



**THE ANTIQUITY OF THE BOOKS
OF MOSES**

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Front cover top left;
Assyrian cuneiform script

Front cover top right; Moses
comes down from the
mountain with the books

Front cover bottom;
cuneiform alphabet

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE BOOKS OF MOSES

The first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis to Deuteronomy—are known collectively as the Pentateuch, and the belief of Jews and Christians that in their present form they are the work of Moses was not challenged until two centuries ago when the emergence of "Textual Criticism" gave opportunity to men with rationalising tendencies to find reasons for asserting that most of the Old Testament was written neither by the reputed authors nor at the period indicated. From this it was an easy step to suggest that much of Old Testament narrative and history is in fact nothing more than "written up" legend and folk-lore having little or no basis in fact: this process, continued into the present, has created in the popular mind a totally false impression of the Old Testament and taken away a great deal of its value. The fact that the discoveries of archaeologists in the last century have nullified many of the Critics' conclusions and assertions, and in not a few cases made their confident 19th century pronouncements look rather silly, has not yet filtered through to popular writers, teachers and broadcasters, with the result that the 19th century picture of the Old Testament is still the one that gets the publicity. It is unfortunately true that youthful Christians are liable to be impressed by this show of scholarship and tend to accept the presentation without knowing how utterly out-of-date it really is; a brief

review of the present position will not be out of place and may be helpful.

It was in the year 1670 that Baruch Spinoza, a Dutch-Jewish philosopher of pantheist leanings, originated and published the theory that writing was unknown prior to the 8th century B.C. (roughly the time of Isaiah) and that the early books of the Old Testament could not have been written by Moses and were in fact composed by Ezra after the Exile. Spinoza was followed by Jean Astruc, a French theologian, who in 1753 published a book in which he separated passages in Genesis where the name for "God" is "Jehovah" from those in which it is "Elohim". He suggested that the compiler of Genesis had two sets of documents or "sources" before him, and these he called the "Jehovistic"(Yahweh) and "Elohistic" respectively. These are termed today, in "scholarly" circles, the J. and E. sources. A few years later, Johann Eichhorn, a German historian, produced his *"Introduction to the Old and New Testaments and Apocrypha"* (1787) in which he endorsed Spinoza's views and invented the term "Higher Criticism". The seed sown by these three men flowered and bore fruit a few decades later, and the theologians who accepted and developed these views became known as "Higher Critics".

The first such of considerable note was Abraham Kuenen, a Dutch theologian, with the reputation of a devout and reverent scholar, Professor of Old Testament theology at Leyden University from 1853 onward. Kuenen did more than any man of

his time to establish the "science" of the Higher Criticism. In this he was supported by Edouard Reuss and Julius Wellhausen, both German theologians, the latter being the only one of all these to live into the 20th century. By then the thesis that the Old Testament was first put into writing in the 8th century B.C. was almost universally accepted by "advanced" scholars. It is true that until 1888 there were no known specimens of writing or alphabetical inscriptions agreed to be earlier than the Moabite Stone and the Siloam inscription, both of the 8th century B.C., and no one in 1888 dreamed that before another half century had passed the world's museums would be replete with written documents and tablets going back to twenty-five centuries before Christ, a thousand years before the time of Moses.

The main principles upon which the case for the late writing of the Old Testament is built up are five in number, to wit:-

1. That writing was unknown and had not been invented before the time of the Hebrew prophets, about 700-800 B.C.
2. That the religious thought of nations, without exception, started with polytheism in the earliest times and progressed to monotheism, the worship of one God, in later times, and not the other way round, as Genesis has it.
3. That the code of laws credited to Moses is too advanced for so early a date and must have been devised in the time of the kings of Israel and Moses' name attached.
4. That the Levitical ritual is too sophisticated for a

people just out of Egypt and must have been the product of a priestly class after the Babylonian captivity.

5. That the historical events in Babylonia and Egypt recorded in Genesis are unhistorical and never occurred, and are a later compilation of old traditions and folk-lore, and that many of the kings and notable persons referred to never existed.

The cold hard facts of archaeological discovery since 1880 have exploded all these assumptions—for assumptions they were—and demolished the theories regarding the Old Testament built up so painstakingly, and sincerely, by the critics of the 19th century. A few only of the established facts will suffice at this moment.

Firstly, the argument for the late invention of writing was nullified in 1888 by the discovery in Egypt of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, a large store of official correspondence between Egypt and Canaan, inscribed in cuneiform on clay tablets, written at the time of the Exodus. This took the art of writing back to 1400 B.C. at one bound. In 1905 the famous Egyptologist, Prof. Flinders Petrie, showed that the Serabit inscriptions in Sinai, previously thought to date from early A.D. times, were in fact of the period of the 12th Egyptian dynasty, about the time of Abraham. In 1907 Winckler found the lost records of the Hittite empire in modern Turkey, deciphered in 1919 and found to date at about 1800 B.C. 1923 saw the discovery of records of the Canaanite people, at Ras Shamra near Sidon; date, 1400 B.C. Eclipsing all these are the thousands of

tablets found in the ancient cities of Babylon, Assyria and Sumeria, going back at least to 2300 B.C. in cuneiform script, and for several centuries before that in a kind of picture writing. The celebrated Sumerian epic, the "*Enuma Elish*", sometimes called the "Babylonian story of creation" contains astronomical allusions which show that it was composed when the sun was in the constellation Aries, and that was between 2000 and 2500 B.C. One Sumerian tablet refers to the "*writings of the ages that were before the Flood*". As far back as any history of man can be traced the art of writing was known. Schultz, in his "*Old Testament Theology*" had said in 1891 "*Of the legendary character of the pre-Mosaic narratives, the time of which they treat is sufficient proof. It was a time prior to all knowledge of writing*". Similar statements had been made by all the leading critics. The later discoveries have shown how mistaken and void of value were their conclusions in this field.

But the clever ones never give up. The British scientific journal "*Nature*", a mouthpiece for the "modern scholarship", commenting in its issue of 12 September 1942 on the impact of the Ras Shamra discoveries, said unctuously "*It would now seem that many of the patriarchal stories of the Old Testament were not mere oral traditions collected by authors of the time of Solomon and later, but were part of a written heritage derived from the Canaanite Bronze Age*". Anything is better than allowing Moses the credit—but the grudging admission was at least a concession to obvious fact.

Secondly, the idea that polytheism preceded monotheism has been effectually refuted now that so much is known about early civilisations. Prof. Stephen Langdon, one of the leading Assyriologists of the 20th century, said "*The history of the oldest religion of man is a rapid decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism . . . It is in a very true sense the history of the fall of man*". It has been observed that, of the many Babylonian and Sumerian epic poems which have survived, the farther back they go in time the nearer they are to monotheistic thought. In fact, many of the "gods many and lords many", to use St. Paul's phrase, revered by the ancients, have been found to be deified men, historical characters elevated to divinity after their death. A notable example is the great Babylonian god Marduk or Bel, who is known now to have been a pre-dynastic hero who lived about five hundred years before the rise of the Sumerian city-states, and is mentioned in Genesis under the name of Nimrod. Dr. Frankfort, who excavated Eshnunna in 1930, found evidence that in the third millennium B.C. the gods worshipped under different names were regarded as varying manifestations or aspects of the one God; this is how polytheism developed. No trace of it exists before 2400 B.C. Prior to that time, the only god worshipped to which any reference appears in presently existing tablets is the Most High God, the God of Heaven.

Thirdly, the idea that the Mosaic Laws were too advanced for human thought in the time of Moses has had to be abandoned since the discovery in 1902 of the Laws of Hammurabi of Babylon,

belonging to about 1800 B.C., and those of Urakagina of Lagash which go back to 2200 B.C. Although neither of these codes rise to the level exhibited by the Laws of Moses they do represent evidence that man's capacity for wise and just law-making was well developed in those distant times and show that the Mosaic authorship of the later laws is perfectly credible; this apart from the fact that, as claimed by Exodus, Moses received the fundamental principles of his laws from God himself.

Fourthly, the Levitical ritual of the Pentateuch has since 1932 possessed a companion ritual of very much the same style, and of about the same date, although framed to suit the worship of the pagan gods of Phoenicia, in some of the tablets discovered at Ras Shamra in that year. While here again there is no connection between the two rituals, the fact that these tablets do exist disposes of the argument that men were not sufficiently developed at that time to devise such rituals.

Fifthly, the assertion that the historical events related in Genesis lacked external confirmation and never really occurred is now disposed of by the vast accumulation of knowledge, regarding the ancient civilisations, which now exists. Not one statement of fact in Genesis has been disproved; a great many records of people and events for which the Bible was the only authority for thousands of years have now been established indisputably true by means of contemporary written tablets and documents. The quiet comment of Prof. A. H. Sayce (died 1933)

a noted archaeologist, is relative and pungent. *"It is not the Biblical writer, but the modern author, who is now proved to have been unacquainted with the contemporaneous history of the time."*

In thus establishing the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch the origin of the documents now composing Genesis have still to be explored; the whole of the events therein narrated occurred long before Moses' lifetime. With regard to the other four books, Exodus to Deuteronomy, the position is different; they have to do entirely with matters with which Moses was personally connected. There can be no doubt that these four books were composed and completed in written form during the Exodus itself, probably in the main during the thirty-eight years that Israel was stationary at Kadesh, the final chapters of Deuteronomy with their account of the death of Moses being added by Joshua or Eleazar. Dr. A. S. Yahuda, a leading authority on the ancient Egyptian and Hebrew languages, pointed out in 1933 that these four books were written in an Egyptianised form of Hebrew which demanded that the writer thought as much in Egyptian as he did in Hebrew. That writer, of course, was Moses, brought up in the court of Pharaoh and *"learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians"*.

In the case of Genesis it has been well established by experts in the ancient languages that the last fourteen chapters of Genesis, which detail the story of Joseph in Egypt, contain a goodly number of Egyptian words, and the first eleven chapters, from

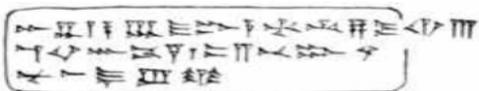
creation to the death of Terah, a great number of Akkadian and Sumerian words and names. (The Akkadians were descendants of Shem and Sumerians descendants of Ham; both races dwelt together in the plains of the Tigris and Euphrates whence Abraham came). In the first case it is evident that the history of Joseph's life in Egypt and the death there of Jacob was recorded by Joseph or his fellows and these documents, written on papyrus and quite likely in Egyptian, came into Moses' possession. The records of the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and the twelve sons of Jacob in Canaan, which might well have been either on goatskins, parchment or clay tablets, all of which were in use in Canaan, would also have been preserved in the archives of one of the heads of the tribes—probably Judah—and so likewise have come to Moses. In the case of the first eleven chapters internal evidences point to their having been compiled, in the form in which they came to Moses, during the period twenty-two to twenty-five centuries before Christ, and therefore considerably earlier than the time of Abraham. Among these evidences are the facts that all the geographical names are those in current use at that period and some of them had passed out of use or been replaced by other names by Abraham's day; the proper names are derived from Akkadian or Sumerian originals and in many cases incorporate the names of their gods; many words of Akkadian or Sumerian origin appear in the text. Thus the geographical names Eden, Havilah, Nod, Hiddekel, in Gen. 2 & 4 are the Sumerian Edinu, Khavila, Nadu, Digtat, of the 24th century B.C.

Instances such as these show that Genesis chapters 2 to 4 at least were composed by a dweller on the Euphrates not later than about 2300 B.C.; certain grammatical errors in dealing with some Sumerian words tend to indicate that the compiler was more familiar with the Semitic Akkadian language than the Hamitic Sumerian, and this strengthens the supposition that he was one of the ancestors of Abraham, perhaps Eber. He must, even at this early date, have compiled his narrative from pre-existing records, and almost certainly had two separate accounts of previous times before him, one Semitic and one Hamitic, which he combined into a continuous story.

So the sacred book of the Christian and Jewish faiths had its origin, not in folk-lore and legends of ancient times collected and edited by some priestly dignitary in the 8th B.C. century, but in the painstaking work of men of God who lived in the dawn of history, setting down their stories in archaic forms of writing which had to be translated and copied time and again in new and different characters, even before Abraham saw them. It has been abundantly demonstrated in this our day that the stories of the Old Testament are factually true, the work of men who knew the facts and lived within measurable time of the events they recorded.

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The thirty Ugaritic letters of their cuneiform alphabet

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