

The Making of Biblical Literature

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WHEN man is under compulsion, either human or divine, to make known a deep religious experience which has come to him, he is confronted with the question, "In what form may I best express this experience?" He may convey his thoughts orally or in a written document. If orally, he may speak or sing in poetry or prose. He may reenact his experience upon a stage, speak over radio or television, or simply talk to a friend. He has a similar variety of choices to make if he should decide to communicate his thoughts in writing. Much will depend upon his purposes and opportunities.

Ancient man did not have as wide a variety of means of communication to draw upon as does modern man, but he still had to choose his media and the form of presentation. There is a wide variety of forms of expression in the Old Testament. A study of the forms by which men have expressed themselves is one of the important approaches to an understanding of religious literature and religion. The purpose of this article is to indicate some of the insights which may come to us through such an approach.

It is important at the outset to distinguish between the religious experience and the words by which that experience is described and communicated. Many people speak of Holy Scripture as "revelation," mistaking the words for the experience. Isaiah experienced the presence of God in the temple (Isa. 6:1ff.). Later, he sought to portray in words the experience through which he had gone. There are sincere people who conceive of God

dictating actual words which were taken down by a prophet. The prophet, however, was not a human stenographer taking down divine dictation. A prophet had a rich and deep experience with the Divine Presence. His thoughts were shaped by his consciousness of the presence of God. His experience inspired his words, but they are his own words, and oftentimes reflect the limitation of human speech to portray the depth of the divine-human encounter.

I

Our Bible has come to us in written form, but we need to note that oral tradition is frequently predecessor to a written document. Before the common use of written documents, it was the custom to preserve tribal and national experiences in the human memory and to pass the records of these events on by word of mouth. Because we distrust our memories and find it hard to believe information that is given by word of mouth, it is difficult for us to understand how dependable such material was in the ancient world, and in fact some parts of the modern world. Dr. William F. Albright tells of listening to a ritual in a Coptic Church which had been handed on by word of mouth for four hundred years. As the ritual was repeated, he checked it against an old manuscript. He said, "I came from that church with a new appreciation for the retentiveness of the human memory." The histories of Arab tribes are sung by the tribal singer around the camp fires, and where facts can be checked, the histories are shown to be accurate. There is evidence from modern customs in the Middle East that oral records can be accurate, and oral records are no more readily changed than written ones. To say that a biblical record began in oral transmission is not to discredit it.

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A change from oral statement to written document is apparent at many points throughout Hebrew history. The early prophets delivered their messages orally. The regularly announced them by saying, "Thus saith the Lord." Emphasis was on the spoken word. Later, their messages were put into writing and have been preserved for posterity. Many a Psalm existed in spoken form before it became part of the collection of writings known as The Psalms. Still later Jesus taught and used parables to illustrate his messages. So far as we know, he never committed anything to writing. Yet, his parables have come to us across the centuries because someone remembered them and put them into written form.

It is sometimes assumed that oral transmission is to be associated with the primitive stages of man's history and that writing was the mark of more sophisticated culture, and the later stages of history. Oral and written messages are found in the same periods, just as sermons and the reading of scripture are to be found in the same church service today. There was, to be sure, a stage in man's development when only oral communication was possible, followed by a period in which most of the communication was still oral, with some messages being committed to writing. Such was true in the early days of the Hebrew people.

II

In the periods of the Patriarchs and of the Judges, roughly in the latter half of the second millenium B.C., narratives of two distinct types were coming into existence. First, there were tales told around a camp fire or at tribal gatherings. These stories were about great heroes, important battles, strange happenings at weddings or funerals, contests of wit, jealousies of women, the all-important discovery of a spring of water or the digging of a well, and a host of other topics of

interest to the tribe. Such stories had great dramatic quality. They were always short and swift moving. The storyteller, through gestures and voice, made the tradition live. Constant retelling of the story fixed its form. Some of the most dramatic stories in all literature are to be found in such records as the Jacob stories in Genesis and those told about David in I and II Samuel or the adventures of tribal leaders in Judges.

Sometimes storytelling took another form and produced a different type of literature. Tribal singers selected the best of the tribal records and put them into rhythmic or poetical form which could be chanted at clan gatherings. Hebrew poetry differs from western poetry. It has two essential characteristics: balance of thought in succeeding lines; and balance of rhythm or metrical phrases.

Balance of thought, technically known as parallelism, was generally achieved in one of three ways. The first was by repetition of the same thought in slightly different words in two or more lines. A perfect example is to be found in Psalms 114:1-4. This is known as synonymous parallelism:

When Israel went forth from
Egypt,

The House of Jacob from a
people of strange language,
Jacob became his sanctuary

Israel his dominion,
The sea looked and fled,
Jordan turned back.

The mountains skipped like rams,
The hills like lambs.

A second pattern of balanced thought was by contrast of concepts. It is known to scholars as antithetic parallelism. Psalms 30 uses this pattern:

For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.
(Psa. 30:5)

The third pattern is the use of a progression of ideas, technically known as synthetic parallelism. Psalms 19:7-11 make use of this particular pattern. The first half of the sentence uses va-

rious synonyms for "law," and there is progression of thought in the last half of the successive sentences. The climax comes in verse 11:

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
The precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is
pure, enlightening the eyes;

.....

Moreover by them is thy servant
warned;
in keeping them there is great
reward.

Still other patterns were achieved through the use of refrains and choruses, couplets and quatrains, and acrostic structure such as Psalms 119.

Balance of rhythm or the metrical structure is accomplished by measuring or counting the number of stressed sounds in a line, not the total number of syllables. Obviously, there is a limit to the number of unstressed syllables which may be included. There seems to have been a close connection between Hebrew poetry and Hebrew music. Hebrew music had major emphasis upon the percussion instruments, not the tonic scale. In addition, Hebrew music was written to a five note scale with the use of quarter tones. Harmony and counterpoint, as we know them in music, composed on the octave scale, was impossible. In music, as in poetry, rhythm was predominant.

Poetry was influenced by music at another point. Since harmony was impossible, variety was brought into music by the use of antiphonal singing, dividing the choir into "light" and "dark" voices, much as we do in voice-speaking choirs. This, naturally, led to the development of antiphonal responses. The Psalms, used in the Temple, were admirably suited to such usage, and are the best known Hebrew poetry.

Some of the oldest fragments in the Bible are poetic in form. The "Song

of Lamech" (Gen. 4:23-24), "Isaac's Second Blessing" (Gen. 27:39-40), and the "Song of Miriam" (Exodus 15:20-21) are but a few examples.

III

The form of literature produced in any period was determined by a number of considerations. First, there were the established customs of the particular period. Prophets in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. delivered their messages in poetry. This was a requirement of the cultic pattern. Poetry was not stressed as much in later generations when prophecy was reduced to writing and messages transmitted in writing. The prophets not only composed their message in poetic form, but frequently used rhythms which had come to have associated moods.

Proverbs and parables are other form which were shaped by popular usage and custom. A proverb has been described as "a long experience in a short sentence," or, a compact statement of a religious principle or a moral teaching. Proverbs appear in two forms in Hebrew literature. First, there is the popular statement such as Jeremiah 31:29, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Second, there is the consciously fashioned literary gem, many of which are to be found in the book of Proverbs. Such Proverbs were used in ancient days as a means of teaching religious principles and the accepted practices of society. They were quickly stated and readily learned.

A Parable is "a short religious allegory" or an illustration of a religious truth. We usually associate the parable with Jesus who frequently expressed himself through this form of teaching. So did some of the Old Testament writers. Best known, perhaps, is Nathan's condemnation of David by use of a parable, II Samuel 12:1-7.

Folk Songs are another expression of the group. In most cases we do not

know the names of the authors of ancient folk songs or of the phrases in such songs. Occasionally a prophet used such a well-known song to emphasize his teaching. The "Vineyard Song" in Isaiah 5:1-7 is an example of this usage. Scholars had suspected for many years that the "Vineyard Song" was quite old and probably was associated with the nature religion. While working on some clay tablets which contained writings from the fourteenth or thirteenth centuries B.C., I discovered the ancient original of Isaiah's poem. The discovery not only confirmed what scholars had assumed, but it gave us insight concerning the method of at least one of the prophets. To catch the attention of his hearers, he took what today we would call a popular song and used its phrases, in edited form, to express his religious teachings. Since the song was popularly associated with the nature, or Baal, religion, we may fairly assume that Isaiah got immediate attention.

Legal documents, in ancient days as well as today, had characteristic form and language. This legal phraseology influenced the form in which religious laws were expressed. We should note, in fact, that ancient Semitic society did not make the differentiation between the sacred and the secular that we do today. Great teachings of the prophets were taken by priests and laymen and put into legal form. The Book of Deuteronomy is an outstanding example of prophetic challenge combined with legalistic phrases. Deuteronomy was a very practical piece of writing. It took the great idealism of prophetic challenge and interpreted it in terms of day by day conduct. They were the rules by which men could live.

Two things need to be noted concerning such writing as Deuteronomy. In the first place, these laws are not the enactments of a legislature. The laws are idealistic challenge and there are no listed punishments by a judge for infractions of the law. Second, the

rules derived from prophetic teaching were suggested as minimum requirements. They were "the floor under moral living" not the top ceiling of one's endeavor. Religion becomes legalistic when the floor is mistaken for the ceiling. Reinterpretation is always necessary in the light of new situations if one is to be guided by the spirit of the prophet.

Psalms, or prayer hymns, also were shaped by popular usage. Many of the great psalms began, as in the case of some Christian hymns, as expressions of individual religious experience and then were adapted to voice the hopes and expectations of the group. Precise patterns suitable for group worship were also developed. Psalmists produced poems which were designed to be a manifestation of group worship: some event of national significance as the anointing of a king, the celebration of a national victory, or the great liturgical moments of the annual festivals. Psalms were written by Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians as well as the Hebrews. As we shall see later, there were times when the Hebrews borrowed such poems from their neighbors, and it may well be that the neighbors borrowed from the Hebrew in turn.

The literary forms of the psalms changed greatly across the centuries, sometimes becoming highly complicated literary structures. But though the literary form of the psalm changed, its purpose among the Hebrews remained unchanged, a prayer-hymn of the people, either in corporate worship or for individual meditation.

IV

A second consideration is cultural heritage. The wandering Hebrew tribes came into a Palestine that was rich with literature, magnificent contributions from the Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures. In addition, Canaanites, Hittites, Hurrians, Phoenicians, Philistines, and Aramaeans also had contributions to make.

Sometimes the Hebrew writer borrowed a literary masterpiece from a neighboring culture as an example for his own efforts, seeking to equal its elegance and beauty, but combining it with his own experiences. In other cases, he expressed his own religious convictions through the best literary medium that he could find, and used it almost unchanged, just as preachers may do today. Genesis 1 appears to reflect an old poem borrowed from the Mesopotamian people, but from a period when men believed in many different gods. The sun, moon, and stars were gods, as was Mother Earth. The poetry was excellent but the religious viewpoint was unacceptable to the Hebrew writer. He, therefore, changed the poem by introducing it with his own conviction that **One God** made all creation. He began by saying, "In the beginning God (One God) created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1 differs from the Mesopotamian version at two points. First, there is emphasis upon monotheism. Second, there is an orderliness to creation. It was not the result of conflict between the forces of good and evil, as in the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian accounts.

Psalms 104 shows marked dependence upon the Egyptian "Hymn to Aton" composed for or by the reformer Pharaoh Akh-en-Aton (Amen-hotep IV), ca. 1380-1362 B.C. Some writers have claimed that this pharaoh was the first monotheist and that Moses may have learned his beliefs from Akh-en-Aton or his followers. Certainly the "Hymn to Aton" praises the Sun God Aton as "Sole god, like whom there is no other." The reformer Pharaoh was evidently on his way to the discovery of the fundamental nature of God and creation. However, it should be noted that while the Pharaoh worshipped Aton as the true god, the people believed that the pharaoh was a god, and this Akh-en-Aton never denied. Second, the reform of Akh-en-Aton was completely wiped out after

his death and was completely lost to history until archaeologists found evidence that there had been such a movement in Egypt. It would, therefore, have been absolutely impossible for Moses to know anything about such a reform or body of beliefs. This, of course, leaves us with the puzzling question of the preservation of the poem which had its influence upon the composer of the 104th psalm. No satisfactory answer has been found, but scholars have written extensively about the literary dependence of the psalm on the Egyptian hymn.

The laws of other nations had their influence upon the Hebrews themselves. In December, 1901 and January, 1902, pieces of black diorite were found at Susa, by a French archaeologist, de Morgan. When these pieces were put together they formed a stele a little over eight feet high, with a circumference varying from six feet at the bottom to five feet at the top. The monument was covered with more than 3600 lines of cuneiform text. When translated, it was discovered this was a body of law gathered together by King Hammurabi. It was soon recognized that there was great similarity between these laws and the collection of laws found in Exodus 21:1-23:19. Even more remarkable was the bas relief carving at the top of the obverse side. It showed King Hammurabi standing before his god, who is seated at the top of a mountain, and receiving from him the law for his people. Later studies have shown that the Hammurabi code itself was borrowed from earlier codes and modified little for Hammurabi's day. This king and his law preceded Moses by several hundred years. There is no possibility, as has been proposed, that the Hammurabi Code was copied from the Mosaic Covenant Code, Exodus 21-23.

Some scholars have recognized two kinds of law in the Old Testament; apodeictic and casuistic. Others prefer to divide them into categorical pro-

hibitions and procedural law. The first were believed to be direct commands from God; the second were laws established by society as it settled disagreements in the community. Throughout the law of the Hebrew people there runs the conviction that these are the laws of a people who entered into covenant relationship with God.

Other literary patterns influenced by the practices of other people are different forms of speculative literature. The Hebrews, just as their neighbors, were concerned with basic issues of life. It has sometimes been claimed that the Hebrews were not philosophers, nor did they produce philosophical literature. This supposition can no longer stand unchallenged. The so-called wisdom literature comes to grips with problems of the meaning of life and death, and while it is true that the Hebrews developed neither formal philosophical logic nor language, evidence was gathered and examined and conclusions were derived from that evidence. Two books in the Old Testament seem to have been strongly influenced from non-Hebrew sources. The first is Ecclesiastes which bears marks of the Greek school of cynics, with editorial revision by a religious teacher. Ecclesiastes is not a book of philosophy. There is no system, but the spirit of inquiry and analysis indicate the Hellenistic culture which had pervaded Palestine.

A second book is of another pattern. Job is speculation presented in the form of drama, not to be enacted upon a stage, but to be read. The book challenges the assumptions of traditional Judaism and does so in terms of the honest cataloging of the facts of life. Judaism taught that the man who obeyed the law and carefully observed the stated requirements of religion would be materially successful and would live to a ripe old age. Evil men would be punished by suffering and death. Through the character Job the writer says quite frankly, "My

observation of life does not support these positions." The friends are the "defenders of the faith." Contrary to popular understanding of the book, it is the friends who are condemned at the last, and Job is sustained and requested to pray for the friends. The prayer of Job for his friends was accepted (Job 42:7-9). The closing portion of Job 42 was added later and brought the book back into harmony with orthodox Judaism, but it contradicts the main thesis of the book. The literary pattern of Greek drama is evident in much of the book.

So far we have noted only influences and borrowing from non-Hebrew sources. In the two or three centuries immediately prior to the coming of Christianity, the Jews began to draw upon their own literary traditions. In the period of growing nationalism following the Babylonian Exile, one writer sought to offset the disastrous reform of Ezra which called upon Jews to divorce their foreign wives. The writer recovered the story of Ruth and Boaz from before the days of David. He used that story with powerful effect to teach the Jews that they were indebted to at least one foreign wife, for she was the great-grandmother of David who was accepted as Israel's greatest king.

The books of Jonah and Daniel similarly were drawn from early stories of the Hebrew people and written also for religious instruction.

V

A third consideration is that of the purpose of the writer himself. Examination of the literary structure may frequently give us a clue to the author's purpose in writing. For example, two accounts are given in Judges of the battle between Barak and Sisera. Chapter 4 is a prose account, and chapter 5 is a poetical version. Is there any reason for having two accounts of the same event? Apparently the two accounts have different purposes. The prose account

seems to be concerned only with giving the details of events and a prose account would suffice. It recorded the triumph of the Hebrews over their enemies. The poetical version sought to induce within the mind of the hearer or reader a certain mood. The writer selected his words and phrases carefully so that the reader would be proud of his heritage and be in a spirit of praise to God for national deliverance. Even if the writer sought only to build up pride of national heritage he stated his case well. Such historical poems were used in liturgical recitals of "the great deeds of the LORD."

Sometimes material was used for tribal and national glorification. Such motivation, combined with a conviction of God's purpose in history, led us to the early collections among the Hebrews both in the north and in the south. Cycles of stories were gathered around great heroes, both political and religious: figures such as Samson, Samuel, Saul, David, Elijah, or Elisha. In the tenth and ninth centuries B.C., the south began to collect its hero stories. Naturally there was emphasis upon southern places and southern heroes. About a century later a similar collection was made in the north with its own particular emphasis upon its heroes and locations.

Since each collection used its own particular vocabulary and characteristic phrases, including its own special name or term for God, it is not too difficult to distinguish between these collections. The southern collection regularly used the term "Yahweh" (better known in English literature as "Jehovah"), and therefore the symbol "J" is used to designate this particular collection. The northern collection designated God with the regular Hebrew common noun "Elohim." The symbol "E" designates this particular collection for scholars. In English translations the word "Yahweh" is generally translated LORD, and the common term "Elohim"

is translated simply "god." The different usages may be noted in two psalms, 14 and 53, which are the same except for the noun designating God. Psalms 14 uses LORD, (verse 2), while Psalms 53 uses God. Here is indication that the two versions of the same psalm came from different collections, and probably from the south and the north respectively.

About the middle of the seventh century these two major collections, together with other material, were combined into a story of the Hebrew nation. It was not only one of the first interpretive stories told of the Hebrews, but it is perhaps one of the earliest of such records of any nation. A philosophy of history had been introduced into the record. In the ancient world many individual records of kings were kept. There is indication that this had also been true of the Hebrew kings. Reference is made to such records by kings and prophets (see I Kgs. 11:41, etc.). The Hebrew sense of destiny under the leadership of God, so stressed by the eighth century prophets, brought to them a sense of history such as had not been discovered by other nations. The record stressed the purpose of God in history and man's responsibility in relationship to that purpose. A major part of the historical record from Genesis through Kings comes from this collection. Strictly classified, these books are not formal histories; they are the story of a covenant people.

VI

A fourth consideration which shaped the forms of literature was that of the circumstances under which a message had to be delivered. Jeremiah, like other prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries, delivered his messages to the people in Jerusalem orally. There were, however, two situations which necessitated written messages. The first of these was Jeremiah's determination to keep in touch with those of his people who had been taken into Baby-

lonian captivity. To convey his messages to these people, Jeremiah wrote letters. He is the first religious leader of whom we have record to write such pastoral letters. Second, the time came when Jeremiah was forbidden to appear in public. His messages had irritated the religious and political leaders. Jeremiah, therefore, dictated his messages to his scribe, Baruch. Baruch then read these in public on behalf of Jeremiah until it became unsafe for Baruch to appear with such messages. Different circumstances required different techniques. There is a description in the book of Jeremiah (36:1-32) which tells of Jeremiah's written document being cut to pieces and thrown into a fire. From this we know that Jeremiah (or Baruch) must have written on papyrus, not leather, otherwise the smell would have driven the people from the room. Then the record goes on to say that Jeremiah dictated his message (second edition) and added many other words (revised and enlarged). There are great differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Book of Jeremiah, both in content and order. These differences indicate either that the writings of Jeremiah went through radical editing at the time of the making of the Greek translation, or more probably that at least two different editions of the collected deeds and sayings of Jeremiah were known in ancient times.

The writer of the Book of Daniel lived about four hundred years later than the hero of his book, and like his hero, he lived in a period of extreme political danger. He sought to convey to his fellow countrymen a message which was politically dangerous to both author and reader. The Jews were under the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes who by his adopted title declared that he was divine. This ruler made it impossible for Jews to be faithful to their own religion except at great peril to themselves and their families. The author, therefore, sought a means of

declaring that Antiochus Epiphanes was neither divine nor immortal; he would soon die. He further wished to declare that no political power or figure could stand against the purposes of the Eternal God and live. The author not only selected Daniel as his hero, but wrote as if he were living in the days of Daniel and could observe all that happened to Daniel and his contemporaries. This naturally meant that anything in the future, particularly events of the Maccabean Period, second century B. C., had to be treated as future events, or prophecy. The second protection for writer and reader was to use a type of code writing. Symbolism, understood by the initiated, carried meanings not recognized by the uninitiated. The main thrust of the writer was to bring courage to a persecuted people, not to discuss problems many centuries in the future. Attempts to identify individuals and nations of the book of Daniel with figures and nations of the twentieth century are doomed to failure. Any attempts read into the record, such interpretation do violence to the purpose of the original writer.

VII

Collectors, compilers, and editors, also played their part in the development of Hebrew literature. In addition to the records from the south and north already discussed, there were two other major collections of the Hebrew story. First, a collection was made and edited about 600 B.C. by a group called the "Deuteronomists." Scholars have given them this name because their writing and editing was done in harmony with the spirit of the Book of Deuteronomy. Their influence and point of view are evident through a considerable part of the Old Testament, notably the books Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The purpose of these writers was to teach by drawing upon history for illustrative purposes. They demonstrated the activity and leadership of God in history, particularly the history of the Hebrew

people. It is increasingly being recognized that a corpus of history from Deuteronomy through Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, resulted from the work of the Deuteronomists, sometimes referred to as the "Deuteronomic School."

In the period immediately following the Babylonian Exile, the priests contributed a second collection to the literature of the Jews. First, they collected the ancient documents, messages of the prophets, law codes, and historical and liturgical materials. In addition they added much detail to the record, particularly in defense of the priestly office and prerogatives. The latter part of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and much of Numbers was contributed by the priests.

One of the major mistakes of the Graf-Wellhausen school was the assumption that all priestly writings were of late origin and reflected late thinking. It has now been recognized, that while there is validity to the theory that several literary sources may be identified in such books as Genesis, none of the sources is to be assumed to contain thought of only the period in which it was actually written. All sources draw upon the preceding generations, and this was no less true of the priestly writers than of the other sources.

The priestly writers, like the others, also had a point of view from which collecting and editing was done. There was a tendency to project recent ideas into the past and to assume that in "the good old days" men had attained maturity of religious thought, personal morals, and social ethics.

We shall turn to the four major religious institutions about which the stories of Israel were gathered in a moment. First, it is necessary to distinguish between a "school of thought" and the individual who gave unity and thrust to the work we generally refer to as a product of the priestly school. One of my favorite definitions is that

describing a camel as "a horse which a committee put together." Committees are good, but competent leadership of a committee can make or break the work of a competent committee. Priests were in the business of collecting ancient records, classifying sources as good or poor. In the end someone had to do the final editing and sorting. It is possible that the final work had to be okayed by an authorizing group. Nevertheless, the priestly document would seem to be the product of an individual rather than a group. In any case, it is a carefully organized body of material and not an agglomeration.

Professor Elmer W. K. Mould¹ has called our attention to the fact that the priestly account is organized into four "world epochs" during each of which a basic and important ceremonial institution was produced. These are: first, the period from creation to the flood which produced the Sabbath; second, the period from the flood to Abram, produced the prohibition against blood and the basic law of kosher; third, the period from Abram to Moses in which the practice of ceremonial circumcision was instituted; and fourth, the period beginning with Moses, which produced the Passover and the Law.

We have noted that there is strong priestly influence in the first four books of the Bible. We have also pointed out that the collection beginning with Deuteronomy has marked evidence of Deuteronomic influence. However, it should also be noted that the priestly editing is to be recognized in this second collection. It was noted by scholars of the nineteenth century that the priestly account continued on into the Book of Joshua. This gave rise to the designation of the first six books of the Bible as the "Hexateuch." No such collection of six books was ever recognized by Judaism in ancient days. When division came, it was to separate

¹Mould: *Essentials of Bible History* (Nelson, 1939) pp. 379-80.

the first five books into the TORAH or Law. Because Moses was accepted as the originator of basic law, he was believed to have been the author of these five books. As a matter of fact, it was considered one piece of literature. Orthodox Judaism does not speak of the Five Books of the Law, but the Five Fiftths of the Law. It is One Law, divided for convenience into five sections. The "Hexteuch" never existed historically in Judaism, and is nothing but a literary classification. It is incorrect because the priestly influence is to be found in books following Joshua. It should be dropped from scholarly vocabulary.

Still another priestly collection may have existed independently for a time and that is the group of books I and II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Unlike the books we have just discussed, these books came to official acceptance quite late and have been included in that division of the Hebrew Bible known as The Writings, whereas the books of Joshua through II Kings were included with The Former Prophets. W. A. Elmslie gives an excellent appraisal of the work of the Chronicler in *The Interpreter's Bible* (1954).

Many attempts have been made to demonstrate a basic unity in the collection we call The Old Testament. Certainly there is a common subject that of the relationship between God and man, and the story of God's search for man and man's search for God. If this be true, then certainly editorial activity must at least be credited with an assist. Documents not dealing with the major theme had to be excluded or given a rationale for being included. It is a mistake, however, to assert as some do that since there is basic purpose for the inclusion of the several parts of the whole that therefore there must be unity of thought throughout. One of the basic results of careful critical scholarship is the discovery that man changed his understanding of the nature of religion and the nature of

God during the long centuries portrayed in the Old Testament records. Over the generations man has grown in his knowledge, including his sense of relationship to God and his responsibility to God and man. This is far from saying that there has been steady progress upward. There have been gains, but there have, also, been tragic losses. The net change is gain and not loss. By recognizing the road over which man has traveled to greater religious maturity, man can avoid immaturity of thought through which forebears passed generations ago.

VIII

After a manuscript has been written, either ancient or modern, it must go through the critical process of acceptance if it is to become a permanent part of a nation's literature. In the modern world, editors protect publishers from loss by rejecting material which will probably not have wide sale. In ancient days, literature came more directly to the people. The books of the Old (and New) Testament came to be a part of the total collection because the people gave them acclaim. The people recognized that in these writings there was a religious message for them. The people played a basic part in the process we call "canonization." The first step in this process of official authorization is the decision by the worshipping public that the particular writing in question does in some way minister to their religious well being. The next step is that of official approval, but frequently this was seldom more than agreement that the decision of the worshipping public was correct. Sometimes a theological rationale was worked out to strengthen what was merely a "feeling" by the people.

There are several instances on record where the religious leaders were inclined to disagree with the choice of the people, but in the end accepted the people's choice. Such an instance is to be found in connection with the Song of Solomon, or The Song of

Songs. It is a collection of love songs. God is nowhere mentioned in the book, nor is there an reference to prayer, the temple, or any religious organization or practice. Why, therefore, was the book included? The first step was the demand of the people. Just as we include the Solemnization of Matrimony in our hymnals as one of the rituals, so the ancients felt that marriage was to be closely identified with religion. Marriage, in an ancient day, consisted of the wooing of the bride, the singing of mating songs, the "abduction of the bride," and the consummation of marriage. No priestly blessing was sought or offered. It was community function. Such songs, therefore, as we have in Song of Songs were well known and regularly used.

To make the collection theologically acceptable allegory was superimposed. The groom was identified as God, and the bride was said to be the people Israel. When the book came over into the Christian collection, a slight modification was made. Column headings in the King James Authorized Version indicate that the groom is Christ, and the bride is the church. The book had been made theologically defensible.

Another book which mentions neither God nor religion is Esther. It was a book which came to be greatly beloved of the people, but it had difficulty in being accepted by the religious leaders. For one thing, it supports a celebration for Judaism not included in the laws of Moses. The people believed that faith in God supported Esther and strengthened her courage. They believed also that it was through the power of God that deliverance came to Esther's countrymen. When the religious leaders finally accepted the book, it was explained that no mention of God was permitted in the book because the setting of so much of the story was in a pagan environment. However, when the story was translated into Greek and included in the Septuagint, prayers were inserted at appropriate places.

IX

Editors, priests, and scholars, both Jewish and Christian, have rendered outstanding service in preserving the ancient words. Once a book had been officially approved, attention was immediately given to establishing an official text. After that had been established, much effort was given to preserving this archetype intact. Various devices were used, particularly by Jewish scholars, to aid the memory. Words and letters were counted. It was known which word and letter came at the exact center of the book. Master copies of manuscripts were used in checking the accuracy of copies. Even so, errors inevitable crept into handwritten copies of biblical books. Modern printing has kept errors to a minimum, but even today and with the most careful editorial supervision, mistakes still occur.

One of the important tasks of the modern scholar is to recover, insofar as this is possible, the most original form of the various biblical books. Before a book can be translated into modern English, the best text in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek must be obtained. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has caused so much excitement for the very reason that scholars now are in possession of copies of Old Testament books in Hebrew which are more than a thousand years older than anything we have formerly known in the modern world. These Dead Sea Cave copies are more than five hundred years older than any copies we have had in any language. This means that we are this much closer to the original documents.

By comparing the Dead Sea Cave manuscripts with more recent copies of Bible books, it can be determined whether or not changes or mistakes have crept into the text. Comparison showed that there is ninety-eight per cent agreement between the traditional Hebrew text of Isaiah and the Dead Sea Scroll (DSS I Isa a). The two per cent disagreement must be checked

out. The mistake may be in the Dead Sea Scroll, even though it is older. Careful checking, technically called collation, with translation in Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Syriac, etc., enables the scholar to decide which may be the more exact reading. The establishment of a dependable document in the original language is known as "textual criticism." The word "criticism" is derived from the French and really means "examination." There is nothing invidious in the term but unfortunately it has been badly misunderstood. "Establishment of the text" describes more exactly in English what the scholar is seeking to do. A second task is that of seeking to discover when, where, and under what circumstances a book was written. Attempts to discover authorship is known as "higher criticism." If the individual insists that Moses wrote the Pentateuch he is using certain facts and his judgment since there is no claim within these five books that Moses is the author. It is sometimes forgotten that fundamentalists and conservatives must of necessity use both lower and higher criticism (except for the few who believe that the King James Version is the original form of the Bible).

A third task of the Bible scholar is that of translation from the ancient languages into modern equivalents. Two important factors make it necessary for this task to be repeated periodically. First, we know much about the ancient languages today and we have better manuscripts than scholars did at the time of the making of the KJAV or the ARV. Second, our own language has changed meanings of words, and thus mis-translations result in the minds of people. The KJAV says that Leah had "tender eyes" when as a matter of fact she had sick eyes. The word "prevent" now is generally understood to mean stop or hinder. It formerly meant to precede or go before. Psalms 79:8 in KJAV says, "let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us:

for we are brought very low." RSV reads "let thy compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low." It is unfortunate that we sometimes seek to combine the best of educational procedures in our church schools with the mistaken pattern of reading Scripture in English which has not been spoken for three hundred years, except in church, or occasionally in the theatre.

A fourth task of the scholar is to give the interpretation of Scripture. He seeks to discover the meaning the passage had when it was first uttered or written. He then seeks to discover the relevance of the message for more recent readers. This is why commentaries are written. Commentaries were written in ancient Judaism prior to the days of Christianity, as is witnessed by the "Commentary on Habakkuk," and other "peshars" found in the Dead Sea Caves. One of the most recent commentaries is *The Interpreter's Bible*.

X

The world-wide influence of Old Testament literature upon religious thought and other writings has been universally recognized. It may be helpful to indicate a half dozen areas in which this Hebrew literature has made significant contributions:

- 1) We begin with religious thought because this is the major import of this material. It is generally reckoned that there are eleven major religions in the world today, not counting various forms of primitive religion. Of these, there are only three which have a basic belief in monotheism. These are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Question may be raised by some concerning the actual monotheism of Islam, and certainly some Christians are dualistic. Claims are made by some Sikhs that they are essentially monotheistic. In any case, monotheism was first accepted by Judaism and came to other groups. Judaism has taught

monotheism to the world, through the Old Testament.

2) Law Codes of western civilization and much of the orient and Africa have been directly or indirectly influenced by Biblical Law. The Hebrews drew heavily upon surrounding cultures as they developed their own law, but the change that resulted from grounding law in their religious conviction and associating law with Covenant relationship with God gave new quality to it. That quality has stood the test of many centuries and cultures.

3) The writing of history is much more than a recital of events. An orderly telling of historical events with an interpretation of these events is first to be found among the Hebrews in the tenth to eighth centuries B.C. Much earlier than this there had been the chronicling of events by monarchs and priests in various countries. These records consisted of facts from which history has been written by modern historians as these records have been made available. Hebrew accounts bore a new quality formerly unknown in literature. This was due to the close relationship between the viewpoint of the prophet movement. It influenced writing in both south and north.

In the Law and the Prophets there is a well developed philosophy of history. The challenge of prophetic religion rested firmly upon the prophetic view of history. One cannot clearly understand the message of the prophets except as one sees this relationship. It is now being recognized that many later historians were greatly influenced in their philosophy of history by the Old Testament prophets. Herodotus has been traditionally known as "the father of history," but he did not live until the fifth century B.C., several centuries later than Hebrew historians.

4) Prophetic literature owes its greatness not only to the depth of religious knowledge and experience, but to the literary quality with which the prophets expressed themselves. It is

constantly apparent that the very circumstances under which the messages were delivered demanded most careful preparation. It is, also, apparent that quality of expression aided in the processes of acceptance and memorization. The writing prophets were literary artists as well as religious leaders. If a man did not express his messages well he could hope to have only a few hearers. The messages preserved in our Old Testament were expressed so well that they were memorized and became a part of tradition. During the Babylonian Exile, men carefully searched their memories for words to inspire and to comfort the exiles in their distress. The Temple and altar had been destroyed. The people had been scattered. Then religious inspiration was brought to the people through words and literature of the masters of the spoken and written word, the prophets of Israel. In addition, the people discovered truth in the warning words of the prophets which had been forgotten but which was demonstrated by the Exilic experiences.

5) The word "Scripture" has come to mean holy writing. For many people it refers specifically to the Bible of Judaism and Christianity. The idea of writings having their origin in the purposes of God was not new with the Hebrews. Indeed until the discovery of the Scroll in the Temple, emphasis among the people had been upon the spoken word. "Thus saith the Lord" had been the ringing cry of the prophets. Beginning with the discovery of the Scroll of Law, the core of Deuteronomy, emphasis changed to the importance of the written document. As we shall see in a moment, there were several occasions when the people put their imprimatur upon the written word. This finally resulted in the concept of Bible or Scriptures, not only for Judaism and Christianity, but other religions as well. Islam has its sacred book known as The Koran. Much of it is directly dependent upon the Jew-

ish and Christian writings. Moslems in the modern world feel a kinship with Christians because both possess sacred writings. A Moslem will say, "We are friends, because we are both 'people of a book.'" The quality of the literature forming the Hebrew Scriptures had no small part in the development of religious literature.

6) Our language, literature, art, drama, music, public institutions, as well as our religious institutions, have been enormously enriched by the literature we call "Scriptures." It is not strange that so many novels and plays are based directly or indirectly upon Old Testament stories. Testimony to its importance in influencing the literature of many people is to be found in countless volumes. The quality of the literature of the western world cannot be appreciated apart from a recognition of the shaping influences that Biblical literature has had in western culture.

XI

We referred, a little earlier, to the group approval given by the people at various times to parts of the Old Testament. Arguments have been proposed that in some cases, group approval came as the result of careful propaganda or opinion manipulation. This has been quite seriously proposed in the case of the approval of the Scroll found in the Temple and which became the basis of Josiah's reform. This may have been true, although the evidence is not as clear as some proponents would insist. The important thing is that the leaders felt the necessity of obtaining popular approval. This indicates something of the nature of Hebrew religion and also Hebrew politics.

There are five major steps in the organization of the Old Testament as it is now known to Judaism, and a sixth step to bring it to the order it now has in our English Bibles. We have already referred to the Scroll of Law found in the Temple in the year 621 B.C. Just

when it was written has been widely discussed. The major part of the evidence indicates that the scroll was written not too long before it was found. In any case, the significant date for the story of the Old Testament is when it came to be known, not when it was written.

After the scroll had been reported and read by the priests, it was reported to the king. He then requested that it be read to the people. When this was done, the people accepted it as the law for country and for themselves. This was the first time in the history of the Hebrew people that such approval had been given to a written document and this shifted the whole emphasis from "thus saith the Lord" to "thus it is written." This in turn lifted the interpreter of the written document to a place of superiority. We sometimes say that the priest displaced the prophet. Not directly. The written word displaced the spoken word and made the priest more significant than the prophet. The account is given in II Kings 22:1 - 23:30.

It was around the Scroll of the Law that other law was gathered. Eventually the whole collection, taking two or three hundred years, perhaps, became Torah or The Law. Scripture, however, records a second instance in which popular approval for the written word was sought. During the Babylonian Exile much written material was gathered together and oral tradition was written down and added to it. Just when the collection was brought to Palestine is debatable, but Jewish tradition accepts the belief that it was brought as a unity when Ezra returned with The Law, either at the end of the fifth century or the beginning of the fourth. The account of Ezra reading the Law is given in Nehemiah 8:1 - 10:39. It is generally agreed by Jewish and Christian scholars that at about this time the Pentateuch had attained to the content and order which we now know. How much of this law was

actually presented and read by Ezra is debatable, and perhaps not too important. Ezra's association with Torah is extremely important.

The Jews believe that no Scripture was written after the days of Ezra. They believe that he rewrote all Scripture which had been given by God through Moses and the prophets. One of the tests in a later day for Scripture was that it could be asserted without fear of contradiction, that the document had been in existence prior to the days of Ezra. Thus, Ezra became the great water shed of Biblical history. We now know that there were several books written or completed after the days of Ezra, but orthodox Jewish belief will not accept any such evidence.

When Jesus referred to Scripture, he often referred to it under the three traditional divisions known to Judaism. In his conversation with the lawyer, he asked, "What is written in the Law? How do you read?" (Luke 10:26). Jesus was making reference to the Torah, or the Pentateuch. On other occasions, Jesus referred to the Prophets. He is often portrayed quoting from the prophet Isaiah. But by the Prophets Jesus meant more than the Major and Minor Prophets. As any other Jew, he included the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These books were known as the Former Prophets and together with the Later Prophets (our major and minor prophets) they constituted the second section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Prophets, or Nebiim.

This collection came to completion somewhere between 250 and 200 B.C. References are made to The Prophets in Ecclesiasticus, otherwise known as The Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclus. 48:24, 49:10). We have no record of any meeting in which popular approval was voted, but this does seem to have been a case of general acceptance. The general content and the title of the collection had been fixed prior to

the middle of the second century B.C. This was the third step.

A third division of Scripture was known simply as The Writings and when Jesus said simply, "As it is written" he was usually referring to this final part of the Scripture. Such books as Psalms, Proverbs, and Job, had been in process of compilation for a long time. The book Esther was one of the last to have been written and as a matter of fact was not readily accepted. There is no evidence in the New Testament that Jesus or his contemporaries even knew about the book.

A fourth step in fixing the content of Scripture was taken when it was decided that the Jewish Scripture should be translated into Greek. This was done for the simple reason that many Jews had forgotten or never knew Hebrew and did not speak Aramaic, the language of Palestine. Greek was the international language. It was used widely and was the daily language of the Jews in Alexandria, Asia Minor, as well as of those in Greece. Tradition says that seventy men made the translation and thus the name Septuagint, or the symbol LXX, is given to the translation.

It now seems highly probable that the original Greek translation contained only the first section of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah. It was the translation of this section which was originally known as the Septuagint. Translation of the remainder was accomplished by Jews and by early Christians. It was in fact the Old Testament in Greek which became the Scripture of the "Followers of the Way." Quotations in the New Testament from the Old are in terms of the Greek translation, not from Hebrew. The translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek of necessity meant that there had to be agreement concerning which books were part of the officially recognized collection. The translation also helped to solidify that collection.

The fifth step in the process of organization of the Old Testament came because of a conflict between Jews and Christians. The Christians began producing documents such as the Epistles and Gospels which they referred to as "Scripture." The Jews disagreed with this designation, but they were faced with the embarrassment that while they claimed to be the sole possessors of Scripture they had never defined it. The old Sanhedrin no longer was in existence. It disappeared with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. A Council of Rabbis was therefore called to meet at Jamnia, sometimes referred to as Jebna, possibly about the year A.D. 90. They fixed the Jewish canon or body of Scripture in the form which Jews know today. It has three parts: Law, Prophets, and Writings. It has not been changed.

It should be noted that the order of the books in the Septuagint differs from the Hebrew canon. Just when the changes occurred cannot definitely be determined. It was the LXX which made the basis of the present order of the English Old Testament or the sixth step. The former prophets were treated as history and combined into the section which contained other books of historical importance, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. The major change was to bring the Old Testament to a climax by putting the Major and Minor Prophets at the close of the Old Testament and, therefore, leading up to the New Testament. This was made possible by grouping poetical books such as Psalms and putting this group after the books of history. Thus, we arrived at the five-fold division of the English Bible so familiar to many people: Law, History, Poetry, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets. The LXX also contains the books of the Apocrypha, books which have generally been rejected by Protestantism, due to the influence of Martin Luther.

XII

The following Table of Dates, grouped according to the traditional Hebrew classification of books, may be helpful to the reader:

I. TORAH—The Law; the books Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books were compiled from various ancient and contemporary sources, some certainly oral, but probably others written. Debate is still keen as to their character and how they developed, but in general it is recognized that the books of The Law are made up, in the main, from four ancient collections which attained completed form as follows:

J—(Yahwist), a southern document, probably from the 10th and 9th centuries B.C.

E—(Elohist), a northern document, probably from the eighth century B.C.

D—(Deuteronomic) between 650 and 550 B.C.

P—(Priestly), between 500 and 400 B.C.

Final compilation in essentially the present form prior to 300 B.C.

II. THE PROPHETS—

(a) FORMER PROPHETS: Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings. Joshua was compiled from many sources including the J. E. and P. collections noted above, with final compilation in the fourth century B.C.

Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings, were also compiled from many sources, including collections of hero stories, narratives of the prophets and other individuals, royal annals, Temple records, southern and northern collections. The process continued until after 561 B.C., but editing went on to the third century B.C.

(a) LATER PROPHETS (Major and Minor Prophets): all books were revised between 538 and 200 B.C. in the light of new religious experiences. This is one of the many evidences that Hebrew religion was never static. New

experiences led to new expressions of faith and hope. Considerable blocks of material were added to the work of the original prophet in the spirit, "if the prophet were alive today, this is what he would say." Not infrequently expansion of his oracles was introduced to make his teaching relevant to the time of the editor or expansionist. Apocalyptic elements were introduced which were based upon a philosophy of dualism and determinism, elements contrary to the spirit of true prophecy. Greater emphasis was also placed upon the predictive aspects of prophecy, an emphasis not stressed by the prophets. Predictive messages of prophets were usually conditional: if you persist in this pattern of conduct, then inevitably, these will be the results. People and nations were urged to repent so that threats could be changed to promises. In apocalypticism, everything had been pre-determined, and emphasis was upon prediction with dates of future events made known through the occult powers of the predictor. The dates of prophetic books are, therefore, spread over a long period of time and can be given only approximately.

Isaiah, most of chapters 1-10, 18, 20, 22, 28-31, perhaps also parts of 14-17, between 740 and 700 B.C.

Chapters 40-66 probably also 35, about 540 B.C., with much later revision, particularly chapters 56-66. The rest from various dates down to the 3rd or 2nd century B.C.

Jeremiah, most of the body of the book chapters 1-44, between 626 and 581 B.C. Chapters concerning nations 45 to end, after 538 B.C.

Ezekiel, between 592 and 570 B.C.,

with much later material and editing.

Hosea, about 735, closing chapter after 538 B.C.

Joel, probably about 350.

Amos, mainly between 750 and 735 B.C.

Obadiah, apparently in the 5th century B.C.

Jonah, probably about 350 B.C.

Micah, Chapters 1-3, between 710 and 700 B.C. Chapters 4-7, mostly from various periods after 538 B.C.

Nahum, Chapters 1:11 - 3:19, about 612 B.C.; 1:1-10, about 300 B.C.

Habakkuk, probably between 615 and 600 B.C. with later additions.

Zephaniah, about 620.

Haggai, 520.

Zechariah, Chapters 1-8, 520-518 B.C., chapters 9-14, 3rd century.

Malachi, between 450 and 400.

III. THE WRITINGS:

Job, between 550 and 250.

Ezra-Nehemiah, about the beginning of the 4th century, with late editing.

Ruth, about 350.

Proverbs, compiled between 300 and 200, but originating much earlier.

I and II Chronicles, between 300 and 250.

Ecclesiastes, perhaps about 200.

Lamentations, Chapter 2 and 4 soon after 586 B.C., Chapter 5 in 5th century, and Chapters 1 and 3 in 3rd century.

Song of Songs, ancient songs collected about 250 B.C.

Daniel, 165 to 164 B.C.

Esther, between 125 and 100 B.C., date highly speculative.

Psalms, between 1000 and middle of 2nd century.

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