble de leur avilissement. Des gens pour qui Dieu avait ouvert la mer Rouge et le Jourdain, et arrêté le soleil et la lune en plein midi, pouvaient-ils ne pas posséder une superbe ville en propre, dans laquelle ils auraient bâti un temple pour leur arche?¹

Voltaire provides an answer to this criticism:

On répond que ce temple fut en effet bâti plusieurs années après dans Jérusalem, et qu'un siècle de plus ou de moins n'est rien dans les conseils éternels de la Providence.²

Voltaire's brilliant wit is also seen in his response to Freret's comment on Samuel's scolding of Saul. The latter had refused to slaughter the Amalekites as commanded by God. Samuel tells Saul that God has rejected him as king (1 Kings 15). Freret claims that Saul could have ascertained the truth by asking Samuel for a sign or a miracle which would prove that God wanted him dethroned. Just as Samuel had aided Saul in finding the lost mules so also could he provide him with a similar aid in understanding God's will.³ But Voltaire counters with:

Les commentateurs sont d'une autre opinion: ils disent que dès qu'un prophète a donne une fois un signe, il n'est pas obligé d'en donner d'autres.⁴

Freret is also mentioned three or four other times in a list which Voltaire frequently produces to show who are the incrédules. Thus in discussing the episode mentioned in 1 Kings 22, where Achab responds to a question by king Josiah, we find Voltaire declaiming:

Mes prédécesseurs dans le travail épique et désagréable de ce commentaire, se sont appliqués à citer et à réfuter milord Herbert, Woolston, Tindal, Toland, l'abbé de Tilladet, l'abbé de

¹Mol., XXX, p. 150. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 175. ⁴Ibid.
Flavius Josephus, the Greek-Jewish historian who flourished in the first century of the Christian era, is frequently quoted by Voltaire, especially in the latter part of his commentary entitled *Sommaire De L'Histoire Juive*, in which there is an account of the Jewish people from the times of the Maccabees until the birth of Jesus. Voltaire's citations and paraphrases of Josephus differ once again from those attributed to Freret or Boullanger, in that Josephus' are quoted correctly. In this case it is no longer a question of a spiritual affinity between the quotations and the actual words of the writer. This faithfulness to the original text is somewhat startling in view of Voltaire's approach to some of the other critics he uses. Perhaps one can attribute his accuracy in this case to the availability of Josephus' comments in the body of Calmet's *Commentaire littéral*.2

Just as the authenticity of Josephus' citations differ so does the way in which Voltaire exploits his remarks. Although the same ironic note is present in Voltaire's rejoinders one senses a more serious tone. Commenting on Joshua's invasion of Palestine, Voltaire quotes Josephus to the effect that the Hebrews never possessed any land on the Mediterranean coast.3 Then he merely adds the fact that this land must have

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1Mol., XXX, p. 222.

2Every citation which Voltaire attributes to Josephus is found under the pertinent interpretation in Calmet's Biblical commentary.

3Mol., XXX, p. 130.
been inhabited by the Canaanites who were subsequently slaughtered by Joshua.¹

Josephus is called in by Voltaire to "testify" that Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter. Voltaire apparently respects his opinions because he calls him "le seul Juif qui ait écrit avec quelque ombre de méthode."² He further reflects his faith in Josephus in the comment he makes after citing his argument:

Cela ne prouve pas que l'histoire de Jephte soit vraie, mais que c'était l'opinion commune des Juifs. Un historien profane, qui n'est pas un contemporain, n'est que le secrétaire des bruits publics; et Flavius Josephè est un auteur profane.³

Even when Voltaire is at odds with an interpretation by Josephus he states his disagreement without his customary malice. Josephus states that the letters exchanged between Solomon and Hiram, the king of Tyre, concerning the building of the temple, were still in existence in his day.⁴ Voltaire makes the following objection:

Serait-il possible que les archives tyriennes eussent subsisté après la destruction de Tyr par Alexandre, et les Juifs après la ruine du temple sous Nabuchodonosor.⁵

Voltaire is slightly critical about Josephus' account of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Au moins, quand Flavius Josephè raconte l'autre destruction de Jérusalem dont il fut témoin, il développe très-bien l'origine et les événements de cette guerre; mais quand, dans ses Antiquités judaïques, il parle de Nabuchodonosor qui brûle Jérusalem en passant, il ne nous en dit plus que ce livre que nous cherchons en vain à commenter. Flavius Josephè n'avait point d'autres archives que nous.⁶

¹Mol., XXX, p. 130. ²Ibid., p. 143. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., p. 206. ⁵Ibid. ⁶Ibid., p. 246.
There is, however, a touch of Voltaire's caustic wit in his comments on Josephus' interpretation of the Vashti episode in the book of Esther. According to Josephus it was not the custom in Persia for women to eat with men. Indeed, women were not even supposed to be seen by strangers. Voltaire says:

Cette remarque sert à détruire la fable incroyable d'Hérodote, que les femmes de Babylone étaient obligées de se prostituer une fois dans leur vie aux étrangers dans le temple de Milita. Ceux qui ont tâché de soutenir l'erreur d'Hérodote doivent se rendre au témoignage de Flavius Josèphe.

Voltaire's main criticism of Josephus is that he was too nationalistic. Speaking of Hyrcanus, Josephus calls him a prophet. For Voltaire this is "L'historien Joseph, ivre de l'ivresse de sa patrie." When Josephus recounts the uprising against the High-priest Jannai, Voltaire suggests that the historian is trying to make it appear that the Jews were independent when in fact they were under the control of the kings of Egypt and Syria. Finally, Voltaire accuses Josephus of exaggerating the number of Jews killed in the temple during Pompey's reign, as well as the numerous and onerous tributes which the temple was required to pay the conquering Roman generals.

Le temple seul paya huit mille talents, et fournit encore un lingot d'or pesant quinze cents marcs, qu'on avait, dit Josèphe, caché dans une poutre évidée. Il faut avouer que le temple juif était la poule aux œufs d'or: plus on lui en prenait, plus elle pondait.

There are fourteen references to Jean Meslier, the apostate priest, in the non-pentateuchal portions of La Bible Enfin Expliquée.

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 257.  
2 Ibid.  
3 Ibid., p. 281.  
4 Ibid., p. 283.  
5 Ibid., p. 284.  
6 Ibid., p. 285.
Morehouse has shown in his *Voltaire and Jean Meslier* that the citations attributed to Meslier by Voltaire, are largely false. Meslier is used by Voltaire much in the same way as Bolingbroke was used, as a vehicle for Voltaire's feigned indignation at the impudent interpretations advanced by the *incrédules* of which Meslier was a well-known and eloquent spokesman.

Voltaire uses Meslier's name to criticize the allegory of the trees recorded in Judges. Voltaire produces an ironical twist in referring to the reign of Abimelech when he says:

*Jean Meslier s'emporte jusqu'à dire que la fable du règne d'Abimelech est bien plus fable que celle des arbres, et d'une morale bien plus condamnable, et qu'on ne sait quel est le plus cruel de Mose, de Josué, et d'Abimelech.*

In quoting Meslier's alleged view on the Samson story, Voltaire waxes eloquent in his righteous condemnation of Meslier's "sarcasms."

*La machoire d'âne avec la quelle Samson tue mille Philistins, ses maîtres, est ce qui enhardit le plus Meslier dans ses sarcasmes aussi insolents qu'impies. Il va jusqu'à dire (nous le répétons avec horreur) qu'il n'y a de machoire d'âne dans cette fable que celle de l'auteur qui l'inventa. Nous répondrons à la fois à toutes les criminelles injures de ce mauvais prêtre, à la fin de cet article de Samson.*

Meslier calls the Samson story a group of absurdities which cannot be compared even to the excesses of the *Légende dorée.*

Meslier's condemnation of the slaughter of the inhabitants of Jabesh (Judges 21) by the Israelites draws one of Voltaire's typically unconvincing rebuttals.

*Nous avouons que cet expédient, pour rétablir la tribu de Benjamin, est d'une barbarie singulière; mais Dieu ne l'ordonna pas. Ce n'est point à lui qu'on doit s'en prendre de tous les crimes que commet son peuple. Ce sont des temps d'anarchie.*

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The longest "citation" from Meslier appears in the commentary on 2 Kings 8, where Hazael murders Benhadad thereby beginning a series of assassinations and murders which run throughout these books. Meslier says that this scene of murder and carnage cannot even be compared to the activities of a weasel described by one of the chickens in the coop.¹

To this Voltaire retorts:

Ce sont les propres paroles du curé Meslier; nous ne pouvons les réfuter qu'en avouant cette multitude effroyable de crimes, et qu'en redisant ce que mes deux prédécesseurs et moi avons toujours dit, que le Seigneur n'abandonna son peuple aux mains des ennemis que pour le punir de cette persévérance dans la cruauté, depuis l'assassinat du roitelet de Sichem et de tous les Sichémites jusqu'à l'assassinat du grand-prêtre Zacharie: ... ce qui fait une période d'assassinats d'environ neuf cents années presque sans interruption; et les mœurs de ce peuple, depuis le rétablissement de Jérusalem jusqu'à Adrien, ne sont pas moins barbares.²

We have seen that Voltaire uses prominent names like those mentioned in this section in order to lend an air of scholarly detachment to his commentary. Except in the cases of Annet and Josephus most of the citations attributed to these prominent scholars are fanciful. However, there is always a community of spirit between what Voltaire says and the people he quotes. In using these people Voltaire has a general pattern. He will present a thoroughly blasphemous interpretation of

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 233
² Ibid., p. 233.
³ Clarence Darrow suggested in a speech that Voltaire lied so that he would live to lie again another day.
Scripture and then denounce this view in language so ironical that it serves to fortify the original statement rather than destroy it.  

In investigating Voltaire’s use of prominent names one must not be misled by a simple numerical evaluation. The number of times a writer is mentioned by Voltaire is not always indicative of Voltaire’s real information concerning the man quoted. Bolingbroke, for example, is one of the most frequently quoted critics in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, yet Hurn and Torrey have shown that not a single attribution is genuine.

On the other hand the non-pentateuchal sections of Voltaire’s commentary contain only two references to Mathew Tindal, both of which are included in a list of the most notorious incrédules. Yet Torrey shows that there are striking similarities in details and associations of ideas in both of their works. Tindal is seen as a major source for Voltaire’s disquisitions on the cruelties of the Jews and the coarseness of the prophets.

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1 This irony is readily perceived by the person who has had a longtime acquaintance with Voltaire’s style. Yet there are those who even today interpret Voltaire literally in his denunciation of blasphemous views of Scripture. A striking example of this misreading of Voltaire is found in the scholarly Jewish Quarterly Review in an article written by Joshua Szechtmman entitled “Voltaire on Isaac of Troki’s Hizzuk Emunah,” (48, 1957-1958, pp. 53-57). The author purports to show that Voltaire’s admiration for a polemical tract written against Christianity has been misunderstood. By citing passages from various works in which Voltaire denounces Isaac Troki, he infers that Voltaire had no praise for the work. What this writer does not appreciate is Voltaire’s brilliant gift for obfuscation. When dealing with Biblical themes, Voltaire often intends the exact opposite of what he says. Voltaire excoriates Isaac Troki the same way he does Bolingbroke, Boullanger, Fréret and Meslier, all the while providing himself with an excellent opportunity to expound their heretical and occasionally blasphemous theses.

2 His two most famous works were *Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*, 1706 and *Christianity as Old as Creation*, 1730.

3 Torrey, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
Similarly, Conyers Middleton, the most articulate of the English deists, is mentioned only once, also in a list of incrédules. Yet it has been shown that Middleton's annotated works, found in Voltaire's Leningrad library, were an important source for much of Voltaire's pages on miracles, martyrs, the Church Fathers, the lack of originality of Jewish customs and the general weakness of the authority of the Scriptures.2

This is not to suggest that Voltaire's citations from the English deists were necessarily correct. A striking example of Voltaire's exploitation of the men who nurtured him in his early years is seen in one of the most vulgar, yet comical allusions in La Bible Enfin Expliquée. In the discussion about the injunction in Deuteronomy by which the Israelites were to make provisions for the disposal of their excrements, Voltaire says that Collins3 felt that this act was injurious to the majesty of God. Voltaire continues:

Et il s'est emporté jusqu'à dire que Dieu avait plus de soin du derrière des Israélites que de leurs âmes. ... C'est s'exprimer avec bien peu de respect. Tout ce que nous pouvons dire, c'est que le peuple juif était, si grossier ... que ses législateurs furent obligés de descendre dans les plus petits et les plus vils détails.4

Torrey states that this attribution is absolutely false.5

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1 Middleton's most famous work was Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Power of the Christian Church, 1748.

2 Torrey, op. cit., p. 156.

3 Author of Discourse of Free-thinking, 1713 and Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered, 1726.

4 Mol.*, XXX, p. 119.

5 Torrey, op. cit., p.
There are four references to John Toland\(^1\) in the latter part of \textit{La Bible Enfin Expliquée}, two of which are appended to Voltaire's ubiquitous lists. The first reference is a comment attributed to Toland that Moses and Joshua were testy old men, one for killing eighty thousand of his brethren because they took Midianite women, the other because he hung thirty-one kinds who had done him no harm.\(^2\) It seems almost natural that Voltaire quotes Toland more often than Middleton, Tindal and Collins even though Toland exerted the least influence upon him. One might even suggest that the importance of a writer to Voltaire is measured in proportion to how remote he is!

Thomas Woolston,\(^3\) the most outspoken of all the English deists, occupies a special place in Voltaire's gallery of incrédules. Torrey says:

\begin{quote}
All English deists, Toland, Collins, Bolingbroke, Gordon, were to him just so many Woolstons all equally rabid in their attacks on the Christian religion. Sometimes he even appears apologetic in repeating such blasphemies as Woolston's, but he wanted to prove to his French readers that a man could write such things and still live peacefully on undisturbed by the thunderbolts of the "God of the Old and New Testaments."\(^4\)
\end{quote}

In \textit{La Bible Enfin Expliquée} Woolston's name is associated with a particularly long passage in the commentary on the book of Judges. Voltaire begins the passage by saying, "Woolston ose déclarer nettement

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1] Author of \textit{Christianity not Mysterious}, p. 1696.
\item[3] Author of \textit{An Old Apology for the Truth of the Christian Religion against the Jews and Gentiles}, Revived, 1705, and \textit{Moderation between an Infidel and an Apostate}, 1725.
\end{footnotes}
que l'histoire des Juges est fausse, ou que celle de Josué l'est d'un bout à l'autre."\(^1\) How could the Jews be enslaved by Chuzan Razarthaim, king of Mesopotamia, right after they had conquered the land themselves? The argument that their defeat was a punishment by God for their iniquities, is dismissed as the same excuse that any nation could give.

Finally, Voltaire suggests that because of the obscurities in Scripture one must rely upon interpreters approved by the Church\(^2\) Woolston is also quoted by Voltaire as an authority in connection with the description of the idolatry allegedly practiced by the Jews in the desert.\(^3\) Voltaire quotes Woolston's arguments against the story of Samuel and his call from God. According to Woolston, one does not distinguish God's voice when God does not speak.\(^4\)

What of the twenty-five odd other names which Voltaire parades through the pages of his Bible commentary? Were names like Leclerc, Tilladet, Pesteau, Bochart, Benjamin of Tudela, Dumarsais and Longuerue merely chosen arbitrarily? Did Voltaire really know what these men had said? A perusal of Voltaire's Leningrad library indicates that the answer to this question is largely a positive one. Although one cannot guarantee that his quotations from these authors are authentic (it would be unusual if they were) his library indicates that Voltaire had at least a browsing acquaintance with most of the people he mentions. The abbe de Longuerue,\(^5\) for example, was the author of the Description

\(^1\) Mol., XXX, p. 133.  
\(^2\) Ibid.  
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 139.  
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 160.  
\(^5\) Mol., XXX, pp. 133, 161, 222. All the books mentioned are found in Havens-Torrey catalogue of the Ferney library at Leningrad.
Voltaire had the 1722 edition of this work in his library. The Lenglet\(^1\) mentioned by Voltaire in connection with his many comments on Jephthah was the author of the *Histoire de la philosophie hermétique* as well as the *Tablettes chronologiques de l'histoire universelle*. Both of these works are found in Voltaire's collection. Basnage, who is quoted by Voltaire to the effect that a priest sent to the Samaritans composed the Pentateuch,\(^2\) was the author of two famous works on Jewish history, the *Antiquités judaïques* (1719) and the *Histoire des Juifs* (1710). These same editions are present in the Leningrad library. Voltaire also had in his possession Isaac Newton's *Chronology of ancient Kingdoms amended* (1728). He quotes the great physicist as stating that Samuel himself composed the book bearing his name.\(^3\) Petau's *Dionysii Petavii Rationarium temporum* (1720) also found in the library was perhaps the inspiration for Voltaire's attribution to this author in connection with the comparison of the Samson-Hercules theory.\(^4\) Dumarsais' *Analyse de la religion chrétienne* (1766), a copy of which Voltaire had, is no doubt responsible for the citation complaining that God, after bringing the Jews out of Egypt, finally builds them a temple and then has it destroyed.\(^5\)

\(^{1}\)Ibid., p. 143.  
\(^{2}\)Ibid., pp. 240, 249.  
\(^{3}\)Ibid., p. 159.  
\(^{4}\)Ibid., pp. 144, 145, 238.  
\(^{5}\)Ibid., pp. 222, 247, 257.
In Voltaire's technique of Biblical criticism there is one other consideration which has not been dealt with fully. This concerns the historical perspective which he brought to the discussion of the Biblical world. It is not surprising that the author of L'Histoire de Charles XII, Le Siècle de Louis XIV, Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations, Histoire de la Russie sous Pierre le Grand and the Histoire du Parlement de Paris could not divest himself of the historical method when approaching the Bible. This method he conceived of as an unbiased view of historical events culled from original source documents and unembellished by the literary flourishes of his predecessors in the writing of history. For Voltaire history was not merely the records of kings and battles. He believed that the history of peoples deserved equal mention in historical accounts. The third element in his historical method was the belief that there is no such thing as a Providence which guides human destiny. All human progress or retrogression was to be conceived strictly in terms of human successes and failures. In his Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire, he writes:

Il est toujours hardi de vouloir pénétrer les desseins de Dieu; mais cette témérité est mêlée d'un grand ridicule quand on veut prouver que le Dieu de tous les peuples de la terre et de toutes les créatures des autres globes ne s'occupait que des révolutions de l'Asie, et qu'il n'envoyait lui-même tant de conquérants les uns après les autres, qu'en considération du petit peuple juif, tantôt pour l'abaisser, tantôt pour le relever, toujours pour l'instruire, et que cette petite horde opiniâtre et rebelle était le centre et l'objet des révolutions de la terre.

1 Predecessors such as Voragine, author of La légende dorée.


3 Mol., XXVII, pp. 248-249.
In view of this statement of belief it is apparent that Voltaire's approach to Biblical history would be a hostile one. The Bible, after all, is the story of the Jews and their vicissitudes in relation to God and the peoples of the Middle East. Voltaire, however, does not attack the historicity of the Bible directly, in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée.* Instead, he employs two techniques to suggest that Biblical history is suspect. The one is the mocking notion that somehow the normal rules of history do not operate in the Biblical world; the other is the malicious comparison of episodes from contemporary history with that of ancient Israel, inevitably to the latter's detriment.

When Voltaire discusses the prodigious achievements and feats of strength which characterize Samson's activities, he mentions the gates of Gaza which Samson carried on his shoulders to the mountains of Hebron. Commenting on this and similar demonstrations of superhuman strength Voltaire makes the following distinction between Biblical and profane history:

Pour les prodiges étonnants opérés par Samson, ce sont des miracles qui montrent que Dieu ne veut pas abandonner son peuple. Nous avons dit vingt fois que ce qui n'arrive pas aujourd'hui arrivait fréquemment dans ces temps-la. Nous croyons cette réponse suffisante.¹

Referring to Boaz¹ characterization as a rich man by the book of Ruth, and his working on the harvest at an advanced age, Voltaire says:

Nous avons dit bien souvent que ces temps et ces moeurs n'ont rien de commun avec les nôtres, soit en bien, soit en mal. Leur esprit n'est point notre esprit; leur bon sens n'est point notre bon sens. C'est pour cela même que le Pentateuque, les livres de Josué et des Juges, sont mille fois plus instructifs qu'Homère et Hérodote.²

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 146. ² Ibid., p. 156.
When Saul assembled his troops at Gilboa (1 Samuel 28) he asked God for support but received no answer either through dreams, priests or prophets. Voltaire comments:

Il est défendu dans le Deutéronome d'expliquer les songes; mais Dieu se réservait le droit de les expliquer lui-même. Aujourd'hui, un général d'armée qui déterminerait ses opérations de campagne sur un songe ne serait pas regardé comme un homme bien senté. Mais nous l'avons déjà dit, ces temps-là n'ont rien de commun avec les nôtres.¹

The march by Roboam at Jerusalem against the house of Israel, chronicled in the first book of kings, evinces the following response from Voltaire:

Voilà une des exagérations incroyables qui se sont glissées dans les livres saints du peuple de Dieu (sans doute par la faute des copistes). Un misérable roitelet de la dixième partie d'un petit pays barbare pouvait-il avoir une armée de cent quatre-vingt mille combattants? Les exagérations précédentes, dit-on, sont encore plus incroyables. Il est vrai; et j'en suis très-fâché. Mes deux prédécesseurs ont dit avec raison que dans ces temps-là rien ne se faisait comme aujourd'hui.²

One of the prophets which Voltaire discusses most in the course of his remarks on the Bible is Ezekiel. He is particularly delighted in being able to exploit the figures of Oholibah and Oholah, the prostitutes who are sensuously symbolic of the degeneration of Jerusalem. In addition Voltaire frequently alludes to Ezekiel's prophecy that the Jews would consume the flesh of their captors.³ After enumerating several of his customary criticisms of this book he says:

Nous ne prétendons point entrer dans toutes les profondeurs mystérieuses de tous les prophètes, ni examiner les divers sens qu'on a données à leurs paroles: nous nous bornons à montrer seulement ce qu'il ya de plus singulier dans leurs aventures, et ce qui est le plus éloigné de nos mœurs.⁴

¹Mol., XXX, p. 184. ²Ibid., p. 211. ³Ibid., p. 266. ⁴Ibid., p. 267.
Finally there are the comments on the prophet Hosea who comes in for a great deal of criticism for Voltaire. The latter relishes telling and retelling what he considers one of the most scandalous pronouncements of Scripture; the directive to Hosea to marry a prostitute and have children by her. Nor will Voltaire accept these stories as being symbolic.¹

After describing Hosea's union with Gomer, Voltaire states:

On ne peut trop répéter qu'il ne faut pas juger de ces siècles par notre siècle, des Juifs par les Français et par les Anglais, des moeurs juives par les nôtres, de leur style par notre style.²

The historical parallels and analogies which Voltaire advances to ridicule the text of the Bible take many and diverse forms. Some of this historical interjections are patent inventions. One of the most humorous concerns his comments on Joshua's stopping of the sun.

Ne sera-t-il permis, à propos de ce grand miracle, de raconter ce qui arriva à un disciple de Galilée, traduit devant l'Inquisition pour avoir soutenu le mouvement de la terre autour du soleil? elle disait qu'il avait blasphémé, attendu que Josué avait arrêté le soleil dans sa course. "Eh! messieurs, leur dit-il, c'est aussi depuis ce temps-là que le soleil ne marche plus."³

Voltaire introduces some contemporary history when he discusses the story of Adam and the legend relating to his burial place. Voltaire tells of Portuguese monks who, arriving at the island of Ceylon, named the highest mountain in the area Adam's Peak. In addition they were

¹Mol., XXX, p. 268. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 128.
alleged to have found Adam's own footprint which measured at least one
certaine de coudées. Then Voltaire continues:

Le Pic d'Adam est encore marqué sur nos cartes, et les
savants moines portugais ont cru qu'Adam y était enterré.
Les Hollandais qui dominent dans le Cylan, et qui recueillent
toute la cannelle, doutent qu'Adam repose dans cette île. Les
habitants même ne savent pas que nous donnons le nom Pic D'Adam
tà leur montagne, et ont le malheur d'ignorer qu'il y ait jamais
eu un Adam. La Genèse ne dit point qu'Adam ait été un géant,
ni qu'il soit enterré à Hébron.2

One of the longest incursions into historical comparisons is made
by Voltaire in his comments on the assassination of Eglon, king of the
Moabites by Aod, the son of Gera (Judges 3:21). This treacherous act
although not ordered by God is apparently allowed to go unpunished at
the time. This seeming approval of assassination provides Voltaire with
the opportunity of mentioning famous assassins such as Jacques Clement,
Scevola, Harmodius, Henri de Transtamare, Balthazar Gerard. He notes
that the Roman senators used the same pretext as Aod when they murdered
Caesar.3 After citing this long table of political crimes Voltaire
invokes the famous double standard:

Il n'est point spécifié, dans la sainte Ecriture, que Dieu ait
ordonné à cet Aod d'aller enfoncer son poignard dans le ventre
de son roi; mais Aod, pour récompense, fut juge du peuple de
Dieu. Cet exemple ne peut tirer à conséquence: un jugement
particulier du Seigneur ne peut prévaloir contre les lois du
genre humain, émanées de Dieu même. Aod était inspiré par le
Seigneur, et le moine Jacques Clément ne fut inspiré que par
la rage du fanatisme.4

The question of assassinations draws Voltaire's attention also in
connection with the behavior of Abimelech toward the members of his

1 Mol., XXX, p. 129. 2 Ibid. 3 Ibid., p. 134.
4 Ibid., p. 134.
family (Judges 8:4). Voltaire says that one cannot explain Abimelech's murder of his brothers simply in terms of political gain. Comparisons with contemporary history he terms faulty.

Si Clotaire et Childebert, fils de Clotilde, assassinèrent deux petits enfants de Clotilde au berceau; si Richard III en Angleterre assassina ses deux neveux; si Jean sans Terre assassina le sien, nous étions tous des barbares en ces temps-là; mais ces horreurs n'approchent pas celle d'Abimélech, qui fut commise sans être excité par un grand intérêt.\textsuperscript{1}

Voltaire then suggests that the Jews engaged in murder merely for the pleasure. Scripture represents them as the most ferocious and yet imbécilic people that has bloodied and soiled this earth.\textsuperscript{2}

Voltaire's historical references are not limited to contemporary sources. In analyzing the Samson story he draws an analogy from the Greek tale of Nisus and Cometho. The rest, he claims, comes from the Hercules legend.\textsuperscript{3} Voltaire realizes that the traditional commentators have already seen the parallels between Hercules and Samson.

Les sages commentateurs répondent qu'il est possible que les deux aventures soient vraies, et que l'une ne soit point prise de l'autre; que dans tous les pays on a vu des hommes d'une force extraordinaire, et que plus on est vigoureux, plus on se livre aux femmes, et qu'alors on abrège ses jours.\textsuperscript{4}

The success of the levites in their expedition against Laish (Judges 18) is explained by Voltaire in terms of historical parallels.

Il est assez difficile de comprendre comment la horde hébraïque, dispersée et esclave dans ces pays, osait enjoyer des espions à Lais, qui était une ville appartenant aux Sidoniens. Mais enfin la chose est possible. Les esclaves des Romains firent de bien plus grandes entreprises sous leur chef et compagnon Spartacus. Les mainmortables d'Allemagne, de France, et

\textsuperscript{1}Mol., XXX, p. 138.  \textsuperscript{2}Ibid.  \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 144.  \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 145.
d'Angleterre, prirent plus d'une fois les armes contre ceux qui l'avaient asservis. La guerre des paysans d'Allemagne, et sur tout de Munster, est memorable dans l'histoire.¹

Voltaire's sincere admiration for the book of Ruth is mitigated by the savage behavior of the Jews on numerous occasions. He is horrified by the phenomenon of a people among whom you can find a Ruth or a Boaz, yet a people who are worse than the followers of Attila and Genseric.²

The story of Ruth also provides Voltaire with the opportunity of drawing a parallel between the life of a Biblical figure and one of the popes. The event which precipitates this comparison concerns the refusal of Ruth's kinsman to marry the widow (Ruth 4:6) according to the laws of Israel. In such a case the law prescribes that the widow is permitted to remove such a man's shoes and spit in his face. Voltaire then ponders the question of whether a man can marry his brother's widow.

Il n'est pas permis parmi les catholiques romains d'épouser la veuve de son frère, à moins d'une dispense du pape. On sait que le pape Clément VII fut cause du schisme de l'Angleterre pour n'avoir pas voulu souffrir les prétendus remords du roi Henri VIII d'avoir épousé sa belle-soeur, et que le pape Alexandre VII donna toutes les dispenses qu'on voulut, quand la princesse de Nemours, reine de Portugal, fit casser son mariage avec le roi Alphonse, et épousa le prince Pierre, frère d'Alphonse, après avoir détrôné et enfermé son mari.³

The Israelite custom of anointing their kings stimulates Voltaire to some observations about this custom in non-Biblical history:

On prit cette coutume en Italie, où l'on croit que ce furent les usurpateurs lombards, qui, devenus chrétiens, voulurent sanctifier leur usurpation en faisant répandre de l'huile sur

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¹Mol., XXX, p. 148. ²Ibid., p. 156. ³Ibid., p. 158.
leur tête par la main d’un évêque. Clovis ne fut point oint; mais l'usurpateur Pépin le fut. On oignit quelques rois espagnols; mais il y a longtemps que cet usage est aboli en Espagne.\footnote{1}

In French history Voltaire remarks that,

On sait qu'un ange apporta du ciel une bouteille sainte pleine d'huile pour sacrer les rois de France; mais l'histoire de cette bouteille, appelée sainte ampoule, est révoquée en doute par plusieurs doctes; c'est une grande question.\footnote{2}

A consistent criticism which Voltaire advances against Biblical events is the exaggeration in the number of soldiers assigned to various armies mentioned in the Bible. The size of Saul's army in particular comes in for harsh appraisal. The two hundred and ten thousand men who marched against the Amalekites are seen by Voltaire to be an epic distortion. Even the modern Turks, he claims, have difficulty in getting together an army of eighty thousand men.\footnote{3}

Samuel's boldness in addressing Saul is seen by Voltaire to be incomprehensible. How could Samuel criticize the king for not slaughtering a whole people? Today, claims Voltaire, such behavior on the part of a subaltern would lead to the gallows.

Si un prêtre, dit-il, avait été assez insolent et assez fou pour parler ainsi, je ne dis pas à notre roi Guillaume, mais au duc de Malborough, on l'aurait pendu sur-le-champ au premier arbre. Samuel, ajoute-t-il, n'est point un prêtre de Dieu, c'est un prêtre du diable.\footnote{4}

Saul's request from David, that he bring the king one hundred Philistine foreskins (1 Samuel 18:25) as a dowry, evokes from Voltaire a short disquisition on interesting customs.

\footnote{1}{Mol., XXX, p. 168.} \footnote{2}{Ibid.} \footnote{3}{Ibid., p. 174.} \footnote{4}{Ibid., p. 175.}
A l'égard des deux cents\(^1\) prépuces, chaque pays a ses usages: on apporte aux Turcs des têtes, on apportait aux Scythes des crânes, on apporte aux Iroquois des cheveux.\(^2\)

The advice presented by Ahijah to Jeroboam's wife that Abijah would die as soon as she set foot in the city (1 Kings 14:12), brings from Voltaire the remark that this prophet was not very consoling. But this is understandable since Ahijah was from the southern kingdom of Israel and hence was a heretic.

Mais il y a eu de tout le temps des prophètes chez les hérétiques. Jurieu l'était en Hollande; il prophétisa contre Louis XIV. Le nommé Montgeron prophétisa en faveur des jansénistes. Il y a des prophètes partout.\(^3\)

Throughout this analysis of Voltaire's comments on the Bible we have used the terms Biblical exegesis and Biblical criticism interchangeably. At this point a distinction should really be drawn between these two approaches to the Bible which are quite different. Casper says:

In contrast to Bible criticism, which assumes the right to amend the text and to analyse the various books of the Bible according to date, place and authorship, Biblical exegesis (or commentary) has accepted the traditional text and the traditional teaching as to authorship and similar questions and has striven to explain the word of the text and to derive from them moral teaching.\(^4\)

In viewing the interpretive remarks of the classical Jewish and Christian Bible scholars it becomes apparent that they were indulging in Biblical commentary and exegesis. Rashi, Ibn Ezra, the Kimchis, Augustine, Origen, Carrière—all accepted the traditional view of the

\(^1\) Although the request was for one hundred, two hundred were collected.

\(^2\) Mol., XXX, p. 181. \(^3\) Ibid., p. 215. \(^4\) Casper, op. cit., p. 113.
Bible as being a divinely inspired book and any remarks they had to make about Scripture were consonant with the seriousness of their reverent approach. Biblical criticism, however, gives to itself the privilege of deciding whether a given text of the Bible is authentic and deems it proper to amend the same text if necessary.¹

Can Voltaire be considered one of the progenitors in the field of Biblical criticism? There is evidence to support the thesis that there is a tangential relationship between Voltaire and those who made great strides in Biblical research particularly in Germany. La Bible Enfin Expliquée, although its scholarship is marred by subjectivity and personal if brilliant sarcasm, was the first example in the genre of Bible commentaries to depart from the traditional acceptance of divine authorship. Voltaire's many discussions of the redaction of various books, his many cogent comments on Biblical incongruities and contradictions point to Voltaire as being perhaps an important if as yet unrecognized figure in the history of the development of Biblical criticism.

As a work of satire La Bible Enfin Expliquée derives its greatness from Voltaire's exploitation of certain techniques of Biblical criticism. The étalage of distinguished names, the feigned orthodoxy, the irreverent historical parallels, the perverse moral lessons which Voltaire abstracts from Scripture—these are the elements which contribute to a brilliant work of satire.

¹Biblical criticism as seen in this light began in Germany during the latter part of the nineteenth century when people like Graf, Kittel and Welhausen began to dissect what they considered various strata of Biblical epochs. The latter in particular devoted his efforts to disentangling what he considered were the historical processes that produced the religion and literature of Israel. But in each case the approach of these men was scholarly rather than devotional.
CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF DOM CALMET

In Gustave Lanson's *Voltaire* the following passage appears: "Il faut lire dom Calmet pour s'expliquer Voltaire. ... Le ridicule dont Voltaire couvrit la Bible est tout entier dans dom Calmet: il ne demandait qu'à être exploité."¹ Who is dom Calmet and how did he influence Voltaire's criticism of the Bible?

Born at Mesnil-la-Horgne on February 26, 1672, dom Augustin Calmet seemed destined for the church from infancy. At age seventeen he entered the priory of Breuil which was attached to the congregation of Saint-Vanne. After a thorough preparation for the priesthood he went to the abbey of Munster where he acquired a prodigious background in Hebrew and Greek. While teaching at the abbey of Moyen-Moutier Calmet spent his free time gathering material for a projected commentary on the Bible.

His *Commentaire litteral sur tous les livres de L'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament*, published in 1724, was the French version of the Latin original. This exhaustive Bible commentary enjoyed a wide vogue in Europe. Editions were published in Venice, Frankfort, Strasburg, Augsburg and Wurtzburg. In addition to this monumental study of the Bible, Calmet also wrote a Dictionary of the Bible and a work on

vampires.\textsuperscript{1} In his old age he retired to the abbey of Senones and died in 1757. His entire outlook on life is summed up in the epitaph he authored himself.

Frater Augustinus Calmet  
\textit{Nations Gallus, religione catholico-romanus}  
\textit{Professione monachus, nomine abbas}  
\textit{Multum legit, scripsit, oravit}  
\textit{Utinam bene!}

Voltaire's acquaintance with Calmet dates from 1736 where the latter is referred to mockingly in \textit{Le Mondain}.\textsuperscript{2} After an exchange of polite letters Voltaire visited Calmet at Senones in 1754. When Calmet passed away in 1757 Voltaire wrote a touching tribute to Calmet in a letter to dom Fange. But Calmet's death appears to have been the signal for Voltaire to speak more truthfully about his opinions of the scholarly priest. In the article "Vampires" in the 1772 edition of the \textit{Dictionnaire philosophique} Voltaire states,

Calmet enfin devient leur historiographe et traite les vampires comme il avait traite l'Ancien et le Nouveau

\textsuperscript{1}Dissertation sur les apparitions, des démons et des esprits, et sur les revenants et vampires de Hongrie, de Bohême, de Moravie et de Silésie (Paris, 1746, in-12). As to Voltaire's knowledge of Calmet's works, Andrew Morehouse in \textit{Voltaire and Jean Meslier}, Yale University Press (New Haven, 1936), p. 9, says, "Voltaire possessed most of Calmet's works in his library. The \textit{Commentaire litteral} . . . and the \textit{Dissertations qui peuvent servir de prolegomènes de l'écriture sainte} (Paris, 1722), are full of markers and marginalia." These works are also listed as part of Voltaire's library by Havens and Torrey's Catalog of Voltaire's Library at Ferney, in \textit{Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century}, edited by Theodore Besterman, Vol. IX.

\textsuperscript{2}C'est bien en vain que, par l'orgueil séduits,/ Huet, Calmet,  
dans leur savante audace / Du paradis ont recherché la place / Le paradis  
terrestre est où je suis.
Testament, rapportant fidèlement tout ce qui avait été dit avant lui.  

Voltaire's use of Calmet's Bible commentary dates from his stay at Cirey. Professor Wade explains:

Moreover, in his Commentary he attracted peculiarly the attention of the Cirey coterie in two respects. He was thorough, examining "tous les livres" and he was "litteral". Hence for anyone wishing to examine the whole Bible and to oppose its literal interpretation, Dom Calmet was an opponent worthy of the greatest consideration.  

Calmet is undoubtedly the major source for Voltaire's La Bible Enfin Expliquée. A study of the pentateuchal portion of the work indicates that Voltaire followed Calmet not only in information but in format as well. Calmet quotes the Church Fathers, Voltaire quotes the Church Fathers. Calmet reconciles alleged incongruities in the Biblical text by calling upon the infallibility of the Church; Voltaire feigns an even greater credulity. Calmet explains Hebrew terms; Voltaire cites the same explanation.  

In the pentateuchal commentary Voltaire is faithful in quoting Calmet correctly. Occasionally he adds or subtracts a little from the

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2 Ira O. Wade, Voltaire and Madame Du Châtelet, Princeton University Press (Princeton, 1941), p. 109. In Rene Pomeau's La Religion de Voltaire, Nizet (Paris, 1956), p. 164, Madame du Châtelet is quoted as saying, "Dom Calmet, qui est quelquefois si sense ... Dom Calmet qui dans tout le reste de son commentaire est aussi raisonnable qu'il s'est permis à un moine de l'être, et qui l'est quelquefois même plus qu'on n'oserait l'espérer. ..."

3 Calmet's name is mentioned textually twenty-eight times in the pentateuchal portion, nine times in Genesis, five in Exodus, four in Leviticus, six in Numbers and three times in Deuteronomy.
original source but there is no attempt at deliberate misquotation. On the other hand Voltaire does not hesitate to manipulate Calmet's erudition in such a way that Calmet's pious interpretations become arguments for the debunkers of the Bible. When Calmet innocently mentions that the name Bethlehem became Ephrata only after the entry of the Jews into Canaan, Voltaire utilizes this information to support an unwarranted assumption.

Ce que dit le texte de la ville d'Ephrata et du bourg de Bathléem donne encore occasion aux critiques de dire que Moïse n'a pu écrire le Pentateuque. Leur raison est que la ville d'Ephrata ne reçut ce nom que de Caleb, du temps de Josué, et que ni Bethléem ni Jérusalem n'existaient encore. Bethléem reçut ce nom de la femme de Caleb, qui se nommait Ephrata.¹

Voltaire's use of Calmet in his criticism of the Pentateuch has another purpose. Although Calmet's commentary contains a wealth of information and an astonishing erudition it is marked by a credulity which appears somewhat ingenuous in our own day. For Calmet the Bible was the divine word of God. Since God's word is perfect there can be no error therein. All attempts to suggest that there are incongruities or contradictions in the Biblical text are summarily rejected by Calmet. For Calmet the authority of the Church Fathers was final in all matters of interpretation. But in fairness to Calmet it should be pointed out that he did realize the presence of certain difficulties in the Biblical text. These difficulties, however, he believed could usually be attributed to a faute de copiste or a redactor whose enthusiasm or carelessness led to occasional exaggeration. In referring to the story in

¹Mol., III, p. 53.
Genesis about a race of giants Calmet spends eleven folio pages in his "Dissertation sur les geans" to authenticate the story of this race. He quotes twenty-two different authorities, both ancient and modern, to support this contention. Torquemada, for example, records that a human tooth was found at Loria the size of a man's fist. Richard Simon describes an excavation in which a human bone was found which had a circumference of two feet.

After what we have said, it seems that one cannot longer disagree that there was another race of giants in large numbers in almost all parts of the world; that if one does not see them more commonly today, that from one part, the vengeance of God did not wish to suffer them until the end of their crimes and their violence.

To Voltaire, the apostle of reason, belief in giants was absurd. And he uses the fanciful information supplied by Calmet to ridicule the Biblical story. Of course, his method is not blatant. The raillerie is seen in the feigned credulity, in the attempt to have the reader think that Voltaire is more Catholic than the Pope. In discussing the problem of giants Voltaire alludes to Calmet as the final authority on the question.

Le R. P. dom Calmet nous instruit qu'on trouva de son temps le corps du géant Teutobocus; mais sa taille n'approchait celle du géant Anthée; celle du géant Og était aussi très-médiocre en comparaison: son lit n'était que de treize pieds et demi.

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2. Ibid., p. XXIX.

3. Ibid., p. XXXII. All quotations from Calmet appear with the original orthography.

4. Mol., XXX, p. 16.
Voltaire's use of Calmet in his pentateuchal criticism is, therefore, highly ironic. Calmet as an orthodox Christian viewed the Hebrew Bible as the preparation for the New Testament. Jesus, the Messiah, was for him the fruition of the Hebrew religion. This led Calmet to engage in what is known as "allegorizing" and "symbolizing," that is, seeing references to the New Testament symbolically in the Old. This unhistorical method of criticism irked Voltaire. In the Bible story of Isaac, Voltaire poses certain questions concerning Isaac's age, whereupon he comments:

Toutes ces choses sont au-dessus de la nature humaine telle qu'elle est aujourd'hui. Saint Paul, dans l'Epître aux Galates, dit que Sara est la figure de l'Eglise. Le R. P. dom Calmet assure qu'Isaac est la figure de Jésus-Christ, et qu'on ne peut pas s'y méprendre.¹

Calmet's insistence upon seeing references to the Church and to Jesus even in the most neutral passages occasioned perhaps what is the most caustic of Voltaire's allusions to Calmet. In La Bible Enfin Expliqüée, Voltaire devotes thirty-one lines to his discussion of the prostitution of Thamar. He then points out that Thamar's incestuous relationship with her father led ultimately to the birth of Jesus Christ. Voltaire calls upon Calmet:

Ce n'est pas sans de bonnes raisons, dit le R. P. dom Calmet, que le Saint-Esprit a permis l'histoire de Thamar, de Rahab, de Ruth, et de Bethzabée, se trouvent dans la généalogie de Jésus-Christ.²

While the quotation ends here in Voltaire's Bible commentary, there is an addition to this quotation which also appears in the article

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 36. ² Ibid., p. 57.
"Onanisme" in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*. There, the following words appear:

Il eût été à souhaiter que dom Calmet nous eût développé ces bonnes raisons.¹

The Pentateuch portion of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* bears the mark of dom Calmet on almost every page. But Voltaire’s superficial orthodoxy is a parody of Calmet’s sincere convictions. For factual information Voltaire is heavily indebted to Calmet. The ubiquitous references to the Church Fathers found in Voltaire’s commentary come from Calmet. The same is true for the explanation of Hebrew terms. Symbolic figures seen in the Old Testament, although always cited maliciously by Voltaire, show direct borrowings from Calmet. In conclusion, the pentateuchal portion of the *Bible Enfin Expliquée* is, in a sense, the erudition of Calmet,² assimilated through the mind of Voltaire with his ironic and cynical accretions. Acting as a catalytic agent Voltaire’s wit transformed Calmet’s pedantry into readable and lively prose.

Calmet and the non-pentateuchal portions of the Old Testament

While Calmet is quoted by name twenty-eight times in the Pentateuch portion, Voltaire mentions him by name forty-five times in the

¹Mol., XX, p. 134.
²Pomeau, *op. cit.*, p. 163, presents the following *éloge* of the *Commentaire*: "Ce Commentaire qui suit le texte sacré verset par verset était une véritable encyclopédie biblique, la meilleure qui existât en son temps; il n’est que de comparer ce trésor de science avec l’*Histoire du peuple de Dieu* du P. Berruyer, verleuse et mal informée, qui connut pourtant un grand succès au dix-huitième siècle."
other references to the Old Testament. This means that in 158 pages of
the non-pentateuchal portion, Calmet's name appears almost every three
pages. This attests to Voltaire's dependence upon the sagacious
Benedictine. The quotations from Calmet are far more lengthy in this
section. Let us analyze Voltaire's use of these quotations and attempt
to ascertain their reliability and accuracy.

On the first page dealing with the book of Joshua Voltaire mentions
Calmet on the interpretation of the Hebrew word zonah. Calmet's text
will appear on the right, while Voltaire's reference will be found on
the left.

La plupart des Interprètes
attachez aux Rabbins, prétendent
que Rahab étoit simplement une
hotellière, qui recevait chez
elle les étrangers; ils avouent
que souvent le terme Hébreu zonah,
se prend pour une femme de
mauvaise vie; mais ils veulent
qu'ici il signifie une personne
qui vend à manger, qui reçoit
chez elle les étrangers, ... ²

M. Fréret traite Calmet d'imbécile,
et se moque de lui de ce qu'il perd
son temps à examiner si le mot
zonah signifie toujours une femme
débauchée, une prostituee, une
gueuse, et si Rahab ne pourrait
pas être regardée seulement comme
une cabaretière.¹

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 121. In his Preface to Voltaire and Jean Meslier
Professor Morehouse says: "I am aware of the importance of parallel
texts as evidence of influence and of the emphasis that I have given to
them. In a movement as great and sustained as was the critical attack
against Christianity inevitable similarities and phraseology appear which
are often impossible to trace to their source. This is especially true
in the case of Voltaire whose ideas were often drawn from the deep and
wide reservoir of European literature. Meslier, however, presents a
special case." I would most certainly add Calmet's name to that of
Meslier. Actually as this study will show, Calmet was far more important
than Meslier for the source of Voltaire's information on the Bible.

² Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 7.
Calmet does discuss the term zonah, but most of his remarks are citations from various rabbinical authorities.

Their respective comments on Rahab and her actions (Joshua 2:4) warrant observation.

Dom Calmet examine aussi avec beau-
coup d'attention si cette cabaretière ne fut pas coupable d'un petit men-
songe en disant que les espions juifs étaient partis, lorsqu'ils étaient chez elle; il prétend qu'elle fit une très-bonne action. "Était informée,
dit-il, du dessein de Dieu, qui voulait détruire les Chanaanéens et livrer leur pays aux Hébreux, elle n'y pouvait résister sans tomber dans le même crime de rébellion à l'égard de Dieu qu'elle aurait voulu éviter envers sa patrie; de plus, elle était persuadée des justes prétentions de Dieu: ainsi elle ne pouvait prendre un parti ni plus équitable, ni plus conforme aux lois de la sagesse."

Mais on en jugera autrement, si l'on fait attention que Rahab étant formée de dessein de Dieu, qui voulait détruire les Cananéens, & leur livrer leur pays aux Hébreux, n'y pouvait résister sans tomber dans le même crime de rébellion à l'égard de Dieu qu'elle aurait voulu éviter envers sa patrie. De plus elle eût persuadée des justes prétentions des Hébreux, & de l'injustice des Cananéens; d l'équité des armes de ceux-la, & de l'injuste résistance de ceux-ci; ainsi elle ne pouvait prendre un parti ni plus équitable, ni plus conforme aux lois de la sagesse.

In this application of Calmet's remarks Voltaire omits an important element in the latter's explanation of Rahab's action. That is, De plus elle eût persuadée des justes prétentions des Hébreux, & de l'injustice des Cananéens. The reference to the "rain of stones" (Joshua 10) evokes the following quotations.

Toute l'antiquité a parlé de pluie de pierres. La première est celle que Jupiter enjoya au secours d'Hercule contre les fils de Neptune. Dom Calmet assure que "c'est un fait constant qu'on a vu autrefois de fort grosses pierres s'enflammer en l'air et retomber sur la terre, et puisque c'est un fait constant, qu'on a vu autrefois de fort grosses pierres s'enflammer dans l'air et tomber ensuite sur la terre, & qu'il est tombé aussi des pluies de pierres dans plusieurs endroits, on ne peut raisonnablement révoquer en doute le prodige raconté dans Josué: il n'est pas plus impossible que les autres prodiges que tout le monde reconnoit & reçoit pour

1Mol., XXX, p. 121. 2Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 10.
qu'on ne peut raisonnablement révoquer en doute le prodige raconté par Josué.1

Calmet really says much more than Voltaire attributes to him. It is obvious from Calmet's remarks that he is trying to show that one does not always have to have recourse to miracles to explain seemingly unnatural occurrences in nature.

Joshua's miraculous action stopping the sun has precipitated much discussion by Bible scholars. Voltaire questions the scientific aspect of this miracle (Joshua 10:14) and says:

Les physiciens ont quelque peine à expliquer comment le soleil, qui ne marche pas, arrêta sa course; et comment cette journée, qui fut le double des autres journées, put s'accorder avec le mouvement des planètes et la regularité des éclipses. Le R. P. dom Calmet dit "qu'il ne fallait que faire aller d'une vitesse égale, pardessus et par-dessous la terre, la matière céleste qui la frotte par là, en l'avancant d'un côté et le retardant de l'autre; le tournoiement de la terre sur son centre ne venait que de l'inégalité de ce frottement." Cette réponse ingénieuse, savante, et nette ne resout pas entièrement la question.2

Voltaire's criticism of the Biblical account of the sun's stopping as reported in Joshua is based on the eighteenth century realization that the earth revolves around the sun and not vice versa. While the

1 Mol., XXX, p. 127.
2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. XV. All references to Biblical passages follow Hebrew system of numbering.
3 Mol., III, p. 128.  
4 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. XII.
defenders of Biblical tradition could explain the difficulty in terms of Biblical style, Calmet certainly avoids the real physical problems involved in the stopping of the sun. His interpretation is obviously too facile.

The reference to the *livre du Droiture* in Joshua produces these comments.

Cela démontre, dit-il (Bolingbroke), que c'est du livre de Droiture que l'histoire de Josué est prise. Mais ce même livre du Droiture est cité dans le second livre des Chroniques des rois. Or comment le même livre peut-il avoir été écrit du temps des rois et avant Josué? Cette difficulté est grande. Dom Calmet y répond en disant que ce livre est entièrement perdu.¹

The quotation from Calmet is correct. But the impression is conveyed by Voltaire that Calmet was actually answering the question posed by Voltaire. Naturally this answer appears irrelevant. But a perusal of Calmet's context indicates that the latter was merely trying to establish the origin of the *livre du Droiture*. Calmet does not investigate any chronological incongruity.

The whereabouts of the indigenous peoples of Palestine after their rout by Joshua has perplexed Biblical scholars for years. Africa appears to have been a popular haven.

The R. P. dom Calmet avoue que "l'opinion qui a le plus d'apparence et de partisans est celle qui place les Cananéens dans l'Afrique. Elle se trouve dans les plus anciens Livres."

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 128. The reference to Bolingbroke is mine.

² Calmet, *op. cit.*., XX, p. 58.
Procope veut que les Cananéens s'étant d'abord retirez en Egypte, craignant les armes de Josué, y aient vécu quelque temps, mais qu'enfin s'étant multipliez, & étant devenus trop nombreux pour le terrain qui leur avait été cédé, ils furent obligez de changer de demeure, & de s'en aller dans le fond de l' Afrique, ... On voit dans la tres-ancienne ville de Tingis qu'ils y bâtirent, on y voit, dit toujours Procope, deux grandes colonnes de pierres blanches dresses pres de la grande Fontaine, avec une inscription en caractères Phéniciens, qui porte: Nous sommes des peuples qui avons pris la fuite devant le voleur Jésus fils de Nave.2

The alleged sacrifice of Jephtnah's daughter has been hotly debated by commentators. Jephthah's profession, as well, has not been clearly ascertained.

Que par consequent aucune jurisprudence n'était encore établie chez le peuple juif; qu'il n'y eut jamais de véritables lois dans ce temps-là, parmi ces peuples vagabonds, que la loi du partage des dépouilles; et qu'enfin toute cette histoire n'est qu'un récit confus de vol et de brigandages. Calmet sur ce passage de Jephté, avoue expressément que "le nom de voleur n'était pas aussi odieux autrefois qu'aujourd'hui". Aucune de ces raisons pour et contre ne détruit le grand principe que Dieu donne les biens a qui il lui plait. C'est là, selon notre avis, le grand dénouement qui résout toutes les difficultés des incrédules.3

1 Mol., XXX, 131.  2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. XVIII.
Voltaire's failure to mention Calmet's explanation that voleur could also be applied to mercenaries makes the priest-scholar appear petty and ludicrous. In a similar vein Voltaire quotes Calmet in an effort to demonstrate that Jephthah recognized the existence of two distinct deities.

Nos incrédules soutiennent que cette vérité est pleinement reconnue par Jephté. Ce que Chamos vous a donné est à vous, ce qu'Adonai nous a donné est à nous. Il n'a point de sophisme qui puisse détruire un aveu si clair et si clairement énoncé. Calmet dit que "c'est une figure de discours, qu'on appelle concession". Mais il n'y a point là de figure de discours, c'est un principe que Jephté établit nettement, et sur lequel il raisonne. Il faut ou rejeter entièrement le livre des Juges, ou convenir que Jephté admet deux dieux également puissants.¹

Although Calmet's argument from "concession" appears somewhat tenuous, Voltaire for his part exaggerates when he says that Jephthah had established a principe. This is a theological consideration which is out of place.

Voltaire spends a great deal of space discussing the alleged immolation of Jephthah's daughter. One objection he points to is Calmet's incorrect translation of the Vulgate text on Judges 11:39.

Calmet traduit tres-infidelement le texte par ces mots: "elle demeura vierge"; il y a "étant encore vierge, ignorant l'homme". Cette faute est d'autant plus

Latin text: Expletisque duobus mensibus, reversa est ad suum, & fecit ei fecit voverat, quae ignorabat virum. Exinde mos increbuit in Israel, & consuetudo servate est. Calmet's translation: Après les deux mois, elle revint trouver son pere, & il exécuta ce qu'il avait permis, & la

impardonnable à Calmet que, dans sa note it dit tout le contraire. La voix: "Il l'immola au seigneur; elle était encore vierge." Et dans sa dissertation sur le vœu de Jephthé, il avoue que cette fille fut immolée.  

Il fit mourir la fille, comme il l'avait promis; il l'immola au Seigneur, & cette fille étoit encore vierge, & n'avoit point été mariée.

It appears that both Voltaire and Calmet have taken some liberties with the Latin text. The pertinent passage in Latin, quae ignorabat virum, literally means, "she did not know a man." There is nothing to support Voltaire's étant vierge. On the other hand Calmet's la fille demeura vierge is also inaccurate from a literal point of view, but it does convey the same meaning. Although the words attributed to Calmet by Voltaire do indeed appear in the dissertation, they are found among several theories enunciated by the gentle scholar to explain what happened to the daughter. Calmet quotes the rabbinic tradition and that of the Church Fathers as well. He does not make an arbitrary decision as to which is the correct one.

Voltaire's purpose in dwelling upon the story of Jephthah's daughter is ostensibly to discredit the deity who could invoke such cruel justice upon a young child. In doing so he quotes every statement

1 Mol., XXX, pp. 142-143.  
3 Ibid., p. 243.  
4 The Hebrew text reads:  

The translation is: "And so it was at the end of two months, and she returned to her father, and he did to her the vow which he vowed, and she did not know a man, and it was to be a law (custom) in Israel." The Hebrew word for virgin (נָעָרָה) does not appear in this passage but it does in the preceding one. However, the idea is certainly inferred from the expression "she did not know a man."
by Calmet which might be construed as verifying the sacrifice of the child. But Voltaire omits those statements by Calmet which attempt to interpret the story more favorably. Voltaire, for example, could have cited the following passage.

Mais ces Loix sont cruelles, & l'exécution en paraît impie. Quoi Jéphé aura donc véritablement immolé sa propre fille, & un semblable vœu, une pareille action sera agréable au Seigneur? Je l'ai déjà dit, il ne s'agit que du fait, & du sens de la Loi... mais aussitôt qu'un homme a fait ces promesses, s'il les exécute à la lettre, il n'y a rien en cela d'injuste de la part de Dieu. ... Ainsi s'il y a du mal retombe sur ceux qui les font, & non pas sur le Seigneur, qui ne les approuve, ni ne les demande pas.¹

Stories of epic proportion narrated in the Bible are inevitably interpreted by Voltaire as quaint mythology. Samson's achievements evinces the following comments from Voltaire.

Il (Meslier) parle avec la même indécence de l'aventure des trois cents renards. Elle lui paraît un conte absurde, qui ne saurait même amuser les enfants les plus imbéciles. Calmet a beau dire que la populace de Rome faisait courir un renard avec un flambeau allumé sur le dos; ...²

When Voltaire states that Calmet a beau dire, one is tempted to interpret this as meaning, "since I have already made up my mind it is useless for Calmet to try to change it."

One area in which Voltaire's censure of Calmet appears to be totally justifiable is in the discussion of the destruction of the

¹Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 158. ²Mol., XXX, pp. 145-146.

indigenous inhabitants of Palestine by the Israelis. While Calmet is interested in ascertaining the accuracy of the number killed, Voltaire always concerns himself with the moral problem involved. Speaking of Samuel 6:19 we find:

Voltaire attacks Calmet where he is most vulnerable. The description of the massacre of the native inhabitants of Palestine was excellent fodder for Voltaire's contention that the morality of the ancient Israelites was more than simply reprehensible: it was barbaric. Moreover, the authorized Catholic interpreters of the Bible (like Calmet) didn't even feel the necessity of explaining this "un-christian" behavior.

In addition to showing how barbaric the Israelites were, Voltaire also sought to denigrate their priesthood. The priests, according to Voltaire, were the real culprits in ancient Judaism. Actually no more

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 164.  
than clever charlatans, these priests helped develop Judaism and were instrumental in the formulation of the Jewish canon. The reference in Samuel 9:7 is used by Voltaire to illustrate the immorality of the priesthood.

By juxtaposing the alleged views of Bolingbroke, Mallet and Huet, all deists, with that of Calmet, the latter emerges a poor second. Calmet's description of oriental customs indeed sounds plausible. But without the entire body of the text his remark on "respect" appears weak.

The anointing of Samuel (1 Samuel 10:1) brings the following utilization of Calmet's erudition by Voltaire.

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 167.

2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 383.
Juifs ne connussent point le verre; et il ne résout point cette question.\textsuperscript{1} Calmet may not have resolved the question in Voltaire's eyes, but he does give a thorough analysis of the probable composition of the vessel.

As to whether the Jews had the verre, Voltaire is quibbling over semantics. The Jews may not have had the eighteenth-century version of a verre but needless to say, they had something resembling it.

The reference to three hundred and thirty thousand soldiers in 1 Samuel 11:8 has, by the enormity of the number, called forth much comment by Biblical commentators. While the citation attributed to Calmet by Voltaire in the following passage is probably false, the passage from Calmet, quoted below, indicates the probability that he might have said such a thing elsewhere.\textsuperscript{3}

Nous avouons que le texte est embarrassant; qu'il faut distinguer les temps; que probablement les copistes ont fait des transpositions. Ce qui est vrai dans une année peut ne l'être pas dans une autre. Peut-être même ces trois cent trente mille soldats peuvent se réduire à trois mille; il est aisé de se méprendre aux chiffres. Le R. P. dom Calmet s'exprime en ces mots: "Il est fort croyable qu'il y a un peu d'exagération dans ce qui est dit de Saül et de Jonathas."\textsuperscript{4}

The only reference to exaggeration in the commentary to this passage in Calmet is the following: La crainte du Seigneur; ou plutôt une grande crainte, une frayeur extraordinaire. On ajoute le nom de Dieu aux choses on veut exagérer la grandeur.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1}Mol., XXX, p. 168. \textsuperscript{2}Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 388.

\textsuperscript{3}I have examined every line in the Commentaire littéral dealing with this passage but was unable to find the passage attributed to Calmet.

\textsuperscript{4}Mol., XXX, p. 170.

\textsuperscript{5}Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 396.
The question of the numbers involved is of secondary importance. The fact that Calmet admits to possible exaggeration in the Biblical text opens a tremendous breach in the wall erected against the alleged infallibility of the Bible. If there is exaggeration here, perhaps there is exaggeration elsewhere, perhaps everywhere! As it turns out this charge becomes almost a leitmotif in Voltaire's attacks on Calmet and on the Bible itself.

A question of numbers is likewise involved in the description (1 Samuel 13:5) of chariots possessed by the Israelite king.

M. Leclerc, Fréret, Boulanger, Mallet, Bolingbroke, Middleton, se récrient sur ces trente mille chariots de guerre. Le docteur Stackhouse, dans son Histoire de la Bible, rejette ce passage. "Calmet dit que ce nombre de chariots de guerre parait incroyable à bien des gens; on n'en a jamais tant vu à la fois. Pharaon Roi d'Egypte ayant rassemblé tous les chariots de son pays pour poursuivre les Israélites, n'en avoit pointant que six cents; au moins l'Écriture n'en exprime que ce nombre. Jabin Roi d'Asor n'en avoit que neuf cents: Salomon quatorze cents; Sésac Roi d'Egypte, douze cents; Zarar Roi d'Ethiopie, dont l'armée étot d'un million d'hommes, n'avoit que trois cents chariots. Le Syriaque & l'Arabe ne lisent que trois mille chariots, au lieu de trente mille; & de très-habiles Critiques croient qu'il faut s'en tenir à ce nombre, le Texte original ayant apparemment été altéré par l'addition de deux lettres.²

Calmet's allusion to a faute de copiste is in the same category as exaggeration, and once again opens up the way for Voltaire to question not only this passage but every other passage as to whether there is not a faute de copiste involved. To admit that the text has been altered,

as does Calmet, in essence, threatens the veracity of the entire Biblical narrative. Voltaire is alert enough to use this argument the very next time he quotes Calmet.

Le même M. Huet re récrit ici sur la contradiction et sur l'anachronisme: dans d'autres endroits, dit-il, l'Écriture marque que Saul régnait quarante ans. Il est vrai qu'il y a la une apparence de contradiction; et dom Calmet lui-même n'a pu concilier les textes. Il se peut qu'il y ait là une erreur de copiste. Il ya peu d'endroits dans l'Écriture qui soient plus obscurs que celui-ci; on peut juger de son obscurité par les divers sens qu'on a cherché pour l'expliquer. Les uns croient qu'il manque une lettre dans le texte Hébreu, & que cette lettre marquait l'âge de Saul; ensorte qu'il faudrait traduire ainsi: Saul étot âgé de ... ans, lorsqu'il commença à régner, & il régna deux ans sur Israël; ou bien supposer le nombre de ses années de cette sorte: Saul étot âgé de trente ou quarante ans; ...

Although Voltaire's allusion to an erreur de copiste is well taken in light of Calmet's efforts here to explain the text by resorting to the alleged absence of a Hebrew letter, the statement dom Calmet lui-même n'a pu concilier les textes, is merely an opinion. As a matter of fact, Calmet does present a rather plausible explanation.

Voici la manière qui nous paroit la plus juste & la plus naturelle de traduire ce passage si difficile. On doit le considérer & comme la conclusion du Chapitre précédent, & comme le préambule, ou si l'on veut, l'époque de ce qui suit. Saul étot fils de l'année de son règne; il avoit été fait Roi cette année dans l'assemblée de Galgal; cette assemblée se tint la première année de son élection.

The mention of Calmet by Voltaire in his comments on 1 Samuel 12-14 shows that Voltaire was quite liberal in his interpretation of what Calmet said.

1 Mol., XXX, p. 170. The passage under discussion is 1 Samuel 13:1.

2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 401. 3 Ibid., p. 402.
M. Huet de Londres déclare que Samuel ne découvre ici que sa mauvaise volonté. Il prétend, avec Estius et Calmet, que Samuel n'était point grand-prêtre, qu'il n'était que prêtre et prophète; que Saul l'était comme lui, qu'il avait prophétisé dès qu'il avait étéoint, et qu'il était en droit d'offrir l'holocauste. Les Rois Hébreux n'ont pas cru outrepasser leur pouvoir de faire quelquesfois des fonctions, qui paraissent propres aux Prêtres surtout avant la construction du Temple. ... Les anciens Rois des nations étaient toujours Sacrificateurs; le Sacerdoce était un privilège attaché à leur dignité.

Although Calmet mentions that the role of priest was a prerogative of kings, he makes no reference to Samuel being merely a priest rather than a grand-prêtre. Although Voltaire may be using Estius alone for this information, his use of the two names suggests that both agree on the material.

The reference to red hair in 1 Samuel 16:12 provides Voltaire with the opportunity of quoting Calmet and then disputing the Benedictine's view.

Calmet observe que c'était une beauté chez les Juifs d'être roux, que l'époux ou l'amant de Cantique des Cantiques était rousseau. Nous ne sommes pas de cette opinion. L'amant du Cantique des cantiques était d'un blanc mêlé de rouge, candidus et rubicundus. On peut l'entendre d'un teint vif, ardent, sanguin, plein de feu; ou des cheveux roux, & doréz. L'Hébreu lit: ... II était rouge avec la beauté des yeux. On lit qu'Alexandre le Grand avait des cheveux dorés, & entortillez en anneau. Bochart soutient que David etoit roux. L'épouse du Cantique dit que son bien-aimé etoît blanc & rubicond, ou blanc & roux, comme ici David.

It appears here that Voltaire is guilty of a too cursory look at Calmet's comments. He probably read only to Calmet's translation of the Hebrew term and stopped there, neglecting the follow-up comment which neutralizes the polemical nature of the former's statement.

3Mol., XXX, p. 176.
4Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 424. The translation from the Hebrew is correct.
The springboard for Voltaire's harshest attacks on Calmet was the latter's orthodox interpretation of the various assassinations and murders recorded in the books of the kings of Israel. Speaking of 1 Samuel 15:32:

Plusieurs personnes excusent les empor­tements du lord Bolingbroke quand ils lisent ce passage. Un prêtre, un mini­stre de paix, un homme qui serait souillé pour avoir touché seulement un corps mort, couper en morceaux comme on coupe un poulet à table! ... Calmet dit que "le zèle arma Samuel dans cette occasion pour venger la gloire du Seigneur"; il veut dire apparemment la justice. Peut-être qu'Agag avait mérité la mort, car quelle gloire peut revenir à Dieu de ce qu'un prêtre coupe un souverain en morceaux? Nous tremblons en examinant cette barbarie absurde: adorons la Providence sans raisonner.¹

Once again Calmet speaks of the murder of thousands of men without dwelling whatsoever upon the moral problem involved. He does not appear to see any contradiction between the events chronicled in the book of Samuel and the idea of a just and moral God. For Voltaire a cardinal attribute of God would be his righteousness. A righteous God could not "arm Samuel with zeal" in order to massacre thousands of men, whether they were guilty or not.

Most of Voltaire's information on Hebrew customs, terms, and musical instruments, comes from Calmet. But it is interesting to note how Voltaire quotes Calmet to ridicule him!

¹Mol., XXX, pp. 175-176. ²Calmet, p. 422.
Les commentateurs exaltent ici le pouvoir de la musique. Calmet remarque que Terpandre apaisa une séditation en jouant de la lyre; et il cite Henri Estienne, qui vit dans la Tour d'Angleterre un lion quitter son dîner pour entendre un violon. Ces exemples sont assez étrangers à la maladie de Saul.¹

The citation from Calmet presented here is only a small segment of his comments on the efficacy of music in soothing savage beasts. But the interminable digressions and the tendentious nature of the remarks lends the reader to wondering, as does Voltaire, whether all these citations are not really irrelevant?

The female wonder-worker, the sorceress of Endor, described in 1 Samuel 28:7-11, evokes what is perhaps Voltaire's most humorous gibe at Calmet.

Origène est fortement persuadé que la pythônisse d'Endor fit venir Samuel en corps et en âme. ... Le plus grand nombre des commentateurs croit que le diable apparut sous la figure de Samuel. Nous ne prenons parti ni pour ni contre le diable. ... Le R. P. dom Calmet prouve la vérité de l'histoire de la pythônisse par l'exemple d'un Anglais qui avait le secret de parler du ventre. M. Boulanger dit que Calmet devait s'en tenir à ses vampires.³

On raconte d'un certain Farming qui vivait en Angleterre en 1645, qu'il avait le secret de parler du ventre, en sorte que ceux au milieu desquels il etoit, & avec qu'il s'entretenoit, s'entendoient quelquefois appeler comme de fort loin, quoique ce fut lui qui parlât.⁴

Voltaire utilizes Calmet for his information on priests. Commenting on 1 Samuel 8:18 we find:

Des commentateurs que Calmet a suivis prétendent que prêtres signifie princes. Il est plus probable que David voulut joindre dans sa maison le sacerdoce avec l’empire: rien n’est plus politique. Au reste, ces mots étaient prêtres n’ont aucun rapport avec ce qui suit: c’est une marque assez commune de l’inspiration.1

Working from the same basic information, Voltaire and Calmet arrive at different interpretations. For Calmet, the problem is textual. For Voltaire, the problem is of a uniquely political nature.

The question of exaggeration in the Bible is the weak link in Calmet’s exegetical chain. Having once admitted the possibility of overstatement, Calmet leaves himself open for a sustained attack by Voltaire on this very point. By the second book of Samuel Voltaire is using the argument from exaggeration under Calmet’s name. The reference is to II Samuel 12:31.

On prétend qu’un talent d’or pesait environ quatre-vingt-dix de nos livres de seize onces; il n’est guère possible qu’un homme ait porté un tel diadème; il aurait accablé Polyphème et Goliath. C’est là où Calmet pouvait dire encore que l’auteur sacré se permet quelques exagérations. Le diadème, d’ailleurs, n’était qu’un petit bandeau.3

Equally biting is the following quotation from Calmet.

Il est à souhaiter que les inconcevables barbaries exercées sur les citoyens de

Il est à prêsumer que David ne suivit en cela que les lois communes de la guerre de ce temps-là; ou que les

Although Calmet discusses the moral implications here, he dismisses them in terms of contemporary laws of war.

The mention of a He-mule in II Samuel 13:29 is the signal for Calmet to display his prodigious erudition on matters relating to animals and genetics. In the following quotations Voltaire shows that Calmet had little practical knowledge of the problem.

C'est la première fois que l'Écriture parle de mules dans l'histoire juive. Tous les princes d'Israël, avant ce temps, sont montés sur des ânes. Le R. P. dom Calmet dit que "les mules de Syrie ne sont pas produits de l'accouplement d'un âne et d'une jument, et qu'ils sont engendrés d'un mulet et d'une mule." Il cite Aristote; "mais il vaudrait mieux, sur cette affaire, consulter un bon muletier". Nous avons vu plusieurs voyageurs qui assurent qu'Aristote s'est trompé, Calmet. Il n'y a point de naturaliste aujourd'hui qui croit aux prétendues races de mules produites par des actions précédentes, qui ne nous fussent point connues, ce qui est certain, c'est que l'Écriture ne reproche rien sur cela à David, & qu'elle lui rend même un témoignage expres que, hors le fait d'Urie, sa conduite a été irréprochable. Il ne faut donc pas condamner légèrement une chose, dont nous n'avons pas assez de connoissance, pour en porter un jugement sur & exact.

1 Mol., XXX, p. 193.

2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 549.
mulets.¹ ils sont plus forts que le cheval, & plus vites que le mulet ordinaire, quoique d'ailleurs ils lui ressemblent assez par leur forme.²

Although Voltaire is correct in ascribing to Calmet his views on the breeding of mules, Calmet does not quote Aristotle. One cannot always depend on Voltaire for the accuracy of comments he ascribes to others.

In the very quotation cited above Voltaire neglects to mention that his information on la première fois comes directly from Calmet.

In commenting upon the action of David, recorded in II Samuel 21:6, Calmet excuses his violence on the grounds that it was a divine behest.

For Voltaire this was the acme of injustice towards the God of justice he venerated.

De quelque côté qu'on se tourne, on ne trouve dans toute cette histoire que l'assemblage de tous les crimes, de toutes les perfidies, de toutes les infamies, au milieu de toutes les contradictions. ... Ces reproches sanglants font dresser les cheveux à la tête. Le R. P. dom Calmet repousse ces invectives en disant que "David avait l'ordre de la part de Dieu, qu'il avait consulté, et que la volonté de Dieu"; et il cite Ce qui embarrasse le plus c'est que Dieu fait retomber sur tout le peuple, une faute qui étoit personnelle à Saül. Dieu ne veut pas qu'on punisse les enfants, pour les pères, ni les pères pour les enfants; & cependant il châtie non-seulement la famille de Saül, mais tout Israël, pour le crime de ce Prince. On répond à cela, que Dieu est toujours en droit de donner, ou de ne pas donner, d'accorder, ou d'ôter à sa créature, certains biens extérieurs. ... David consulta sans doute de nouveau le Seigneur par ses Prophètes, ou par le grand-Prêtre, s'il accorderoit aux Gabanites ce qu'ils demandoient; ou bien il avoit l'ordre de la part de Dieu, dès la première fois qu'il l'avoit consulte de faire tout ce qu'ils voudroient. Sans cela, à quoi se seroit-il

¹ Mol., XXX, pp. 194-195.
² Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 553.
Estius, Grotius, et les Antiquités de Flavius Josephe.  

expose? Et n'auroit-on pas cru dans tout Israël qu'il auroit voulu, sous ces pre-textes se défaire tout d'un coup de la famille de Saul. David ne fut ici que l'exécuteur de la volonté de Dieu.  

The quotation from Calmet which appears in Voltaire's comments is only a small portion of the remarks devoted to the question of the massacre. As a result of this, the reader gets the distinct impression that Calmet is quite inelastic about this problem, when in fact, his comments attest to a certain uneasiness on his part. Calmet's God is not subject to human laws. Voltaire's God is limited by them. From this weltanschauung Calmet is able to accept all of God's actions recorded in the Bible. For the same reason Voltaire must criticize the God whose behavior goes against what is the accepted moral norm.

The reference to famine recorded in II Samuel 24:13 provides an example of an allusion to Calmet and at the same time a criticism of his arguments without even citing the argument. The autres objections mentioned by Voltaire are probably concerned with the cause and duration of the famine.

Nous ne sommes pas de l'avis de M. Fréret. Nous pensons qu'Esdras lui même ne connut jamais les Grecs, et que jusqu'au temps d'Alexandre il n'y eut jamais le moindre commerce entre la Grèce et la Palestine. Ce n'est pas que quelque Juif ne put, des

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 199.

2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 593. Calmet's footnotes to this page show: Vide Est. & Grot. hic. & Joseph. Antiqu. lib. 7, c, 10, 12. Grotius Estius, Vatable. This indicates that Voltaire read not only the text but the notes.
Whether Calmet has answered the questions *trop facilement*, is in the realm of opinion. In actual fact Calmet's case is quite plausible.

The unusual means of resuscitation alluded to in 1 King 1 quite naturally calls forth much comment from Voltaire and Calmet. The spectacle of king David being revived physically through contact with a young girl evokes the following comments:

Le R. P. dom Calmet observe qu'une jeune fille fort belle est très-propre à ranimer un homme de soixante et dix ans; c'était alors l'âge de David. Il dit qu'un médecin juif conseilla à l'empereur Frédéric Barberousse de coucher avec de jeunes garçons, et de les mettre sur sa poitrine. Mais on ne peut pas toute la nuit tenir sur la poitrine un jeune garçon. On emploie, ajoute-t-il, de petits chiens au même usage. Il faut que Salomon crut que son père avait mis la belle Abisag à un autre usage, puisqu'il fit assassiner (comme nous le verrons) son frère aîné Adonias pour lui avoir demandé Abisag en mariage, comme s'il avait voulu épouser la veuve ou la concubine de son père.3

Les Médecins, dit Joseph, & après lui, quelques Interprètes, jugèrent qu'il falloit lui donner une jeune personne pour l'échauffer, puisque les secours extérieurs ne lui servoient de rien. ... L'empereur Barberousse sur la fin de sa vie, fut conseillé par un Médecin Juif de tenir continuellement de jeunes garçons sur la poitrine, pour l'échauffer. On emploie quelquefois de petits chiens au même usage.4

Here Voltaire quotes Calmet faithfully yet adds a malicious note which does not appear in Calmet's text.

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 200.  
2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 609.  
3 Mol., XXX, p. 201.  
4 Calmet, op. cit., II, pp. 635-636.
David's punishment of Joab found in 1 Kings 2:6 evokes one of the few instances where Voltaire quotes Calmet accurately and almost without comment.

Yet in spite of the care in quoting Calmet properly, Voltaire negates the force of Calmet's explanation through the use of the introductory remarks, ces paroles remarquables, which in Voltaire's lexicon means, absurd remarks! By this time the reader is so accustomed to Voltaire's quoting Calmet ironically, that the introduction appears superfluous.

Calmet's consistent efforts to infer Christological allusions from passages in the Old Testament invariably elicit sarcastic rejoinders from Voltaire. Such is the case with episode recounted in the second book of Kings 4:25, where Elisha orders his servant not to greet anyone during his trip to the home of a woman whose child has died.

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2Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 645.
On demande pourquoi Eliseé envoie son valet ressusciter le petit garçon avec son bâton, puisqu'il savait bien que son valet ne le ressusciterait pas. On demande pourquoi il lui ordonne de ne sauvr personne en chemin. Il est clair que c'est pour aller plus vite; et Calmet remarque que Jésus-Christ ordonne la même chose à ses apôtres dans saint Luc. Mais pourquoi aller si vite pour rien faire? Le Sauveur du monde envoyant ses Apôtres, prêcher le royaume de Dieu, leur défend de sauver personne en chemin. Ce n'est pas que le Fils de Dieu défende, dit S. Ambroise, de s'acquitter des devoirs de l'honnêteté, ... mais il veut ôter les obstacles qui pourraient retarder l'ardeur de notre dévotion.

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Here Voltaire not only exploits the inexplicable action of the prophet but also, by implication, shows that Calmet's attempt at New Testament parallelism is inapplicable.

Elisha's success in reviving the dead child is also seen by Calmet to have a symbolic meaning for the New Testament. Voltaire with characteristic irony narrates the event and the interpretation Calmet gives it.

Les incrédules se moquent de ce miracle d'Elisée, et de toutes ses simagrées, et de toutes ces contorsions; ils disent que ce n'est là qu'une fade imitation du miracle d'Elie, qui ressuscita le fils de la veuve Sarepta. Mais il y a sens mystique; et ce sens est qu'il faut se proportionner aux petits pour leur faire du bien. Le R. P. dom Calmet, profond dans l'intelligence de l'Ecriture, ne doute pas, après plusieurs autres Pères, pour qu'est un effet de la Providence, qui vouloit nous procurer dans cette action, une figure du grand mystère de l'inutilité de la Loi & de la nécessité de l'incarnation du Fils de Dieu. Le bâton d'Elisée mis sur le corps de l'enfant, marquait la Loi de Moïse, qui ne pouvait par elle-même, donner ni la vie, ni la justice à personne; il fallait qu'Elisée lui-même, figure de Jesus-Christ, & le Maître de tous ceux qui avoient été envoyez sous la Loi, vint & se raccourcit dans une incarnation, pour se proportionner au corps de l'enfant; c'est à dire de tout

1 Mol., XXX, p. 229.

At first glance it appears here that Voltaire has taken unwarranted liberties in paraphrasing Calmet. But although Calmet makes no specific mention of the synagogue and the church, the references to Moses and Jesus are substantially in the same category. But Voltaire leaves no doubt as to what his feelings are on symbolic interpretations.

Probably the most vulnerable aspect of Calmet's Biblical exegesis is his attempt to explain, in terms of eighteenth century physics, miraculous departures from the natural order recorded in various places in the Bible. Voltaire, who was keenly aware of contemporary scientific thought, was quick to point out any scientific inaccuracies in Calmet's theories. Commenting on the retrogression of the sun mentioned in 2 Kings 20, we find:

On peut dire que le prophète Isaïe n'était pas obligé d'être astronome, et même que dom Calmet, qui a voulu expliquer dans une dissertation cette retrogradation a fait beaucoup plus de bévues qu'Isaïe. On est obligé de dire qu'il n'entend rien du tout à la matière, et que dans tous ses commentaires, il n'a fait souvent que copier des auteurs absurdes qui n'en savaient pas plus que lui.

On répond à toutes ces raisons, qu'à la vérité l'Ecriture n'est pas faite pour nous enseigner la Philosophie, & les secrets de la nature; mais très-souvent elle s'exprime d'une manière qui serait inexplicable, si on remenait ses expressions aux règles de la raison, & aux raisonnemens de la Philosophie.

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1Mol., XXX, p. 229.  
2Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 825.  
3During his sojourn at Cirey, Voltaire, under the guidance of Madame du Chatelet, studied chemistry, mathematics and Newtonian physics.  
5Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 797.
Calmet's comments quoted here are from the Dissertation Sur La Retrogradation Du Soleil A L'Horloge D'Achaz. In this treatise, which comprises six and one half folio pages, Calmet cites authority after authority to explain in a scientific manner the phenomenon under discussion. These "scientific" authorities include Jerome, Symaque, Cyrille d'Alexandre, Vatable, Grotius, Elie Chomer, S. Denys, S. Gregoire, Augustine and Spinoza. Aside from Spinoza, none of these scholars could be considered scientists. Moreover, Spinoza's domain was mainly in ethics and philosophy. One is constrained to agree with Voltaire when he criticizes Calmet's sources. But what is even more surprising is that after citing one theory after another to account for the sun's retrogression, Calmet terminates the discussion by suggesting that the Biblical version of scientific events is not amenable to rational understanding. Why then six and a half folio pages to announce this?

Another area in which Calmet left himself liable to the sardonic barbs of Voltaire was his pronouncements of le merveilleux in the Bible. In his zeal to proclaim his faith in the Bible, Calmet made statements which were mockingly exploited by Voltaire.

Le livre de Tobie est tout merveilleux. Calmet dans sa Préface, dit ce grand mot sans y penser: "S'il fallait rejeter le merveilleux et l'extraordinaire, où serait le livre sacré qu'on peut conserver?"  

Ni l'Histoire en elle-même, ni la manière dont elle est racontée, ne porte en aucune manière le caractère de Fable, ou de fiction. S'il fallait rejeter toutes les Histoires de l'Ecriture où il paroit du merveilleux, & de l'extraordinaire, où seroit le livre sacré que l'on peut conserver? Il y a des difficultéz sans doute dans le Texte de Tobie. Et quel est le livre qui n'en enferme point?

1Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 797.  2Mol., XXX, p. 249.  3Calmet, op. cit., III, p. 382.
What for Calmet is a reasonable affirmation becomes for Voltaire a confession of the legendary nature of the Bible.

Since the apocryphal book of Tobit mentions devils and evil spirits it was natural that Voltaire would comment on it and utilize Calmet's knowledge of supernatural creatures.

The book of Tobit is also seen by Calmet to be rich in symbolical allusions to the New Testament.

Once again Voltaire is liberally paraphrasing Calmet's words but at the same time is being quite consistent with the original ideas.

Voltaire is always fond of pointing out chronological inconsistencies in the Bible. In the pentateuchal portion he devotes many lines to discussing the discrepancy in Abraham's age when he left Haran. In

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 250.  
2 Calmet, op. cit., III, p. 383.  
3 Mol., XXX, p. 252.  
4 Calmet, op. cit., III, p. 387.
analyzing David's kingship over Judea, Voltaire again exposes what he thinks are incongruous remarks. Now in his commentary on the book of Judith he delves into the problem of numbers calling upon Calmet for assistance, which he tacitly rejects.

Une chose encore plus rare, c'est d'avoir demeuré cent cinq ans après ce del exploit dans la maison de feu son mari, comme il est dit au chapitre XVI, v. 28. Si nous supposons qu'elle était âgée de trente ans quand elle fit ce coup vigoureux, elle aurait vecu cent trente-cinq années. Calmet nous tire d'embarras en disant qu'elle avait soixante-cinq lorsqu'Holopherne fut épris de son extrême beauté: c'est le bel âge pour tourner et pour couper les têtes.1

Interpretation

The thirty-five matched passages which appear in the preceding pages are eloquent testimony to the importance of Calmet in understanding Voltaire's Biblical criticism. Except for one or two citations, all the passages attributed to Calmet by Voltaire are found in the Commentaire littéral.

Certain observations are warranted, however, on the manner in which Voltaire utilized Calmet's scholarship. What are the important elements in his treatment of Calmet?

Voltaire manifests a superficial respect for Calmet. Rarely does he name this Church scholar without the title Le R. P. (Le Révérend Père). Yet the reader quickly senses that there is more mockery than respect.

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1Mol., XXX, p. 253.
2Calmet, op. cit., III, p. 515.
behind the appellation. In the same passage where Calmet's good name is evoked, Voltaire will terminate his remarks with sarcasm and irony. After introducing the R. P. Calmet's efforts to prove the veracity of the account of the pythoness of Endor, Voltaire suggests in the name of M. Boullanger that Calmet should stick to his vampires!

It is evident that Voltaire's purpose in quoting from Calmet is to refute, contradict and ridicule him. But depending upon the passage in question he is not always successful. Voltaire's attempt to refute Calmet is continually marred by the tendentious nature of his arguments. But a more serious error in Voltaire's technique is his failure (perhaps intentional) to cite more fully the passages he attributes to Calmet. The suppression and omission of pertinent information may have impressed those who did not have access to Calmet. But a comparison of their arguments shows that through these omissions Voltaire mitigates the force of his arguments.

There are at least eight passages where this failure to quote Calmet entirely results in faulty critical techniques on Voltaire's part.

The very first reference to Calmet in the non-pentateuchal portion attributes to Calmet the interpretation of the Hebrew word zonah. A closer reading of Calmet indicates that he was using rabbinic sources. In reference to Rahab's alleged lie Voltaire omits the remark of Calmet that she was persuaded that the claims of the Hebrews were just. The "rain of stones" episode in Joshua evokes from Calmet the comment that one does not always have to have recourse to miracles to explain natural phenomena. Voltaire quotes only the first section of Calmet's
explanation. By suppressing the relevant passages in Calmet, Voltaire makes the former's remarks appear ludicrous in the discussion of the *livre de Droiture*. By manipulating Calmet's words Voltaire makes it appear that Calmet is answering a problem in an absurd manner. Actually Voltaire errs in applying Calmet's explanation of origin to a question of chronology. In the discussion surrounding Jephthah's alleged profession, Voltaire omits from his quotation from Calmet that the Hebrew term for *voleur* can also be applied to mercenaries. Moreover, when Voltaire tries to present Calmet's views on the eventual fate of Jephthah's daughter, he distorts the Benedictine's position by failing to mention that the citation he is using is merely one of several interpretations offered by Calmet. By failing to quote Calmet's complete analysis of why the prophets were presented with gifts, Voltaire leaves the mistaken impression that they were merely cheap charlatans. Finally, Voltaire's failure to pursue Calmet's comments on red hair, led the ambitious critic to suppose an error in Calmet's comments which is in no respect an error.

By dint of judicious selection and malicious omission Voltaire attempts to refute the Biblical criticism of 18th century France's greatest Bible commentator. It can be assumed that the average reader in perusing *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* would be quite impressed by Voltaire's apparent success in "demolishing" Calmet's interpretations. Indeed, the writer of this study, before he had carefully consulted the *Commentaire litteral*, was fully convinced that Voltaire had effectively ridiculed the abbot of Senones. But the comparison of passages presented
in these pages illustrates that Calmet was no dilettante in his field
and that Voltaire, in many instances, fails to weaken Calmet's arguments
and wins victories over him which are quite hollow.

Although Voltaire very rarely argues with Calmet openly in the
body of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, there are several instances where
Voltaire directly contradicts Calmet's interpretation, usually to the
detriment of the former. Voltaire will summarily dismiss a detailed
explanation and elucidation of a difficult text by sarcastically prefacing
his quotation with *ces paroles remarquables* or appending *Calmet ne
résout pas le problème* to a citation which is inaccurate in the first
place. The dispute over Saul's age is seen by Voltaire to be a glaring
contradiction in the Biblical text. Yet without citing Calmet's actual
remarks, Voltaire concludes that Calmet is not able to conciliate the
discrepancies. The fact is that Calmet presents a very sensible inter-
pretation based on the alleged absence of a Hebrew letter. If Voltaire's
reference to *les autres objections* is to the famine mentioned in II
Samuel 24:13, the caustic remark by Voltaire that Calmet "answers too
easily" is unwarranted. Indeed Calmet shows a good understanding of
the problems of Biblical chronology. It would have been to Voltaire's
credit to have given his readers more exact reasons why Calmet's inter-
pretation was faulty, rather than frivolously dismiss it with a *boutade*.

In addition to omission, suppression and flippancy in dealing with
Calmet, Voltaire commits the serious mistake of arguing from a premise
which is untenable. Typical is the argument concerning Jephthah's
alleged recognition of two distinct deities. In quoting Calmet, Voltaire
denies the possibility of a *figure de discours*. Instead of stopping at
this point Voltaire dogmatically asserts that Jephthah has established a principe upon which he reasons. This is a premise which is wholly untenable and shows the thinking of an eighteenth century deist imposed upon a Biblical figure. Thus Voltaire's inflexible position makes his interpretation more suspect than Calmet's.

When Voltaire tries to negate a statement by Calmet he is fond of employing the same comical techniques he perfected in such works as Candide. The unexpected conclusion ranks among his favorite ploys. When Candide is in the process of being imprisoned we learn that he is conducted to a refreshing apartment "where he will never be inconvenienced by the sun." In a similar vein Voltaire terminates the discussion of the anointing cup which Samuel used. After mentioning the various interpretations advanced by Calmet, Voltaire innocently adds the comment, quoique les Juifs ne connussent point le verre. Unfortunately his humor appears out of place here. Indeed Voltaire portrays himself as being picayune. Whether the Jews had a verre as Voltaire understood it, is questionable; but that they had some sort of receptacle is obvious. In this case, therefore, Voltaire's wit makes him appear more petty than brilliant.

Voltaire is guilty of utilizing information garnered from Calmet and then giving that information a coloration which is not warranted by the context in which it appears. The book of Samuel uses the Hebrew word for priest (kohen) in many places where an ecclesiastical position does not seem to be involved. In his comments on 1 Samuel 8:18 Voltaire abstracts from Calmet the fact that the word prêtre can also mean prince. From this Voltaire introduces the consideration of political chicanery
on David's part. David wanted to consolidate his empire by combining the monarchy and the priesthood. Thus from a simple philological note that Calmet mentions, Voltaire constructs a political situation.

The main difference between Voltaire and Calmet lies in their respective concepts of God. Calmet accepts the traditional Christian view that God is not answerable to man for His actions. Voltaire’s idea of God is tempered by his rationalism which requires God to be subject and master as well of the laws he creates. Starting from these opposing, and in a sense contradictory, viewpoints, it is natural that Calmet and Voltaire would differ on many points of Biblical criticism. These two viewpoints are seen in the comments offered on II Samuel 21:6 where Voltaire solidly and vehemently condemns the violence perpetrated by David while Calmet affirms that David was an agent of God’s will and that God est toujours en droit de donner, ou de ne pas donner, d'accorder, ou d'ôter à ses créatures certains biens extérieurs. ... In many areas of confrontation there is more than just a difference of viewpoints between Voltaire and Calmet. There are a number of passages where the reader must opt for Voltaire's interpretation. These occur particularly in discussions of moral or ethical questions. Moreover it must be pointed out that Voltaire often quotes Calmet accurately and without malice. His adaptation of Calmet's remarks on Tobit and Judith are legitimate even in paraphrase form.

But Voltaire appears most effective in those passages where there is a discussion of alleged barbarities in the Bible. This is a favorite theme with Voltaire and is present to a great extent in the pentateuchal portion. In his commentary on Genesis, Voltaire excoriates Abraham for
the massacre of the Shechemites. In Exodus he laments bitterly the
destruction of the Amalekites. In Numbers he complains about the demise
of the Moabites. In Joshua the annihilation of the indigenous people of
Palestine draws the ire of Voltaire.

It is to be expected therefore that the description of rivalries
recorded in the books of Samuel would attract Voltaire’s critical eye.
The death of fifty thousand men referred to in 1 Samuel 6:9 evokes from
Voltaire the sardonic comment that we should not be surprised by such
horrendous massacres since God has commanded the same many times. In
his comment on this passage we have seen Calmet concentrating merely on
the problem of numbers. There is no mention of the moral problem
involved in the complete destruction of enough people to fill a modern
size city. One feels constrained to concur with Voltaire when he says
*il est bon de nous humilier.*

Calmet appears to manifest the same indifference to the plight of
the one hundred and thirty thousand soldiers killed in 1 Samuel 11:8.
In his remarks on this episode Calmet once again spends many lines
discussing the figures involved. Once again there is no thought of the
moral question involved. Calmet merely suggests that there is a possible
exaggeration in the numbers employed. Voltaire’s harshness in condemning
Calmet’s apparent coldness to the loss of human life appears quite
excusable.

Calmet interprets the various assassinations and murders in the
book of Samuel in the same manner. Commenting on 1 Samuel 15:32 Calmet
excuses the prophet’s commission of murder by explaining that he was
armed by the zeal of carrying out God’s command. While Calmet is content
to exonerate the prophet by implying that he is no more than an instrumentality in God's design, Voltaire caustically compares the murder to a chicken that is served up for dinner!

In the three preceding passages the same pattern is noted. Calmet shows interest only in the literal problems of the text. Voltaire, on the other hand, treats the problem from a moral point of view. But is there really any other than a moral problem involved? Although Calmet's commentary is announced as literal, there is no excuse for him not examining the basic issues in Biblical controversies. If Calmet could have been challenged by Voltaire directly, the priest doubtless would have replied, as he does in other instances, that criticism of Biblical morality presupposes a standard of behavior which is distinctly human. But the Bible is the repository of God's record and activity on earth. His behavior and his morality are not subject to human evaluation. Starting from this premise Calmet's refusal to discuss so-called barbarisms in the Bible is perfectly understandable. But while his position may be understandable, it leaves much to be desired. Moreover, it was this unbending attitude which so alienated the thinkers of the enlightenment and prompted writers like Voltaire to counter this viewpoint with irony and sarcasm.

We have stated on numerous occasions that Voltaire quotes Calmet with the view to ridicule him. Sometimes the attempt at ridicule falls short. When Voltaire omits pertinent information the ironic note is not impressive. When Voltaire dismisses coherent interpretations presented by Calmet, his irony loses much of its power. But there are
several striking instances where Voltaire exploits an idea or a phrase enunciated by Calmet with a devastating effect on Calmet's arguments. In these instances Voltaire's irony is incomparable.

A good example of this irony is seen in the application which Voltaire makes of Calmet's remarks about the efficacy of music. Calmet spends an entire folio page citing various historical incidents where music had an appeasing effect. He devotes hundreds of words to describing an alleged case where a lion was quieted by music. All this information is, of course, second hand. But all these digressions are really irrelevant because the music requested by Saul was to be spiritual solace for an anguished mind. Voltaire quotes the story of the lion and then adds: *Ces exemples sont assez étrangers à la maladie de Saul.*

Similar is the comment which Voltaire makes after quoting a small segment of Calmet's remarks on the pythoness of Endor. Calmet once again occupies almost two folio pages with a discussion of alleged incidents in which the human voice appeared to be projected from other than the articulatory organs. Finally Calmet alludes to an Englishman named Firming who *avait le secret de parler du ventre.* Calmet here is obviously far too credulous in his willingness to accept what was probably a ventriloquist's trick. Yet Calmet speaks of the event with great seriousness. The reader feels sympathetic with Voltaire when he says in reference to this interpretation: *M. Boulanger dit que Calmet devait s'en tenir à ses vampires.*

The Christological interpretations which are typical of Calmet's treatment of the pentateuchal portion are also found in various places in the non-pentateuchal sections. These interpretations are used by
Voltaire as a vehicle of satire and irony. Elisha sent his valet with a baton to bring back to life a young child. For Calmet this is a pre-figuration of Jesus sending his apostles to preach the kingdom of heaven. Moreover, just as Jesus recommends to the apostles not to tarry with anyone so as not to delay the message of salvation, the prophet tells the valet not to speak to anyone in order to speed up the resuscitation of the child. Thus far Calmet's analogy appears beautiful if not somewhat forced. But Voltaire slips in the little comment that the boy remains dead even after the valet's visit. After quoting Calmet's analogy from the New Testament Voltaire adds: *Mais pourquoi aller si vite pour rien faire?*

Calmet's efforts to explain certain miraculous events recorded in the Bible are generally quite embarrassing in view of his limited knowledge in scientific spheres. Moreover, his complete reliance on the Church Fathers for complicated scientific information further compounds his awkward attempts to explain rationally a supernatural phenomenon. In the comments on 2 Kings 20, Calmet furnishes the reader with an impressive series of "scientists" to explain the retrogression of the sun. Upon examination, however, Calmet's scientists turn out to be Orthodox Bible commentators who knew a great deal about dogma but little about physics. Voltaire was alert to the many errors in Calmet's scientific explanations. He could not resist the temptation to ridicule Calmet for these inaccuracies. In his remarks on Calmet, for the first time, Voltaire comes out with a direct contradiction: *Il n'entend rien du tout à la matière ... il n'a fait souvent que copier des auteurs absurdes qui n'en savaient pas plus que lui.* In the same paragraph
Voltaire notes that Calmet makes more mistakes than Isaiah, who certainly was no astronomer!

Probably the weakest link in Calmet's chain of Biblical exegesis was the occasional concession that the Bible contained exaggeration as well as *fautes de copistes*. It is difficult to understand why Calmet did not sense the seriousness of this important concession. How could one affirm the complete infallibility of the Bible on the one hand, and on the other hand admit to the possibility of scribal error? Calmet doubtless would have retorted that while the original text of the Bible is divine and hence infallible, its subsequent transmission through seventeen centuries has resulted in the presence of certain textual errors.¹

But even this rationale is open to critical evaluation. Are these textual errors concerned with narrative or doctrinal questions? How does one distinguish between them? Perhaps the errors are far more widespread than previously imagined? What is to prevent the average

¹Calmet, *op. cit.*, II, ii. Quel est l'ouvrage où les copistes, ou les Lecteurs ou le tens n'aisent fait glisser quelque chose d'étranger. Nous appelons cela des tâches dans les Auteurs profanes, mais non pas dans les Livres sacrés dans ceux-ci tout est divin, tout est autentique, tout est respectable; les additions reconnues, comme les reste du Texte; elle sont emanees de la même source, & également inspirées de l'Esprit saint a des hommes ayant carâtre, & animez du S. Esprit: J'en excepte quelques fautes de Copistes, qui peuvent s'être glissées dans le Texte des Livres sacrés & que la Religion ne nous oblige pas de recevoir, elle nous oblige même de les rejeter, lorsqu'elles sont bien reconnues. ... Il faut pourtant reconnoître de bonne foi qu'on y remarque quelques additions qui ne peuvent être de Josué; On convient que l'ouvrage, en l'étant ou nous l'avons, a été retouche depuis ce Chef du peuple d'Israël. Il y a des noms de lieu, & des remarques qui n'y ont été mises qu'après coup. Mais ces additions & changemens sont de peu de conséquence, & en petit nombre. Rien n'est plus aisé que de les distinguer. On en doit faire le même jugement que de ceux qu'on apperçoit dans les Livres de Moise. ... Si l'on vouloit pour de semblables diversitez rejeter tous les ouvrages de l'Antiquité, il y en aurait bien peu, qui fussent a couvert de la censure.
reader from rejecting an offensive Biblical passage simply by saying that it is a faute de copiste.\(^1\)

Voltaire was quick to seize upon this interpretative technique of Calmet and parroted it for his own ends. When Calmet discusses the number of chariots described in 1 Samuel 13:5, he suggests the possibility of an error in computation because le texte original ayant apparemment été altéré par l'addition de deux lettres. Voltaire does not refer to this explanation in his comment on this passage. He merely quotes Doctor Stackhouse who says that thirty thousand chariots is an improbable number. But in his very next reference to Calmet which appears in the comments on 1 Samuel 13:1, Voltaire feigns sympathy with Calmet because of the difficulty involved in ascertaining Saul's age. Then Voltaire adds gingerly: Il se peut qu'il y ait là une erreur de copiste. Henceforth in La Bible Enfin Expliquée Voltaire will delight in offering as a solution to all textual problems the presence of scribal error. In analyzing the reference to the temple mentioned in 1 Kings 6:1, Voltaire shows that he has already learned to parrot Calmet but with devastating effect.

Les auteurs ne s'accordent pas davantage sur la chronologie de ce temple. Les pretendus Septante le disent bâti quatre cent quarante ans après la fuite d'Egypte; Joseph, cinq cent quatre-vingt-douze ans; et parmi les modernes on trouve vingt opinions différentes: cette question n'est d'aucune importance; mais dans un livre sacré l'exactitude ne nuirait pas.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Voltaire makes the following statement about the copistes (XXX, p. 188): "Plusieurs incrédules nous reprochent de recourir si fréquemment à la ressource d'imputer tant de fautes aux copistes. Ils affirment qu'il était aussi aisé à l'Esprit Saint de conduire la plume des scribes que celle des auteurs. Nous les confondons en disant que les scribes n'étaient pas sacrés et que les auteurs juifs l'étaient."

\(^2\)Mol., XXX, p. 206-207. The italics on Septuagint are Voltaire's. The rest are mine.
Unacknowledged borrowings from Calmet

Thus far only passages clearly attributed to Calmet have been discussed. But there is a large body of passages which bears the unmistakable imprint of Calmet but for which Voltaire does not mention the source. Although in modern times this would be clearly recognized as plagiarism, Andre Morize points out that seventeenth and eighteenth century France were somewhat predisposed to accept this literary practice. Therefore, when Voltaire quotes from Calmet, sometimes word for word, without attributing the source, the reader must remain indulgent.

The miraculous stopping of the sun recorded in Joshua evokes from Voltaire the customary name dropping techniques he inevitably employs to impress the reader. Once again Voltaire's comments are found in the left column while Calmet's are found in the right.

Grotius prétend que le texte ne signifie pas que le soleil et la lune s'arrêtèrent, mais que Dieu donna le temps à Josué de tuer tout ce qui pouvait rester d'ennemis avant que le soleil et la lune se couchassent. Leclerc décide nettement que le soleil ne s'arrêta pas, mais parut s'arrêter. Grotius est à peu près de même avis lll mais seulement qu'alors Dieu combatit en faveur d'Israël, & donna à son peuple la vigueur nécessaire pour poursuivre, & pour tailler en pièces une si grande armée dans si peu de temps. ... Il (Leclerc) soutient que le soleil ne s'arrêta pas, mais parut simplement s'arrêter.

1Andre Morize, Problems and Methods of Literary History (New York, 1922), p. 89. Pomeau, op. cit., p. 161, attests to the fact that Voltaire was not the only writer to quote from Calmet without acknowledging the source. "Il faut rendre cette justice à Mme du Châtelet qu'elle cite très souvent Dom Calmet. Mais il lui arrive plus souvent encore de le piller sans le nommer."

2Mol., XXX, p. 127.

3Calmet, op. cit., II, pp. v-vi.
Here Voltaire is paraphrasing Calmet's explanation. But the similar arrangement of fact and the use of words common to both writers indicates Voltaire's indebtedness to Calmet. It should be noted that Voltaire makes no effort in this section to ridicule either Grotius or Leclerc or Calmet. But in the following paragraph Voltaire maliciously compares the accomplishment of Joshua with that of Bacchus who stopped the moon as well as the sun.¹

Most of Voltaire's information on the ultimate fate of Palestine's indigenous peoples originates with Calmet.

It was not actually Serarius who placed the displaced tribes in Germany. He was merely quoting the Rabbi Ibn Ezra. Again Voltaire shows his opinion of their theories when he adds ironically: Chacun donne de profondes raisons de son système.⁴ The idea espoused by Grotius that the tribes went to the Canary islands and hence to the New World is also quoted by Voltaire and ostensibly comes from Calmet.

¹Mol., XXX, p. 128. ²Ibid., p. 131.
³Calmet, op. cit., II, p. xviii.
⁴Mol., XXX, p. 131.
Grotius trouve très-vraisemblable qu'ils allèrent d'abord des les îles Canaries, et de là en Amérique. D'autres ayant remarqué que ce trajet était trop long et trop difficile, ont mieux aimé faire aborder des Cananéens, premierement dans l'Afrique, puis dans les Canaries, pour les transporter ensuite dans l'Amérique.

The reference to Judah in the first chapter of the book of Judges has been variously interpreted as the tribe of Judah or a chieftain of the same name.

On dispute si c'est à un capitaine nommé Juda, ou à la tribu de ce nom; mais capitaine ou tribu, c'est une victoire de surérogation. Quelques-uns ont cru que Judas marquait ici un homme qui devait succéder à Josué, comme Josué avait succédé à Moïse. Mais toute la suite de l'Histoire montre visiblement que Judas est mis pour toute la tribu de ce nom; c'est le sentiment commun des Pères & des Commentateurs.

It is apparent that Voltaire never quotes information from Calmet merely with the intention of imparting knowledge or facilitating interpretation. By adding the remark c'est une victoire de surérogation, he is, in effect, saying that the identity of Judah is irrelevant. What is relevant here is the fact that he was responsible for the death of ten thousand men.

Once again Voltaire is perturbed by the apparent indifference of the traditional commentators to the fate of men's souls. Their sole preoccupations seem to be with picayune matters of title.

The knowledge that Moses' sister was considered a prophetess came no doubt from Voltaire's reading of Calmet.

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 131.
2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. XX. Calmet's footnote reference is to Vide Grot.
3 Mol., XXX, p. 132.
4 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 164.
Débora est la seconde prophétesse, car Marie, soeur de Moïse, le fut avant elle; mais Débora fut la première et la seule qui fut juge.1

Débora étoit Prophétesse; qualité qui n'est pas fort extraordinaire dans les femmes. Marie soeur de Moïse, ... & quelques autres ont été honorées de l'esprit de la Prophtie.2

But Voltaire is not content merely to furnish his reader with this information. In the same paragraph he asks:

On est surpris de ne trouver ni dans le Lévitique, ni dans le Deutéronome, ni dans l'Exode, ni dans les Nombres, aucune loi qui permette aux femmes de juger les hommes. Il y a eu de tout temps, et dans toutes les histoires anciennes, des femmes qui ont prédit l'avenir, mais on ne leur attribue jamais de juridiction.3

From an innocent adaptation of Calmet's identification of Deborah as a prophetess and a judge, Voltaire suggests that women never had such power in any other ancient civilization. Moreover, he cites the authority of the Pentateuch to show that there are no provisions for this type of female jurisprudence.

Voltaire's information on the inheritance rights of children of concubines indicates a reliance on Calmet as a source. The passages under discussion are those dealing with Jephthah who is introduced as the son of a prostitute.

Ils repliquent qu'il n'y a aucune loi dans le Pentateuque même contre les enfants des prostituées, et que, selon le texte, les enfants de servantes de Rachel et de Lia hériterent comme les enfants de leurs maîtresses.4 autres enfants.5

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1Mol., XXX, p. 135. 2Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 185.
3Mol., XXX, p. 135. 4Ibid., p. 140.
5Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 236.
Working from basically the same premise Calmet and Voltaire arrive at completely different conclusions. For Voltaire the problem is stated in negative terms. There is no law in the Pentateuch prohibiting the inheritance rights of children of concubines, ergo the Jews had no legal system. Ergo

aucune jurisprudence n'était encore établie chez le peuple juif; qu'il n'y eut jamais de véritables lois dans ce temps-là, parmi ces peuples vagabonds, que la loi du partage des dépouilles.¹

What for Voltaire is a negative statement about Jewish laws is for Calmet the positive affirmation that according to Jewish law, a woman who had completely embraced Judaism, though she be a concubine, conferred upon her offspring the same inheritance rights as a child of a legal marriage. Calmet shows the liberality of the Jewish law while Voltaire sees an absence of it. And from this alleged absence he derives an abusive theory about the nature of Biblical mores.

The attempt to prove the incongruity of the Bible led Voltaire to cite cross-references which were mutually contradictory. Among his many remarks on the episode of Jephthah, Voltaire cites a verse in Leviticus which I believe he obtained through footnotes in Calmet.

J'ai fait un voeu, il faut que je l'accomplisse. Il est statué expressément au chapitre XXVII du Lévitique, que tout ce qui sera voué au Seigneur, soit homme, soit animal, ne sera point racheté, mais mourra de mort”.²

In the Dissertation Sur Le Voeu de Jephté Calmet does not quote the same passage as Voltaire but he gives the reference to the book of Leviticus in the footnote.³

¹Mol., XXX, p. 140. ²Ibid., p. 142. ³Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 159.
It is possible, of course, that Voltaire arrived at the citation from *Leviticus* independently of Calmet. He would naturally be anxious to utilize any statement which might support his contention that the ancient Hebrews were a barbaric race. But as he so often does, Voltaire argues from the same information as Calmet but ends up with a doctrine which is at variance with his erudite mentor. For Calmet Jephthah's sacrifice shows the folly of frivolous vow-swearing. For Voltaire,

Nous sommes donc obligés malgré nous de convenir que, selon le texte indiscutable des livres sacrés, Dieu, maître absolu de la vie et de la mort, permit les sacrifices de sang humain. Il les ordonna même. Il commanda à Abraham de sacrifier son fils unique, et il reçut le sang de la fille unique de Jephté. 

The suggestion that the story of Iphigenia comes from the Biblical account of Jephthah is acknowledged by Voltaire to come from Calmet.

Le même commentateur dit que le sacrifice d'Iphigénie est pris de celui de la fille de Jephté. L'histoire fabuleuse a aussi mêlé beaucoup de circonstances de l'aventure de la fille de Jephté avec celui d'Iphigénie.

As is shown in the following refutation, Voltaire appears much more vehement in his condemnation of Calmet when the latter's name is not immediately juxtaposed to the citation. Referring to Calmet's suggestion about Iphigenia Voltaire says:

Rien n'est plus mal imaginé; jamais les Grecs ne connurent les livres des Juifs; et les fables grecques eurent toujours cours dans l'Asie.

The idea that non-Jews could also be prophets is advanced by Voltaire in his discussion of the Philistine prophets mentioned in the

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 142.  
2 Mol., XXX, p. 143.  
3 Calmet, *op. cit.*, II, p. 244.  
4 Mol., XXX, p. 143.
first book of Samuel. His remarks appear to be an echo of what Calmet says.

Il est étrange que les prophètes des Philistins, peuple maudit, soient ici regardés comme de vrais prophètes. ... Les uns soutiennent qu'ils furent éclairés dans cette occasion d'une lumière sur-naturelle & divine, de même que Balaam & Caiphe. 2

But Voltaire is not content to leave the prerogative of prophecy to Jews and gentiles. He capitalizes on the reference to the cows that carried the ark of the covenant. In the paragraph directly following the explanation of true prophets we find:

Les vaches qui ramènerent l'arche sont une espèce de miracle: elle vont d'elles-mêmes à Bethsames, village qui semble appartenir en propre aux Hébreux. Il semble que ces vaches fussent prophétesses aussi. 3

Voltaire devotes some eight lines to the question of the anointing of a king chronicled in the first book of Samuel. He mentions that the terms Oint and Christ were employed by Jews to designate the great kings of Persia and Babylon. 4 It is quite probable that Voltaire obtained this information on the Hebrew term mashiak (anointed) from Calmet. In his commentary on 1 Samuel 5:1 Calmet spends two folio pages discussing the origin and development of the concept of anointed kings. He traces most thoroughly the Hebrew term mashiak and how it is applied in various ways, to kings, foreign and present and also to the messiah. 5

1 Mol., XXX, p. 163. 2 Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 368.
3 Mol., XXX, p. 163. Italics mine.
4 Ibid., p. 168.
When Saul becomes ill he asks for someone who knows how to play the harp well. His illness has been interpreted in certain quarters as being the results of a visitation from the devil.

Le souffle malin de Dieu, c'est à dire un souffle tres malin, une espèce de possession, l'avait rendu maniaque, et, selon plusieurs commentateurs, Dieu l'avait abandonné au diable.¹

But with his usual caustic spirit, Voltaire summarily rejects this theory advanced by Calmet.

Mais il est prouvé que les Juifs ne connaissaient point encore d'esprit malin, le diable qui s'emparât du corps des hommes; c'était une doctrine des Chaldeens et des Persans, et jusqu'ici il n'en est pas encore question dans les livres saints.²

The reference to Saul's unprovoked attack on David recorded in 1 Samuel 18:6 has been interpreted as temporary madness. Some commentators, however, merely see this as an excess of anger.

L'auteur sacré nous représente ici Saul dans un accès de folie. Quelques commentateurs disent que ce n'était qu'un accès de colère, et qu'il était jaloux de la chanson qu'on chantait à l'honneur de David, et surtout de ce qu'il avait été oint en secret.³

It is most probable that Voltaire's information on the théraphim referred to in 1 Samuel 19 was obtained from Calmet.

⁵Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 437.
Michol sauve son mari en mettant une figure dans son lit, coiffé d'une peau de chèvre: cette peau de chèvre était-elle le bonnet de nuit ordinaire de David? C'était un teraphim, mais un teraphim était, dit-on, une idole. Michol faisait-elle coucher des idoles avec elle?  

Teraphim ... se peut donner en général à toutes sortes de figures sacrées ou profanes. ... D'autres ne prouvant se persuader qu'un homme aussi pieux que David eut voulu conserver chez lui des figures idélatres. ...  

Voltaire cannot resist the temptation of asking whether the teraphim was the regular night gear of David!

The marriage between David and Bathsheba recorded in 2 Samuel 11 stimulates Voltaire to a great deal of mischief in his commentary on the pertinent passages.

Le mariage de Bethsabée, grosse de David, est déclaré nul par plusieurs rabbins et par plusieurs commentateurs. Les Loix Canoniques déclarent nuls ces sortes de mariages, contractez entre l'homme adultère, & la femme qui est complice de son crime. ... Il y a des Commentateurs qui semblent vouloir dire que celui de David & de Bathsabée, étoit nul.

From the information derived from Calmet, to the effect that certain interpreters see David's marriage as nul and void, Voltaire introduces a consideration which bears upon the lineal pedigree ascribed to Jesus by the writers of the New Testament. If their marriage is nul and void then Jesus cannot be considered the legitimate descendant of David!

Il y a une autre difficulté: si le mariage de David et de Bathsabée est nul, on ne peut pas donc dire que Jésus-Christ est descendant légitime de David, comme il est dit dans sa généalogie. Si on décide qu'il en descend légalement, on foule aux pieds la loi de toutes les nations; si le mariage de David et de Bathsabée n'est qu'un nouveau crime, Dieu est donc né de la source la plus impure.

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1Mol., XXX, p. 181.  
2Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 441.  
3Mol., XXX, p. 192.  
4Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 543.  
5Mol., XXX, p. 192.
When David marched against Rabbath (2 Samuel 12) he took from the head of the vanquished king his crown. The weight of the crown was equivalent to a talent d'or.

On prétend qu'un talent d'or pesait environ quatre-vingt-dix livres de seize onces.\(^1\) Le talent chez les Hébreux, étoit du poids de quatre-vingt-dix livres quatorze onces, \(\times\) cinq gros de notre poids de marc.\(^2\)

Voltaire believes that no crown could weigh that much. It would have weighed down Goliath! Obviously, suggests Voltaire, this is another example of Biblical exaggeration. C'est la où Calmet pouvait dire encore que l'auteur se permet quelques exagérations.\(^3\)

Once again Voltaire makes use of Calmet's cross-reference when he discusses the turpitude involved in the incestuous relationship between Thamar and Amnon.

Ce qu'il y a de plus étrange encore, c'est que Thamar dit à son frère: "Demande-moi en mariage, etc." Le Lévitique défend expressément, au chap. XVIII, de révéler la turpitude de sa soeur.\(^4\)

Voltaire does not leave the question at this point. From the injunction in Leviticus forbidding marriages between brother and sister and the apparent transgression of this law by Thamar and Amnon, Voltaire derives the following conclusions.

\(^1\) Mol., XXX, p. 193.  \(^2\) Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 548.

\(^3\) Mol., XXX, p. 193.  \(^4\) Ibid., p. 194.

\(^5\) Calmet, op. cit., II, p. 551. This passage has a footnote reference to Leviticus XVIII.
Il fallait bien que les Hébreux fussent dans l'usage d'épouser leurs sœurs, puisque Abraham dit à deux rois qu'il avait épousé la sienne. Il se peut que plusieurs Juifs aient fait depuis comme le père des croyants disait qu'il avait fait. Le chapitre XVIII du Lévitique, après tout, ne défend que de révéler la turpitude de sa sœur; mais quand il y a mariage il n'y a plus turpitude.  

Voltaire's mention of Flavius Josephus as a source for his information on the prophet Addo (1 Kings 13:1) is correct as far as it goes. But it is most probable that the attribution to Josephus originates with Calmet.

C'est l'historien Flavius Joseph qui appelle ce prophète Addo; les sacrés cahiers ne le nomment pas.  

But Voltaire is not impressed with Addo's miraculous freezing of Jeroboam's hand. (The king had stretched out his hand demanding the seizure of this prophet who had criticized the altar he had erected.

While the hand was outstretched it became paralyzed.)

Le miracle de cette main sèche est bien peu de chose en comparaison de la mer Rouge fendue en deux, et du soleil s'arrêtant un jour entier sur Gabaon, comme la lune sur Aialon. Mais nous verrons d' aussi beaux miracles quand nous serons parvenus au temps du divin Elie, et du roitelet Achab.  

Voltaire's long note on Isaiah 7:15 is most certainly inspired by Calmet's exhaustive study of the famous Emmanuel passage in his *Dissertation Sur Ces Paroles D’Isaie: Une Vierge concevra, & Enfantera un Fils: & vous l'appellerez Emmanuel,* In this study which covers several volumes:

1Mol., XXX, p. 194.  
2Ibid., p. 212.  
4Mol., XXX, p. 212.
Calmet traces the historical context of the prophecy with great care. He shows that the Hebrew word used in Isaiah 7:14 is *alma* which generally means a young woman although the Christian tradition usually designates the word virgin to translate it. Calmet also discusses the name assigned to one of the son’s of the prophet, *Maher-salai-has-bas*, which means “let the booty be quickly taken.”

Voltaire must have read Calmet’s dissertation quite carefully, for all the pertinent information is transposed into the body of his own commentary. In a footnote, for example, Voltaire speaks of the word *alma*:

> Le mot hébreu *alma* signifie tantôt fille, tantôt femme, quelquefois même prostituée. Ruth étant veuve, est appelée *alma*. Dans le *Cantique des cantiques* et dans Joël, le nom d’*alma* est donné à des concubines.²

Voltaire also discusses the name of the prophet’s son but gives his remarks the customary ironic twist:

> C’est dans ce discours d’Isaïe que des commentateurs, appelés *figuristes*, ont vu clairement la venue de Jésus-Christ, qui pourtant ne s’appela jamais ni Emmanuel, ni *Maher-salai-has-bas*, "prends vite les dépouilles".³

The historical reference to Herodotus made by Voltaire in 2 Kings 18:13 comes, no doubt, from Calmet.

> Hérodote parle d’un Sennacherib qui vint porter la guerre sur les frontières de l’Egypte, et qui s’en retourna parce qu’une maladie contagieuse se mit dans son armée.⁴

> Le Roi Sennacherib est connu dans les Auteurs profanes. Son nom & ses expéditions contre l’Egypte sont décrites dans Hérodote.⁵

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⁵ Calmet, *op. cit.*, II, p. 901. There is a footnote reference here to *Vide Herodot lib.2. c.141*. 
Voltaire's comments on the apocryphal book Tobit are derived principally from Calmet. Since this work is not officially in the Jewish canon or the Christian for that matter, it has not been heavily commented upon by Bible commentators. One of the few people who dealt with it thoroughly was Calmet.

Les Juifs n'ont jamais inséré le livre de Tobie dans leur Canon; ni Joseph ni Philon n'en parlent; il est rejeté de notre communion. Les savants le prétendent composé neuf cent ans après la dispersion. Le Concile de Trente l'a décidé canonique.¹

But Voltaire states that the only reason he will comment on this book is because it is "curious."³

The identity of the king recorded in the book of Esther has always puzzled Bible commentators. Who was Ahasuerus? Voltaire quotes Calmet and then adds his own rejoinder.

On ne sait que était cet Assuérus. Des doctes assurent que ce nom était le titre que prenaient tous les rois de Perse; ils s'intitulaient Achawerosh, qui voulait dire héro, guerrier invincible; et de cet Achawerosh les Grecs firent Assuérus. Mais cette étymologie ne nous apprend pas qui était ce grand prince.³

The observation which Voltaire makes on the alleged belief in purgatory which is abstracted from a statement in the second book of Macabees 12:43, probably originates with Calmet.

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 248.
² Calmet, op. cit., III, pp. 380-82.
³ Mol., XXX, p. 257.
⁴ Calmet, op. cit., III, p. 539.
Finally we have a polemical statement by Voltaire concerning the alleged attempt by Judas Macabee to align himself with the Roman invaders.

That Voltaire used Calmet for the information on Scipio is born out by a direct reference to Calmet in the following paragraph where he is quoted ironically to explain that Antiochus the Great was not really a Roman captive. Calmet dit, pour rectifier cette erreur: "Ce prince se soumit au vainqueur ni plus ni moins que s'il eut été captif."

**Interpretation**

In this section nineteen different passages have been adduced to show how Voltaire utilizes information garnered from Calmet. While there may be other borrowings from Calmet which are unacknowledged, I have selected only those which can be documented with some degree of

1 Mol., XXX, p. 274.  2 Calmet, op. cit., III, p. 996.

3 Mol., XXX, p. 276.  4 Calmet, op. cit., p. 996.
reliability. Ultimately an investigation of this nature will aid in ascertaining the originality of Voltaire. As Morize says:

The labor of investigating and discovering sources of every kind is important, as we have seen, because it is the indispensable condition for determining the originality of an author.¹

Is there a difference in the way Voltaire uses Calmet in this section? We have seen that in the previous pages that Voltaire has compromised his integrity on several occasions by dint of omission and suppression. Often the force of his argument depended upon an ignorance of Calmet's original remarks. While the same irony is present in Voltaire's approach in the unacknowledged citations and paraphrases there is less misrepresentation through suppression.

Instead of resorting to the ad hominem argument to ridicule Calmet's orthodox interpretation, Voltaire restricts himself to the text itself and thereby tries to underline contradictions or incongruities.

After discussing the miraculous stopping of the sun by Joshua, Voltaire dismisses the Biblical account by comparing this feat with that of Bacchus. Similarly, he negates the role of prophetess assigned to Deborah by adding the comment that the pentateuchal books make no mention of the power of judgment being conferred upon women.

When Calmet suggests that the Bible is the source of the story about Iphigenia, Voltaire categorically states in a rejoinder that the Greeks never knew the Jews. From a reference in 1 Samuel to Phillistine prophets, Voltaire adds that cows must also have been endowed with the

¹Morize, op. cit., p. 84.
gift of prophecy. After quoting Calmet to document the nature of Saul's illness, Voltaire negates the priest's theory by affirming that the doctrine of the evil spirit was a Chaldean belief and was unknown to the Jews. After citing Calmet's explanation of the _teraphim_ Voltaire asks if this idol was David's regular bed companion.

This technique indicates a definite difference of treatment with regard to information from Calmet which is unacknowledged. Voltaire achieves the result of discrediting Calmet's views through the malicious rejoinder and the challenging marshalling of contradictory evidence. From a stylistic point of view this may appear very effective. Yet a scrutiny of Voltaire's rejoinders shows that Voltaire is often overzealous in presenting his case and that Calmet is ultimately correct. Because no law is promulgated in the Pentateuch outlining the duties of a female judge, this does not mean that no female judges could rule in Israel. Moreover, the assumption that the Jews had no system of jurisprudence is completely unwarranted. The Talmud, according to Jewish tradition, is an enormous body of religious law. This _corpus_ of laws antedates even the Hebrew Bible. Voltaire's charge that the Jews encouraged sodomy because of the incestuous relationship between Thamar and Amnon is an exaggeration of the type which Voltaire finds wrong in Calmet.

On the other hand there are an equal number of passages here where Voltaire's irony is well taken. The various theories about the lands which received the indigenous peoples of Palestine after they were expelled by Joshua are no more than theories. Yet Calmet speaks of the Canary islands and quotes Ibn Ezra to the effect that they must be in
Germany. Voltaire is justified when he mocks the profondes raisons which each theoretician uses to prove his theory. When Calmet quibbles endlessly over the identity of the Judah mentioned in Judges, Voltaire puts his finger on the real problem at hand, not the identity, but the act. Why did Judah slaughter ten thousand men? Once again Voltaire attacks the moral question which Calmet avoids. Similarly Voltaire exploits effectively the adulterous relationship between David and Bathsheeba to impugn the lineal pedigree assigned to Jesus by New Testament writers. The idea advanced by Voltaire that the souffle malin is a concept which was borrowed from Chaldean religion is consistent with recent findings which shows that Chaldean and Persian religions such as Zoroastrianism influenced Jewish beliefs about the demon world and the after-life.

**Pentateuch vs. non-Pentateuch**

We have previously shown the indebtedness of Voltaire to Calmet in the Pentateuch portion of La Bible Enfin Expliquée. What are the similarities and the differences which mark Voltaire's treatment of Calmet in the pentateuchal and non-pentateuchal portions?

Calmet's contribution to Biblical scholarship has been acknowledged.

Here is the scholarly but pedantic "frater" whose faith is so strong that all difficulties of interpretation disappear before him. One must not forget, however, that Calmet's work is full of interesting and informative facts. The Commentaire

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elucidates many obscure passages. The translations of Hebrew terms are invaluable. Although no examples have been given here, even a cursory glance at his work will show that there is scarcely a page on which he does trace the translation of a Hebrew word to the Septuagint and thence to the Vulgate. It must be remembered that Calmet was the first to attempt a completely literal interpretation of the Bible.¹

This evaluation of Calmet drawn exclusively from the Pentateuch commentary could be equally applied to the interpretations discussed in the previous pages. Calmet furnishes Voltaire with translations of Hebrew terms such as mashiak (messiah), melek (king), alma (young woman), phac (cup), teraphim (household idols). Calmet assists Voltaire in understanding the conflicts involved in the interpretations of certain passages. He furnishes Voltaire with cross references to the book of Leviticus which point out apparent contradictions in Biblical mores.

Unfortunately the demerits ascribed to the Pentateuch commentary also are present in the non-Pentateuch portion.

Alongside these merits, however, are demerits too numerous to mention. Two faults in particular stand out. First is the heavy style of composition. Sentences of forty words are not uncommon. Secondly, and probably what Voltaire objected to the most, was the completely credulous attitude of Calmet. No matter what the source, if the information corresponded to what the Church Fathers say, then it was accepted as truth. Thus the flood is true because the Bible and Tradition affirm it is true.²

While Calmet's syntax remains unencumbered by clarity in the whole of his commentary there is a slight difference in the use of authorities in the non-pentateuchal sections. The Church Fathers are always nearby in case Calmet needs the authority of the Church to back up his views. They are especially evident in the various "Dissertations" which

¹Ages, op. cit., pp. 43-44. ²Ibid., p. 44.
Calmet composes to examine a given subject more thoroughly. But in the passages which Voltaire adopts the Church Fathers are almost absent. Instead the name of the ancient Hebrew historian Josephus becomes far more prominent. In regard to Calmet's credulous attitude toward Biblical events it appears that his faith remains unshaken throughout the prophetic works of the Bible. In the *Dissertation Ou L'on Fait Voir L'Excellence De L'Histoire Des Hébreux par dessus toutes celles des autres Nations*, we find the following affirmation.

Le premier & le plus essentiel de tous les avantages de l'Histoire des Juifs par dessus celles des autres Nations, c'est qu'elle a pour Auteur Dieu même qui nous l'a donne par la plume des Historiens sacrés, & des Prophètes, qui étoient remplis d'une lumière surnaturelle, & dirigez spécialement par la vérité essentielle & infaillible.¹

The Pentateuch portion of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* contains twenty-eight passages quoted from Calmet by name. Although no study was made of unacknowledged possible citations from Calmet there were at least the same number of passages which Voltaire took from Calmet without naming him as the source. Adding these figures we come to at least fifty citations which can be documented as originating with Calmet. In the non-pentateuchal portion we have shown at least sixty different passages which attest to Voltaire's reliance upon Calmet. This indicates that Calmet's spirit pervades almost the entire Old Testament portion of Voltaire's commentary.² In effect, the reader gets the impression often while reading Voltaire's work, that it is a sort of *Contra Calmet* in the

¹ Calmet, op. cit., II, p. xxxii.

² Pomeau, op. cit., p. 177, calls *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* "une parodie impertinente de Dom Calmet."
classical Christian sense, e.g. *Contra Celsum*. One feels that Voltaire composed his commentary just for the purpose of combatting Calmet and the other representatives of his type of Biblical exegesis. While this may not be true for the commentary as a whole this was doubtless one of things uppermost in Voltaire's mind during the composition of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*.

But are the citations borrowed from Calmet exactly of the same nature in the Pentateuch and non-Pentateuch portions? One of the main similarities lies in Voltaire's feigned credulity *à la* Calmet, except that with Calmet it is not feigned.

Voltaire also assumes a pose of seeming to emulate Calmet's credulity and orthodox adherence to the infallibility of Scripture and tradition. This is seen in the manner in which the two critics terminate an important point. ... After discussing the attitude of the incredules towards the flood, Calmet resolves the entire problem by saying, "puisqu'enfin il s'agit d'un fait, & d'un fait miraculeux, qu'on ne pourra jamais bien attaquer par des raisons tières de la difficulté qui s'y rencontre. Nous avouons que c'est un miracle, & qu'il faut de la Foi pour le croire. ..." For the purpose of irony Voltaire feigns an orthodox position in his summation remarks. Although he ridicules the idea of the flood by prominently displaying the remarks of the incredules he ends his comment thus. ... Des accessoires peuvent être faux, quoique le fond soit véritable. Ce n'est pas avec les yeux de la raison qu'il faut lire ce livre, mais avec ceux de la foi. ... Tout cela n'est qu'une supposition, une conjecture qui doit disparaître devant l'autenticité des livres saints.¹

¹*Ibid.*, pp. 163-164. Pomeau believes that Calmet himself was troubled by the conflict between his faith and incomprehensible action on the part of Biblical figures. "Il ose s'étonner du châtiment de Saül, puni par Dieu d'avoir sacrifié seul: "Si on n'était pas persuadé de la justice de Dieu, il faudrait ou supposer dans Saül des crimes cachés, ou accuser Dieu de ne pas proportionner ses châtiments aux crimes (Com. lit. v. p. 162)" Dom Calmet comprend mal le Dieu vengeur de l'Ancien Testament. L'esprit du siècle a soufflé dans sa cellule."

²*Ages, op. cit.*, p. 46.
There are numerous incidences of this Voltairean "orthodoxy" in the non-Pentateuchal sections as well. When he completes the discussion of the alleged sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter he says that no matter what the incrédules may say, God bestows His blessings on those he wishes to. This, says Voltaire, is the great dénouement which resolves all difficulties. After denouncing the Biblical narrative dealing with the death of fifty thousand men (1 Samuel 6:19), Voltaire faithfully defends the "orthodox" view espoused by dogmatists.

Convenons qu'il y a dans l'Écriture bien des passages qu'il n'est pas donné aux hommes de comprendre: il est bon de nous humilier.1

Voltaire sums up Samuel's bloody vengeance (1 Samuel 15:32) by stating "adorons la Providence sans raisonner."2

On a number of occasions Voltaire attributes a statement to Calmet which does appear in the body of the latter's commentary but which is not original with Calmet.

Voltaire is guilty of the same behaviour in his treatment of the "vache rousse". "Calmet dit que la vache rousse marque assez Jesus-Christ dans son agonie."3

A perusal of comments made by Calmet on this passage indicated that it was not Calmet who made the remark but Spencer. This technique shows that Voltaire often uses Calmet's name when he really is referring to the entire body of the Commentaire littéral. Voltaire uses this same inaccurate method of attribution in the non-Pentateuchal portions. When he discusses the role of Rahab in the book of Joshua he attributes to

1Mol., XXX, p. 164. 2Ibid., pp. 175-176.
3Ages, op. cit., p. 52.
Calmet a rabbinic tradition which saw Rahab as a simple inn-keeper. In both sections, however, it should be pointed out, that Voltaire does not alter the meaning of the passage.

We have shown the similarities which exist in Voltaire's utilization of Calmet in both the Pentateuch and non-Pentateuch portions of La Bible Enfin Expliquee. In both portions Voltaire is scrupulously careful about addressing Calmet as Le Révérend Père (more out of irony than respect). In the two parts Voltaire employs valuable translations of Hebrew terms furnished by Calmet. Voltaire feigns the same credulity with regard to Calmet in both sections. Finally, Voltaire makes the same indiscretion in attributing sources.

But there is one major and important difference in the treatment of Calmet in the pentateuchal and non-pentateuchal areas. In his remarks relating to Calmet in the five books of Moses Voltaire makes only one harsh reference to him. Speaking about the melting of the golden calf recorded in Exodus, Voltaire says:

Tout ce que dit là-dessus dom Calmet est d'un homme qui ne sait aucun principe de chimie.¹

Although there are many satirical and ironic allusions to Calmet, the preceding passage is the only one in the Pentateuch portion which could be judged as a direct attack on Calmet's erudition. It is the remark of an angry man.

But by the book of Joshua Voltaire's attitude toward Calmet has turned from ironic citation to direct denigration. Referring to Rahab, Voltaire says that Freret treats Calmet as if he was an imbecile. Then

¹Mol., XXX, p. 99.
by the tenor of his remarks we see that Voltaire tacitly agrees with Freret. After hearing Calmet's explanation of Joshua's stopping of the sun, Voltaire adds, "Cette réponse ingénieuse, savante, et nette ne répond pas entièrement à la question."¹ When Jephthah speaks to the Ammonites about Chamos, their God, Calmet speaks about figure de discours. Voltaire unequivocally states, "Mais il n'y a point de figure de discours, c'est un principe que Jephté établit nettement, et sur lequel il raisonne."² When Voltaire quotes Calmet on Samson's achievements, he prefices his remarks by saying "Calmet a beau dire."³ After questioning the morality of the various massacres mentioned in Samuel, Voltaire says of Calmet, "Calmet, il faut avouer, ne dit rien de satisfaisant."⁴ Voltaire expresses his disagreement with Calmet on the red hair mentioned in 1 Samuel 16:12. He says simply, "Nous ne sommes pas de cette opinion."⁵ When Calmet states that God armed Samuel with the zeal to defeat and destroy his enemies, Voltaire bitterly adds: "Car quelle gloire peut revenir à Dieu de ce qu'un prêtre coupe un souverain en morceaux? Nous tremblons en examinant cette barbarie absurde."⁶ Calmet's allusion to the Englishman Farming in connection with the sorceress of Endor elicits from Voltaire: "M. Boulanger dit que Calmet devait s'en tenir à ses vampires."⁷ Voltaire is horrified by Calmet's exoneration of David. Calmet stated that aside from his behavior towards Uriah, his conduct

was irproachable. Voltaire challenges with "Cette excuse serait bonne dans l'histoire des tigres et des panthères." 1 The attempt by Calmet to explain the retrogression of the sun recorded in 2 Kings 20 draws from Voltaire the statement that "On est obligé de dire qu'il n'entend rien du tout à la matière, ..." 2 Calmet's suggestion that the Greeks transposed the Biblical Jephthah story into their Iphigenia legend is summarily rejected by Voltaire. "Rien n'est plus mal imaginé; jamais les Grecs ne connurent les livres des Juifs; ..." 3 Similarly Voltaire rejects the theory advanced by Calmet that a souffle malin infected Saul. "Mais il est prouvé que les Juifs ne connaissaient point encore d'esprit malin, le diable qui s'emparât du corps des hommes." 4

How are we to explain the witty, urbane, and gentle criticism of Calmet characteristic of the pentateuchal comments with the bold and occasionally insulting sallies of the non-pentateuchal section?

There may be an internal reason. While there are scattered references to barbaric acts recorded in the Pentateuch (the massacre of the Shechemites, the death of Pharaoh's armies, Abraham's war with the four kings) it is on the whole a document which emphasizes the religious beginnings of Israel. It contains, especially in Leviticus, a great deal of material dealing with the sacrificial system and the fabric of Jewish ritual law. It contains the Jewish view of the creation of the world and origin of man. It helps define the relationship between God and man. It contains the Ten Commandments.

1 Mol., XXX, p. 193.  
2 Ibid., p. 242.  
3 Ibid., p. 143.  
4 Ibid., p. 177.
By the book of Joshua, however, the Israelites are becoming confronted with contemporary political realities. Under God's aegis they liberate the promised land. In the book of Judges the Jews are challenged continually by hostile and belligerent neighbors. In Kings and the books of Samuel, internal and external situations cause endless strife. Thus in the non-pentateuchal sections Voltaire faces excesses in human behavior which are not characteristic of the Pentateuch. He reacted to the internecine strife recorded (quite honestly) in these books by condemning them outright as being unworthy of a divine document.

Add to this a second consideration. Here is Dom Augustin Calmet, author of the celebrated *Commentaire littéral*, acknowledged as the last word in eighteenth century Biblical criticism, who dismisses all objections to moral inconsistencies by saying that what God ordains is right, and beyond this there is no problem. We can understand Voltaire's ire when he sees Calmet concentrating on how many soldiers were killed but paying no heed to the circumstances of their death nor to the justification of their death. Voltaire's early acquaintance with Calmet and his genuine affection for the man could not prevent him in the end from lashing out at him just as he would at any other man who permitted blind faith to render him insensitive to human tragedy.

**Conclusion**

An examination of the Old Testament portion of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* has shown that Calmet was a major source and perhaps even the inspiration for Voltaire's work. There are almost one hundred and thirty passages which indicate direct citations or paraphrases from Calmet.
Voltaire utilizes Calmet in many ways; for information on Hebrew terms, for explanations of ancient Hebrew customs, for chronological and numerical problems, for important cross references. But he also uses Calmet to refute him either by quoting him ironically, or prefacing a citation with a remark which nullifies Calmet's arguments, or by directly contradicting him with his own views.

While the tenor of the pentateuchal section is mild in its criticism of Calmet, Voltaire becomes much more vehement towards him in the latter books where vituperation and invective become characteristic of Voltaire's treatment of Calmet. This change of attitude is seen to derive from the nature of the books under discussion and Voltaire's inevitable loss of patience with a Calmet who refuses to consider moral questions.
Voltaire's La Bible Enfin Expliquée was not his first pronouncement on Biblical themes nor his last. There are at least fifty essays or opuscules published by Voltaire prior to 1776 in which he treats of the same subject matter as he does in La Bible Enfin Expliquée. In isolated cases there is a more complete analysis of a Biblical theme in the Dictionnaire philosophique than in the Bible commentary itself. The article "Abraham," for example, occupies almost twenty pages in the Dictionnaire, while Abraham is accorded not more than a couple of pages in the pentateuchal portion of La Bible Enfin Expliquée. On the other hand, in the majority of cases the treatment of Biblical episodes in the latter work sums up Voltaire's definitive views. This work then becomes in Voltaire's mind a sort of summa of his numerous ideas and arguments about the Bible. In addition there are several areas of Biblical history, especially in the period of kings, which Voltaire discusses for the first time in La Bible Enfin Expliquée.

Between 1756 and 1776 Voltaire produced over fifty documents pertaining to the Bible. In every discussion of the Pentateuch found in these works Voltaire furnishes the same arguments. When the primordial firmament is under discussion, a reference to the Hebrew concept of the

^See Appendix A.
sky as being a roof will generally follow. If Abraham is being
delineated, the reader will inevitably find a censure of the patriarch's
behavior towards his wife in Egypt. In the same way Voltaire continually
recalls Moses' speech impediment, the massacre of the Shechemites and
the smelting of the golden calf. If the New Testament is treated,
Voltaire will challenge the lineal pedigree assigned to the Messiah by
the authors of the Gospels. In the case of Jesus, Voltaire can never
refrain from quoting from a medieval Jewish polemical tract called Sefer
Toldos Jeshu. After reading work after work the reader automatically
begins to have definite expectations as to what will follow. Thus when
the word Leviticus appears anywhere in his works, one immediately knows
that chapter 26 is under consideration because of the verse in that chap­
ter which enjoins the Jews to fulfill vows made to God.

As for the non-pentateuchal portion of Voltaire's Biblical inter­
est, the same observation is true. To illustrate this, several themes
from La Bible Enfin Expliquée will be explored with reference to their
treatment in works preceding it by as much as twenty years. An effort
will be made to ascertain if there has been any progression, refining or
intensifying of the thought as it finally manifests itself in La Bible
Enfin Expliquée.

In terms of frequency the book of Ezekiel is discussed by Voltaire
more than any other Biblical document. This is somewhat curious in that

1The Sefer Toldos Jeshu (meaning the History of Jesus) was a com­
pilation of legends most of which were sacrilegious, surrounding the
birth and career of Jesus. They were the product of the medieval Jewish
mind seeking to denigrate the character and figure of the founder of
Christianity.
he devotes only two and one-half pages to it in *La Bible Enfin Expliquee*. Here Voltaire describes in a rather neutral tone God's command to the prophet to eat parchment and tie himself up. In a similarly controlled manner Voltaire narrates God's request of Ezekiel to lie on his left side for three hundred and ninety days and on his right side for forty days and to eat bread covered with human excrements for three hundred and ninety days. After his rather bland presentation of this somewhat unusual material, Voltaire says:

Il s'est élévé une grande dispute entre les interprètes. Tant de choses extraordinaires, si opposées à nos mœurs et à notre raison, se sont-elles passées en visions ou en réalité? Ezéchiel raconte-t-il cette histoire comme un songe, ou comme une action véritable? Les derniers commentateurs, et surtout dom Calmet, ne doutent pas que tout ne se soit pas réellement passé comme le dit Ezéchiél.

Then he quotes the very credulous Calmet to the effect that everything Ezekiel experiences was true on the literal level and that there is no figurative meaning intended. To Calmet's facile acceptance of the Biblical story, Voltaire responds:

On doit donc croire qu'effectivement tout se passa comme Ezéchiel le raconte; et cela n'est pas plus surprenant que les aventures réelles d'Elie, d'Elisée, de Samson, de Jéphé, de Gédéon, de Josué, de Moïse, de Jacob, d'Abraham, de Noé, d'Adam et d'Éve. Mes prédécesseurs ont remarqué que dans les livres judaïques rien ne s'est fait de ce qui se fait aujourd'hui.

Voltaire introduces Ezekiel's reference to Oholah and Oholibah by saying that the passages dealing with these two prostitutes are those which have excited the most murmuring among the critics and which have

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 264.  
2 Ibid., p. 265.  
3 Ibid.
caused the most embarrassment. With apparent delight Voltaire relates the sensuous way in which these women are described including their fornication with all who pass by. The reference to Oholibah's desire for animal company as well as human appears even too strong for Voltaire for he presents the pertinent passage in the Vulgate Latin:

Ensuite le Seigneur s'adressa à Ooliba; il dit qu'Ooliba à exposé à nu ses fornications, "et insanivit libidine super concubitum eorum quorum carnes sunt ut carnes asinorum, et sicut fluxus equorum fluxus eorum".2

Voltaire's reaction to this latter section is contained in his remark:

Ce n'est qu'une pure allégorie exprimée avec une naïveté qu'aujourd'hui nous trouverions trop grossière, et qui peut-être ne l'était point alors.3

Towards the end of his discussion of this book Voltaire mentions that the Jews thought this book so dangerous that they prevented its reading before the age of thirty. He finishes his treatment of Ezekiel by referring to chapter thirty-nine where God is purported to promise the Israelites that they will drink the blood of their victims and consume the flesh of the horses and riders. Voltaire comments:

On a cru que la première promesse, de manger la chair des guerriers et de boire le sang des princes était faite pour les oiseaux; et que la seconde, de manger le cheval et le cavalier, était faite pour les guerriers juifs. Il y avait, en effet, dans les armées des Perses beaucoup de Scythes qui mangeaient de la chair, et qui s'abreuvait de sang dans le crâne des ennemis. Le Seigneur pouvait dire aux Juifs qu'il traiterait un jour les Scythes comme les Scythes les avaient traités. Le Seigneur pouvait bien leur dire: Vous saurez que c'est moi qui suis le Seigneur; mais il ne pouvait le dire aux quadrupèdes et aux oiseaux, qui n'en ont jamais rien su.4

1 Mol., XXX, pp. 265-266.  
2 Ibid., p. 266.  
3 Ibid.  
4 Ibid., p. 267.
Voltaire's parting sally to the book of Ezekiel is the oft employed technique of historical relativity:

Nous ne prétendons point entrer dans toutes les profondeurs de tous les prophètes, ni examiner le divers sens qu'on a donné à leurs paroles: nous nous bornons à montrer seulement ce qu'il y a de plus singulier dans leurs aventures, et ce qui est le plus éloigné de nos moeurs.¹

The first reference to Ezekiel prior to La Bible Enfin Expliquée is found in Voltaire's *Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke* (1761), where the author in discussing Biblical morality alludes to the case of Oholah and Oholibah. By 1762 Voltaire is discussing the prostitute's association with the animal kingdom.

Dieu dit, au vingt-troisième chapitre d'Ezéchiel, que la jeune Oolla n'aime que ceux qui ont membre d'âne et sperme de cheval. Comment ces fourbes insensés auraient-ils connu l'avenir?²

In Voltaire's *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) he reports that it is the libertinage of the two sisters Oholah and Oholibah that prompted the Synagogue to prevent the reading of this book before the age of thirty. They felt that youngsters might abuse the naivete of the story.³

By 1764 in the article "Ezechiel" of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* Voltaire, for his own purposes, interprets the activities of the two sisters as being figures of the iniquities of Jerusalem and Samaria.⁴

In the *Questions de Zapata* (1767) Voltaire adopts a quizzical tone insisting that he cannot understand the purpose of the account of Oholah's

²*Mol.*, XIV, p. 325.  
³*Mol.*, XXV, p. 79.  
and Oholibah's practices. After this confession he says:

Sages maîtres, dites-moi si vous êtes dignes des faveurs
do Ooliba?

Voltaire presents a particularly detailed analysis of Oholah and Oholibah
in the Instructions du gardien des capucins à Raguse à Frère Pédiculoso
(1768).

Les passages les plus essentiels d'Ézéchiel, les plus con-
formes à la morale, à la honneté publique, les plus capables
d'inspirer la pudeur aux jeunes garçons et aux jeunes filles
sont ceux où le Seigneur parle d'Oola et de sa sœur Oolibah.
On ne peut répéter ces textes admirables. ... Le terme de
semence est beaucoup plus expressif dans l'hébreu. Nous ne
savons si vous devez le rendre par le mot énergique qui est
en usage à la cour, chez les dames, en de certaines occasions.
C'est que nous laissons absolument à votre discrétion.

In his Relation du bannissement des Jésuites de la Chine (1769), Voltaire
amuses himself with the figurative explanation of these passages.

Les deux sœurs Oolla et Ooliba ouvrent leurs cuisses à tout
venant, font bâtir un b...., et donne la préférence à ceux qui
ont le membre d'un âne ou d'un cheval, selon les propres
expressions de la sainte Ecriture! cela signifie l'Eglise de
Jésus-Christ. 3

Perhaps the strongest indictment which Voltaire presents against
this episode from Ezekiel is contained in a letter to the Marquise du
Deffand written on September 17, 1759:

N'oubliez pas le premier chapitre d'Ézéchiel, que personne ne
lit; mais faites-vous surtout traduire le chapitre XVI, qu'on
n'a pas osé traduire fidèlement, et vous verrez que "Jérusalem
est une belle fille que le Seigneur a armée dès qu'elle a eu du

1 Mol., XXVI, p. 183.


3 Mol., ibid., p. 8. In Catechisme de l'honnête homme (1763)
Voltaire directly states that they established a bordel.
poil et des tétons; qu'il a couché avec elle, et qu'il l'a entretenue magnifiquement; que cependant elle a couché avec mille amants, et que même elle s'est souvent servie quand elle était seule de, ... je n'ose pas dire quoi. Et au verset 20 du chapitre XXIII il est dit "qu'Ooliba, la bien aimée, après avoir tâché de mille amants, a donné la préférence à ceux qui ont le talent d'un âne."

After the story of Oholah and Oholibah it is Ezekiel's unusual diet which prompts Voltaire to spend many lines in various works to castigate what he considers improper behavior from a prophet. As early as 1763 in the Traité sur la tolérance, Voltaire cites Ezekiel's strange diet, but without comment. In the same year the description of the meal comes with a more customary Voltairean addenda:

Je demande comment un pareil extravagant serait reçu chez les plus imbéciles même de tous nos provinciaux.

In the Sermon des cinquante (1762) Ezekiel provides Voltaire with another foray into the field of figurative interpretation:

Puis-je vous répéter sans vomir ce que Dieu ordonne à Ezéchiel? Il le faut. Dieu lui ordonne de manger du pain d'orge cuit avec de la merde, ... Oui mes frères, le prophète mange son pain d'orge avec ses excréments; il se plaint que ce déjeuner lui repugne un peu, et Dieu, par accommodement lui permet de ne plus mêler à son pain que de la fiente de vache. C'est donc là un type, une figure de l'Eglise de Jésus-Christ.

By 1763 Voltaire is telling his readers that Ezekiel was eating his bread with excrement and bouse de vache. In 1764 through the article "Ezechiel" in the Dictionnaire philosophique he is referring to these latter condiments as confitures and suggesting that the majority of

1 Mol., XL, p. 172.  
2 Mol., XXV, p. 75.  
4 Mol., ibid., p. 448.  
people find God's commandments unworthy of divine majesty.¹ Later on in the same article we learn that the critics are revolting against these God-given orders and that Ezekiel also ate fromage and millet.² Three years later in Homélies prononcées à Londres he repeats a similar charge without comment.³ In the Relation du bannissement des Jésuites de la Chine (1768), Voltaire irreverently suggests that Ezekiel's diet refers to Jesus Christ.⁴ In the same year Voltaire makes some further observations on the diet of Ezekiel:

Vous avez osé dire que Dieu ordonna au prophète de faire cuire son pain avec de la bouse de vache; ce n'est point cela, il s'agit de mieux. ... Si le déjeuner d'Ézéchiel est un peu puant, le dîner des Israélites dont il parle est un peu anthropophage. ... Passe encore que les enfants mangent leurs pères, qui sont coriaces, cela est-il de la nouvelle cuisine?⁵

In this same work Voltaire informs the reader that his soul se dilatera on reading about these unusual customs.⁶ But one of the most comical references to this by now infamous diet is made in the article "Tolerance" (1772) taken from the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie.

Mais que dirai-je à mon frère le Juif? Lui donnerai-je a souper? Oui, pourvu que pendant le repas l'âne de Balaam ne s'avisne pas de braise, qu'Ézéchiel ne mêle pas son déjeuner avec notre souper, ...?⁷

By the time of Un Chrétien contre six Juifs (1776) Voltaire is suggesting that Ezekiel's eating habits disqualify him from the respect due to prophets.⁸

The third aspect of the book of Ezekiel to which Voltaire devotes many passing and occasionally detailed references is the one outlined in chapter thirty-nine where God allegedly promises the Israelites that they will drink the blood and devour the flesh of their enemies. It was natural that Voltaire would jump upon this enigmatic promise describing as it does cannibalistic practices. He would be happy to find any evidence which would support his theory advanced on numerous occasions that the Jews were a semi-barbaric tribe of Arab nomads. And what better evidence could there be than the witness of Scripture itself?

Thus as early as 1761 in Lettre de M. Cloppicre à M. Eratou, Voltaire quotes in full the pertinent passages but without accompanying comment. In 1763 he interprets this promise as being a form of encouragement for the Israelites to battle courageously. There is a veiled reference to this event, although unnamed in Voltaire's Dialogue du chapon et de la poularde (1763) where we find:

Je n'oserais pas l'assurer; mais je me souviens bien d'avoir entendu clairement qu'il y a bien des pays, et entre autres celui des Juifs, où les hommes se sont quelquefois mangés les uns les autres. Thus as early as 1761 in Lettre de M. Cloppicre à M. Eratou, Voltaire quotes in full the pertinent passages but without accompanying comment. In 1763 he interprets this promise as being a form of encouragement for the Israelites to battle courageously. There is a veiled reference to this event, although unnamed in Voltaire's Dialogue du chapon et de la poularde (1763) where we find:

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By 1764 in the article "Anthropophages" of the Dictionnaire philosophique, Voltaire uses this episode to assume that it was customary among the Jews to eat human flesh because the prophet announces that the Israelites will eat not only the enemy horses but also the enemy himself. He repeats this same charge in the Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des

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1 Mol., XXIV, p. 235.
2 Mol., XXV, p. 73. Traité sur la Tolérance.
3 Mol., XXV, p. 121.
4 Mol., XVII, p. 264.
nations where he tries to show that the lack of food often drove people to eat their own kind.

Probably the most complete discussion of the question of cannibalism comes in Voltaire's *Instruction du gardien des capucins de Ragusa à Frère Pédiculoso* (1768).

In the article "Juifs" (1771) which appeared in the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, Voltaire addresses the Jews directly and complains that this episode in Jewish history has caused him to frémir and that in spite of the text he would prefer to believe that it is the birds who will feed off human flesh. By 1776 he is becoming more critical of the story and after narrating the main elements, he says:

Nous ne mangerions ni le cheval ni la cavalier; nous parlerons des sottises anciennes et modernes.

Although there are differences in the way Voltaire treats the book of Ezekiel, there is no logical progression in the various chronological references. Some statements are bolder than others. Some are

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1 Mol., XII, p. 389.  
2 Mol., XXVII, p. 306.  
3 Mol., XIX, p. 535.  
more humorous than others. There is, however, an important stylistic
difference between the treatment in La Bible Enfin Expliquée and the
works prior to it. In the former Voltaire tries to maintain the neutral
aloofness required of an impartial Bible commentator. But his neutrality
is mitigated by the subtlety of his tone and the malice of his employment
of historical relativity to explain away apparent contradictions. While
Voltaire does not cover all the details in the three episodes from
Ezekiel in La Bible Enfin Expliquée, he treats the major objections in a
way which illustrates his humorous technique better than the scattered
references in different works.

After the book of Ezekiel the Biblical work which attracts
voltaire's attention is the book of Samuel. There are several aspects
of this document which Voltaire deals with time after time in his various
brochures and pamphlets. First there is the question of authorship. In
La Bible Enfin Expliquée he quotes Newton as saying that Samuel himself
wrote it.¹ Second, there is the encounter between Samuel and Agag
recounted in chapter fifteen. When Saul disobeys God's order to slaughter
the Amalekites, Samuel reproaches him and then causes Agag to be brought
before him, whereupon Samuel cuts him up into pieces. Voltaire devotes
only thirteen lines in his commentary on this story. He mentions that
Samuel's act is even too strong for a hangman and that there is no one
for whom the reading of this passage would not fill with horror. He

¹He makes this same point in Traité sur la tolérance (1763), Mol.,
XXV, p. 69; Seconde lettre du Quaker (1764), Mol., XXV, p. 142; La défense
de mon oncle (1767), Mol., XXVI, p. 428; Homélies prononcées à Londres
(1767), Mol., XXVI, p. 347.
calls the whole affair an absurd act of barbarism. The third portion of the book of Samuel frequently alluded to by Voltaire is the attack made by Nahash, the Ammonite king, against Jabesh-gilead (1 Samuel 11) and the subsequent routing of Nahash by Saul with an army of three hundred thousand men. In this story Voltaire objects to Saul having such a great army when, according to the text, the Jews were still slaves to the Philistines, when they had neither lance, nor sword. He suggests that Gulliver has more fables but fewer contradictions. The request of the Israelites to have a king (1 Samuel 8) and Samuel's answer that this is tantamount to rejecting God, is referred to by Voltaire several times. In Le Bible Enfin Expliquée, Voltaire interprets this request as implying a rejection of Samuel as the leader of the people. He quotes Arbuthnot as saying:

On fait sur cette parole de Dieu une difficulté: il est certain dit le docteur Arbuthnot, que Dieu pouvait gouverner aussi aisément son peuple par un roi que par un prêtre; ce roi pouvait lui être aussi subordonné que Samuel.

The witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:7) mentioned in connection with Saul's effort to communicate posthumously with Samuel is a theme frequently commented upon by Voltaire. In his official Bible commentary he discusses this incident in the following terms:

Partout ailleurs que dans la sainte Écriture, cette histoire passerait pour un conte de sorcier assez mal fait mais puisqu'un auteur sacré l'a écrite, elle est indubitable: elle mérite autant de respect que tout le reste.

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 176.  
2 Ibid., p. 170.  
3 Ibid., p. 165.  
4 Ibid., p. 185.
Of the five incidents from the book of Samuel it is the episode of Samuel and Agag which attracts Voltaire's attention the most. In 1761 his *Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke* stresses Samuel's outrageous act in order to show the moral level of the Israelites.

Et il prend un saint couperet, et il hache en morceaux le roi Agag. Si une telle action est véritable, quel peuple était le peuple juif, et quels prêtres étaient ses prêtres.\(^1\)

The same theme is enunciated in Voltaire's *Lettre de M. Clocpicre à M. Eratou* (1761) except that in this work he describes the act in terms of stew.

Vous sentez bien, messieurs, leur dis-je que nous ne devons pas juger des moeurs de l'antiquité par celle de l'université de Tubinge; vous savez que les Juifs immolaient des hommes; or on a toujours mangé des victimes immolées; et, à votre avis, quand Samuel coupa en petits morceaux le roi Agag, qui s'était rendu prisonnier, n'était-ce pas visiblement pour en faire un ragout?\(^2\)

When Voltaire discusses this incident in the *Sermon des cinquante* he calls it the most detestable yet sacred of acts, and characterizes Samuel as a *prêtre boucher* for reproaching Saul and for killing Agag.\(^3\)

The sacrificial element in the slaughter of Agag is brought out by Voltaire's treatment of the subject in the *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) where Agag is termed the *vrai sacrifice*.\(^4\) In the article "Jephte" (1764) of the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire explains the murder of Agag in terms of a pentateuchal law.

Il était expressément ordonné par la loi juive d'immoler les hommes voués au Seigneur. "Tout homme voué ne sera point racheté, mais sera mis à mort sans rémission." La Vulgate

\(^1\)Mol., XXVI, p. 214.  
\(^2\)Mcl., XXIV, p. 236-237.  
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 443.  
\(^4\)Mol., XXV, p. 72.
traduit: "Non redimetur, sed morte morietur." C'est en vertu de cette loi que Samuel coupa en morceaux le roi Agag. ...

In the same article Voltaire describes Samuel as a butcher who slaughters a bull in his abattoir. Passing references to Samuel and Agag designed to show the primitive level of the Jews are found in the Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations (1765) and the Questions de Zapata. In "Juifs" (1771) from the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie, Voltaire emphasizes that the sacrifice of Agag was a divine behest. Voltaire's final mention of this episode comes in Un Chrétien contre six Juifs (1776) where he introduces a new consideration into the discussion; whether Samuel would have been physically strong enough to perform the act which is attributed to him.

Je vois Samuel qui se met en prières avec Saul, qui fait amener entre eux deux le roi captif, et qui le coupe en morceaux de ses propres mains. Si ce n'est pas là un sacrifice, il n'y en a jamais eu. ... Le zèle lui met l'épée à la main, dit le savant dom Calmet; il pouvait ajouter que le zèle donna des forces surnaturelles car Samuel avait près de cent ans, et à cet âge on n'est guère capable de mettre un roi en haches.

Voltaire's preoccupation with the account of Saul's defeat of Nahash, king of the Amonites, probably stems from the fact that Voltaire saw in this portion a perfect example of Biblical inconsistency. It did not seem possible that Saul could have acquired such an arsenal of weapons at a time when the Jews were captives. His first reference to this even comes in 1761 where the comparison with Gulliver's Travels...
takes place. Here Voltaire uses almost the same language as the Bible Enfin Expliquée when he explains that Swift had similar fables but not such contradictions.\(^1\) By 1764 Voltaire openly states that there is blatant contradiction involved in the description of Saul's army:

Une des plus fortes contradictions qu'on ait cru trouver dans l'histoire des Rois est la disette totale d'armes offensives et défensives chez les Juifs à l'avènement de Sàul, comparé avec l'armée de trois cent trent mille combattants que Sàul conduit contre les Ammonites, qui assiégaient Jabès en Galaad.\(^2\)

In the Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations (1765) Voltaire's objection to the size of Saul's army parallels the criticism in La Bible Enfin Expliquée.\(^3\) In the Questions de Zapata the number 300,000 is again challenged:

Cependant Saul donne une bataille aux Philistins, et remporte sur eux la victoire; et dans cette bataille il est à la tête de trois cent trente mille soldats, dans un petit pays qui ne peut pas nourrir trente mille âmes: car il n'avait alors que le tiers de la Terre Sainte tout au plus, et ce pays stérile ne nourrit pas aujourd'hui vingt mille habitants.\(^4\)

There are several references in Voltaire's critical works to the request made by the Jews for a king. For Voltaire this incident in Jewish history reflects upon the omnipotence of the Biblical God. Moreover, there is an implied rejection of God in the desire for a king. In his Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire (1768) Voltaire stresses this point of view.

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\(^1\) Mol., XXVI, p. 214. Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke.


\(^3\) Mol., XI, p. 111.

\(^4\) Mol. XXVI, p. 181.
... même quand les Hébreux voulaient avoir des rois, Dieu leur déclare expressément, par la bouche de son prophète Samuel, que c'est rejeter Dieu que d'obéir à des monarques: or plusieurs savants ont été étonnés que Dieu voulut être l'historien d'un peuple qui avait renoncé à être gouverné par lui.1

In the Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke (1761) Voltaire interprets Samuel's remark that asking for a king was renouncing God, as a selfish and bold statement from one who was merely interested in preserving his own authority.2 Voltaire's allusions to the witch of Endor, who was allegedly able to conjure up the spirit of Samuel for Saul, are part of his plan to show that the religion of the Israelites was a primitive one. Sorceresses, charms and serpents were part of the paraphernalia of magical cults. In 1761 in the Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations, Voltaire includes this episode in his description of magic and mystery employed in ancient religions.3 He also questions the translation of the Hebrew term ob:

La pythonisse d'Endor, qui évoque l'ombre de Samuel est assez connue; il est vrai qu'il serait fort étrange que ce mot de Python qui est grec, eut été connu des Juifs du temps de Saul. Mais la Vulgate seule parle de Python; le texte hébreu se sert du mot ob, que les Septante ont traduit par enastrimuthon.4

The major difference between the discussion of the themes in Samuel in La Bible Enfin Expliquée and the several other works cited is that in the former the treatment is far more complete. Also, as in the case of Ezekiel there is a light satirical touch which is present to a greater degree in La Bible Enfin Expliquée than in the prior works.

1 Mol., XXVII, p. 241. 2 Mol., XXVI, p. 213.
There is no figure in the Bible, save that of Jesus perhaps, which Voltaire discusses more frequently than Jephthah. His name is associated with three separate episodes from the book of Judges; with the sacrifice of his daughter, with the pronunciation of the word shibboleth and with the allusion to the Moabite God Chamosh. But since the third reference will be discussed in a further section, we shall consider the first two. Voltaire devotes fifty-nine lines in La Bible Enfin Expliquée to the question of whether Jephthah really sacrificed his daughter. Voltaire concludes that if one takes into consideration the wording of the original vow there can be no doubt that she was sacrificed. He cites as proof the law stated in Leviticus requiring the sacrifice of those who have been vowed to the Lord. He suggests also that not only did God accept human sacrifice, he demanded it as in the case of Isaac. Voltaire suggests that God did not prevent Jephthah from carrying out his pledge because the Israelites were too numerous, whereupon he adds:

Nous ne proposons cette solution qu'avec défiance, sachant bien que ce n'est pas à nous de deviner les desseins et les raisons de Dieu.

In the remainder of his remarks on Jephthah's sacrifice, Voltaire argues that the phrase "cried for her virginity" does not change the fact that she was indeed sacrificed. He denies as well that the Greek legend of Iphigenia comes from the Hebrew tale. Voltaire quotes the Greek-Jewish historian Josephus to substantiate his claim that Jephthah's daughter died.

\[^1\] Mol., XXX, p. 142. \[^2\] Ibid., p. 103.
The first reference Voltaire makes about Jephthah occurs in
l'Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke (1761) where he makes the cate-
goric statement that Jephthah sacrificed his own daughter to a Dieu
sanguinaire.¹ A year later in his Sermon des cinquante, Voltaire
alludes to Leviticus, chapter 27, as the authority for which Jephthah
sacrificed his own daughter.² Jephthah along with Samson, Joshua, Saul
and others is criticized in the following year in the Catéchisme de
l'honnête homme for his barbarous deed.³ In his Traité sur la tolér-
ance, (1763), Voltaire makes use of Calmet for the first time to support
his view that there was a sacrifice involved.⁴ In the article "Religion"
(1764) of the Dictionnaire philosophique, Jephthah's act is cited as an
example of primitive religion.⁵ In L'Epître aux Romains (1768) Voltaire
makes a suggestion about the origin of this story which is not found in
La Bible Enfin Expliquée. He suggests that the sacrifice of Idoménée is
at the origin.⁶ The death of Jephthah's daughter as a sacrifice victim
is cited by the theist in Profession de Foi des théistes (1768). There
once again the brutality of Hebrew religion is stressed.⁷ The clearest
statement made by Voltaire on this question outside of his Bible com-
mentary comes in the article "Jephté" (1764) of the Dictionnaire
philosophique, where after relating the major elements, he adds:

Voilà donc les sacrifices de sang humain clairement établis;
il n'y a aucun point d'histoire mieux constate: on ne peut
juger d'une nation que par ses archives, et par ce qu'elle
rapporte d'elle même.⁸

¹ Mol., XXVI, p. 212.  ² Mol., XXIV, p. 441.  ³ Ibid., p. 527.
⁴ Mol., XXV, p. 72.  ⁵ Mol., XX, p. 356.  ⁶ Mol., XXVII, p. 89.
⁷ Ibid., p. 63.  ⁸ Mol., XIX, p. 498.
In the article "Idole" (1764) of the same work, Voltaire again returns to the argument that the law in Leviticus is the basis for the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter.¹ He reiterates this argument a year later in the Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations (1765).² In this same document he debunks the idea advanced by certain scholars that the Celts are descendants of the ancient Hebrews because they sacrifice à la Jephthah.³ By 1771 in the article "Juifs" of the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie, Voltaire appears moved by the necessity of attacking those who feel that Jephthah's daughter merely became an anchorite and did not die.

Tournez-vous de tous les sens; tordez le texte, disputez contre les Pères de l'Église, il lui fut comme il avait voué; et il avait voué d'égorger sa fille pour remercier le Seigneur. Belle action de grâces.⁴

The same polemical tone is present in Voltaire's presentation of the problem in Un chrétien contre six Juifs (1776).

Vous n'osez dire nettement que selon le texte, Jephté n'égorgea point sa fille. La chose est constante, trop avérée par les plus grands hommes de l'Église. Vous dites que peut-être cela s'expliquait d'une autre façon; que Jephté pourrait avoir mis sa fille au couvent; ... je m'en tiens au texte, en quoi je crois plus qu'en eux.⁵

In the same work Voltaire caustically remarks:

Que nous importe au fond, à vous et à moi, pauvre Gaulois que nous sommes, si on a écrit, je ne sais où, et je ne sais quand, qu'un barbare, dans une guerre barbare entre des villages, ait égorgé sa fille par pitié.⁶

Jephthah's name is also associated by Voltaire in connection with the massacre of the Ephramites whose downfall was precipitated for not

⁴Mol., XIX, p. 534. ⁵Mol., XXIX, p. 533. ⁶Ibid., p. 528.
being able to pronounce the Hebrew word *shibboleth*. His comments in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* are summed up in:

... que la fable de quarante-deux mille hommes tués l'un après l'autre aux gués du Jourdain, pour n'avoir pas du prononcer *shibboleth*, est une des plus grandes extravagances qu'on ait jamais écrite ... : tout est exagéré et absurde dans l'histoire juive; et il est aussi honteux de la croire que de l'avoir écrite.\(^1\)

The failure to pronounce a Hebrew word appears for Voltaire to be a ridiculous reason and an impossible stratagem with which to defeat the Ephramites. When he refers to the incident, Voltaire always speaks of it lightly and mockingly.\(^2\) On the other hand, in *Des conspirations contre les peuples* (1766) he appears to admire the clever way in which the People from Galaad ascertained the real identity of the Ephramites.\(^3\)

In the article "Osée" (1771) of the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, Voltaire humorously concludes that the Ephramites were not schismatics.\(^4\)

A similarly humorous treatment of the event is found in *Un chrétien contre six Juifs* (1776):

Il s'agit de quarante-deux mille de vos frères, les Juifs de la tribu d'Ephraïm, qui furent tous égorgeés par leurs frères des autres tribus à un des gués de la petite rivière du Jourdain. On leur criaient: "Prononcez *shibolet*, épé de blé." Ces malheureux, qui grasseyaient et qui ne pouvaient dire *shibolet*, disaient *siboleth*, et on les égorgea comme des moutons. ... Quelle horreur y a-t-il donc, monsieur? quelle mauvaise intention? quelle faute à dire qu'ils furent massacrés pour avoir grasseyé?\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Mol., XXX, p. 143.


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 2.  
\(^4\) Mol., XX, p. 158.  
\(^5\) Mol., XXIX, p. 505.
Voltaire's treatment of Jephthah is most fully developed in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*. Except for the reference to Idumeneus as the source for this story, Voltaire incorporates all the material he uses in other works into the pertinent section of his Bible commentary. The same may be said for the discussion of the word *shiboleth*.

There are four events (three of which are found in Judges, one in Joshua) in the Bible which form a unit around which Voltaire continually lets fly his criticisms of Scripture. These are: the language Jephthah employed in referring to the God Chamosh (Judges 11:24), the idolatrous practices of Micash and her private sanctuary (Judges 17), the allusion to *Adonai* being the God of the mountains (Judges 1:9), and the admonition by Joshua to the Israelites not to follow the worship practices of their fathers (Joshua 24:15). The aim of his critique of these sections is to show that in the Biblical period the Israelite religion was undergoing flux and change and that there was no fixed religion. Through this attack Voltaire hoped to show that there was nothing original about Judaism.

Voltaire begins his discussion of Chamosh in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* by saying:

Nous sommes obligés de réfuter les critiques presque à chaque ligne. C'est ici leur plus grand triomphe.¹

From this point he presents the arguments of the critiques fully. There was complete equality among the gods of ancient peoples. Every people fought under the banner of its god just as the barbarian peoples of Europe fought under the banner of their respective saints after the

¹Mol., XXX, p. 141.
destruction of the Roman empire. Voltaire, in his effort to feign the most orthodox views presents the following argument in mitigation:

Le meilleur reponse, a notre avis, serait que le texte est corrompu dans cet endroit par les copist, et qu'il n'était pas possible que Jephte, qui avait entendu parler de tous les miracles du Dieu des Juifs en faveur de son peuple, put croire qu'il y eut un autre dieu aussi puissant que lui.  

In his discussion of Micash and her idols, Voltaire remarks in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* that this story illustrates that the book was written during the period of the kings. Voltaire also quotes Fréret to the effect that Micash's case was not isolated, that every family had its personal idol.  

As for the question of God residing in the mountains we find:

Joshua's admonition to the Jews to make a choice between the gods of Mesopotamia and the God of Israel is interpreted by Voltaire in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* as meaning that the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had served another cult before the religion of Israel. In effect, argues Voltaire, Terach, Abraham's father, was a hewer of idols, Jacob married two idol-worshiping sisters. But Voltaire's

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 141.  
2 Ibid., p. 147.  
3 Ibid.  
4 Ibid., p. 132.  
5 Ibid., p. 131.
main objection to this episode is that there could have been any choice offered in the first place.

Mais ici, comment Josué peut-il laisser le choix au peuple, après tant de miracles? Il y aurait donc eu beaucoup d’Hébreux qui n’auraient rien vu de ces miracles, ou qu’ils n’y auraient ajouté aucune foi. Il se peut que ce texte signifie: Vous voyez ce que Dieu a fait pour vous, et combien il serait dangereux d’en adorer un autre.

In his Traité sur la tolérance (1763) Voltaire makes his first telling analysis of the Chamosh problem. Here he sees this episode as showing at the very least that God tolerated Chamosh:

Car la sainte Ecriture ne dit pas: vous pensez avoir droit sur les terres et vous dites vous avoir été données par le dieu Chamosh: elle dit positivement: "Vous avez droit, tibi jure debentur"; ce qui est le vrai sens de ces paroles hébraïques: Otho therash.

In his article "Religion" (1764) of the Dictionnaire philosophique, Chamosh is mentioned to show the instability of Biblical religion. A similar purpose is noted in Voltaire’s reference to this material in Essai sur les moeurs et l’esprit des nations (1765). By 1767 in the Questions de Zapata the idea of the local god is being stressed:

... que les Juifs regardassent alors leur Dieu comme une divinité locale et protectrice, qui tantôt était plus puissante que les dieux ennemis, et tantôt était moins puissante?

In Dieu et les hommes (1769) Voltaire clearly states the idea that the Jews had no fixed religion:

Voici une seconde preuve beaucoup plus forte que ces Juifs n’avaient point encore de religion déterminée. ... Certes il

\[\text{Mol., XXX, p. 131.} \quad \text{Mol., XXV, p. 73.} \quad \text{Mol., XX, p. 351.} \quad \text{Mol., XI, p. 13.} \quad \text{Mol., XXVI, p. 180.}\]
In the *Profession de Foi des théistes* (1767) Voltaire presents the exact same argument about the local god with the addition of the epithet *brigand* affixed to Jephthah's name. In the *Défense de mon oncle* (1767) he attributes to Freret, as in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, the idea that Adonai, the Hebrew god, and Chamosh, the Moabite god, were on equal footing. In his *Discours de l'empereur Julien* (1768), a bitterly anti-Christian work, Voltaire not only declares that the Jews accepted several gods but suggests that their Phoenician god, called Adoni or Adonai, was continually being represented as being jealous of the other gods. In the article "Epopée" of the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie* (1771), Voltaire surrounds his interpretation of this passage with a list of impressive authorities:

Mme Dacier, dans sa préface d'Iliade, remarque très sensément, aprèss Eustache, évêque de Thessalonique, et Huet, évêque d'Avranche, que chaque nation voisin e des Hébreux avait son dieu des armées. En effet, Jephté, ne dit-il pas aux Ammonites... Voltaire demands that the text not be distorted from the simple meaning in his *Un chrétien contre six Juifs* (1776):

Vous avez beau faire, monsieur ou messieurs, vous ne ferez jamais accroître à personne qu'on doive entendre dans votre sens ces paroles de Jephté aux Ammonites. ... Vous croyez

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1 Mol., XXVIII, p. 162.  
2 Mol., XXVII, p. 58.  
3 Mol., XXVI, p. 425.  
4 Mol., XXVIII, p. 20.  
5 Mol., XVIII, p. 568.
The chief difference between the *Bible Enfin Expliquée* and the other critical works, relative to the Chamosh episode, is the heavy irony present in the former. Here Voltaire presents the arguments of the *incrédules* in all its detail, including a list of eighteen gods thought to be local,\(^2\) and then attempts to counter all these criticisms by lamely suggesting a *faute de copiste*. In the various other works the arguments are present but the malicious rejoinder is largely absent.

The longest treatment of the Micash story outside *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* is found in *Dieu et les hommes* (1769) where Voltaire cites this episode as a fifth proof that Jewish religion was not completely formulated in Biblical times. After spending many lines in retelling the story he says:

*La Vulgate* met cette réponse sur le compte du mari même de Michas; mais, soit qu'elle eut encore son mari, soit qu'elle fut veuve, soit que le mari ou la femme ait crié, il demeure également prouve que la Michas, et son mari, et ses enfants, et le prêtre des Michas, et toute la tribu de Dan, étaient idolâtres.\(^3\)

In the article "Juifs" which appeared in the *Suite des mélanges* (1756) Voltaire alludes to the Micash story in his indictment of Jewish idolatry.

Il n'y a vait pas trente-huit ans que votre Moïse était mort, lorsque la femme à Michas, de la tribu de Benjamin, perdit onze cent sicles. ... Aussitôt la bonne Juive en fait faire des idoles, et leur construit une petite chapelle ambulante selon l'usage.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) *Mol.*, XXX, p. 141.  
\(^2\) *Mol.*, XXVIII, p. 164.  
\(^3\) *Mol.*, XIX, p. 532.  
\(^4\) *Mol.*, XXV, p. 73.
In the **Traité sur la tolérance** (1763) Voltaire provides an interesting twist in the application he makes of the Micash story. There he claims that the family's idolatry is incontestable proof of the liberality and tolerance which reigned in ancient Israel toward other gods.\(^1\) The Danites who ran off with Micash's idols come in for mention in the article "Juifs" of the **Questions sur l'Encyclopédie** (1771). Here they are referred to as *flibustiers*, pirates, who had much gratitude towards Micash's gods.\(^2\) The idolatrous practices of this family is outlined by Voltaire in his article "Ignorance" of the **Questions sur l'Encyclopédie** (1771) to illustrate the base level of Israelite religion. Perhaps the strongest words employed by Voltaire in discussing this episode appear in **Un chrétien contre six Juifs** (1776):

> Non, vous ne ferez jamais accroire à personne que la femme à Michas ait bien fait d'acheter des idoles, et de payer un chapelain d'idoles; que la tribu de Dan, n'ayant point assez pillé dans le pays, ait bien fait de voler les idoles et le chapelain de la femme à Michas; et que le chapelain ait bien fait de benir cette tribu de voleurs quand elle eut ravagé je ne sais quel village qu'on nommait, dit-on, Lais.\(^3\)

While Voltaire presents the same facts in **La Bible Enfin Expliquée** as he does elsewhere concerning the Micash episode, his Bible commentary has a deftness of approach which is lacking in all preceding works. For example, in his commentary, Voltaire magnanimously suggests that the petty contradictions of the text be passed over, whereupon he proceeds to record these contradictions.\(^4\) When he quotes Fréret's arguments about the local deity, Voltaire prefaxes the paraphrase with

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\(^1\)Mol., XXV, p. 73. \(^2\)Mol., XIX, p. 533.

\(^3\)Mol., XXIX, p. 524. \(^4\)Mol., XXX, p. 149.
the statement that Fréret's ideas are trop téméraire. Elsewhere he summarily dismisses Fréret, after providing a full page for his argument, by saying that his point of view would be plausible were it not contrary to Scripture. In almost all the works quoted before the Bible Enfin Expliquée one finds the same material but the tone is different.

The third proof which Voltaire frequently adduces to show the instability of Biblical Judaism is the reference to the god of the mountains. In Dieu et les hommes (1769) Voltaire says:

Nous ne voulons pas examiner si les habitants de ces cantons hérissés de montagnes pouvaient avoir des choses de guerre, eux qui n'eurent jamais que des ânes. Il suffit d'observer que le dieu des Juifs n'était alors qu'un dieu local qui avait du crédit dans les montagnes, et point du tout dans les vallées.

In the Questions de Zapata (1767) Voltaire uses this episode to question the omnipotence of the Hebrew deity:

Je ne puis comprendre par faibles lumières comment le Dieu du ciel et de la terre, qui avait changé tant de fois l'ordre de la nature, et suspendu les lois éternelles en faveur de son peuple juif, ne put venir à bout de vaincre les habitants d'une vallée parce qu'ils avaient des chariots. Serait-il vrai, comme plusieurs savants le prétendent, que les Juifs regardassent alors que leur Dieu comme une divinité locale et protectrice.

In the Défense de mon oncle (1767) Voltaire quotes Tilladet and Boullanger (as he does in La Bible Enfin Expliquée) to the effect that these brigands (Israelites) recognized two distinct deities, one of the mountains and one of the valley. In his Profession de foi des théistes (1768) he refers to the pertinent passage in Judges to show that the

Jews worshiped a mountain god. By the time of the article "Epopée" (1771) in the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie, Voltaire is painting the picture of a frivolous deity who wins in the mountains but is defeated in the valleys.

Voltaire mentions Joshua's offer to the Israelites in 1763 in the Traité sur la tolérance, where he concludes that under Moses the Israelites worshiped other gods than Adonai. The same argument is advanced in the Défense de mon oncle (1767) where he categorically states that the Jewish religion was not fixed at this time. In the Profession de foi des théistes, Voltaire uses Joshua's suggestion to charge the Jews with polytheism.

Il est bien évident par ces passages, et par tous ceux qui les précèdent, que les Hébreux reconnaissaient plusieurs dieux, que chaque peuplade avait le sien; que chaque dieu était un dieu local, un dieu particulier.

In the article "Ignorance" (1771) of the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie the same argument is used to show the ignorance, hence primitive behavior of the Jews. Voltaire deals with the problem of Joshua at great length in Dieu et les hommes (1769) where he spells out the deities to which the Jews at one time owed allegiance.

Il est évident, par ce passage, que les Juifs y sont supposés avoir adoré Isis et Osiris en Egypte, et les étoiles en Mésopotamie. Josue leur demande s'ils veulent adorer encore ces étoiles ou Isis et Osiris, ou Adonai, le dieu des Pheniciens, au milieu desquels ils se trouvent.

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1 Mol., XXVII, p. 58. 2 Mol., XVIII, p. 568.
3 Mol., XXV, p. 70. 4 Mol., XXVI, p. 425. 5 Mol., XXVII, p. 57.
6 Mol., XIX, p. 421. 7 Mol., XXVIII, p. 162.
In the case both of Judges and Joshua, the account in La Bible Enfin Expliquée of the god of the mountain episode and Joshua's offer is substantially the same as that found in the other works. As a matter of fact Voltaire devotes only one short paragraph to Joshua's admonition in his commentary. This shows that while La Bible Enfin Expliquée generally sums up the comments found elsewhere, it does not always go beyond them.

Even a cursory reading of La Bible Enfin Expliquée will indicate that the figure most frequently commented upon after Jephthah is David. We have seen in the discussion of Voltaire's handling of "Huet" or Peter Annet the numerous references to David, ironically referred to as "the man after God's own heart." But in the context of Voltaire's general critical remarks on David, there are two incidents which appear with greater frequency than others, his affair with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) and his dealing with Achish (1 Samuel 27).

In La Bible Enfin Expliquée, Voltaire introduces his comments on this affair by saying that the story is so well known it requires no commentary, whereupon he devotes some thirty-three lines to analyzing some choice aspects of the narrative. He concludes that Uriah's house must have been very close to David's because the latter was able to see Bathsheba bathing from his own roof. Voltaire also discourses on bathing practices:

Il est remarquable que l'écrivain sacré se sert du mot sanctifier pour exprimer que Bethsabée se lava après le coit. On était légalement impur chez les Juifs quand on était mal-propre. C'était un grand acte de religion de se laver; la

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\(^{1}\) Mol., XXX, p. 191.
The main point which Voltaire makes about the relationship between David and Bathsheba is the effect this has upon the lineal purity of Jesus who was to be, according to Jewish tradition, of the house of David. Voltaire does not accept the customary argument that David's repentance effaced his crime.

"Pour échapper à ce triste dilemme, on a recours au repentir de David, qui a tout réparé. Mais en se repentant il a gardé la veuve d'Urie: donc malgré son repentir, il a encore aggravé son crime; c'est une difficulté nouvelle. La volonté du Seigneur suffit pour calmer tous ces doutes qui s'élevent dans les âmes timorées. Tout ce que nous savons, c'est que nous ne devons être ni adultères, ni homicides, ni épouser les veuves des maris que nous aurions assassinées."²

It is this last aspect of the David and Bathsheba affair which interests Voltaire in the *Examen important de Milord Bolingbrooke* (1761).

"Il assassine Urie pour couvrir son adultère avec Bethsabée; et c'est encore cette abominable Bethsabée, mere de Salomon, qui est une aïeule de Jésus-Christ."³

In the *Sermon des cinquante* (1762) Voltaire finds David's behavior somewhat incongruous for a king who merits being part of the messianic line.

"Mais que dirons-nous du saint roi David, de celui qui est agréable devant le Dieu des Juifs, et qui mérite que le messie vienne de ses reins. Ce bon David fait d'abord le métier de brigand ... Devenue roi; il ravit la femme d'Urie, fait tuer le mari; et c'est de cet adultère homicide que vient le messie, le fils de Dieu, Dieu lui même."⁴

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¹*Mol.*, XXX, p. 192.  
⁴*Mol.*, XXIV, p. 443.
There is a sarcastic reference to David's repentance in the article "Histoire" (1764) of the Dictionnaire philosophique:

Les commentateurs conviennent que l'adultère de David et l'assassinat d'Urie sont des fautes que Dieu a pardonnées. On peut donc convenir que les massacres ci dessus dont des fautes que Dieu a pardonnées aussi.

Voltaire also refers to the act of saint David in his Questions de Zapata (1767) where he excoriates David for the numerous assassinations which he committed or perpetrated. He tries to draw a moral lesson from David's behavior in the Homélies prononcées à Londres (1767):

Quand David ravit la femme d'Urie et qu'il assassine son mari; quand Salomon assassine son frère; ... adoucisons nos moeurs en lisant cette suite affreuse de crimes. Lisons enfin toute la Bible dans cet esprit; elle inquiète celui qui veut être savant, elle console celui qui ne veut être qu'un homme de bien.

In this same work Voltaire makes an extremely ironical attack against the whole idea of Davidic lineage in the messianic line:

... et qui, non content encore de ses concubines, ravit Bathsabée à son mari, et fait tuer celui qu'il déshonore. J'ai quelque peine encore à imaginer que Dieu naissit ensuite en Judée de cette femme adultère et homicide que l'on compte entre les aïeules de l'Être éternel.

Voltaire does not forget to mention David's affair with Bathsheba in his article "David" (1767) of the Dictionnaire philosophique. Here he lists this sin along with David's destruction of Nabal, his conduct with Achish, his massacre of the inhabitants of Rabbath and his hanging.

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1 Mol., XIX, pp. 369-370.  
3 Mol., XXVI, p. 346.  
4 Ibid., p. 182.
of Saul's children. In the article "Emblèmes" (1771) of the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie, Voltaire ridicules David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba by suggesting that the entire episode is to be considered merely as a figure of something else, but he does not indicate what these figures are.

Mais ensuite tous ces événements devinrent des emblèmes, des figures, lorsque les choses qu'ils figuraient furent accomplies. There is a further mention of the crime of David and Bathsheba in the article "Onan" in the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie (1774).

Of the many acts which David performed, none seem so unjust to Voltaire as those directed against Achish (1 Samuel 27). In discussing this episode in Le Bible Enfin Expliquée, Voltaire understates the case when he says that killing all of Achish's allies was not the best way of inspiring confidence in the king. Voltaire believes that Achish must have been very stupid not to have realized what was going on.

Mais comment ce roi pouvait-il ignorer que David combattait contre lui-même, sous prétexte de combattre pour lui? Il fallait que ce roi Achis fut plus imbécile que David n'avait feint de l'être devant lui. M. Huet déclare David et Achis également fous, et David le plus scélérat de tous les hommes. Il aurait dû, dit-il, parler de cette action abominable dans ses psaumes.

Voltaire makes a direct reference to David's treachery with Achish in L'A, B, C (1762) when he cruelly invokes the former's name:

Mais vive la perfidie de David, qui s'étant associé quatre cents coquins perdus de dettes et de débauche, et ayant fait alliance avec un roitelet nommé Achis, allait égorger les

1 Mol., XVIII, pp. 315-319. 2 Ibid., p. 529.
3 Mol., XX, p. 133. 4 Mol., XXX, p. 183.
5 Mol., XXX, p. 183. Italics are mine.
hommes, les femmes, les petits enfants des villages qui étaient sous le sauvegarde de ce roitelet, et lui faisant croire qu'il n'avait égorgé que les hommes, les femmes et les petits garçons appartenant au roitelet Saül.¹

One year before in L'Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke Voltaire had denounced David with equal vehemence, playing as he does on the saying "a man after God's own heart."

C'était un homme selon le coeur de Dieu; aussi la première chose qu'il veut faire est d'assassiner un tenancier nommé Nabal ... il s'enfuit chez le roi Achis, ennemi de son pays; il y est bien reçu, et pour récompense il va saccager les villages des alliés d'Achis: il égorgea tout, sans épargner les enfants à la mamelle. ... Il faut avouer que nos voleurs de grand chemin ont été moins coupables aux yeux des hommes; mais les voies du Dieu des Juifs ne sont pas les nôtres.²

In his Homélie du pasteur Bourn (1768) Voltaire asks what vayvode would have the nerve to commit the crimes which are attributed to David, including the treacherous massacre of Achish's allied villages.³ One of the most detailed attacks against David come in Voltaire's Fragment sur l'histoire générale (1773). Here with typical irony ne understates the nature of the crime.

Apres les exemples continuels d'injustice, de cruauté, de meurtre, de brigandage, dont l'histoire de presque toutes les nations est surchargée, il nous parut utile et consolant de ne pas canoniser ces crimes chez les princes, de quelque religion qu'ils fussent. David était sans doute un bon Juif (humainement parlant) de se révolter contre son souverain; ... de trahir à la fois sa patrie et le roitelet Achis, son bienfaiteur; de massacer tout dans les villages de ce bienfaiteur, jusqu'aux enfants à la mamelle, afin qu'il ne restât personne pour le dire ... etc., etc.⁴

After examining the various references to David, one is constrained to admit that the account in La Bible Enfin Expliquée suffers somewhat in comparison. But this is natural. Limited as he was by space Voltaire had only enough room to express his main thoughts and could not include the divagations which add so much to the tone he generates in many of the lesser works.

After Jephthah and David it is Solomon who appears most consistently in the critical works of Voltaire. This king of the Hebrew nation was a natural target for his barbs. With his reputation for riches, wisdom and power he was bound to attract attention. In La Bible Enfin Expliquée, Voltaire devotes eight full pages to his career. His first criticism is directed to Solomon's assassination of his brother Adonias. He asks if this could be the history of the people of God. Or is it the history of highway robbers? Voltaire compares the initial stages of Solomon's reign with that of Caligula and Nero. But the major objection made by Voltaire concerns the numbers associated with Solomons' wealth. His forty thousand stables (1 Kings 4:26) is seen to be a gross exaggeration. As for the many odes which Solomon is alleged to have composed, Voltaire opines

Plût à Dieu qu'il eût toujours fait des odes hébraïques, au lieu d'assassiner son frère.

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 203.  
2 Ibid., p. 204.  
3 Ibid., p. 205.  
4 Ibid., p. 206.
Voltaire questions the accuracy of the number of artisans who allegedly worked on Solomon's temple:

Cent quatre-vingt-trois mille trois cents hommes employés aux seuls préparatifs d'un temple qui ne devait avoir que quatre-vingt-onze pieds de face révoltent quiconque à la plus légère connaissance de l'architecture.¹

Voltaire also doubts the extent of Solomon's enormous treasures. Calculating in terms of contemporary currency, Voltaire concludes that Solomon must have been worth some six million écus.

On est dégouté de tant d'exagération pueriles: cela ressemble à la Jérusalem céleste, qui descend du ciel dans l'Apocalypse, et que le bonhomme saint Justin vit pendant quarante nuits consecutives les murailles étaient de jaspe, la ville d'or, les fondements de pierres précieuses, et les portes de perles.²

The various criticisms of Solomon in Voltaire's other works revolve around several points; the books attributed to him, the wealth attributed to him and the wisdom attributed to him. In the Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke (1761) Voltaire alludes to Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. But,

Les cantiques qu'on lui impute est dans le goût de ces livres érotiques qui font rougir la pudeur.³

Voltaire also groups Solomon's wives with his books in Discours de l'empereur Julien (1768).

A l'égard des livres de Salomon, qui connut tout depuis le cèdre jusqu'à l'hysope, on pourrait les mettre avec ses sept cents épouses et ses trois cents concubines. Il est fort vraisemblable que quelque bel esprit juif donna ses rêveries sous le nom de Salomon, longtemps après le règne de ce prince. Il n'y a pas, dans les Proverbes, une sentence qui fasse apercevoir que c'est un roi qui parle.⁴

³ Mol., XXVI, p. 215. ⁴ Mol., XXVIII, pp. 41-42.
Voltaire is fond of pointing out that Solomon was guilty of transgressing the law by placing images in the temple. In the Traité sur la tolérance (1763) he announces that the king had twelve sculptured bulls in the temple.¹ He points out the contradictions explicitly in Dieu et les hommes (1769)

Leur loi (en quelque temps qu'elle ait été écrite) leur défend expressément tout ouvrage de sculpture, et leur temple en est rempli. Leur roi Salomon, après avoir consulté le Seigneur, place douze figures de veau au milieu du temple, et des chérubins à quatre têtes dans le sanctuaire, avec un serpent d'airain. Tout est contradictoire; tout est inconscient chez eux, aussi que dans presque toutes les nations. C'est la nature de l'homme; mais le peuple de Dieu l'emporte en cela sur tous les hommes.²

As for Solomon's famous gift of wisdom, Voltaire says in connection with the murder of Adonias:

Apparemment que Dieu, qui lui donna l'esprit de sagesse, lui refusa alors celui de la justice et d'humanité, comme il lui refusa depuis le don de la continence.³

But as in La Bible Enfin Expliquée Voltaire's major comments on Solomon are reserved for debunking the enormous wealth attributed to him. In the article "Juifs" of the Suite des mélanges (1756) Voltaire doubts that David could have left Solomon such a large inheritance.⁴ In the article "Salomon" (1764) of the Dictionnaire philosophique Voltaire calculates the value of his wealth in cash money arriving at the contemporary figure of one million nine hundred thousand pounds sterling.⁵

But in the same article Voltaire asks whether Solomon was more famous for his cash or for his women or his books. In any case, argues

Voltaire, it would have been preferable had he begun his reign without slaughtering his brother.\(^1\) The prodigious number of the king's chariots perturbs Voltaire.

Voila bien des chariots pour un pays de montagnes, et c'était un grand appareil pour un roi dont le prédécesseur n'avait en qu'une mule à son couronnement, et pour un terrain qui ne nourrit que des ânes.\(^2\)

In the Questions de Zapata (1767) Voltaire claims that cavalry colonels would shrug their shoulders if they were told that Solomon had four hundred thousand horses in a country where there weren't even any mules.\(^3\)

In the following year in the Discours de l'empereur Julien he states that not even the king of Prussia had as many chariots as did Solomon.\(^4\)

Perhaps the most humorous of all the references to Solomon occurs in this same work where Voltaire, reflecting on the king's household, says:

L'immensité de ses richesses, et le nombre de ses femmes, et ses livres, étonnent les pauvres de ce siècle. Mille femmes dans sa maison, a deux servantes seulement pour chaque dame, c'était trois mille femmes sous le même toit. S'il faisait, comme Douyat et Tiraqueau, un enfant à chaque femme et un livre par an, voilà de quoi peupler et de quoi instruire toute la terre.\(^5\)

The treatment of Solomon found in La Bible Enfin Expliquée is by the fact of its comprehensiveness superior to references found in other works. Yet, as the previous citation shows, Voltaire does not include all his wit in the commentary.

There are four sections of the book of Joshua which Voltaire deals with in La Bible Enfin Expliquée and elsewhere. These

\(^1\)Mol., XX, p. 363. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 385. \(^3\)Mol., XXVI, p. 182. \(^4\)Mol., XXVIII, p. 182. \(^5\)Ibid., p. 41.
include Joshua's destruction of Jericho, the assistance of Rahab, the stopping of the sun and the lost book known as the *livre du Droiturier.* In his Bible commentary Voltaire records his objection to the ease with which Joshua conquered Jericho. If Jericho was occupied by a race of giants, how was it so easily defeated? Rahab's role in the capitulation of the city is thoroughly discussed by Voltaire. What need did Joshua have of a prostitute when God had promised him victory? Was Rahab actually a prostitute or was she merely an inn-keeper? Rahab's pedigree is also mentioned.

Nous savons que le Nouveau Testament compte cette Rahab au nombre des âeules de Jésus-Christ; mais il descend aussi de Bathsabée et de Thasar, qui n'étaient pas moins criminelles. H (Fréret) a voulu nous faire connaître que sa naissance effaçait tous les crimes. Mais l'action de la prostituée Rahab n'en est pas moins punissable selon le monde.

Voltaire also quotes Collins to the effect that sending spies to this woman was an act of faithlessness on the part of Joshua.

In his comments on the miraculous stopping of the sun Voltaire records the opinion of Grotius, Leclerc, Spinoza, Boullanger and Calmet. The first two observe that Scripture was merely using figurative language and that the sun only appeared to stop. The others accept the account at face value. Boullanger, for example, says that if the sun did stop it was because it was horror-struck at Joshua's savagery. Voltaire's attitude toward this Biblical event can be surmised from the following comment:

> Ne sera-t-il permis, à propos de ce grand miracle, de raconter ce qui arriva à un disciple de Galilée, traduit devant...
l'inquisition pour avoir soutenu le mouvement de la terre autour du soleil? On lui lisait sa sentence; elle disait qu'il avait blasphémé, attendu que Josué avait arrêté le soleil dans sa course. "Eh! messieurs, leur dit-il, c'est aussi depuis ce temps-là que le soleil ne marche plus."

As for the livre du droiturier, Voltaire points out that according to the Bible, the story of Joshua is taken from this unknown document which is also cited in the Chronique des rois. The question is then raised, how could this book have been written at the time of the kings and also before Joshua?

The main impression which La Bible Enfin Expliquée leaves of Joshua is that of a savage barbarian. Voltaire says that it is an offense to God to take seriously such a tissue of fables. But he mitigates the force of his criticism by saying that Joshua's behavior can be compared to that of the conquerors of Mexico and Peru.

In his Profession de foi des théistes (1768) Voltaire makes a similar comparison when discussing Joshua's deeds.

Le même livre nous dit que Josué, fils de Nun ayant passé avec sa horde la rivière du Jourdain à pied sec, et ayant fait tomber au son des trompettes les murs de Jéricho dévoué à l'anathème, il fit péris tous les habitants dans les flammes. ... Nous n'avons rien de comparable à ces assassins religieux dans nos derniers temps, si ce n'est pas peut-être la Saint-Bathélemy et les massacres d'Irlande.

In the article "Osee" of the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie (1772) Voltaire says that Joshua's slaughter of the inhabitants of Jericho was unjustified. In his comments on Joshua's massacre of the thirty-odd kings, Voltaire adds:

Il faut se prosterner ici devant la Providence qui châtiait les pêchés de ces rois par le glaive de Josué.

\[1\text{Mol., XXX, p. 128.} \quad 2\text{Ibid.} \quad 3\text{Ibid., p. 125.} \quad 4\text{Mol., XXVII, p. 63.} \quad 5\text{Mol., XL, p. 117.} \quad 6\text{Ibid.}\]
In his *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) Voltaire lists Rahab along with other foreigners who influenced Jewish history:

Rahab était non-seulement étrangère, mais une femme publique; la Vulgate ne lui donne d'autre titre que celui de *meretrix*.¹

Two years later in his *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, Voltaire waxes indignant over the fact that of all the inhabitants massacred at Jericho only Rahab, a prostitute, and her family were saved.²

In the *Question de Zapata* (1767) the indictment becomes more clear.

Comment excuserai-je l'action de la courtisane Rahab, qui trahit Jéricho sa patrie? En quoi cette trahison était-il nécessaire, puisqu'il suffisait de sonner de la trompette pour prendre la ville? Et comment sonderai-je la profondeur des secrets divins, qui ont voulu que notre divin Sauveur Jésus-Christ naquit de cette courtisane Rahab, aussi bien que de l'inceste que Thamar commit avec Juda son beau-père, et de l'adultère de David et de Béthsabée.³

Voltaire invokes Rahab's name in his *Homélies prononcées à Londres* (1767) where he ridicules the whole idea of figurative interpretation.

L'autre manière de développer le sens caché des Ecritures est celle de regarder chaque événement comme un emblème historique est physique. ... Selon eux (les Pères), le morceau de drap rouge que la prostituée Rahab prend à sa fenêtre est le sang de Jésus-Christ.⁴

Whenever Voltaire makes reference to miracles or anomalies in nature, be it in a work of Biblical criticism or of a scientific nature, he inevitably makes reference to Joshua's apparent harnassing of the sun and moon. He makes a somewhat ironical use of this information when in *Il faut prendre un parti* (1772) he has a Jew say:

Nous sommes sept fois esclaves malgré les miracles épouvantables que Dieu fait chaque jour pour nous,

jusqu'à faire arrêter la lune en plein midi et, même le soleil.¹

There is even more irony in his reference to this phenomenon in Introduction du gardien des capucins de Raguse à frère Pédiculoso (1768):

Nous ne vous parlons pas des exploits de Josué, successeur de Mosé, et de la lune qui s'arrêta sur Alalon en plein midi, quand le soleil s'arrêta sur Gabaon: ce sont ces choses qui arrivent tous les jours, et qui méritent qu'une légère attention.²

In the same year in his L'Épitre aux Romains Voltaire is disparaging of Joshua's miraculous performance pointing out that Bacchus had stopped the sun and the moon before him; "Même fables, même extravagances de tous les cotes."³ Voltaire takes the same approach in 1770 in the article "Bethsames" (Questions sur l'Encyclopédie) and in the article "Horloge" in the 1772 edition of the same work.⁴

The book of "righteousness" sefer hayashar, in Hebrew, is mentioned by Voltaire in his Sermon des cinquante (1762) where he brings in an interesting historical parallel to show the inconsistency in the Biblical chronology.

Nous ne comprenons pas trop comment la lune était de la partie, mais enfin le livre des Josué ne permet pas d'en douter, et il cite, pour son garant, le livre du Droiturier. Vous remarquerez, en passant, que ce livre du Droiturier est cité dans les Paralipomènes; c'était comme si l'on vous donnait pour authentique un livre du temps de Charles-Quint, dans lequel on citerait Puffendorf.⁵

In *Dieu et les hommes* (1769) Voltaire cites the same document and mentions that it was composed during the period of kings.\(^1\) He includes the *livre du Droiturier* in a list of lost books which he describes in his *Pyrrhonisme de l’histoire* (1768).\(^2\)

Voltaire’s treatment of these several episodes from Joshua finds its fruition in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, where with similar but enlarged material, plus the gratuitous citations from Calmet, Fréret and Boullanger, he achieves an irony which surpasses the glimpses thereof in the other works.

The period of kings in Jewish history appears to have interested Voltaire a great deal. However, his interest is centered almost uniquely on their mutual destruction. In *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, one of the most commonly employed words is *assassinations*. Voltaire is indignant with David and his murder of Uriah, among others.\(^3\) He bitterly condemns Aod’s devious attack upon Eglon. He inveighs against Solomon’s treachery against Adonias.\(^4\) Jeroboam is censured for his attack against Roboam.\(^5\) At one point in his narrative Voltaire says:

> Dans la crainte où je suis que cette histoire ce commentaire ne causent au lector un ennui aussi mortel qu’à moi, je passerai tous les assassinats des rois de Juda et d’Israël, qui ne forment qu’un tableau dégoûtant et monotone de guerres civiles entre deux petits pays barbares, dont les capitales n’étaient qu’à sept ou huit lieues l’une de l’autre.\(^6\)

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\(^1\) Mol., XXVIII, p. 175.  
\(^2\) Mol., XXVII, p. 240.  
\(^3\) Mol., XXX, p. 192.  
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 203.  
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 211.  
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 215.
By the time Voltaire reaches the fourth book of Kings in his commentary he is constrained to remark:

Nous voilà retombés dans cet épouvantable labyrinthe d'assassins multipliés que nous voulions éviter ...

Elisée ...; envoie à sa place un petit prophète, et dès que Jéhu est cint, il devient plus méchant que tous les autres; il assassine son roi Joram; il assassine sa reine Jézabel ...; il assassine soixante et dix fils du roi Achab ...; il assassine quarante-deux frères d'Ochozias ...

Athalie, grand'mère du petit Joas, assassine tous ses petits-fils dans Jérusalem .... Enfin c'est une scène de meurtres et de carnage, dont on ne pourrait trouver d'exemple que dans l'histoire des fousines, si quelque coq de basse-cour avait fait leur histoire.1

Voltaire begins his characterization of the Jewish kings as assassins as early as 1756 in the article "Juifs" of the Suite des mélanges where he says:

... car presque tous vos roitelets sont des assassins, à commencer par David, qui assassine Miphiboseth, fils de Jonathas, son tendre ami ... qui assassine Uriah, le mari de Bethsabee; qui assassine jusqu'aux enfants qui têtent, dans les villages alliés de son protecteur Achis; qui commande en mourant qu'on assassine Joab son général, et Séméi, son conseiller.2

One of the many lists of kingly assassinations is found in Candide (1759) where Pangloss attempts to show that great position does not always bring comfort.

Les grandeurs, dit Pangloss, sont fort dangereuses, selon le rapport de tous les philosophes: car enfin Eglon, roi des Moabites, fut assassiné par Aod; Absalon fut pendu par les cheveux et percé de trois dards; le roi Nadab, fils de Jéroboam, fut tué par Baasa; le roi Ela, par Zambri; Ochosias, par Jehu; Athalie par Jociada; le roi Joachim, Jéchonias, Sédécias, furent esclaves.3

3Mol., XXI, p. 217.
In his *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763) Voltaire seeks to give the impression that the various murders and exterminations were motivated by self interest and not by faith.¹ In the article "Fanatisme" of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764) on the other hand, religion is seen to be the cause of the internecine strife.

Les lois de la religion ne suffisent pas contre la peste des âmes; la religion, loin d'être pour elles un aliment salutaire, se tourne en poison dans les cerveaux des infectés. Ces misérables ont sans cesse présenté à l'esprit l'exemple d'Aod qui assassine le roi Églon; de Judith, qui coupe la tête d'Holopherne en couchant avec lui; de Samuel, qui hache en morceaux le roi Agag, du prêtre Joad, qui assassine sa reine à la porte aux chevaux.²

In the same year Voltaire suggests in "Histoire" of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* that if the history of kings is divine perhaps the stories recounted therein are not.³ After enumerating the usual list of assassinations Voltaire comments:

On passe sous silence beaucoup d'autre menus assassinats. Il faut avouer que si le Saint-Esprit a écrit cette histoire, il n'a pas choisi un sujet fort édifiant.⁴

Perhaps the most detailed and at the same time humorous discussions of the fate of many of Israel's leaders comes in the *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (1765) where Voltaire makes a statistical analysis of Israel's murdered dead.

Arrêtons-nous ici un moment pour observer combien de Juifs furent exterminés par leurs propres frères, ou par l'ordre de Dieu même, depuis qu'ils errèrent dans les déserts jusqu'au temps où ils eurent un roi élu par le sort.

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¹ Mol., XXV, p. 71. ² Mol., XIX, p. 80.
³ Ibid., p. 368. ⁴ Ibid.
Les Lévites, après l'adoration du veau d'or jeté en fonte par le frère de Moïse, égorgent ................ 23,000 Juifs
Consumés par le feu pour la révolte de Core ............. 250
Egorgés pour la même révolte ............................. 14,700
Egorgés pour avoir eu commerce avec les filles madianites .............................................. 24,000
Egorgés au gué du Jourdain, pour n'avoir pas pu Prononcer Shiboleth .................................. 42,000
Tués par les Benjamites, qu'on attaquait ............... 40,000
Benjamites tués par les autres tribus ...................... 45,000
Lorsque l'arche fut prise par les Philis-tins, et que Dieu, pour les punir, les ayant affligés d'hémorroides, ils ramenèrent l'arche à Bethsames, et qu'ils offrirent au Seigneur cinq ans d'or et cinq rats d'or; les Bethsamites, frappés de mort pour avoir regardé l'arche, au nombre de .................................................. 50,070

Somme totale 239,020 Juifs

By 1768 in the Discours de l'empereur Julien Voltaire says that luckily all these Biblical tales of assassinations are unbelievable. They are in the same realm as Gargantua's feats. But at least Rabelais did not try to make us believe that God was the author of his tale. And if we are to derive moral instruction from the Bible does this mean that we must kill, burn and assassinate all heretics?

Voltaire delves into the statistical problem again in Instruction du gardien des capucins de Raguse à frère Pédiculoso (1768).

Il faut absolument supputer combien ils commirent d'assassinats. Il y a des Pères de l'Eglise qui en comptent cinq quatre-vingt; d'autres, neuf cents soixante et dix; il est important de ne s'y pas tromper. Souvenez-vous, surtout, que nous n'entendons ici que les assassinats de parents, car, pour les autres, ils sont innombrables. Rien ne sera plus édifiant qu'une notice exacte

1Mol., XI, pp. 117-118. 2Mol., XXVIII, p. 31. 3Ibid., p. 137.
Finally there is a repetition of the list of assassinations in the article "Juifs" of the Question sur l'Encyclopédie (1771). 2

One notes in Voltaire's treatment of the Hebrew kings outside La Bible Enfin Expliquée some extraordinary examples of irony, to wit, his mathematical tabulation of massacred Jews, as well as his request for a notice exacte of all the assassinations in order to have a sermon text on the love of one's neighbor. In his Bible commentary, one gets the impression that Voltaire, by the time he got around to discussing the book of Kings, was somewhat tired or perhaps irritated because the tome of his remarks on the numerous assassinations is more angry than satirical.

After Ezekiel, the prophet which Voltaire most discusses is Hosea. In La Bible Enfin Expliquée, Voltaire paraphrases the book, he does not present the text. He describes God's command to Hosea first to go and marry a prostitute and have children by her. God's request of Hosea to marry an adulteress is also fully chronicled by Voltaire. 3 Voltaire insists that these instructions are to be understood literally, not as visions.

Tous ces faits ne se passent point en vision; ce ne sont point de simples allégories, de simples apologistes; ce sont des faits réels. Osee n'a point eu trois enfants de Gomer en vision ou en songe; mais ces faits, quoique arrivés en

1 Mol., XXVII, pp. 304-305.
2 Mol., XIX, pp. 534-535.
3 Mol., XXX, pp. 267-268.
effet, n'en sont pas moins des types, des signes, des figures de ce qui arrive au peuple d'Israël. Toute action d'un prophète est un type.¹

In the Examen important de Milord Bolingbroke (1761) Voltaire appears to have been more concerned with the price Hosea paid for the adulteress, rather than the union itself.

Il n'en coute au prophète que quinze drachmes et un boisseau et demi d'orge: c'est assez bon marché pour un adultere. Il en avait couté encore moins au patriarche Juda pour son inceste avec sa bru Thamar.²

The question of price also preoccupies Voltaire in the Traité sur la tolérance (1763).³ In the article "Ezechiel" (1764) of the Dictionnaire philosophique, Voltaire points to Hosea's instructions to show that one has difficulty understanding how there can be a figurative explanation for God telling a prophet first to marry a prostitute and then an adulteress.⁴ In the Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations he dismisses the Hosea episode by informing the reader that times and customs are different today.⁵ In a letter to M. Beaudinet, on December 1, 1765, Voltaire advises his correspondent that if people taunt him about his love affair with Mlle Ferbot, he can cite the case of Hosea who had three children by a prostitute, having been ordered to do this by God.⁶ By 1767 in the Questions de Zapata, Voltaire once again shows concern for the price Hosea paid for his pleasure.⁷ In his Le principe de l'action (1772) he cites the episode with Hosea to show that

¹ Mol., XXX, p. 268. ² Mol., XXVI, p. 218.
³ Mol., XXV, pp. 75-76. ⁴ Mol., XIX, p. 58. ⁵ Mol., XI, p. 127.
although everything is divine in the Bible, its laws do not correspond to what we generally term honnête in our own society. In the Homélies prononcées à Londres (1767) Voltaire says that man cannot challenge the Jews for the unusual images they use in their history, nor can God be asked to give account of himself for fitting his message to the mentality of this people. In the Relations du bannissement des Jésuites de la Chine (1768) Voltaire suggests that Hosea's association with the prostitute means not only Jesus Christ but also his two brothers. In the article "Emblèmes" (1771) in the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie he states that one does not produce children in visions. Voltaire asks if men should practice cruelty to one another in order to know if a prophet paid money to a prostitute to fulfill God's order. In this same work, Un Chrétien contre six Juifs (1776) he dismisses the affair with typical humor:

Je vous avoue que je suis las de cette querelle, et qu'Osee forniquera sans que j'en mêle.

Voltaire's irreverent references to Hosea outside the Bible Expliqué indicate that he is sometimes most effective in the boutade appended to a section which ostensibly has nothing to do with this remark. Thus in his letter to M. Beaudinet, Voltaire achieves an irony which is not present in his Bible commentary. On the other hand, by the nature of his commentary, he must add a great deal of explanatory material before he launches his satirical barbs. Thus in the section of Hosea,

1 Mol., XXVIII, p. 546.  2 Mol., XXVI, p. 348.
3 Mol., XXVII, p. 8.  4 Mol., XVIII, p. 529.
5 Mol., XXIX, p. 528.  6 Ibid., p. 541.
he spends half his comments setting the scene and the other half dis-
crediting its elements.

The only other prophets whom Voltaire mentions with any consistency
are Isaiah and Elijah. And in Isaiah he is primarily concerned with one
or two chapters, namely, those dealing with the birth and life of the
Messiah (7-10). In *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* there is no commentary on
the book of Isaiah. Voltaire's remarks on this book come in 2 Kings 17:3
where there is a reference to Shalmanazar, the king of the Assyrians.
Voltaire recounts the encounter between Isaiah and king Achaz. The
prophet asks the king to ask for a sign from God. When he refuses Isaiah
himself says that a young woman will conceive and bear a child. His
name will be Emmanuel. Reference is also made to the child *Maherchalal-
hash-baz*. Voltaire adds:

> C'est dans ce discours d'Isaïe que des commentateurs,
appliqués figuristes, ont vu clairement la venue de Jésus-
Christ, qui pourtant ne s'appela jamais ni Emmanuel, ni
Maher-salal-has-bas, "prends vite les dépouilles".

Voltaire provides an additional note in his commentary to clarify the
meaning of the Hebrew word *alma*.

> Le mot hébreu *alma* signifie tantôt fille, tantôt femme, quel-
fois même prostituée. Ruth étant veuve, est appelé *alma*. Dans
*Cantique des cantiques* et dans Joel, le nom d'*alma* est donné à
des concubines.

Voltaire takes objection to the Christological interpretation of
these passages in the *Sermon des cinquante* (1762) where he says that
*Maher-salal-has-bas* is definitely Jesus but the butter and honey which
are mentioned in the prophecy are incomprehensible to him. He expresses

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1 Mol., XXX, p. 238.  
2 Mol., XXX, p. 238.  
3 Mol., XXIV, p. 448.
the same reluctance to believe that Isaiah's reference to Emmanuel refers to Jesus in the *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763). In his *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (1765), Voltaire terms the Christological interpretation of the pertinent passages as *infiniment respectable*, but continues to question their credibility in the light of contemporary standards. In the *Questions de Zapata* (1767) Voltaire pleads complete inability to explain the meaning of Isaiah's cryptic remarks. In the *Discours de l'empeureur Julien* (1768) Voltaire becomes emboldened in his analysis of the prophecy:

> Si le prophète Isaïe dit qu'une femme ou fille accouchera d'un garçon qui s'appellera *partagez vite les dépouilles*, cela signifie Marie, femme du charpentier Joseph, qui avait déjà deux enfants, accouchera de Jesus et demeurera vierge.

He makes almost exactly the same criticism of Mary's status in *Dieu et les hommes* (1769). In the *Relations du bannissement des Jésuites de la Chine* (1768), Voltaire affirms with irony that the name *Maher-halal-hash-baz* indeed refers to Jesus.

> Un prophète, nommé Isaïe, coucha par l'ordre du Seigneur avec une femme; il en eut un fils, et ce fils était notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ: car il s'appelait Maher-Salal-has-bas; *partagez vite les dépouilles*.

In the article "Figure" (1771) of the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, Voltaire asks how any *gens sensés* could prove that *Maher-halal-hash-baz* is really a figurative representation of Jesus? But the most comprehensive and at the same time most ironical of all Voltaire's discussions

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1. Mol., XXV, p. 75.  
4. Mol., XXVIII, p. 47.  
5. Ibid., p. 212.  
of this passage comes in the article "Prophéties" (1771) of the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie.

Le fameux passage qui doit confondre les Juifs et faire triompher la religion chrétienne, de l'aveu de tous nos grands théologiens, est celui d'Isaïe ... . Le rabbin Isaac affirme, après tous les autres docteurs de sa loi, que le mot hébreu alma signifie tantôt une vierge, tantôt une femme mariée; que Ruth était appelée alma lorsqu'elle était mère; qu'une femme âgée est quelquefois même nommée alma ... . Ainsi ces interprètes aveugles de leur propre religion et de leur propre langue combattent contre l'Eglise, et disent obstinément que cette prophétie ne peut regarder Jésus-Christ en aucune manière. On a mille fois refusé leur explication dans nos langues modernes. On a employé la force, les gibets, les roues; cependant ils ne se rendent pas.¹

It seems somewhat strange that Voltaire does not devote a separate section in La Bible Enfin Expliquée to Isaiah but this question will be entertained in the concluding essay. On the other hand his reference to the Emmanuel passage in the body of 2 Kings succeeds in incorporating the major elements of the approach he takes in his other works.

The prophet Elijah wins nine pages of critical comment from Voltaire in his Bible commentary. However, there are only two passages which evoke comment from Voltaire outside this work. These concern the prophet's miraculous ascent to the heavenly spheres (2 Kings 2) and his disciple Elisha cursing the forty-two children who ridiculed him. In La Bible Enfin Expliquée Voltaire suggests that Elijah's chariot is an imitation of the Greek Phaeton. But at least in this fable of Egyptian origin there was a moral lesson, that of the dangers of unbridled ambition. But what possible moral value could there be in the fiery chariot

¹Mol., XX, p. 289.
which lifts Elijah into the heavens?\(^1\) As for Elisha's cursing of the mocking children, Voltaire quotes Bolingbroke to the effect that the prophet was quite rash in precipitating the death of the innocent children merely because they called him "bald head." Moreover, there were no bears in Palestine which could have devoured the children as recorded in Scripture.\(^2\)

In the *Sermon des cinquante* (1762) Voltaire uses the description of Elijah's chariot to symbolize the *extravagances inouies* which characterizes the Bible.\(^3\) In 1766 in the article "Prophètes" of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* he suggests that the life of the prophet is no easy one since Elijah, for one, was required to travel from planet to planet in a lovely lighted carriage.\(^4\) In the *Discours de l'empereur Julien* (1768) Voltaire repeats the charge that the Jews copied the idea of the fiery chariot from the Greeks but adds that their attempts to disguise the origin were awkward.\(^5\) On the other hand, in the same document, he says that this story shows the Jews being more imaginative than in their story of Lot's wife.\(^6\)

In the *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (1765) Voltaire makes the following observation of Elijah's disciple:

> Nous n'approfondirons point quel est le type, que est le sens mystique de ces quarante-deux petits enfants qui, en voyant Elisée dans le chemin escarpé qui conduit à Bethel, lui dirent en riant: Monte, chauve, monte; et de la vengeance qu'en tira le prophète, en faisant venir sur-le-champs deux ours qui dévorent ces innocentes creatures.\(^7\)

\(^1\)Mol., XXX, p. 226. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 227. \(^3\)Mol., XXIV, p. 447.
\(^4\)Mol., XX, p. 282. \(^5\)Mol., XXVIII, p. 58. \(^6\)Ibid., p. 58.
\(^7\)Mol., XI, p. 124.
In the Traite sur la tolerance (1763) he says:

Elisée fit venir des ours pour dévorer quarante-deux petits enfants qui l’avaient appelé tête chauve; mais ce sont des miracles rares, et des faits qu’il serait un peu de vouloir imiter. ¹

This study of thematic repetitions indicates that Voltaire’s energetic pen was engaged in Biblical criticism long before he set down his ideas in definitive form in La Bible Enfin Expliquée. As early as 1759 in Candide and the Suite des mélanges in 1756 Voltaire was exercising his acumen in satirizing the regicides in the book of Kings. Over a period of twenty years, he returned time after time to parts of Scripture which he considered amenable to critical analysis.

If one compares the overall treatment of a given theme in La Bible Enfin Expliquée with any or several of Voltaire’s other works, the official commentary occasionally suffers, in terms of impact. Thus the frequent references to Ezekiel’s diet, by the boldness of the image they evoke, are probably more effective than Voltaire’s ironic treatment of the same material in La Bible Enfin Expliquée.

On the other hand, we must take into consideration that Voltaire, in his effort to construct his summa of Biblical criticism, had to give his work a veneer of scholarship. This he did by liberally and arbitrarily citing a prodigious number of well known scholars. His utilization of Dom Calmet is an example of this exploitation of great exegetes. It is possible, therefore, that due to his preoccupation with the techniques of Biblical criticism, Voltaire did not have the time, or

¹ Mol., XXV, p. 71.
perhaps did not wish to reproduce the same approach to the subjects which he had treated previously.

This is not intended to be a derogation of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, however. A previous chapter on Voltaire's satirical techniques showed that we need make no apologies for Voltaire's mastery of the art of satire and irony. But we must be prepared to accept the fact that in certain works previous to his Bible commentary, especially *Les Questions de Zapata* and several of the articles of the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire equaled or surpassed the satirical art of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*. Yet it is in this latter work that Voltaire for the first time discussed the entire Old Testament. This achievement alone is eloquent testimony to the breadth and scope of Voltaire's erudition. The way in which this work surpasses its predecessors is the comprehensiveness of its material and the simulated orthodoxy of its composer.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In assessing the value of Voltaire's *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* one needs to differentiate between Voltaire the Bible critic and Voltaire the master of satirical literature. If his work is to be evaluated in terms of the history of Biblical criticism it will certainly not stand the test of sound Biblical scholarship. If, however, it is examined as a literary experiment by Voltaire in a new genre, then it surely can be compared to the best of Voltaire's literary productions.

If we are to examine *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* as Biblical criticism, several observations must be made. First, there is the problem of original sources. Although Voltaire acquired a smattering of Hebrew through his association with Polier de Botens and his readings in Calmet's *Commentaire littéral*, and in spite of several essays which he composed on the Hebrew language, there is no evidence to show that Voltaire had any real understanding of Hebrew or Aramaic; however, he tries to convey the impression that he does possess this knowledge. In the commentary on the Old Testament, he continually cites Hebrew words such as *raklah* (firmament), *tohu bohu* (chaos and void), *naveeh* (prophet), *shiboleth* (ear of grain and password), *alma* (virgin), *Adonai* (one of the names for God), *ob* (magician), and *melech* (king). Since all of these words appear in transliteration in Calmet's commentary, it is somewhat presumptuous, therefore, for Voltaire to have constructed a commentary on the Hebrew Bible without having access to it in the original language.
Second, there is the question of the scope of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*. The New Testament part of the commentary takes only sixteen pages and covers only the synoptic Gospels. This means that Voltaire did not comment upon twenty-three other books which make up the New Testament. The Old Testament portion of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, it is true, covers three hundred pages, but in this section as well there are glaring lapses in the material presented. Voltaire makes no reference to the following books: Chronicles, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. And although Isaiah is mentioned in connection with Kings, only one passage from the entire work is discussed, albeit vigorously. The absence of these integral parts of the Old Testament in his commentary limits the claim implicit in the title that a discussion of the whole Bible is contained under the cover of the *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*.

It is somewhat difficult to understand why Voltaire did not choose to incorporate the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Psalms into his critical analysis of the Bible. Why, for example, did Voltaire take time to concern himself with the apocryphal documents Tobit and Judith, which present pictures of the supernatural and the demonic and yet neglect the universally recognized sublime utterances of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah? The answer to this question is not an easy one. Edme Champion, in light of his theory about the composition of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, might

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1Edme Champion in his "Doutes sur l'authenticité de l'ouvrage de Voltaire 'La Bible enfin expliquée'" *Revol Fr* 48: 481-9, juin, 1905, argues that Voltaire was not even the author of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, that although he might have begun the work, he could not maintain the pace. Perhaps Wagniere, his secretary, compiled notes written by Voltaire and then added information of his own. Champion's theory has been declared unfounded by Torrey.
suggest that Voltaire left these books out because by the time he came to them fatigue had set in. But if Voltaire was following the ordinary sequence of Biblical books, he would have come to Isaiah before Hosea, yet the latter work receives a separate billing and a two-page summary and criticism in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*.

There is another consideration which might explain why Voltaire neglected to dissect books like Job and Psalms like he did with Ezekiel and Joshua. This is the nature of the books themselves. Isaiah, for example, contains some of the most articulate expressions of the Hebrew religious genius. True, Voltaire mentions the Emmanuel passage but he does not touch the description of the Messianic era which the prophet delineates in chapter 11. This book also records in the unusual image of the "Servant of the Lord" the redemption of Israel from the Babylonian exile. The book of Job enunciates perhaps more clearly than any other Biblical document the predicament of man's fate. This eminently human work tries to solve the perplexing question of the innocent suffering in world ruled by a "just" God. Psalms is the classical Hebrew expression of faith in and devotion to God. The book of Proverbs is the ultimate in Hebrew gnomic literature. In view of these facts might one be justified in suggesting that Voltaire had not entirely lost his sense of the holy? Perhaps he realized that certain parts of the Old Testament simply could not be subjected to the impertinent irreverences which characterized his treatment of Oholah and Oholibah. Rather than present an ineffectual critique of a work which he might have genuinely admired, Voltaire chose to leave it out completely.

Third, there is the question of originality. Is it possible to separate what is Voltaire in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* and what is Calmet,
or Freret, or Jean Meslier? We have already shown that huge portions of Voltaire's commentary are drawn from Calmet whether acknowledged or not. Professor Morehouse has shown how Jean Meslier inspired the spirit if not the substance of many of Voltaire's arguments. Moreover, the English deists preceded Voltaire by many years in exposing incongruities and contradictions in the Bible. They provided him with an arsenal of facts and arguments which he incorporated into the body of his commentary. That Voltaire contributed anything new in the field of Biblical knowledge is highly debatable therefore. His contribution was in another area which we will deal with later.

Fourth there is the tendentious nature of his work. Voltaire's pose of orthodoxy, for all its feigned credulity, really deceives no one. Throughout La Bible Enfin Expliquée, his aim remains perceptibly the same, to discredit the Bible by means of pointing out contradictions, inaccuracies and errors in the text. Perhaps his major weapon is underlining the brutal behavior and the "barbaric" customs of the Jews and the other Levantine peoples. Now ideally a Bible commentary should be an objective work of impartial scholarship. Admittedly few commentaries measure up to this criterion past or present. Calmet, for all his rabbinic, patristic and other sources still makes his own feelings felt about certain Biblical stories. This illustrates that a Bible critic cannot divorce himself entirely from his work; yet Voltaire went too far.

Is there anything to say on the positive side about La Bible Enfin Expliquée as Biblical scholarship? Voltaire's approach to the Bible, characterized above as "tendentious" and therefore, weak, is nonetheless his greatest strength. Heretofore the Bible (speaking in
terms of formal commentaries) had been commented upon to substantiate, protect, and defend the traditional view that it was the sacred repository of God's word. The necessity of defending this position led people like Calmet to make the wildest claims for the veracity of Scripture. Voltaire's *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* was the first example in that genre known as Bible commentary to depart from the idea of plenary inspiration. By treating the Bible as a document existing in historical time and as a book equal to, superior to, and occasionally inferior to the other documents of antiquity, Voltaire tried to divest it of its divine aura. By doing this he opened up a whole new field of Biblical research unrestrained by the requirements of dogmatic considerations.

As a satirical work *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* merits the highest praise. In an effort to produce a Bible commentary which would appear authoritative and scholarly he provides the reader with frequent lists of well known scholars. In the non-pentateuchal section, excluding the historical essays on pre-Christian Judaism, Voltaire mentions forty-five different names, some of whom (like Bolingbroke) appear more than twenty times. Only rarely do the opinions attributed to these men ever correspond to their actual pronouncements.

The principal satirical technique which Voltaire employs so successfully is his simulated orthodoxy. This he achieves by feigning indignation at the liberal interpretations of the critiques and the incrédules. This does not mean that this technique is used for the first time in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*. In many of his opuscules, including numerous articles in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, one finds the same attempt to cloak the traditional view in a mantle of great respectability.
But in his official Bible commentary Voltaire sustains this literary stratagem far more vigorously than in previous works. Here he usually follows up his "orthodox" pronouncement with a comment which either mitigates or directly contradicts the traditional and therefore religious interpretation.

Equally effective in Voltaire's fund of satirical devices are his impertinent comparisons between Biblical and profane history. Voltaire's conclusions after citing these historical parallels are inevitably based on the argument that the Biblical world had customs and morals which were completely different from contemporary practices. But even the most casual reader can make the inference suggested by Voltaire, that Biblical morality was not simply different but so debased that by comparison contemporary mores appear superior.

Voltaire's treatment of Dom Calmet furnishes perhaps the best example of the satirical technique. By quoting the author of the Commentaire litteral on almost every page of his commentary Voltaire achieved a double aim stylistically. He gave the impression that he was using the great authority in the field and at the same time showed the inadequacies of the literalist approach to Scripture. Whether or not Voltaire was scrupulously fair to Calmet is a debatable question. But there is no doubt that he did take liberties with Calmet's text which were not justified by the priest's actual comments. Still there are

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1 In this approach Voltaire gets the opportunity of censuring one of his favorite targets, the Pope. In one instance he uses the Pope's name in connection with a discussion on incest and concludes that the Pope's permission is required to sanctify an incestuous union (Mol., XXX, p. 158).
many sections in which Voltaire through the weapon of irony showed Calmet to be weak in Biblical interpretation. This is seen in the discussions of the various massacres mentioned in the Bible. Voltaire points out with great delight that Calmet never treats the moral problem but only the statistical one.

Whether Voltaire's citations from Calmet were fair or not (I believe I have shown that through omission and suppression, Voltaire often misrepresents Calmet), they are designed to and succeed in creating a humorous approach to Bible investigation. By latching on to Calmet's occasional recourse to the *faute de copiste*, Voltaire makes the phrase almost a *leitmotif* to be used in the most preposterous cases. In the same way the argument from exaggeration used by Calmet as a concession to the weakness of the Biblical redactors becomes for Voltaire a weapon to be used every time he meets figures or incidents which are out of the ordinary. And of course every time he mentions either of these two points he is sure to cite Calmet as their source.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that Calmet, whom Voltaire respectfully (and satirically) refers to as *le révérend Père*, is the real inspiration, in a negative way, for *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*. Voltaire's association with Calmet began very early. Calmet was the author most frequently discussed by the Cirey coterie. Calmet is the author not only most often quoted by Voltaire in his Bible commentary but also the principal source for his information on Hebrew, on Josephus and the Church Fathers. In short, Calmet is the central figure in Voltaire's commentary. In a sense *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* was written for the express purpose of refuting the Biblical interpretations found
in the *Commentaire littéral*. But while Voltaire chooses Calmet as the target for his critical observations, it must be pointed out that this was not merely a question of personal antipathy. What Voltaire disliked in Calmet was what he disliked in all traditional Biblical exegetes: a blind subservience to the literal inspiration of Scripture and a refusal to address the Bible with the same critical faculties as those employed in examining historical or other secular works. In Calmet's readiness to accept every part of the Biblical record Voltaire saw not only an unsound but a dangerous approach to Scripture. When Calmet affirms that the God of Israel has the privilege of judging people according to His own standards, whether or not these standards conform to human norms, Voltaire saw in this a corroboration of his feeling that the God of the Old Testament is a tyrannical and unjust deity. Moreover, Calmet's apparent indifference to the ethical aspects of the many murders and assassinations enjoined by God, reinforced in Voltaire's mind the belief that Biblical morality was essentially debased. His reaction to Calmet's dismissal of the charges against David (Calmet explained David's involvement in many bloody murders by saying that he was armed by the zeal of the Lord) is predictable. When Voltaire refers to Calmet, therefore, in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, he is speaking not only of one man but of the traditional attitude towards the Bible.

The study of thematic repetitions showed that Voltaire had formulated many of his views on certain Biblical episodes as much as twenty years before they were incorporated into his Bible commentary. In many cases such as the *Questions de Zapata* and the *Discours de l'empereur Julien* he presents his arguments with more vigor and wit than he does in his definitive work. His treatment of Ezekiel's diet and the fortunes of
Oholah and Ohilibah show Voltaire at his irreverent best. By the time one arrives at his discussion of these themes in *La Bible Enfin Expliquée* the impression one receives is that Voltaire has lost some of his vitriol. However, when Voltaire wrote this work he must have felt that his readers were reading his arguments for the first time. He did not, therefore, make an analysis of his previous references to the same subjects. He did not attempt to reproduce the same treatment as he had done in fifteen other opuscules. On the other hand, his Bible commentary goes beyond these works through its scope, its veneer of orthodoxy, its parading of great names and its utilization of historical relativity.

*La Bible Enfin Expliquée* considered as a Bible commentary per se does not rank high. In works devoted to the history of Biblical criticism, Voltaire's name is never mentioned. In modern Bible commentaries such as the *Interpreter's Bible* or the *Sifrei Mikra*¹ one searches in vain for a reference to Voltaire. In general works devoted to the history of the Bible or individual works thereof, his name is also absent. Yet Voltaire did contribute much in an indirect way to the science of Biblical criticism. He helped to inaugurate an attitude toward the sacred which was characterized by freedom of interpretation and freedom from the restraints imposed by a society which looked to Scripture as the unquestionable word of God, unimpeachable and literally true.

¹ *Sifrei Hamikra* (Books of the Bible) edited by M. Casuto is considered to be the best modern commentary on the Bible in the Hebrew language.
The *Bible Enfin Expliquée* considered as a literary work *per se* is an excellent example of Voltaire's satire and irony. His use of hyperbole and understatement in this work are equal to many pages of *Candide*. Where can one find a better instance of Voltairean satire than his comments on the contradictory accounts of the building of the temple at Jerusalem when he states that in a holy book some exactness would do no harm!\(^1\)

The art of *La Bible Enfin Expliquée*, however, can be appreciated only if one recognizes that the genius of the work lies in the application of literary techniques to a *genre* known primarily for scholarly endeavors. One cannot help admiring Voltaire's audacity in adopting a format generally reserved for the defense of Scripture and transforming it not only into a subtle attack against the Bible but also into a satirical piece of literature.

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\(^1\) *Mol., XXX*, p. 207.
APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF WORKS IN WHICH VOLTAIRE DISCUSSES THEMES FROM THE NON-PENTATEUCHAL PORTIONS

(Articles from Dictionnaire Philosophique and Questions sur l'Encyclopédie are enclosed in quotation marks)

1756: "Juifs" (Suite des Mélanges)

1759: Candide

1761: Lettre de M. Cloppicre à M. Eratou, Examen important de Milord Bolingbrooke

1762: Sermon des Cinquante, Extrait des sentiments de Jean Meslier, L'A.B.C

1763: Catéchisme de l'honnête homme, Dialogue du chapeau et de la poule, Traité sur la Tolérance, Lettre d'un Quaker à Jean-George Lefranc de Pompignan


1765: Questions sur les miracles, Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations

1766: Des conspirations contre les peuples, Commentaire sur le livre des délits et des peines

1767: La défense de mon oncle, Homélies prononcées à Londres, Questions de Lapata, "David"

1768: Discours de l'empereur Julien, Homélies du pasteur Bourn, Épitre aux Romains, Profession de foi des Théistes, Relations du bannissement des Jésuites de la Chine, Instruction du gardien des capucins de Toulouse à Frère Pediculoso

1769: Dieu et les Hommes

1770: "Bensane," "Abraham"

1771: "Gouvernement," "Figure," "Juifs," "Ignorance," "Epopée," "Emblèmes"

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