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978-1-107-68048-7 - The Church of Israel: Studies and Essays

Robert Hatch Kennett and S. A. Cook

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ISRAEL

I. INTRODUCTION

AN adequate treatment of the questions suggested by the name "Israel" would require an encyclopædia to itself. All that is attempted is to trace the religious development which has given pre-eminence to Israel among the spiritual teachers of mankind. The religion of Israel cannot be satisfactorily studied apart from the external history of the race, but account will here be taken of the latter only in so far as it serves to elucidate the former. An inquiry into the historical value of the narrative of the Pentateuch is beyond the scope of the present article. Suffice it to say that by the name "Israel" we understand that people which, though not originally homogeneous, had been formed into a single nation in Palestine about a millennium before the Christian era.

Of this nation the strictly Israelite element was of comparatively recent introduction, the Israelites before their conquest of the Canaanites and subsequent mingling with them having occupied the oases in the wilderness to the south of Palestine, where they had entered into close relation with the Kenites and other tribes of kindred stock as well as with the Midianites further east, from whom, perhaps, they learned to reverence Horeb, the holy mountain. They regarded themselves as closely akin to the Edomites, who seem to have gained a permanent settlement in the district south of the Dead Sea at a somewhat earlier date; and somewhat less closely to the Moabites and Ammonites on the east. The belief that their ancestors had been Aramæans and had once lived in north-western Mesopotamia may not, perhaps,

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be of very ancient origin, and may be due to the fusion with Aramæan settlers which took place during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. It was commonly believed among the Israelites that before the conquest of Palestine their ancestors had for some time sojourned in Egypt, where they had been compelled to do task-work, from which they had been freed by Moses. It may be questioned whether all the tribes of Israel were ever in Egypt. The early legends which have come down to us had taken final shape at a time when stress was being laid on the national unity of Israel, and doubtless this unity has in many cases been wrongly ascribed to the past.¹

II. TRIBAL DIVISION AND CONQUEST OF PALESTINE

The twelve tribes of which, in later times, Israel was considered to be composed fall into four groups, severally connected by descent from four women to whom they traced their ancestry. The Leah group included Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; the Rachel group, Joseph (subdivided into Ephraim and Manasseh) and Benjamin. To Zilpah, said to be Leah's handmaid (whereby some dependence upon the Leah tribes seems to be indicated), were assigned

¹ We must guard against the supposition that every statement in the Pentateuch and the historical books of the Old Testament embodies a "tradition". Hebrew writers were as capable of drawing inferences as modern commentators, and in some cases they cannot have intended their statements to be taken literally. In the section Gen. xxv. 1-4 we have what appears to be a mere literary device to shew in genealogical fashion the connexion of Israel with Midian and other tribes. It is conceivable that the section is now misplaced, and that it once followed the account of the birth of Ishmael; but it does not harmonise well with the tone of that story, and in any case the editor who gave it its present position can scarcely have failed to notice its incongruity, if taken literally, with its context. In the Old Testament we are dealing with writings emanating from a people whose ideas of arrangement were based on oral rather than on literary methods.

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Gad and Asher; to Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, Dan and Naphtali.¹ We need not suppose that all the tribes finally incorporated in Israel had become confederated before the Exodus or even before the conquest of Palestine. For the Egyptian sojourn of the Rachel tribes at least we have the witness of Amos (ii. 10, iii. 1); for that of the Leah tribes we have no early evidence apart from the Pentateuch; but it would be difficult to explain the prominence of Moses, a Levite, in the traditions of the Exodus, if only the Rachel tribes had come out of Egypt. The tribes which are represented as descended from the concubines were probably of mixed origin, mainly Canaanite, and were incorporated in Israel only after the conquest of Palestine. In addition to these, in Judah at least, were other tribes, such as the Calebites, which, however, remained more or less distinct for a long time after their inclusion in Judah. It is probable that these clans entered upon their inheritance from the south; but, since Reuben, not Judah, is reckoned as the first-born son of Leah, by which priority of settlement is probably to be understood, and since Moses the Levite was buried in Reubenite territory east of the Jordan,² the Pentateuchal tradition, according to which the land between the Arnon and the Jabbok was first won by Israel, and western Palestine was invaded from this region, may be accepted as correct for both the Leah and the Rachel tribes, though it is unlikely that these acted together. In the section Judges i. 1–7 Simeon is associated with Judah, but the writer to whom we owe this section in its present form has probably modified an early tradition of Simeon's first invasion of Palestine to

¹ Although the grouping of the Leah and Rachel tribes is probably pre-Palestinian, the names Leah and Rachel may be somewhat later. On such points certainty is impossible.

² It is a significant fact that Gen. l. 10 f. evidently implies that the tomb of Israel was east of the Jordan. The burial at Machpelah belongs to the later and exclusively Judæan modification of tradition.

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suit the fact that in later times Simeon was incorporated with Judah. Bezek, which is reasonably identified with the modern Ibzik, 14 miles north-east of Shechem, seems to be beyond the sphere of Judah's operations; but a Simeonite war in this neighbourhood is perfectly consistent with the fact that in Gen. xxxiv (cf. xlix) Simeon is found with Levi in central Palestine. We do not know the extent of the area occupied by these tribes, but it is probable that, allowance being made for the many strongholds which remained in the hands of the Canaanites, the five Leah tribes west of the Jordan were originally contiguous, Judah being settled in the south, where the tribe came into contact with the friendly Calebites, and Issachar and Zebulun in the plain of Megiddo and the district to the north.

The permanent effect of this invasion of western Palestine was not very great. Issachar and Zebulun were entirely dominated by the Canaanites; Simeon, which, next to Reuben, must have been originally the most important of the Leah tribes, was before long expelled from its first settlements, the survivors finding a refuge in the south;¹ at the same time Levi as a territorial tribe ceased to exist. Since, however, in view of Gen. xxxiv, xlix, it can hardly be maintained that Levi was always merely a priestly caste, we may reasonably

¹ Whether the expulsion of Simeon was due to the Canaanites only, or, in some measure, to the Rachel tribes, cannot be determined. It is noteworthy that in Gen. xxxiv. 30 (cf. xlix. 5-8) Israel repudiates the action of Simeon and Levi, and in Gen. xlii. 24 Joseph imprisons Simeon. The later settlement of Simeonites in Judah proves nothing as to their earlier home. The migration of the Danites from their original settlement furnishes an exact analogy. It is, indeed, not impossible that those Simeonites who survived the Canaanite onslaught retained their original settlement as an *enclave* in the territory of the house of Joseph as long as the Northern Israelite kingdom lasted, perhaps as late as the destruction of Shiloh, mentioned in Jer. vii. 12-15. The earliest evidence for Simeon's connexion with Judah is in Judges i. 1-7, which in its present form is not earlier than the Exile.

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conclude that the tribe of Levi once had a settlement just where we should expect to find it, viz. between Simeon and Judah; and, if so, we may hazard the guess that Shiloh was the chief sanctuary of Levi, while the tribe still occupied territory in central Palestine.¹

The Leah tribes' invasion was followed by a second, undertaken by the Rachel tribes under the leadership of Joshua. These crossed the Jordan near Jericho, which they took, advancing thence to Ai and Bethel, from which point they gradually extended their power over central Palestine.² For a long time many Canaanite fortresses remained unsubdued, but the tribes of Israel (Leah and Rachel) were able by degrees to consolidate their position and to exercise some sort of hegemony over tribes of mixed origin—the sons of the handmaids. The assignment of Gad to Leah's handmaid may be explained by the position of the tribe immediately to the north of Reuben—Asher, similarly assigned, being contiguous to Zebulun. Dan, assigned to Rachel's handmaid, lay immediately to the west of the Rachel tribes, and the similar assignment of Naphtali may perhaps be accounted for by its proximity to the northern Dan. Benjamin, which would appear to have been originally a subdivision

¹ The history of Shiloh presents a most difficult problem. The place appears to have possessed a sanctuary of great importance, which contained the Ark. It is generally supposed that Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines, and that the surviving priests fled to Nob; but the only ground for connecting the priesthood of Shiloh with that of Nob is the awkward statement in 1 Sam. xiv. 3. Moreover, Jeremiah (vii. 12) implies that the sanctuary of Shiloh had continued until fairly recent times (cf. Judges xxi. 19). Its destruction perhaps took place in the catastrophe referred to in Isaiah vii. 8, i.e. about 670 B.C. If the cult at Shiloh differed in important particulars from that of other sanctuaries of the Rachel tribes, we can understand why Northern Israelite writers should ignore it. It is certainly hard to believe that the Ark was connected with the early religion of the Rachel tribes, for, had this been the case, a duplicate would probably have been made.

² Josh. viii. 30–35 is based directly on Deut. xxvii, and cannot be regarded as a “tradition”.

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of the Joseph tribes,¹ gained in importance sufficiently to be reckoned as a separate tribe, and colonists from Manasseh re-crossed the Jordan and settled in Bashan.

III. UNION OF THE TRIBES

It is impossible here to do more than indicate briefly the process by which the tribes of Israel were welded together. The cause of unity was the common danger which for several generations threatened the tribes, either from the original inhabitants of Canaan, whom they had sought to dispossess, or from other invaders, such as the Philistines, who, like Israel, were seeking to gain possession of the country. Thus the struggle against the king of Hazor (Josh. xi, Judges iv) probably involved not only Naphtali, but also the neighbouring tribes; the power of Sisera and the fortified towns of the plains of Megiddo and Jezreel threatened both the Leah tribes, Issachar and Zebulun, and the Rachel tribes to the south of them. From time to time a military leader who had been successful in struggles of this kind would exercise authority as a king in the region which he had delivered. Thus Gideon was elected king² over some portion of Manasseh and Ephraim. Somewhat later, apparently towards the end of the eleventh century B.C., the opposition of Philistines, Ammonites and Amalekites demonstrated the need of concerted action, and for a time united the Rachel tribes with the Leah tribes farther south. The union was short-lived, and was broken in the reign of Rehoboam; but it gave to later ages an ideal of what Israel should be.

An exact history of the reigns of Saul and David is impossible. The longer accounts of these reigns—

¹ Cf. 2 Sam. xix. 20; Amos v. 6, vi. 6.

² That Gideon, or Jerubbaal (if the two are really identical), was king is evident from Judges ix. 2. The account of Gideon's refusal of the kingship (Judges viii. 23) evidently proceeds from the same clerical school as 1 Sam. viii, x. 17-19, xii.

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though they doubtless embody some true traditions—are inconsistent with the short summaries given in 1 Sam. xiv. 47 f. and in 2 Sam. viii. These sections, which are certainly quite independent, shew that in the circles in which they originated all that was definitely known of the reigns of Saul and David was that certain wars had been waged during this period, the exploits of the two kings not being clearly distinguished.¹

IV. EARLY RELIGION OF ISRAEL

Of the religion of the tribes of Israel proper at the time of the conquest of Palestine we have no direct information; all the stories relating to this period are written for the edification of later ages and are coloured by their circumstances. The most noteworthy passages which throw any light on the subject are Amos v. 25 and Jer. vii. 22. If in both the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. it could be asserted that Israel had not offered sacrifices and burnt-offerings during the sojourn in the wilderness, we cannot doubt that throughout the Monarchy there still existed in some circles traditions of a religion which must have been very different from what is presented to us, not only in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings, but even in the earlier documents of the Pentateuch. We need not go so far as to suppose that in the early days sacrifice was altogether unknown, but we shall scarcely do justice to the plain words of the prophets if we do not conclude that it was a comparatively infrequent rite, perhaps confined to the feast of the Passover. The statements of Amos and Jeremiah are also in harmony with the fact that the great feasts of

¹ Definiteness is no proof of historicity. Many of the incidents recorded may be historical, though they are not necessarily ascribed to the right persons. There is no reason to doubt that Goliath was slain by somebody, but the otherwise unknown Elhanan (2 Sam. xxi. 19; cf. xxiii. 24) was probably the hero on that occasion, his exploit being ascribed, centuries afterwards, to the better known Bethlehemite David.

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Israel were mainly agricultural, and could not, therefore, have been celebrated by such people as the Rechabites, who were loyal worshippers of the national God of Israel. It is not improbable that the Rechabites may be regarded as representative of the true Israelite, as distinct from the Canaanite, elements in Israel. Presumably before the conquest of Canaan the Israelites lived mainly on milk, as do the Bahima and the Todas in modern times, though the eating of game may also have been allowed. We may accordingly picture the primitive Israelites as a race of men, cruel, fierce, and barbarous indeed, but preserved by their abstinence from agriculture from that crude nature-worship with which agriculture was connected. It may well be that the great prophetic reformers of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. were not so much innovators as champions of an ancient Israelite tradition which the most genuine Israelite families had never wholly abandoned.

The provenance of the name of the national Israelite God, Jahweh (Jehovah),¹ is as yet uncertain. Ex. iii. 14 (E) represents it as revealed to Moses at Horeb, whereas according to J the name was known to the antediluvian ancestors of Israel (Gen. iv. 26). Ex. iii, as is shewn below, reflects the circumstances of a later age, but it is noteworthy that Joshua bears a name compounded with the Tetragrammaton, and it is possible that the tribes of Israel were united in the worship of Jahweh before the conquest of Palestine.

Yet, if they gave to the God whom they worshipped the same name, they at all events represented Him by different symbols. The tribe of Levi, and probably all

¹ There is no doubt that the pronunciation "Jehovah" rests altogether on a misconception. At the same time the name, in this form, has so long been bound up with the religious ideas of English-speaking people that the author of this essay thinks it might stand. (As the form Jahweh is used in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, from which this essay is reprinted, it is retained here also.)

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the Leah tribes, venerated a seraph, or winged serpent; the Rachel tribes, a bull. They seem to have practised circumcision—though the story in Ex. iv. 24–26 might suggest that the rite had not been adopted by the primitive ancestors of Israel—but it was performed, at all events normally, not in infancy but in adolescence or manhood.¹ This fact and the use of flint knives (Josh. v. 2 f.; Ex. iv. 25) shew that the rite was of a barbarous character, as among the modern Zulus and other peoples. In the earliest times Jahweh would seem to have been regarded as a God of war, and we may conclude that the tabus to which we find warriors subject (cf. 1 Sam. xxi. 4 f. etc.) date from primitive times.

We cannot say whether other features of Israelite religion were brought by Israel into Palestine or were there acquired. We do not even know whether the observance of the new moon and the Sabbath goes back to the earliest period. Similarly, we have no exact information regarding the ethical ideas current in Israel in pre-Palestinian days. It is probable that then, as in later times, polygamy² prevailed, and that, though adultery was condemned, concubinage was freely allowed. Ideas of blood vengeance may also be ascribed to the earliest period.

¹ The proof of this assertion is to be found in the note in Josh. v. 4–7. The writer seeks to excuse the non-circumcision of the people on their arrival at Gilgal on the ground that during the journey circumcision had been impossible. No one could have accepted such an excuse, if the circumcision of infants had been contemplated, but it might be accepted as valid in the case of adults. We may perhaps infer from the story of the vicarious circumcision of Moses that the rite was occasionally practised on infants, but we should probably infer from Josh. v that down to the Exile the normal time was manhood (see, further, the writer's *Old Testament Essays*, p. 28, note 3, and p. 51).

² On such points it is impossible to speak definitely. It cannot be maintained that polyandry is found in the Old Testament, though some Hebrew customs may be supposed to have originated in such a state of things.

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V. BLENDING OF ISRAELITE AND CANAANITE
RELIGIOUS IDEAS AND TRADITIONS

It was not long before the Israelite conquerors, with the exception, perhaps, of some families, such as the Rechabites, became thoroughly merged with the conquered Canaanites, adopting the customs and consequently, to a great extent, the religion of the latter. Canaanite sanctuaries continued to exist as sanctuaries of the mixed race resulting from the fusion of conquerors and conquered. At these sanctuaries Israel would acquire the traditions of the patriarchal heroes associated with them. Thus we may suppose that at Bethel Israel learned the traditions of Jacob, at Ramah of Rachel, at Shechem of Joseph, and so forth; and these, being now regarded as ancestors of the united people, would have deeds assigned to them which in pre-Israelite times had not been told of them. The transparently artificial character of some features in the genealogies has already been noticed, and we have only to suppose that this free treatment of the genealogical style was possible in early times to account for much in the patriarchal stories which is otherwise inexplicable. Probably Joseph was at first revered as the ancestor of the population in the district of Shechem, where was his reputed tomb; Jacob and Rachel would be similarly honoured in the districts of Ramah and Bethel, Abraham at Hebron, and so forth. With the growing sense of the unity of the nation, traditions originally local would obtain a wider currency, and thus, in course of time, the reputed ancestors of clans would be regarded as ancestors of great tribes, or even of the whole nation.¹

¹ We need not suppose that all the stories of the patriarchs can be explained from incidents of which we have precise knowledge. The traditions of the nation generally have been finally shaped in the south, and incidents true with regard to Judah, or to part of it, may have been referred to Northern Israel, or *vice versa*. There may have been, at least