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INTRODUCTION
TO THE PENTATEUCH
BY NEIL J. M^CELENEY, C.S.P.



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INTRODUCTION
TO THE PENTATEUCH

BY NEIL J. M^CELENEY, C.S.P.

Member of the Catholic Biblical Association of America

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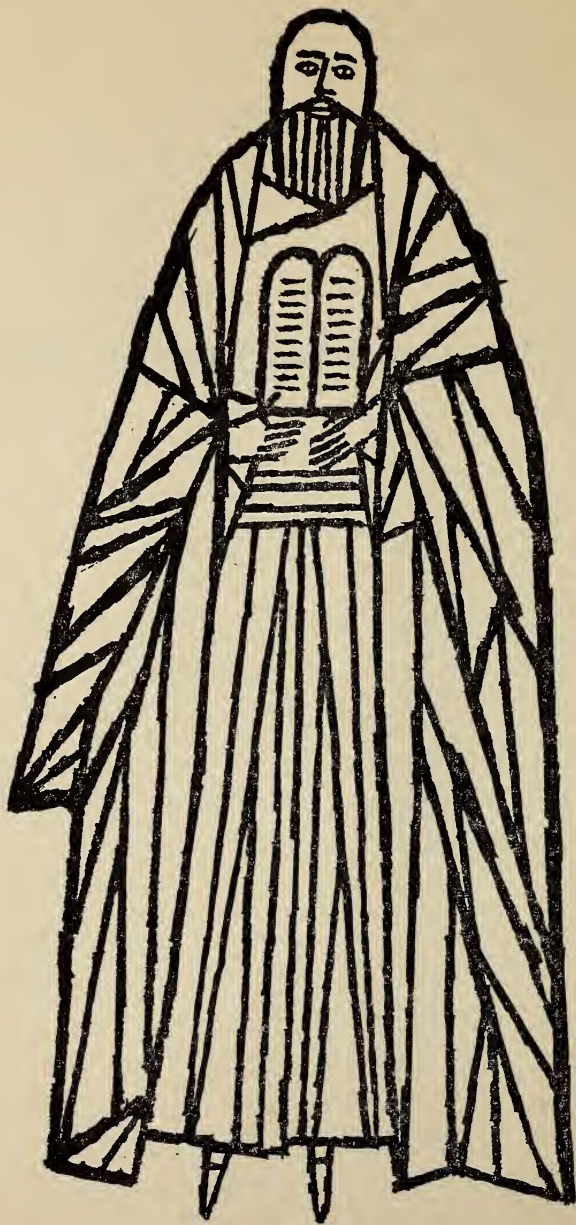
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Neil J. McEleney, C.S.P.
General Editor
Pamphlet Bible Series

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St. Paul's College
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THE LAW GIVEN THROUGH MOSES



Christianity and the Law

Before Christianity was very old, it faced a crisis. What of the Law of Moses? Christ had said that He came not to destroy the Law but to perfect it, and many Hebrew-speaking Christians were willing to keep it just as it was. But here were the Gentile converts, some Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, and even the Apostle Paul himself, all insisting that circumcision and other practices of the Mosaic Law were no longer necessary.

The crisis led to a decision, reported in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15), which effectively turned the Church from the Synagogue and widened the rift between Judaism and Christianity.

With the insight granted them by the Holy Spirit, Peter and the Apostles saw that acceptance of the New Covenant necessitated a change in attitude toward the Old. The essentials of the Mosaic Law were to remain. Christ had assured them of that. But not everything was essential. Insisting on the temporal character of the Law, Paul compared it to the pedagogue or tutoring-slave whose function was fulfilled when his master grew up. Under the New Covenant brought by Jesus Christ, circumcision and other elements of Jewish practice were no longer necessary. Belief in Christ was what counted. It made all men equal. "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3,28).

Where did that leave the Law? "Do we therefore through faith destroy the Law? By no means! Rather we establish the law" (Romans 3,31). Here was the same insistence that the Law did remain despite apparent changes. This had characterized the speech of Christ.

It is easy today to see which party in the early Church had the clearer vision in the matter of the Law. Yet the Jews and Jewish Christians of

the apostolic age must not be judged too harshly. The issue was not clear-cut and simple for them. It was deeply embedded in their emotions.

For the Israelite, the Law of Moses was not just a legal code. It was a way of life, the people's heritage, the religious and even the civil foundation of the national being. Though he might disobey its prescriptions, he could hardly break with it entirely, unless he abandoned the people of his fathers. The Law penetrated into every aspect of Jewish life—civil, military, economic, cultural and religious. It embodied the cultural history of his people, the stories of his ancestors and, most important of all, the revelation that God had made of Himself and the record of His alliance with His chosen people.

No wonder, then, that so many Jewish Christians were reluctant to abandon its practices and thought that they could not please God without them. "Unless you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved," they cried (Acts 15, 1). But the Holy Spirit of God, guiding His infant Church through the crisis, clarified the issues for them. In the New Covenant received through faith in Jesus, they lost nothing of their Jewishness, but became the true inheritors of the promises in the Law.

What is this Law of Moses? How did it come to be? Why is it so important to Jew and Christian? These are the questions this Introduction undertakes to answer.

Naming the Pentateuch

The name Pentateuch comes from two Greek words meaning the "five parts" of the Law. The Palestinian Jew divided the Law, or Torah as Hebrew has it, into five books. These they named according to the Hebraic opening of each. Thus they called the books: (1) bereshith, "In the beginning"; (2) we'elloh shemoth, "And these are the names"; (3) wayyiqra', "And he called"; (4) wayyedabber, "And he spoke" (also: bammidbar, "In the desert"); (5) 'elloh haddebarim, "These are the words."

The Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria followed the same divisions of the Law in the Septuagint, the Greek translation they made of the Hebrew Bible. But they named these books according to content: (1) Genesis related beginnings. (2) Exodus was the story of the departure from Egypt. (3) Leviticus contained the laws regarding sacrifice, legal purity, ordinations and other matters of special interest to the priests, who came from the tribe of Levi. (4) Numbers (or Arithmoi) began with a census of the Israelites in the desert and showed a special interest in numbers throughout. (5) Deuteronomy repeated many of the laws in the previous books and added to them or explained them, thus earning its Greek name of "second law."

In the matter of titles, as in so many other things, Christianity has followed the Septuagint, retaining the Greek names of the books and referring to the whole of the Law of Moses as the Pentateuch.

The Historical Framework of the Pentateuch

Despite its five divisions, however, the Pentateuch is really one work, at least as it passed into the sacred literature of the Jews. It centers around one momentous event in Israelite history, the Covenant of Sinai, and its legislation is basically that given by Moses in view of this Covenant.

Genesis prefaces the whole work. Opening with Creation, it sketches the relationship of God and man in the period preceding Abraham, using stories culled from the semitic background of the chosen race (Genesis 1-11). Then it passes swiftly to the call of Abraham, and from that point on, the history of God's people unfolds. The wanderings of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are traced, and Joseph is sold into Egypt (Genesis 12-50). This sets the stage for the great scenes of the Exodus and the Covenant of Sinai.

In the first part of Exodus, Moses leads the oppressed Hebrews from Egypt into the desert, going as far as Sinai (Exodus 1-18). There the

great Covenant or Alliance is concluded and its laws promulgated (Exodus 19-24). Since the Lord is to dwell among them and to travel with them, His Dwelling-place, His ministers, and the worship due Him must be provided for (Exodus 25-31). Almost immediately, the people's sin severs the Covenant. Moses obtains pardon for them, and the Lord renews His Alliance with them (Exodus 32-34). The making of the Dwelling-place and its furnishings is then described (Exodus 35-40).

At this point, the story pauses to give an account of the ritual of sacrifices, ordinations and other elements of the new worship (Leviticus 1-27).

The narrative resumes. The people end their stay in the desert of Sinai (Numbers 1-10) and move to the plains of Moab (Numbers 10-22), where in succession they are praised by Balaam, receive new ordinances, and prepare to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 22-36).

The story of Moses is completed in Deuteronomy. Between the last discourses (Deuteronomy 1-11 and 27-30), lies a good-sized legislative code, religious and civil (Deuteronomy 12-26). Moses' farewells and death close the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 31-34).

Legal Content of the Pentateuch

This historical narrative serves as the framework for the legislation which is at the heart of Israelite life. The Pentateuch is the basic code of the Jewish people, the fundamental law governing its religious and civil life. It was as the Law that the work of Moses passed into the sacred literature of God's people. Nearly all of the legislative texts of the Bible can be found here.

It is difficult to sort out properly and classify this legislation. Moral precepts, customs and laws are found throughout the Pentateuch, at times apparently without order, a hodge-podge of legalisms. Some laws are attached to the historical situations in which they were given. For ex-

ample, the law of circumcision is shown in Genesis 17, 9-14 to have originated with Abraham. Other laws are left floating, unattached to any special historical circumstance, such as the law of the Sabbath rest in Exodus 31, 12-17. However, all is not chaos. Closer study reveals certain basic collections of laws in the Pentateuch.

First of all, there is the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, found in Exodus 20, 2-17 and Deuteronomy 5, 6-21. Here are moral rather than juridical precepts. They are directed more to the individual than to the social order, though they have social implications.

In addition to the Decalogue, there are several legislative groupings to be found, each reflecting a cultural and religious stage in Israel's history.

The oldest, as its social background shows, is the Code of the Alliance in Exodus 20, 22 to 23, 19. This regulates a society, imperfectly organized, in which religious tradition is strong and political authority weak.

Within the Yahwist Code of the Alliance, another statement of the Covenant of Sinai, is the group of laws sometimes called the Ritual Decalogue, Exodus 34, 11-26. It regulates feasts and sacrifices and supposes a society clearly agricultural.

The Deuteronomic Code, in Deuteronomy 12-16, repeats part of the Code of the Alliance, with variations. This is supplemented by laws which envisage a society long established in the Promised Land and possessed of a more developed culture. Commerce is flourishing and there are regulations for each of the social strata.

One other collection of laws in the Pentateuch is the Law of Holiness in Leviticus 17-25. Like the Deuteronomic Code, it is a compilation of laws made over a period, and sometimes it repeats itself. To see this, compare chapters 18 and 20 of Leviticus. The Law of Holiness presupposes a later stage in Israelite history, a time when the priesthood and its concerns were in the ascendancy.

One fact may be emphasized here and explained later. The narrative

elements of the Pentateuch relate events spanning a considerable period of time and culminating in the work of Moses, The legislation reflects this period, but it also continues the work of Moses, bringing his legislation into conformity with the new social and religious circumstances which later ages developed.

At the Heart of the Law

Underlying the Pentateuch and giving it meaning is the Covenant of Sinai. It is the unifying principle of all this mass of story and law. Without it, the Law becomes a lifeless collection of antiquities. Only the Covenant can explain the passionate attachment of Israel to its Torah.

God has intervened in history. At Sinai He chose Israel as His people. He was not forced to, of course; it was His own free choice. And this choice was foreshadowed in the history of man and in Israel's own ancestry.

Genesis shows God promising Adam the continuous struggle and eventual victory of mankind over sin. Noe receives the promise of a new world order. Then Abraham is called about the middle of the 19th century, B.C. God is preparing the stage of world history for the scene of Sinai.

In Abraham, all nations shall receive a blessing. His offspring shall be numerous, and the land in which Abraham now sojourns shall belong to them. But toward the 17th century B.C. Jacob takes his sons to Egypt, and their subsequent fate there seems to belie God's promise. Initial prosperity gives way to oppression. God seems to have abandoned them.

But no, four centuries later God's marvelous power makes itself felt again in Israel's history. Faithful to His promises to the patriarchs, God raises up Moses to lead their children out of the land of bondage. In the desert He forges a new bond with them. The Covenant of Sinai surpasses the promises related in Genesis.

God has no need of Israel. All the same, He chooses Israel and pledges Himself to it. "You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians

and how I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself. Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19, 4-5).

The Israelites are reminded of what God has done for them. Now He chooses them as His own and binds them to Himself. In their turn, they must keep His commandments. The laws of the Pentateuch must be viewed in this light. They are the people's part of the agreement. Through the ages of Israel's history, the legislation found in the Pentateuch interprets the Covenant, adjusting it to new economic and social circumstances as they arise.

As long as the Israelite keeps the Law, he fulfills his share of the Covenant and will be blessed. But if he is unfaithful, if he disobeys the commandments of God as expressed in the Law, he cuts himself off from the source of life.

God is the source of all good to Israel. The Covenant is the link between God and man. The Law is the intermediary through which Israel receives life and the pledge of the future. Israel's hope for God's continued intervention and support rests in the Law and faithful observance of it. It is the basis of the messianic hope.

Growth of the Pentateuch: Beginnings

This is the Law and what it means to Israel. But how did it reach the form in which later ages received it? To answer that, it is necessary to follow the course of Israel's history and to mark the progress in the development of the Pentateuch as a literary work. This development is influenced not only by the supernatural revelation granted the chosen race, but by the social and cultural status of that people at various stages in its history and by the constant necessity of interpreting the Covenant to later generations.

While cultures change, and institutions in Israel evolve, the basic principles of the Covenant remain. Each new situation or conflict of interests calls forth some recollection from the sacred past or demands some new application of Mosaic principles to the current need.

In the beginning, Israel's culture was pastoral and its social structure was that of the family, clan and tribe. Abraham was a herder, a nomad who sought pasturage for his flocks up and down the land of Chanaan. He was the all-powerful chieftain, the head of the family society.

In the whole time that the patriarchs were in Chanaan before going down to Egypt, they were wanderers. This nomadic, pastoral life is not the type of culture which easily gives rise to a written literature. Religious education and family history passed from father to son down through the generations by word of mouth.

God had not called Abraham out of a religious and cultural vacuum. Abraham's ancestors were polytheists, worshipers of the strange gods of Mesopotamia. God revealed Himself to Abraham, but He did not blot out from his mind all memory of the traditions of his ancestors. In the light of the new revelation of God, Abraham and his sons after him could judge the folklore and myth of their Semitic background and could later put it to use in the service of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Later, as patriarchal families grew into strong clans and tribes, the body of traditions grew too. Each clan, each tribe treasured the memory of what its ancestor had done, the part he had played in Israel's past. Juda's offspring would remember the events of Genesis 38, because they explained the origins of the clans of Phares and Zara. Other traditions surrounded sacred places such as Bethel, where God had manifested Himself to Jacob, or Hebron, near which Abraham had buried Sara. Still others recalled the parts played by Joseph's brothers in the sorry story of his enslavement in Egypt and how it had come about. All this material, the exploits of the fathers, became the heritage of the Israelite tribes.

During the Exodus, Covenant, Conquest

After the experience of Egypt, there was Sinai. Moses bound Israel to its God, Yahweh, in the Covenant. He set before the Israelites the record of what God had done for them, and he gave them laws regulating their duties. With Moses, the Pentateuch as a book begins. We see him writing down the words of the Lord in Exodus 24, 4 and again in 34, 27. He records the battle with Amalec "as something to be remembered" (Exodus 17, 14). Other literary activity is ascribed to him in Numbers 33, 2, where he records the stages of the Exodus.

It is difficult to say, however, how much of the Pentateuch as it now exists was written by Moses. Perhaps the extent of his literary activity will never be known. It is entirely possible that some of the traditional tribal materials had already been committed to writing before his time, but this is not likely to have happened on any extensive scale. How much he himself set down is debatable; what form he gave the materials is unknown. The Ten Commandments and the bulk of the Code of the Alliance reflect the Israel of his day and are definitely Mosaic. To limit his influence, however, to the parts of the Pentateuch which he actually wrote, is to misunderstand the import of his life and work. Moses is the author of the Pentateuch in the primary meaning of that word "author." He is the source of it—the human source, to be sure; God is its divine source. All subsequent re-workings of the traditional material, all later additions to the legislation, are made in the spirit of Moses and are covered with the mantle of his authority.

After entering the Promised Land, the tribes went their own separate ways, each pursuing the conquest of the land allotted to it. Gradually they settled the land and became an agricultural society. To some extent, this process had begun even before the death of Moses, when the tribes of Ruben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasse settled the Transjordan re-

gions. Political organization was still loose; the tribes were bound by common ties of religion and ancestry, but not by much else. From time to time they came together to renew the Covenant of Sinai. At sacred places such as Sichem or Silo, they reaffirmed their loyalty to Yahweh, their God, and retold the sacred history. Josue 24 gives us one such occasion when the Covenant was renewed. The people are reminded of the sacred history and recalled to their duty of serving the Lord completely and sincerely.

These were the occasions when the materials of tradition seem to have fallen into cycles or groupings of stories centering around various themes. Sometimes the stories revolved about the exploits of a tribal ancestor in the period of the patriarchs, the Exodus, or the Desert. Sometimes the cycle centered about places hallowed in Israelite memory, such as Bersabee, Sichem, Cades, or Bethel. Or there might be a grouping of stories pertaining to the Ark of the Covenant or the Aaronic priesthood. In any case, the process of organizing the historical material seems to be at work in the period of the Judges.

Along with this, there was the matter of the Law. The new cultural and social situations which were evolving called for new expressions of old principles. The customs of a nomadic or quasi-sedentary society could not adequately cover the new conflicts of interest developing in an agricultural and fully sedentary community, such as Israel had now become. The basic principles of Moses were still there—the Covenant, the Decalogue, fidelity to the God who manifested Himself on Sinai. But new expressions of this Covenant theology, new applications to new situations were needed.

These were given at the various sanctuaries where the people worshiped. The problem was presented and a solution given. Eventually this resulted in new legislation, and thus the body of the Mosaic Law grew. Every law was presented as coming from Moses, because no law possessed value without the authority of that great mediator of the Covenant.

The Yahwist Tradition

It was not enough, however, for the Israelite people to establish themselves in the Promised Land by conquest. Other peoples were there who disputed Israel's territory and waged constant war against the chosen people, notably the Philistines. From time to time, some great Israelite leader appeared to lead his tribe or a coalition of tribes to victory over the common enemy. But the threat was chronic, and there was need of a permanent authority generally recognized by all. The answer to this was the monarchy. Yahweh, the God of Israel, chose Saul as the first king of His people. Shortly thereafter, David succeeded him, about 1000 B. C. And it was in David's dynasty that the future hopes of Israel were placed.

This gave the Covenant a new form. Henceforth the king was the mediator of the Covenant of Sinai. Bearer of the promises, because he summed up in himself the corporate personality of the people, the king had an importance which was not just political but deeply religious.

David made changes. He chose Jerusalem as his capital and centralized his government there. He transferred the Ark of the Covenant to his capital and thus centralized religious worship as well. Solomon, David's son and heir, built the Temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, and from then on the national sanctuary eclipsed the various holy places in Israel.

A privileged class of officials sprang up around the new monarchy with its centralized court and worship. Scribes kept the royal archives and recorded the principal events of the king's reign in their annals. The priests functioned in the Temple. Chanaanite features of worship were adapted to the service of Yahweh, Israel's God, and were added to the traditional rites. Judges administered the legislation of Moses, adapting its prescriptions as the need arose. Prophets, too, frequented the king, reminding him of his obligations to the God of the Covenant.

All this had its influence on the traditional Pentateuchal material and

its transmission. The intellectual and cultural atmosphere of the royal court favored the rise and development of a sacred literature. It was in this period of the united kingdom, when all Israel was subject to one monarch, that the Yahwist tradition took form.

Ever since the time of Moses, and even before that, the story of what had happened to the patriarchs and their descendants was told everywhere among the Israelites. To this was added the history of the Exodus and Sinai. It was a living tradition which recounted this material. How much of it Moses personally set down in writing, how continuous a narrative he constructed to enclose his legislation, is not known. At any rate, his literary effort, however extensive, was not considered inviolable, because later Israelites undertook to improve on it and add to it.

As told in the southern part of the kingdom, in the territory held by the tribe of Juda, the material took on local color. The Judean storyteller would naturally choose from the national heritage whatever had particular value for his audience. This resulted in imparting a definite continuity and viewpoint to the material itself. Moreover, the story developed themes and literary qualities fitted to the needs of the age in which it was told. By Solomon's reign, roughly 970 to 931 B. C., the basic characteristics of the Yahwist tradition were set. It was at this time, too, when conditions were just right for literary activity, that the Yahwist account was put into writing. Whether this was done by one or more authors cannot yet be determined by modern scholars.

The Yahwist tradition itself as a literary document was not inviolable. Later ages improved upon it. And elsewhere in Israel the same basic material took a different form. Then too, not everything in Israel's heritage was related in the Yahwist tradition. Word-of-mouth tradition continued to flourish side by side with the Yahwist tradition and showed enough influence to later modify it.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YAHWIST TRADITION

The Yahwist tradition is but one of four major sources or elements of the Pentateuch. Best described by what it does, it groups various narrative accounts of the Pentateuch into a synthesis showing definite literary characteristics and doctrinal themes. There is practically no legislation in it, only the Ritual Decalogue is of note. Scholars name it the Yahwist source or tradition because it generally calls God by His personal name of Yahweh. They assign this or that portion of the Pentateuch to the Yahwist source by detecting in it the characteristics of that tradition. Admittedly, this is not easy to do in detail. But in a general way at least, the Yahwist tradition is clearly discernible in the Pentateuch.

One of the more striking features of the Yahwist tradition is the way in which it speaks about God. It pictures Him with human qualities. God does not merely create man, He fashions him as would a potter. God walks in the garden in the cool of the day. He visits Abraham and eats with him. The Yahwist tradition knew, of course, that God had no body and that He did not suffer human emotions. This was only a simple, picturesque way of presenting Him to a people in love with imagery.

The Yahwist tradition excels, too, in portraying human psychology. This is brought out vividly by the story of the Fall. The tempter flatters and the woman becomes curious. After the Fall, the guilty parties outdo one another in shifting the blame.

Again, the Yahwist tradition is interested in the why of things. Its stories seek to explain the origin of suffering, why there are so many languages and peoples, and such things.

The prime concern of the Yahwist tradition, however, is with salvation history. In its vivid manner, it traces the moral decline of humanity. The events of Eden, the murder of Abel, the increasing corruption preceding the Flood, the tower of Babel—all these are told in such a way as to bring out and reprove the particular sins of the Yahwist's day.

Humanity is not without hope, though. Yahweh intervenes. Most of the messianic prophecies of the Pentateuch are found in this tradition. And here too, is the story of what Yahweh has done. The divine plan is already at work in Israel's history. Thus, Yahweh is shown to be unlike the other gods of the times. They are capricious, whimsical, even malicious, whereas He has a plan for human happiness and fulfills it, turning even the evil actions of men to His use.

He chooses the patriarchs and makes promises to them. He chooses a people and makes a Covenant with it. He fulfills His promises by making Israel a nation and bringing it out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Other books of the Bible continue the story of the Yahwist tradition, telling how God led the Conquest and established His people in the land. In all this, the emphasis lies on the free choice of God. The claims of the first-born, so important to Semitic peoples, seem to have no place in His plan. Abel is preferred to Cain, Isaac to Ismael, Jacob to Esau, and Juda to his older brothers.

Choice, Promises, Covenant—so goes the tale of the Yahwist tradition. In this way, the tradition shows the God of Israel to be far superior to the false gods of the other nations. It shows Israel as the people of the Covenant, a chosen race. And it warns against the principal sins of its day. It shows too, though somewhat indirectly in the Pentateuch, that David's dynasty is the inheritor of the divine promises and blessings.

The Elohist Tradition

The united kingdom did not survive Solomon's death. The demands of his reign, heavy taxes, burdensome public works and the like, had alienated any affection which the northern tribes might have had for David's dynasty. When Roboam, Solomon's son, promised even heavier burdens, the northern tribes rejected him and made Jeroboam king. Their secession brought about the two kingdoms of Juda and Israel. In the

south, David's heirs ruled the tribe of Juda and her allies. To the north, Jeroboam and his successors ruled the rest of Israel. Each kingdom went its own way.

Religious schism followed the political. Jeroboam feared that any Israelites who went up to the Temple of Jerusalem to worship would return to the service of Roboam. So he set up golden calves to represent Yahweh and bade the people worship at Bethel and elsewhere in the northern kingdom. He introduced pagan practices in this way and thus combined the service of Yahweh with Chanaanite worship, to the detriment of true religion. This policy was followed by his successors and encouraged by the new royal court which formed around the northern kings. The prophets roared, but were largely ineffective.

The southern kings were often not much better. Many of them, too, fell into idolatry and other Chanaanite sins. But the Temple was there in Juda, and its influence kept the Judean kings from such a sin as making an image of Yahweh Himself. Its religious traditions kept Yahwism strong.

The northern kingdom, Israel, was more open to pagan encroachments upon the true religion. Yet there were fervent spirits there who preserved the traditions of Moses under the influence of the prophets. These true worshipers of Yahweh were found even in circles belonging to the royal court. It is they who preserved and set down the element of the Pentateuch known as the Elohist tradition because it calls God by the name of Elohim. As in the case of the Yahwist tradition, the Elohist shows definite qualities which reflect the problems of the age in which it grew and took form. Dating it is quite a problem for scholars, but it seems that it had its essential characteristics by the 9th or, at the very latest, by the first half of the 8th century B. C.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELOHIST TRADITION

As might be expected, the Elohist tradition adopts a reactionary attitude toward the Chanaanite practices which have crept into northern

Yahwism. It tells the same basic story as its sister tradition, the Yahwist, because both are of Mosaic origin. But it does so with its own peculiar emphases. Its ideal is the Israel of the Exodus and the Desert (in other books of the Bible it extends this to the Conquest). Accordingly, it reproduces older materials, such as the Ten Commandments and the Code of the Alliance. It retraces the story of the past to draw lessons for the present. Thus the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32 has special meaning for Israelites who once more worship God under the form of a golden image.

Because it wishes to avoid making any image of God, the Elohist tradition does not picture Him in the vivid way of the Yahwist. God is more remote and invisible. He does not walk with men; He speaks to them out of a cloud, or He uses dreams.

Again, the Elohist tradition reacts against popular religious practices, pointing out that the patriarch Jacob did the same by ridding his family of the teraphim or household gods which they had taken with them from Phaddan-Aram (Genesis 35, 2; 31, 18-19).

The morality of the Elohist tradition is more demanding. It has a deeper sense of sin. For instance, it feels compelled to justify the embarrassing actions of the patriarchs on occasion, though the Yahwist tradition places them in a poorer light. Thus the increase of Jacob's flock is due not so much to his wives (Genesis 30, 27 and following—Yahwist tradition) as to God's blessing upon him (Genesis 31, 5 and following—Elohist tradition). Abraham didn't really lie about Sara as the Yahwist tradition indicates (Genesis 12). She is really his sister (Genesis 20, 12).

The fundamental interest of the Elohist tradition is in the Covenant. It recalls the Israelites to the duties assumed when they united their wills to God's in the desert. Any innovation which draws them away from that agreement is to be condemned. The ideal period, then, was the time of the Exodus and the Conquest, before the monarchy brought in Chanaanite practices to contaminate the service of Yahweh.

Fusion of Yahwist and Elohist Traditions

The fall of Samaria to the Assyrian besiegers in 721 B. C. put an end to the northern kingdom. Refugees from Israel streamed southward to Judah, where Yahweh was still served properly. With them went the Elohist tradition. Sometime later, possibly during the reign of Ezechias of Judah, 716-687 B. C., the two traditions, Yahwist and Elohist, were combined into one account. The fusion was made generally in favor of the Yahwist, as might be expected. Yet the Elohist was respected too, for its character can still be detected. The new work, sometimes called the Jehovist tradition, combined the lessons of the separate traditions. Once more there was a united historical tradition of Mosaic origin.

The Deuteronomist Tradition

The same fervent circles which brought forth the Elohist tradition gave birth also to the Deuteronomist tradition, the third major element in the Pentateuch. While the Yahwist and Elohist traditions provide the historical background for Israel's law, the Deuteronomist tradition is basically legislation, though not exclusively so. Some slight touches of this tradition are present in the first four books of the Pentateuch, but the fifth book, Deuteronomy, is wholly given to it. The legislative code at the heart of this book (Deuteronomy 12, 2 to 26, 15) has named both book and tradition.

From the time of the Conquest, when they had established themselves in the land, the northern tribes followed the law of Moses. As time passed and their mode of life changed and developed, they found it necessary to add to it. The Ten Commandments and the Code of the Alliance were not sufficiently detailed to cover all the circumstances of life in a culturally evolving society. New cases brought new decisions and adaptations which became new precedents. Gradually, a sort of customary law came into being, a law profoundly Mosaic in its principles and inspiration. This

ruled new institutions and old. It warned against the abuse of royal power (Deuteronomy 17), against the exactions of the rich (Deuteronomy 15), corrupt judges (Deuteronomy 16), moral and religious laxity (Deuteronomy 13).

The fall of Samaria, in 721 B. C., effectively ended the northern kingdom, Israel. A portion of the Israelite population was sent into foreign lands and colonists were brought in to replace them. The sacred traditions of the nation were in jeopardy. Again, the sins of Israel had brought about its defeat and showed the need for a reform. But such a reform had to take place along Mosaic lines. Accordingly, the priest-levites of the northern kingdom codified existing legislation, thus producing the Deuteronomic Code. They gave this an historical framework, encasing it in discourses attributed to Moses.

GROWTH OF THE DEUTERONOMIST TRADITION

It is difficult to say when this was done or even where. Most likely, the material of the Deuteronomist tradition went South to Juda with the refugees after the fall of Samaria. There it became an early edition of the book of Deuteronomy, perhaps under the reign of Ezechias. By this time, the survival of David's dynasty (in Juda) and the preservation of Jerusalem from Sennacharib's siege of 701 B. C. had convinced these refugees that the Temple was the place chosen by Yahweh for His dwelling. It was the true center of national worship. A copy of this "second law" was placed in the Temple.

Toward the end of the 7th century, after successive kings had departed from the path of righteousness, the Law—in all probability the book of Deuteronomy—was discovered in the Temple during repairs made in the reign of Josias. It sparked the reform of 622 B. C., and the Covenant was once more renewed, this time with the Deuteronomic Code as its guiding legislation.

The discourses of Moses which enclose the legislation give us the spirit of the tradition at this time, when the "book" of Deuteronomy probably comprised only chapters 5-29. God has freely chosen Israel as His people. His providential care of them is amply demonstrated by the wonders He wrought at the time of the Exodus and Conquest. He has made a pact with them, but He demands in return that they obey His law. If they do not, He will punish them by allowing their enemies to overtake them and destroy them. The Deuteronomist tries to emphasize the goodness of God toward Israel. How much He has done for them! Is this not a motive for keeping the law? God is the intimate of Israel! The law is His life-giving word!

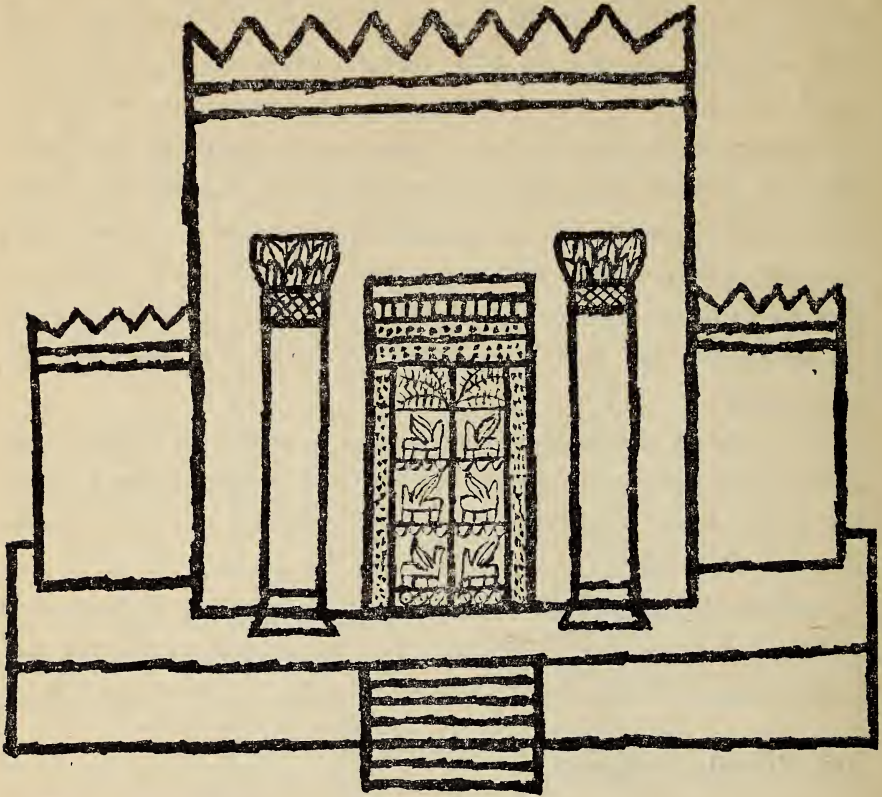
Later, during the Babylonian exile, more additions were made to the book of Deuteronomy. The exiles are reminded that those who have the law in their hearts can find God even in their distress. God will rescue a portion of His people.

Scholars cannot say with certainty at what time the Deuteronomist tradition was added to the "Jehovist." They generally agree that this happened before the Priestly tradition finally formed the written Law of Moses.

The Priestly Tradition

In the days of the united kingdom, Solomon had chosen Sadoc to be his priest. Since that time, the sons of Sadoc had ministered in the Temple of Jerusalem. Their mentality and spirit was different from that of the northern priest-levites who had brought the Deuteronomist tradition southwards. The introduction of the Deuteronomist Code as the law of the Temple would hardly be fully acceptable to these priests who wanted to preserve their own point of view and the legal traditions of the southern kingdom.

They were, moreover, reluctant to share the ministry of the Temple with the newcomers from the North. Even at the time of the Josian re-



form, as we see in 4 Kings 23, 9, the northern priests were excluded from the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, despite the law of Deuteronomy 18, 7 which allowed them full access to it.

It is in this period after the fall of Israel, when the Deuteronomic spirit and influence was gaining ground in Juda, that the priestly traditions of the South were codified. The result was the Law of Holiness (Leviticus 17-26). This legal code embodied the ancient legislative traditions and customary law of the Temple clergy in Jerusalem. Much of the content of this code is very old. Its mentality is that of the sons of Sadoc.

In their view, Yahweh was the Holy One, remote from men, separated from them by His exalted sanctity. Because He is holy, the chosen people should be holy. They become so by obeying the laws He has given. There is a spirit of worship about the Law of Holiness; all obedience to law is in a sense liturgical. The awareness of God's presence in the Temple and its rites is stronger. The presence of sin and its corrupting force is felt intensely.

THE EXILE AND THE PRIESTLY TRADITION

With the fall of Juda, in 586 B. C., the needs of the chosen people changed. Now it was necessary to maintain the true religion of Yahweh in a pagan land, among pagan neighbors, in the face of the allurements of pagan life and worship. The monarchy was gone. All that bound the exiles together were the common ties of tradition, blood and the priesthood.

The exiled Jews gathered together to read the ancient story of their nation and to be instructed in their duties by the priests. These same priests gathered together and preserved the ritual and customs of the Temple against the day when they would return. At this time, the sacred history was retold once more, to supply a setting for the preserved materials. The priests took the traditional plan of the Yahwist, systematized it more, pointing out the features most interesting to the priestly heart, and

gave a new framework to Israel's history. The past became a series of alliances. After Adam there was Noe and God's Covenant with him. Then there was the Covenant with Abraham and the patriarchs. Finally, there was the great Covenant of Sinai. Aaron, Moses' brother, had a prominent part in the Israel of his day. Now the priests, descendants of Aaron, were the acknowledged leaders. Israel was once more a theocracy, God ruling the people by His priests. Worship was the center of Israelite life.

Cyrus permitted the Jews to return home in 538 B. C. The Temple was rebuilt, and worship of Yahweh once more took place in it according to the ancient ritual. The priesthood remained the dominant institution in the newly restored society. To the priestly writings, codifying ancient customs and their development, were added new sections regarding sacrifices and purity. Still other regulations were added later. Before long, this Priestly tradition became the recognized basis, together with the Yahwist, Elohist and Deuteronomist traditions, of the newly re-established state.

After the Exile, then, the Pentateuch reached its final form. It became a single work, a fusion of the successive traditions. In it were the two currents of historical tradition, the Yahwist and the Elohist, and the two currents of legal tradition, the Deuteronomic and Priestly. The whole of the Mosaic heritage of Israel was now contained in the one basic work, the Torah or Law of Moses. Mosaic in origin, in spirit, in much of its content, it held the history of the nation within it. It was the only basis for the future, the foundation of the State now, as once, in Moses' day, it had been the cornerstone of its national beginnings.

The Law of Moses in Later History

After the Exile, Judaism regarded the Law of Moses as the gift of God. It led men to true happiness when faithfully observed. Studied and commented upon by the great rabbis, it was the center of religious life. Its

ceremonial observances achieved great prominence under the dominant priestly influence. Persecution of the people by the Gentiles threw them back on themselves and caused them to treasure the Law, which related what God had done for them. The Law was the basis of their hope for the future; they were God's people, He would act.

Christ came, bringing with Him the fulfillment of the promises made to the chosen people through the prophets. A new Moses, He forged a new Alliance or Covenant. God pledged Himself to men once more, but this time it was to all men.

While Christianity was the fulfillment of the Jewish past, it was also a break with the extreme nationalism of Christ's contemporaries. For the Jews, the Law was something peculiarly their own, their story, their customs, their heritage which was to endure. Its ceremonial must be scrupulously observed. For Christianity, the Law had permanence in its essential teaching, yet the Law had a temporal character too. It disappeared as the child into the man, the seed changing into the tree. Its ceremonial prescriptions were no longer necessary; faith in Christ, the Son of God, replaced circumcision.

In the tremendous controversy between Christian and Jew, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch went unquestioned. Lost in the obscurities of time, the gradual process of the formation of the Law was unknown. What endured was the Mosaic origin of the work.

Subsequent centuries continued this thought. The Fathers of the Church did not concern themselves very much with questions of a literary nature. It mattered to them what the Bible said, not who wrote what. The ancient civilizations, the social conditions, the cultural institutions, the forms of ancient society, everything that had influenced and shaped the Pentateuch, all that had faded into antiquity.

Until the 16th century, just about everyone thought of the Pentateuch as written entirely by the hand of Moses, except for the account of his

death. Then critics began to point out its repetitions, differences of style, the insertion of later conditions into a background of earlier circumstances. Literary criticism was born!

This criticism was at first crude. The Pentateuch was divided into "documents" which multiplied until there was truly a "mosaic" composition. Writers hostile to the Church tied their literary criticism to false theories of history and religious development. As a result, Moses was the last person to whom they were willing to attribute the Pentateuch. Catholics stoutly maintained the traditional view, as did many Protestants and Jews. Yet the traditionalists often did this at the expense of not admitting valid critical arguments.

In 1906, the Pontifical Biblical Commission upheld the view of Moses' authorship, pointing out that the constant tradition of Judaism and Christianity in this respect could not be ignored. At the same time, it admitted the presence in the Pentateuch of later additions and modifications.

More recent study has clarified the matter further. The story of the Pentateuch's growth has gradually come to light and is now accepted by scholars everywhere. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission's response to Cardinal Suhard of Paris in 1948 said, "There is no one today who . . . refuses to admit a progressive development of the Mosaic laws due to social and religious conditions of later times, a development which is also manifest in the historical narratives." Inviting scholars to continue research into the matter, the Commission added, "Such study will doubtless establish the great part and deep influence exercised by Moses both as author and lawgiver."

This, then, is the story of the Law of Moses, the great and enduring work which welded a people together and held them united till the time when God's plan for man's salvation was accomplished.

*"For the Law was given through Moses;
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1, 17).*

Self-Teaching Quiz

MARK T. IF TRUE, F. IF FALSE

- T. F. 1. The New Law of Christ completely rules out the Law of Moses.
- T. F. 2. The Jewish Christians easily abandoned the Law of Moses.
- T. F. 3. *Pentateuch* in Greek means "five parts" of the Law.
- T. F. 4. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.
- T. F. 5. Today the Pentateuch refers to the first five books of the Bible.
- T. F. 6. Deuteronomy is the fourth book of the Bible.
- T. F. 7. There are several collections of laws in the Pentateuch.
- T. F. 8. The Covenant of Sinai made the Israelites God's chosen people.
- T. F. 9. Israelites must keep God's commandments as their part of Covenant.
- T. F. 10. Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch as it is today.

CHOOSE CORRECT ANSWERS

- 11. Much of the history before Moses' time was preserved: (a) in Egyptian libraries; (b) by fortune tellers; (c) by word of mouth.
- 12. The Yahwist tradition is so-called because: (a) scholars discovered the name on old pottery; (b) it generally calls God by His personal name of Yahweh; (c) Moses liked the word.
- 13. The Yahwist tradition is mainly concerned with: (a) the heroic battles of the Israelites; (b) the geography of the Holy Land; (c) the salvation history of man.
- 14. The Elohist tradition is so-called because: (a) it calls God by the name of Elohim; (b) it has Greek origins; (c) Moses first named it.
- 15. The main concern of the Elohist tradition is: (a) Adam and Eve; (b) the Covenant; (c) David.
- 16. The Yahwist and Elohist traditions were combined into one account sometimes: (a) during Abraham's lifetime; (b) in the period of the Exodus; (c) in the 8th - 7th Century B.C.
- 17. The Deuteronomist tradition is named from a word that means: (a) the second law; (b) two coins; (c) dualism.
- 18. The Deuteronomist tradition tries to emphasize: (a) the greatness of Israel; (b) severity of the Law; (c) goodness of God toward Israel.
- 19. The Priestly tradition points out: (a) the importance of not eating pork; (b) the features of interest to soldiers; (c) the features most interesting to the priestly heart.
- 20. The Pentateuch has two main themes running through it: (a) history and law; (b) buying and selling; (c) marriage and divorce.

MATCH THE FOLLOWING COLUMNS

- | | |
|--|---|
| 21. a. Pentateuch | w. choice, promises, Covenant |
| b. Moses | x. chosen race |
| c. Yahwist tradition | y. five books |
| d. Israel | z. author of the Pentateuch |
| 22. a. Elohist tradition | w. fusion of Yahwist and Elohist |
| b. Code of the Alliance | x. Covenant |
| c. 8th - 7th century B.C. | y. Elohist tradition |
| d. Deuteronomist tradition | z. legislation |
| 23. a. Deuteronomist tradition | w. spirit of worship |
| b. Added to "Jehovist" tradition | x. Law of Holiness |
| c. Priestly tradition | y. goodness of God to Israel |
| d. Law of Holiness | z. Deuteronomist tradition |
| 24. a. 4 Traditions | w. 10 commandments, Code of the Alliance, Law of Holiness, Deuteronomic Code. |
| b. 4 groups of laws | x. Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, Deuteronomist |
| c. 3 Covenants | y. Moses, Adam, Abraham |
| d. 3 people | z. Noe, Abraham, Sinai |
| 25. a. fulfillment of Jewish past | w. Christ |
| b. New Moses | x. faith in Christ |
| c. replaced circumcision | y. Pontifical Biblical Commission |
| d. progressive development of Mosaic law | z. Christianity |

Answers to Commentary Quiz

- 1:F (p. 7) - 2:F (p. 8) - 3:T (p. 8) - 4:T (p. 9) - 5:T (p. 9) - 6:F (p. 9) - 7:T (p. 11) - 8:T (p. 12) - 9:T (p. 13) - 10:F (p. 15) - 11:c (p. 14) - 12:b (p. 19) - 13:c (p. 19) - 14:a (p. 21) - 15:b (p. 22) - 16:c (p. 23) - 17:a (p. 24) - 18:c (p. 25) - 19:c (p. 27) - 20:a (p. 28)
- 21:a & y (p. 9) - b & z (p. 15) - c & w (p. 20) - d & x (p. 20)
- 22:a & x (p. 22) - b & y (p. 22) - c & w (p. 23) - d & z (p. 23 & p. 9)
- 23:a & y (p. 25) - b & z (p. 25) - c & x (p. 27) - d & w (p. 27)
- 24:a & x (p. 28) - b & w (pp. 23, 24, 27) - c & z (p. 28) - d & y (p. 28)
- 25:a & z (p. 29) - b & w (p. 29) - c & x (p. 29) - d & y (p. 30)



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