

INTRODUCTION

1. THE TITLE OF THE BOOK AND ITS POSITION IN THE CANON.

THE name for the book among the Hebrews was We'ēleh Shemōth, its title being derived from the first few words of the original in accordance with the usual manner of referring to books amongst the Hebrews. The title in our English Bible comes from the Vulgate *Exodus*, which in its turn was taken from LXX Ἔξοδος. Exodus is the second book of the *Torah* or Law, the first division of the Hebrew Canon or list of sacred writings. It is usual to refer to the five books which make up this division as the Pentateuch.

In Exodus the history of the Hebrew people is continued from the death of Joseph (i. 8) to the commencement of the second year of the wanderings (xl. 1, 17) which found the tribes encamped in the wilderness of Sinai around the newly erected tabernacle.

2. THE SOURCES AND LITERARY STRUCTURE.

Tradition has ascribed the authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses. It should however be remembered that the books themselves give no hint of this ascription; on the contrary, since Moses is referred to in the third person and even his death is described (Deut. xxxiv. 5 ff.), their evidence, at first sight at any rate, is inconsistent with it. The possibility of the closing portion of Deut. being an addition must not however be ignored, nor is the custom of an author's referring to himself in the third person entirely unknown. It is hard to conceive however that

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passages like Exod. xi. 3 and Numb. xii. 3 can have come from Moses himself. On the other hand, though we may question the Mosaic authorship of the books of the Pentateuch as they now exist, it would be difficult to deny them a Mosaic kernel around which later additions have been formed.

A careful examination of the Pentateuch, especially if it be conducted in the original Hebrew, almost inevitably suggests that whoever gave the final form to the books and whenever this stage of their development was reached, many documents or oral traditions were combined in them; and further, that these traditions whether oral or written had their origins amongst people of different points of view and living in widely separated generations. It will perhaps be well to give a few instances of narratives or incidents which appear more than once in the story and also of some which seem definitely to disagree the one with the other. The call of Moses is twice given (iii. 2 ff. and vi. 2 ff.), as is the story of the quails (xvi. and Numb. xi.) and that of the striking of the rock (xvii. 1 ff. and Numb. xx. 1-13). It may be that such incidents did actually occur more than once, a possible explanation also of the twofold appointment of Moses' co-adjutors (xviii. 21 ff. and Numb. xi. 14 ff.), but such repetitions are so frequent and so similar in detail that some other explanation seems to be necessary. Furthermore, in certain of these repetitions the subject would seem to be considered from entirely different standpoints. Examples of this are to be found in the matter of the speaking powers of Moses (cf. iv. 10 ff. with viii. 9 f., 26 f., etc.); the agent by whom the wonders were wrought—in vii. 8, 20, viii. 5, 16, ix. 8, xii. 1 (all P) this agent is Aaron, in vii. 14, viii. 1, 20, ix. 1, 13, 22, x. 1, 12, 21 (all JE) it is Moses; in xvi. 31 the manna tasted like wafers made with honey, in Numb. xi. 8 like fresh oil; in xxxviii. 25 f. the census has already taken place, but

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according to Numb. i. it was still to be made. Other instances of different traditions may be found in the name of Moses' father-in-law, and also in the name of the sacred mountain (Sinai in J and P, Horeb in D and E).

That the Pentateuch was made up of different documents or sources would be admitted I think by all schools of critics; the difficulty arises when the attempt is made to arrange these various sources into groups and to trace their origins. The system which in broad outline has been accepted by the large majority of scholars in recent years is that generally associated with the name of Wellhausen. This system would divide up the Pentateuchal sources into four main groups, known as J, E, D, and P. There is in addition a smaller source known as the Law of Holiness (H) which underlies Lev. xvii.-xxvi., traces of whose influence can be found here and there in the rest of the Pentateuch.

The four main sources belong to different ages of the Hebrew people, though it must be remembered that any dates which we may assign to them are only approximate and are not intended to rule out the inclusion of much earlier matter or even the addition of later accretions. The latest source is that known as the Priestly (P), which McNeile would date from 500 to 300 B.C. This source is greatly interested in the origins of religious institutions and in matters of ritual; it is fond of using set forms of words and takes delight in preserving detailed statements of measurements and distances. A few of its characteristic words and phrases are the following:

between the two evenings: xii. 6 (see note), xvi. 12, xxix. 39, 41, xxx. 8. Six times elsewhere, all in P.

congregation (עֵדָה): used in a technical sense it appears 115 times, all of them in P or in H, which has many of the characteristics of P.

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offer, lit. *bring near* (הִקְרִיב): very frequent in P, H and in Ezekiel.

plague, lit. *striking* (נִגַּף): xii. 13, xxx. 12, and five times elsewhere, all of them P except Isa. viii. 14.

tribe, lit. *staff* (מַטֵּה): xxxi. 2, 6, xxxv. 30, 34, etc. Never found in JE or D.

The next source in point of time is the Deuteronomic (D), which is so called from the book of that name. The traces of its influence in Exodus are but slight and consist of a few phrases exhorting the people to obedience and to the exhibition of kindness: see xii. 25 ff., xiii. 3-9, 14-16, xv. 26, xix. 3-6. The date according to McNeile is from about 600 to 550 B.C.

The two remaining sources, the Jahvistic (J) and the Elohist (E) are so called because of their preference for the different names for the God of Israel, in the one the personal name, Jehovah (or better, Jahweh; see on iii. 2) is used, in the other up to Exod. iii. 14 the general term for God, Elohim. The source J probably came from Judah and reached its final form about 800 B.C., whilst E, which came from the Northern kingdom, is slightly later. At a comparatively early date these sources were combined into a single history (JE), and as they have many characteristics in common it is often quite impossible to separate them with any certainty. When compared with P both are simpler and more natural in style and have a more primitive outlook on life and religion: they contain the earliest traditions of the Hebrew people. The following are some of the few marks which distinguish them:

(a) Characteristics of J.

Preference for the name *Jahweh*.

to find grace or favour (מָצָא חֵן): xxxiii. 12 f., 16, xxxiv. 9. Fifteen times elsewhere in J, once in D and once in P.

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flowing with milk and honey : iii. 8, 17, xiii. 5, xxxiii. 3.

In J four times elsewhere, seven in D, once in H.

harden, lit. *make heavy* (כבד) : of Pharaoh's heart,
 vii. 14, viii. 15, 32, ix. 7, 34, x. 1. Never in E or P.

(b) Characteristics of E.

Preference for *Elohim* (up to iii. 14).

Horeb used instead of *Sinai*.

Jethro for the priest of Midian : iii. 1, iv. 18, xviii. 1, etc.

Idiomatic use of בַּעַל (= *Master*) to express ownership
 or property in : see xxi. 3 (with note), 22, 28 f., 34 f.,
 36, xxii. 8, 11 f., 14 f., xxiv. 14, etc. Usage three
 times in D, not in J or P.

By some critics the various sources have been analysed
 still further and divided up into different strata. Such
 divisions are not very convincing, as the evidence which
 is supposed to support them is often mainly subjective.

Fuller details as to the sources of the book will be found
 in the two excellent commentaries of McNeile (Westmin-
 ster Series) and Driver (Cambridge Bible), as well as in
 Chapman's *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Cambridge
 Bible), in which references to larger works such as Car-
 penter and Harford, *The Composition of the Hexateuch*,
 will be found.

3. THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE BOOK.

In past ages the narrative of Exodus was accepted as a
 literal account, accurate even in the minutest details of the
 events which took place in Egypt and in the wanderings,
 and it was believed that this account came from the prin-
 cipal actor, Moses himself. As we saw in the previous
 section such a view of the book is no longer held by the
 great majority of scholars ; on the contrary, it is regarded
 as coming from a variety of periods, several of them much
 later in time, and as having been affected by the ideas and
 pre-suppositions of such periods.

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If this is a true account of Exodus, as seems most likely, the question immediately arises as to whether it possesses any historical value at all. To this it may be replied that the historical value of the book is still as great as ever; for though it may not be a contemporary account of the sojourn in Egypt and of the deliverance therefrom, yet it gives very valuable insight into the religious ideas of a later age, and in those sections which come from P we are made acquainted with the longings and ideals of the post-exilic priesthood. The earlier sources have also preserved many primitive traditions of the Israelites and some even which go back into far past ages before the different branches of the Semitic stock had separated from one another.

The history itself in its broad outlines is unaffected by criticism. Three great historical phenomena are to be found in Exodus: (*a*) the sojourn in Egypt; (*b*) the deliverance and wanderings; (*c*) the work of a great leader and teacher. Round each of these three groups of facts many traditions and stories have gathered, but if in the light of modern research we are compelled to reject many of these, such a rejection does not involve the denial of the occurrences themselves.

(*a*) *The Sojourn in Egypt.* According to xii. 40 the children of Israel were in Egypt for 430 years. There are however grave difficulties in the way of accepting this figure since Moses and his contemporaries seem to have been the fourth generation only from Jacob; we may take it however that we are intended to suppose that the whole people was in Egypt for some considerable period. This tradition is so firmly planted in the mind of the Hebrew nation that it must certainly be based upon real facts. Is there any evidence in favour of it from sources outside the Bible? The testimony of Egyptian history is not absolutely clear, but it is at least probable that the *Aperu*

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mentioned in the inscriptions are of Hebrew race, or perhaps it would be safer to say included Hebrews amongst them, for we can hardly imagine that the Egyptians were at pains to distinguish very exactly between one Bedawin tribe and another. If all the children of Israel went into Egypt at the time of the famine there are reasons for supposing that some of them returned to Palestine soon afterwards, for "Israel" is included in the list of Canaanite peoples punished by Merenptah in 1220 B.C., shortly before the generally accepted date of the Exodus.

(b) *The Exodus.* The canonical book tells us that the whole of the people of Israel went out of Egypt accompanied by a mixed multitude (xii. 37 ff.). If however we accept the identification of the Hebrews with the *Aperu* of the inscriptions some of them must have been left behind in Egypt, since these people are mentioned in inscriptions as late as the reign of Rameses IV (1171–1165 B.C.). It should not be forgotten however that the writers of the Old Testament not infrequently speak in a general way, and in the long period which elapsed between the events themselves and the time when they were put into writing, the traditions of the various tribes and peoples who went to make up the later Israel may have been fused, and experiences which befell portions of the people only may have been referred to the whole.

(c) *The work of Moses.* If the Old Testament did not inform us of the existence of Moses, some great leader would have to be postulated in order to account for the development and rise of the Hebrew people. The book of Exodus shews him to us as a statesman consolidating and moulding the scattered tribes who fled from Egypt into a united nation; it shews him to us as a great teacher and prophet sent from God; and it shews him to us as a great lawgiver (cf. § 5). Modern critics accept him in all

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these capacities, though they may not accept in its entirety all that has been attributed to him by later tradition.

4. THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE BOOK.

To the Jews history had above all else a didactic value, it was written in order to shew forth the wonders of God's dealings with His people: hence its supreme value for religion. This value is quite independent of the exact truth of the narrative in which the teaching is conveyed, since, as we saw in the previous section, a late account of an event may throw light on the ideas of the time in which it was put into writing. As a record of men's aspirations after God and the gradual response of God to such aspirations the importance of the book is undiminished by the work of critics, nay, its value is increased, since the true perspective is restored.

The Old Testament is a vehicle for conveying to us the spiritual experiences of the Hebrew people and a record of the development amongst them of the knowledge of God. This being so we must not be surprised if we find in the different strata of Exodus conceptions of the divine nature and of religion which are by no means identical. The following are some of the main religious ideas of the book:

(a) *The idea of God.* Exodus contains two great passages in which the character of God is disclosed. In iii. 14, according to some of the greatest of recent scholars, the Name should be rendered I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE, meaning that God's character will become known more and more fully as man's experience increases, the revelation unfolding with the evergrowing life of the race. When this conception of God is combined with the revelation of xxxiv. 6f. we have an idea of God which is potentially capable of meeting all our needs.

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To the Israelite Jehovah was the God of the ancestors of his race (iii. 16) with whom and with whose descendants He stood in covenant relation (vi. 4 f.). He is revealed in history as the guide and protector of His people, for whose welfare even the course of nature could be diverted according to the Hebrew interpretation of events (xiii. 21 f., xiv. 15 ff. etc.). He was accepted as the supreme God, though the existence of other deities might appear to be recognised in certain passages (xv. 11, xx. 3). At the same time primitive ideas concerning Him still existed, the crude anthropomorphisms which had survived amidst more spiritual conceptions; Jehovah has to come down (iii. 8), He attacks men (iv. 24), He has bodily parts like a man (xxxiii. 22 f.). In other passages however God is represented as speaking from heaven (xx. 22) or as revealing Himself by means of inferior beings (iii. 2, xxxiii. 20).

(b) *The duty of man.* (i) *Righteousness.* In the laws of Exodus (cf. § 5) we have the beginnings of social righteousness based on the requirements of a righteous and holy God (xxii. 31) with whom the Israelites stand in covenant relation (xxxiv. 10). The world was thus being prepared through the training of a selected nation for the much higher standard required in the New Testament.

The duty of man. (ii) *Worship.* God demands not only righteousness, but worship also (xxiv. 17 ff.). In those parts of the book which come from P an elaborate sacrificial system is described; but it is not probable that this system was actually carried out in all its fulness at any period of Israel's history, certainly not during the wanderings in the wilderness; like the system described in the closing chapters of the book of Ezekiel we have here an attempt to represent the greatness of Jehovah and His separation from all that is unholy, "endeavours to give a fixed and permanent shape, according to the conditions of earthly life, to ideas which in their essential

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nature led the thoughts of men forward to the future and the unseen" (Westcott, *Hebrews*, p. 235).

The whole system was a permanent witness to the Presence of God in the midst of His people, to His holiness and hatred of sin, and to His desire that men should hold communion with Him. Such truths can never be over-emphasised and the Jewish system has still a value for us when spiritually interpreted, and not least of all as fore-shadowing the work of our Saviour (cf. the working out of this in the Epistle to the Hebrews).

5. THE LEGISLATION IN EXODUS.

The four later books of the Pentateuch as they stand at present contain various groups of laws all of which are attributed to Moses acting as the messenger of Jehovah. These various groups are attributed to four different periods: (*a*) the eve of the Exodus (Exod. xii, xxiii); (*b*) the sojourn before the Sacred Mountain (Exod. xx.—Numb. x. 10); (*c*) the wandering in the wilderness (Numb. xv. ff.); (*d*) the time immediately before the entry into Palestine (Deut.). Some of these laws come from the early sources JE, e.g. xx. 1–7, xx. 22–xxiii. 33 (the Book of the Covenant), xxxiv. 11–26 (the second decalogue), but the majority belong to P.

If the laws are arranged according to subject matter two principal divisions at once reveal themselves, (A) laws concerned with the religious or ceremonial life of the nation, (B) those intended to regulate social life. It must however be remembered that such a distinction had no meaning for the Hebrews; since the whole community was regarded as being under the direct rule of God Himself, all laws were equally sacred. The division between religious and secular had not yet arisen.

A. *Ceremonial Laws.* The following are some of the more important subjects dealt with.