

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

NEW HORIZONS IN
BIBLICAL STUDIES

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INAUGURAL LECTURES

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NEW HORIZONS IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

Inaugural Lecture: 27th February, 1957.

THE University of Sheffield is, I believe, the first University in the British Isles to institute a Chair of Biblical Studies in the Faculty of Arts. In the older Universities, of course, Chairs in this field have always existed, but they have been Chairs in the Faculty of Divinity; the same is true of the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester, which was established in 1904 and has been adorned by the prestige of the three great scholars who have occupied it since that date. More recently, it is true, the Universities of Birmingham, Leeds and Nottingham have established Chairs of Theology in their Arts Faculties, and several other Universities have made provision for the teaching of Biblical subjects to Arts students; but this University seems to be the first to institute a Chair in the Arts Faculty expressly for the study and teaching of Biblical History and Literature.

Future students of British education may think it strange that our Arts Faculties, which made due provision for the study of other strands which are interwoven into our cultural pattern, should have been so slow in doing justice to this one. It is certain that a good part of our civilization is unintelligible if one leaves the Biblical contribution out of account. No doubt there were at one time weighty practical reasons for the apparent neglect of this discipline; but these reasons, happily, have ceased to operate, and this University has acted (if I may say so) with characteristic wisdom in placing Biblical Studies on the same academic footing as other subjects which properly belong to the Faculty of Arts. And if the first incumbent of the new Chair cannot do what is frequently done in Inaugural Lectures and express his sense of honour in being called upon to follow illustrious predecessors, he may at least say that he feels it an inexpressible honour to be the first Professor of Biblical History and Literature in the University of Sheffield. To teach this subject of all subjects in the academic freedom which we value so highly, *nullius addictus iurare in uerba magistri*, is the most rewarding and exhilarating work in the world.

It might be argued—in theory, at least—that the various studies which go to make up Biblical History and Literature might quite well be divided between Departments of Ancient History and Semitic and Greek Literature. But in actual fact they have a coherence and individuality which justify their recognition as a distinctive discipline. That does not mean, however, that Biblical history is a special *kind*

of history, or that Biblical literature claims exemption from the critical canons by which other bodies of literature are assessed.

Miss Dorothy Sayers, in an essay entitled *A Vote of Thanks to Cyrus*,¹ tells how in her childhood she came across "the astonishing equation . . . 'Ahasuerus (or Xerxes)'," in some out-of-the-way primer of general knowledge. It was people like Cyrus and Xerxes, belonging both to Bible history and to classical history, who (she says) "prodded me into the belated conviction that history was all of a piece, and that the Bible was part of it." It is a lesson which a surprisingly large number of otherwise well-educated people have yet to learn.

There was, perhaps, some excuse for failing to realize this at a time when a historical context for the Old Testament narrative earlier than the 6th century B.C. hardly existed at all. To-day we have the detailed record of the rise and progress of civilization in the Near East—a record stretching back four or five thousand years before Christ—as the context for Biblical history and literature. It is the manifold phases of this record, brought to light mainly by archæological discovery, that have provided us with the "new horizons in Biblical studies" which form the subject-matter of this lecture. But if these new horizons have helped us to appreciate better the significance of Biblical studies in their Near Eastern setting, they have at the same time helped us to appreciate better the distinctive qualities which justify the recognition of Biblical history and literature as an independent discipline.

The phases of the Near Eastern record, even within the historical period, are too numerous to be treated even in the sketchiest manner in the course of a single lecture. I therefore confine myself to certain phases which have been brought to light in written documents, and have a direct bearing on the Bible.

CONFLICT WITH CHAOS

It was the discovery of written records that gave a great impetus to the popular interest in Biblical archæology early in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the Babylonian and Assyrian counterparts to the Old Testament narratives of the Creation and the Flood were published by George Smith under the title *The Chaldaean Account of Genesis* (1876). The Babylonian flood story occurs in the Gilgamesh epic; as the demigod Gilgamesh wanders in search of the secret of immortality, he visits the island where the immortal survivor of the Flood lives and hears from his lips an account of the disaster. The Babylonian creation story told how Marduk, the chief deity of Babylon, overcame Tiamat, the monster of chaos, and established the ordered world; the conflict was dramatically re-enacted year by year in Babylon at the New Year festival. But Tiamat, the

1. *Unpopular Opinions* (1946), pp. 23 ff.

monster of chaos, is simply a personification of the unruly sea, the symbol of disorder to the Semitic mind.

More recently a version of the conflict with the unruly sea has come to light nearer the land of Israel than Babylonia. When an Arab peasant struck his plough against a slab of stone near Ras esh-Shamra in North Syria in 1928, he could not have realized what he was letting loose on the world of archæology. But that simple accident led to the uncovering of the archives of the ancient Phœnician city of Ugarit. Among these archives was the temple library, containing a large number of ritual texts, inscribed in a cuneiform alphabet of thirty letters in the North-west Semitic language of Ugarit.² One of these texts describes the dramatic conflict between Baal, one of the chief deities in the Canaanite pantheon, and the sea-god Yam. That the ancestors of the Hebrews had their own account of a dramatic conflict between Yahweh, the God of Israel, and the sea (*yam* in Hebrew) appears clearly from a number of Old Testament passages. No account of this action is found in the Genesis creation stories, to be sure, but in poetical passages of the Old Testament we catch echoes of it—in a well-known passage in Job, for example (Job 38: 8-11):

Or who shut in the sea with doors,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, 'Thus far you shall come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?

There, at any rate, we are given to understand that divine coercion had to be imposed upon the unruly sea to keep it in its place. But the Old Testament passages which preserve the language of the ancient drama in greatest purity have detached it from the creation and transferred it to the Israelites' escape from Egypt, where Yahweh, by making the water of the 'Red Sea' (more strictly, the 'Sea of Reeds') recede, proved Himself Master of the sea. Thus, when a Hebrew prophet wishes to call on Yahweh to deliver His people from Babylonian captivity as He had formerly delivered them from Egyptian bondage, this is his prayer (Isaiah 51: 9-10):

Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of Yahweh;
awake, as in days of old,
the generations of long ago.
Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces,
that didst pierce the dragon?

2. See G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myth and Ritual* (1956).

Was it not thou that didst dry up the sea,
the waters of the great deep;
that didst make the depths of the sea a way
for the redeemed to pass over?

Rahab, the monstrous personification of chaos (like Tiamat in Babylon), has now become a cartoon-symbol for Egypt; her dragon-associate similarly represent Pharaoh. So the Hebrews' vigorous historicizing tendency cut the old dramas loose from their mythological setting which they found so offensive, and gave them a new literary life as figures under which the mighty deeds of Yahweh in Israel might be rehearsed.

But a number of the details in these ancient dramatic descriptions have become illumined and clarified by the discoveries from Ugarit. The dragon who was pierced, for example, elsewhere called Leviathan, is described as many-headed in a passage from the Psalter (Psalm 74:14) similar to the one just quoted from the Book of Isaiah. But the Ugaritic texts inform us more explicitly that its heads were seven in number. Or again, when in Isaiah 27:1 he is described as "Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisted serpent", the terms used appear centuries earlier in those same Ugaritic texts.

Centuries later, again, the Book of Revelation in the New Testament makes fresh use of these ancient figures, no longer symbolizing the creation or even the Exodus from Egypt, but the Christian gospel of conflict waged and victory won by Christ against the powers of evil. And here the great seven-headed dragon re-appears, with his demonic associates, filled with deadly enmity against the Woman and her Son and the rest of her offspring, while the Divine Hero who subdues the hellish host is presented as Lion and Lamb in one.

But the Ugaritic tablets do more than throw light on the background of those recurrent symbols of Biblical language. They give us detailed information about Canaanite religion with its theogony and cosmogony, its myth and ritual patterns, its fertility cults and so forth; and enable us to understand as we could not do as recently as thirty years ago just what it was that Moses and the prophets inveighed against when they warned the people of Israel so sternly (and, for centuries, so ineffectually) against having any truck with the religious practices of the neighbours among whom they lived after their settlement in Canaan. We can appreciate better than before that, although the Canaanite civilization was much higher than that of the incomers from the desert, yet Canaanite religion presented a mortal menace to those ethical and spiritual ideals which the Israelites brought with them into that land. We may also grasp the significance of some of the curious and (we might think) pointless prohibitions

included in the laws of Israel. The command not to boil a kid in its mother's milk, for instance, may allude to a piece of Canaanite fertility magic; the command not to wear clothes belonging to the other sex may have primarily in view some dramatic ritual from the same context.

From the lexicographical point of view our understanding of the Old Testament vocabulary has been helped by the study of the Ugaritic language; in particular, mention should be made of the coincidence of many words used in Ugaritic ritual texts with the technical terms of the priestly legislation of the Pentateuch.

CONDITIONS BEFORE THE EXODUS

The last thirty years or so have brought to light another body of literature belonging to the same general period as the Ugaritic texts. These are the texts from Nuzu, modern Yorghana Tepe, east of the Tigris, a few miles south of the Little Zab. The texts from this city (the capital of the kingdom of Arrapkha) have been particularly valuable for detailed information about social customs obtaining there in the 15th and 14th centuries B.C., and what specially interests us is the fact that those customs bear such a close resemblance to those described in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis. The family records of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob presuppose accepted conditions in matters like adoption, inheritance, the privileges of primogeniture, women's property rights, the provision by which a childless wife might have a child by proxy by providing her husband with a slave-wife, and so forth—conditions which differ considerably from those in force after Israel's settlement in Canaan, but which tally remarkably with those described in the Nuzu texts. The patriarchal narratives, therefore, cannot be the simple invention of a later age for which those conditions belonged to the forgotten past; they plainly contain well-preserved traditions of what once was real life. It is reasonable to suppose that the social customs of Haran, in Northern Mesopotamia, from which the patriarchs came directly to Canaan, were essentially the same as those in Nuzu.³

The Nuzu texts have also amplified our knowledge of the Habiru, a curiously undefinable set of people who turn up all over the Fertile Crescent around this period, sometimes hiring themselves out as voluntary slaves or as mercenary soldiers, sometimes going about in bands of marauding freebooters and terrorizing the city-states of Syria and Canaan. It is in this latter rôle that they first became known to us, when their name was deciphered on the Tell el-Amarna tablets. These clay tablets, inscribed in the Akkadian language and the cuneiform script, were accidentally discovered in 1887 by an Egyptian

3. See H. H. Rowley, "Recent Discovery and the Patriarchal Age" in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the O.T.* (1952), pp. 269 ff.

peasant-woman on the site of Akhetaton, the capital city of the heretic king Ikhnaton (1377-1360 B.C.). They proved to be the surviving archives of that king and his father (Amenhotep III), including not only copies of correspondence and treaties with the rulers of the Hittite Empire and the Euphrates valley, but also reports from the tributary governors of the Canaanite city-states.⁴ The grip of Egypt on her Canaanite dominion was weakening at the time, and these Habiru, among others, were profiting by the situation to seize for themselves what power and wealth they could. Some have even equated their attacks on the Canaanite cities with those launched by the Israelites under Joshua. This equation is highly improbable; the details do not tally at all, and Joshua's invasion is to be dated more than a century after the period of the Tell el-Amarna records. Yet the term *Habiru* may be the equivalent of *Hebrews*, but if so, we must conclude that the Israelites were but one among several Hebrew groups. If we look for a Biblical counterpart to some of the movements mentioned in the Tell el-Amarna records, we may find it in the story of the assault on the city of Shechem by two of the sons of Jacob in Genesis 34. More important than this, however, is the help which these records supply in filling out our knowledge of the state of Canaan on the eve of the Israelite settlement.

Although the Israelites' departure from Egypt under Moses bulked so largely in their national consciousness ever afterwards, the one possible contemporary allusion to it by non-Israelites appears in a victory inscription of the Pharaoh Merneptah⁵ about 1230 B.C. in which the boast occurs: "Israel is desolate; it has no seed left." This could be the official Egyptian account of the crossing of the 'Red Sea' (although it is more often interpreted as a reference to an otherwise unknown Egyptian attack on the Israelites after their entry into Canaan); in any case, subsequent events have shown that the Egyptian ruler's confidence in Israel's annihilation was premature.

NEAR EASTERN LAW

The mention of Moses, Israel's great legislator, brings us to another body of Near Eastern literature—the ancient law-codes of Mesopotamia and adjacent lands. At one time only one of these was known, the law-code of the Babylonian king Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.), discovered in 1901 at Susa (where it had been deported from Babylon by an Elamite conqueror) and now housed in the Louvre. Even this one code provided valuable comparative material for the earlier Israelite laws. But within the last ten years we have had

4. J. A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln* (1907-15).

5. Translated by J. A. Wilson in J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the O.T.* (1950), pp. 376 ff.

further additions in this field in the discovery of the Sumerian law-code of Lipitishtar, 150 years before Hammurabi's time, the code of Bilalama, king of Eshnunna (near Bagdad), earlier still, and the laws of Ur-Nammu, king of Ur of the Chaldees in the middle of the 21st century B.C. Over and above these we should mention the Assyrian laws, and the Hittite laws; the latter, while based on different principles from the Mesopotamian laws, present some striking affinities to Biblical law.

The Hittite influence on the laws and customs of the Hebrews and their immediate neighbours goes back to a much earlier period than that of Moses. When Abraham (not later than 1700 B.C.) approaches Ephron the Hittite, a landowner of Hebron, to buy a burial-ground, the negotiations, as recorded in Genesis 23, find quite remarkable illumination from current Hittite laws governing such matters. This narrative, says Professor Manfred R. Lehmann, "is permeated with intimate knowledge of intricate subtleties of Hittite laws and customs, correctly corresponding to the time of Abraham and fitting in with the Hittite features of the Biblical account . . . Our study again confirms the authenticity of the 'background material' of the Old Testament, which makes it such an invaluable source for the study of all . . . social, economic and legal aspects of the periods of history it depicts".⁶ This is the more striking as the Hittite Empire never extended its political control as far south as Palestine; and a number of questions are raised in this connection which still await a satisfactory answer.

The impression we get is that, all over those lands, in the 2nd millennium B.C., there was a generally accepted code of customary law, adapted to the varying social conditions of this land and that. Each law is casuistic in form: "If a man do so-and-so, he shall pay such-and-such a penalty". When we consider the earliest Israelite law-code, the so-called Book of the Covenant preserved in Exodus 21-23, we find that rather more than half of it contains laws of this kind, laws which belong to the common heritage of Western Asia. But alongside these case-laws the Book of the Covenant contains others which are more categorically expressed: "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan." "The first-born of your sons you shall give to me." "Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me." (The style, of course, is that best known in the Ten Commandments.) These are religious laws, in the sense that they are represented as direct utterances of Yahweh, but they include many social obligations as well as others which are more distinctively religious in character. To these "apodictic" laws, as they are commonly called, no parallel is found in the ancient law-codes; the closest parallels to their form

6. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 129 (February, 1953), p. 18.

appear in ancient treaties, which were in essence covenants protected by the deities whom the contracting parties invoked.⁷ But as part of the earliest of Israel's law-codes, these laws constitute the really distinctive feature of Israelite law.

THE AGE OF THE HEBREW MONARCHIES

Unfortunately, for the centuries between the Israelite settlement in Canaan in the 13th century B.C. and the beginnings of Assyrian intervention in the affairs of Israel and her neighbours about the middle of the 9th century B.C. we have relatively little in the way of written documents to throw light on the Biblical record. We should particularly welcome information of this sort on the important period of David and Solomon. Literary parallels, on the other hand, are not lacking for the collections of hymnic and wisdom literature which Hebrew tradition has attached, so far at least as their first beginnings are concerned, to the names of these two kings. The dominant features of Hebrew poetry and a good deal of Hebrew poetic diction may be recognized now as early as the Ugaritic texts. The setting of the earliest forms of Hebrew psalmody in the temple cult can be better appreciated now that we have such abundant material for the comparative study of the subject. From another angle, the affinity between the hymn of creation which we know as Psalm 104 and Ikhnaton's hymn to the god Aton has been marked for a long time now; another Egyptian affinity has more recently been noted between one of the central sections of the Book of Proverbs and a collection of wise sayings by Solomon's contemporary Amenemope.⁸ Comparative study of this kind enables us to appreciate both the resemblances and the differences existing between the Israelites and their neighbours; with all the similarity in form and content, Israel's insistence upon the acknowledgment of Yahweh as the living, holy and dependable God gives distinctiveness to all her literature.

While the Assyrian records give us a detailed account of events, from a different point of view, for two centuries and more preceding the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C., I do not propose to deal with these voluminous records here. Many of them have been known to us for so long that the horizons which they have brought to view can scarcely be called "new" horizons at this time of day. Yet fresh records from Assyria are constantly being deciphered and published, and these frequently amplify our knowledge of historical details in this period.

As early as 1868 one valuable monument from the era of the Hebrew monarchy became known to the west—the so-called "Moabite

7. See G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (1955).

8. See W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Wisdom of Egypt and the Old Testament* (1927).

Stone", containing a victory inscription set up in the name of the Moabite king Mesha about 850 B.C. Not only is this inscription historically valuable as giving the Moabite account of the Moabite revolt against Israel's domination, briefly recorded in the Second Book of Kings; it is also of considerable interest for the study of religion, for Moabite reverses and successes are there put down as plainly to the anger and good will respectively of the national deity as similar events in Israel are ascribed in the Old Testament to the wrath or favour of Yahweh.⁹

Quite recently the British Museum has published a volume of Babylonian chronicles¹⁰ covering the crucial years at the end of the 7th and beginning of the 6th century B.C., when Egypt, after trying to exploit the collapse of the Assyrian Empire to her own advantage by extending her control as far as the Upper Euphrates, was defeated at Carchemish and expelled from Asia by the Babylonians under Nebuchadrezzar. The small states of south-west Asia, including the kingdom of Judah, did not find it easy to adapt themselves to these sudden changes of overlord. Many points in the Biblical narratives of this period find clarification from these newly published records.

A pathetic footnote to the history of these days is provided by a fragmentary Aramaic letter discovered at Saqqara in Egypt in 1942. This letter was written to the Egyptian king Necho by his former vassal, the king of Ashkelon, about 604 B.C., frantically begging him to send reinforcements immediately if he did not wish to see his loyal supporters in that area, bordering on his own frontier, fall into the power of the Babylonians. But no help was sent, and the Babylonian chronicle records the fall of Ashkelon towards the end of 604. As someone has remarked, if the king of Ashkelon had only had a Hebrew prophet at his court, he would have been warned in time of the folly of expecting any material help from Egypt.¹¹

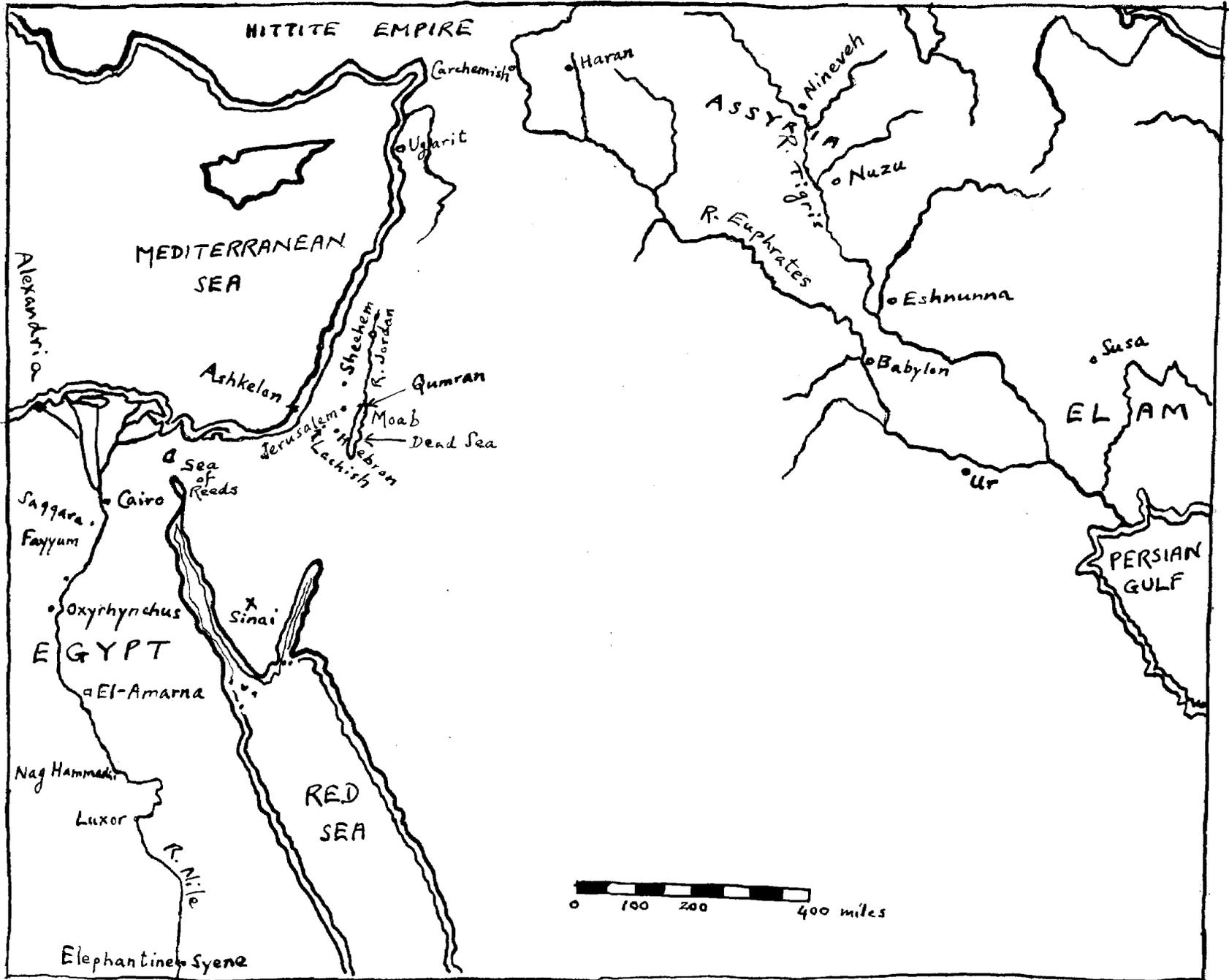
Egypt was content to foment disaffection against the new overlord among the border-states, and incite them to revolt. The kingdom of Judah revolted twice. On the first occasion Nebuchadrezzar led an army which (according to the Babylonian chronicle) captured Jerusalem on 16th March, 597 B.C. The king was taken to Babylon, while another member of the Judaeans royal family was placed on the throne, after swearing a solemn oath of allegiance to Nebuchadrezzar.

The king who was taken to Babylon at this time, Jehoiachin by name, spent the remainder of his life there—over 35 years. The Old Testament record tells how Nebuchadrezzar's successor, Evilmerodach,

9. See S. R. Driver, *Notes on Hebrew Text of Books of Samuel* (1913), pp. lxxxiv ff.

10. D. J. Wiseman (ed.), *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (1956).

11. H. L. Ginsberg, "An Aramaic Contemporary of the Lachish Letters", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 111 (October, 1948), pp. 24 ff.



released him from confinement and gave him an honoured place at court as a royal pensioner. But an interesting sidelight on the conditions of his captivity at an earlier date is supplied by some Babylonian tablets which list the rations of barley and oil provided from the public stores for Jehoiachin and five of his sons.¹² (His captivity was evidently not so strict that he was unable to bring up a family.)

The king whom Nebuchadrezzar placed on the throne of Jerusalem as his vassal in Jehoiachin's place was overborne by his pro-Egyptian advisers and persuaded to renounce his allegiance to Nebuchadrezzar. In consequence, Jerusalem was subjected to a siege of eighteen months' duration; it fell in the summer of 587 B.C., and the Judæan monarchy was brought to an end. Other Judæan strong-points were besieged and reduced about the same time—among them the city of Lachish. On the site of Lachish (modern Tell ed-Duweir) there were unearthened in 1935 and 1938 twenty-one ostraca, pieces of pottery, inscribed in Hebrew lettering, belonging to the last few months before the city's capture by the Babylonians at the end of 589 B.C. or early 588. The place where they were found was probably a guard-room where messages were received by the officer in charge. They form an eloquent commentary on the state of public opinion at the time, as attested by the contemporary account of the prophet Jeremiah, even if they do not present any detailed overlapping with the Biblical record. The spreading of rumours (optimistic and pessimistic), the pathetic hope of help from Egypt, charges of treason, self-exculpation and counter-charges—all the features of such a time of siege and inevitable doom are illustrated in these chance survivals.¹³

JEWES OF THE DISPERSION

A year or two before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., an Egyptian king hired a Jewish mercenary force to aid him in a war against Ethiopia. At the end of the war, he settled these mercenaries as a military colony on his southern frontier, in the fortress-cities of Syene (Aswan) and the Nile-island of Elephantine. The existence of this Jewish colony first came to light with the acquisition of a collection of Aramaic papyri from that region in 1898 and the following years.¹⁴ Most of these documents belong to the fifth century B.C., when Egypt was part of the Persian Empire. (Aramaic, we should remember, was the language for official communication between the Persian court and the various provinces of the empire.) Some of these documents illustrate the official interest

12. See G. R. Driver, "Jehoiachin in Captivity", *Expository Times* 56 (1944-5), pp. 317 f.

13. See W. F. Albright's translation in J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the O.T.* (1950), pp. 321 f.

14. The most convenient edition is that of A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (1923).

which the Persian court took in regulating the religious affairs of its subject-peoples (an interest of which we have Biblical evidence in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). One document, for example, sent in the name of the Great King to the Persian governor of Egypt, authorizes the Jewish colony to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread at the appropriate season in 419 B.C.

Other documents illustrate the social and religious life of the settlers. Just a generation or so before they came to Egypt, there had been a religious reformation in Judah, led by King Josiah, which aimed at the extirpation of every trace of Canaanite and other non-Israelite religion from the national worship, and centralized the national worship at Jerusalem, whose temple was to be henceforth the one and only sanctuary of Yahweh. That this reformation was but skin-deep is evident from the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and further evidence is provided from the Elephantine papyri. The names of various Canaanite gods and goddesses were combined with the name of Yahweh in the religious vocabulary of the colony, and a Jewish temple with sacrificial worship was established at Elephantine before the Persian conquest of Egypt in 525 B.C.

After the Persian conquest, the colony appears to have been maintained by the new rulers to safeguard Persian interests on the frontier, and consequently incurred the hostility of Egyptian nationalists. The temple at Elephantine was destroyed in 411 B.C. in an anti-Jewish riot led by the priests of a local Egyptian cult, and one of the most interesting pieces of correspondence in the papyri describes the long-drawn out negotiations by which the leaders of the colony procured a building-licence from the Persian court for the restoration of their temple and the resumption of its cultus.

It is over fifty years since these papyri were published in an edition by A. H. Sayce and A. E. Cowley. But early in 1893—that is to say, five years before the discovery we have been considering—an American scholar who spent his summers cruising on the Nile bought a quantity of papyrus from some Arab women at Elephantine. These papyri were placed in a trunk, where they lay unexamined until they were presented to the Egyptian department of Brooklyn Museum ten years ago. Then they proved to constitute the largest collection of Aramaic papyri outside Cairo, and to contain further documents from the Jewish colony at Elephantine, considerably amplifying the information supplied by the Sayce-Cowley papyri. They have now been published in a magnificent volume—*The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (1953), edited by Professor E. G. Kraeling of Yale. Over and above their interest from the Biblical point of view, they include material which enables historians to date with greater precision than heretofore the wresting of Egyptian independence from

the Persians by the national leader Amyrtaeus towards the end of the 5th century B.C.¹⁵ With the end of Persian domination the Jewish colony also came to an end.

Another collection of Egyptian Aramaic documents from the same period was bought from a dealer in 1932. Several scholars have occupied themselves with the study of these texts during the past twenty to twenty-five years, and in 1954 a fine edition, equipped with introduction and commentary, was produced by Professor G. R. Driver of Oxford.¹⁶ These documents were letters written between 411 and 408 B.C. from the Persian court at Susa or Babylon to Persian officials in Egypt; they give a wider view of the state of Egypt under the Persian administration.

THE DEAD SEA DOCUMENTS

Of all the new horizons that have come into view in recent times, the most unexpected and the most promising are surely those unfolded as a result of the manuscript finds at Qumran and other places in the Judaean wilderness,¹⁷ rightly described as the most remarkable archaeological discovery of the 20th century. This is not the place to give a detailed assessment of the significance of these documents. Let me remind you, however, that the Qumran texts represent the surviving fragments of the library of a Jewish religious community—possibly an Essene group—which had its headquarters in that area, near the north-western shore of the Dead Sea, from about 100 B.C. to shortly before A.D. 70. The fragments thus far secured (some 40,000 in all) represent over 400 books, biblical and non-biblical, most of which were copied between the 2nd century B.C. and the 1st century A.D. They were apparently stored in the caves where they have been found to protect them from the Roman soldiers who were engaged in putting down the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66-73, and who actually sacked and destroyed the community headquarters about A.D. 68. These documents have added very considerably to our knowledge of the textual history of the Old Testament; but even more important is the contribution they have made to our knowledge of the closing period of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, and more particularly to the religious background of Christian beginnings.

One feature of this contribution may be mentioned. When, early in the present century, Albert Schweitzer dropped that bombshell

15. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, pp. 111 ff.

16. G. R. Driver (ed.), *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.* (1954).

17. Most of these texts are to be published in a series of volumes entitled *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, of which Vol. I (*Qumran Cave I*), edited by D. Barthélemy and J. T. Milik, appeared in 1955. For other texts see M. Burrows (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery*, I (1950), II, ii (1951); E. L. Sukenik (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls of the Hebrew University* (1955); N. Avigad and Y. Yadin (ed.), *A Genesis Apocryphon* (1956). The best general account of the discovery is given by M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (1955).

of a book, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (translated into English in 1910 as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*), into the camp of theological liberalism, interpreting the career of Jesus in terms of eschatological expectation, he found no contemporary context for the announcement by John the Baptist and Jesus that the kingdom of God was at hand. "It cannot be said . . . that we know anything about the Messianic expectations of the Jewish people at that time . . . What is really remarkable about this wave of apocalyptic enthusiasm is the fact that it was called forth not by external events, but solely by the appearance of two great personalities . . . The Baptist and Jesus are not, therefore, borne upon the current of a general eschatological movement" (p. 368). Some of these statements (especially the disclaimer of any knowledge about Jewish messianic expectation at the beginning of the Christian era) were open to question even when Dr. Schweitzer first penned them. But our knowledge about messianic expectation at that very time has been greatly increased, thanks to the discovery of a very clearly directed eschatological movement. And although it would be very far from true to say that John the Baptist and Jesus were borne upon the current of this particular eschatological movement, there are features in the messianic expectation of Qumran which might almost justify us in suspecting that the eschatological teaching of John and Jesus represented a conscious reaction against just these features. Here is an attractive field for research, although we hope that the many documents yet to be deciphered and published may supply more directly relevant evidence than has come to light thus far.

Here is another subject for further exploration. In a book published a few years ago Professor C. H. Dodd showed good reason for believing that the "sub-structure of New Testament theology"—and therefore ultimately of classical Christian theology—is to be found in an "original, coherent and flexible method" of Old Testament exegesis, followed by Jesus and the apostles, which paid attention to the original context and was based on the primary, historic intention of the Old Testament texts in question.¹⁸ The theology of the Qumran community was also based to a large extent on a coherent system of Old Testament exegesis. It was not the same system as we find in the New Testament, although the divergences and affinities between the two systems are alike significant; but the point of importance is that here we have two movements, roughly contemporary, basing their distinctive theology on a rationally constructed system of Old Testament interpretation, introduced in either case by the founder of the community. I cannot think of a third instance within the same general period. There are quite a crop of questions waiting to be answered here.

18. C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (1952), pp. 108 f. *et passim*.

From the same general vicinity as Qumran, but from a rather later period, come the documents found in the Wadi Murabba'at, whose chief interest lies in the new evidence they provide for the second Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 132-135), and the manuscripts of Khirbet Mird, which include both Biblical and classical texts.

DISCOVERIES IN EGYPT

Egyptian Christianity in its earliest stages is not recorded in such detail as we should wish, but it probably goes back to the first decade after the death of Christ. It is of special interest because in so many respects it pursued distinctive lines of its own. Fortunately, the sands of Egypt are constantly yielding fresh papyrus treasures which in the most unexpected ways amplify our knowledge of Christian Egypt as of the Egypt of earlier days. Moreover, the ancient libraries of Egypt give us pleasant surprises from time to time. Towards the end of last century the long walled-up store-room of the ancient synagogue in Old Cairo proved to contain a wealth of Jewish lore;¹⁹ one previously unknown work discovered there at that time is now recognized as emanating from the Qumran sect.²⁰ Further discoveries in the store-room have supplied us with a good part of the lost Hebrew original of the Book of Ecclesiasticus.²¹ The library of St. Catherine's Monastery on the traditional Mount Sinai, which in the 19th century yielded the Codex Sinaiticus and a most important copy of the Gospels in the Old Syriac version, has been thoroughly explored more recently—not only by the scholars who arrived there in the wake of Israel's army in November last, but on a much more grandiose scale seven years ago when the monastery was visited by a munificently equipped expedition acting under the auspices of the American Foundation for the Study of Man on behalf of the Library of Congress and in co-operation with the University of Alexandria. The entire library of manuscripts was examined so that the most important texts might be selected for reproduction on microfilm. Out of 3,282 manuscripts in the library 1,687 were reproduced in this way, and microfilms of any of them may now be obtained by scholars in any part of the world from the Library of Congress, Washington, for almost a nominal price.²²

As for the treasures of the sands, seven manuscript volumes of Manichean texts were discovered in the Fayum about 1930, translated from Greek into the Subakhmimic dialect of Coptic. In 1941 some ancient quarries near Toura, six or seven miles from Cairo, which

19. See P. E. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (1947).

20. The best edition of this work is C. Rabin (ed.), *The Zadokite Documents* (1954).

21. See W. O. E. Oesterley, *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha* (1935), pp. 254 f.

22. See K. W. Clark, "Exploring the Manuscripts of Sinai and Jerusalem", *The Biblical Archaeologist* 16 (1953), pp. 22 ff.

were being used by our Army of the Nile as munition stores, yielded a large number of Greek texts containing unpublished works of Origen, the great theologian of Alexandria (A.D. 185-254), and of his disciple Didymus.

But even nearer to our biblical field are thirteen papyrus codices which, about 1945, were found buried in a jar at Nag Hammadi (the ancient Chenoboskion), west of the Nile, about 60 miles north of Luxor. These codices contain some 48 Gnostic treatises, mostly if not all translated from Greek into Coptic. While the codices themselves belong to the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., the Greek originals were composed a century or two earlier. Twelve of the codices, running to 1,000 pages, are in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. One was acquired in 1952 by the Jung Institute at Zürich;²³ it contains five treatises of the Valentinian section of Gnostics in the Subakhmimic dialect—an *Epistle of James*, the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Epistle to Rheginus*, a *Treatise on the Three Natures*, and two damaged pages of a work called the *Prayer of the Apostles*. Of these the most important is the *Gospel of Truth*, the text of which was published the other day.²⁴ It was composed about A.D. 150 and is mentioned by orthodox Christian writers towards the end of the 2nd century.

The texts in the Coptic Museum have not been published yet, but some of their contents were also known from references in pagan and Christian critics of Gnosticism. One interesting work of which some information has lately been released is a *Gospel of Thomas* (not identical with the apocryphal work of the same name), which is a comprehensive collection of Sayings of Jesus of the same character as the Oxyrhynchus Logia discovered earlier in the present century. It begins, in fact, with a text already known from No. 654 of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri (published in 1904), in which Jesus says: "Whosoever listens to these words shall never taste death. Let not him who seeks cease until he finds, and when he finds he shall be astonished; astonished he shall attain the kingdom and when he attains it he shall rest . . ."

These codices are fraught with exciting possibilities—not because of any fresh information about Jesus and the apostles, but because of much fresh information about the views held of Jesus and the apostles by a very influential body of opinion in the 2nd century A.D. Relatively little Gnostic literature was hitherto known, our information about this literature coming principally from Celsus, Plotinus and Porphyry on the pagan side, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Epiphanius on the Christian side. For the most part, their accounts, though hostile, are now seen to have been remarkably fair and accurate. But now

23. See F. L. Cross (ed.), *The Jung Papyrus* (1955); J. E. Ménard, "Les Manuscrits de Nag Hammadi", *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 13 (1956), pp. 2 ff.

24. In an edition by M. Malinine, H. C. Puech and G. Quispel.

we have a whole library which, when fully published, will add greatly to our knowledge of several schools of Christian Gnosticism—and of some pagan Gnosticism as well, such as Hermeticism.

The student of Biblical History and Literature need not complain that his field of research is too restricted!

But no more alluring horizon can be described than that unfolded in the New Testament itself in the Fourth Gospel. We may be reminded afresh of this work by the recent publication of a papyrus codex containing a good part of its text in Greek. Although Papyrus Bodmer II (as it is called) cannot rival in antiquity the papyrus fragment of St. John's Gospel in the Rylands Library in Manchester, being some seventy years younger (i.e., dating from about A.D. 200), it has preserved very much more of this Gospel—the first fourteen chapters, in fact, almost without a lacuna, amounting to more than two-thirds of the whole, in a text of Alexandrian type.²⁵ No student of Biblical History and Literature can rest until he has tried to penetrate the mind of the Fourth Evangelist and grasp the significance of his work. It is given to few students to succeed in this attempt, even to their own satisfaction. (It is remarkable, too, how nearly every fresh discovery in the religious history of this general period and region—not excluding the Qumran and Gnostic literature—has been hailed somewhere or other as providing the solution to the "enigma of the Fourth Gospel.") But success here might well give control of the key to the central problem of Biblical History and Literature: the words of the *logion* already cited are most applicable in this regard: "Let not him who seeks cease until he finds, and when he finds he shall be astonished; astonished he shall attain the kingdom and when he attains it he shall rest."

25. V. Martin (ed.), *Papyrus Bodmer II: Evangile de Jean, chap. 1-14* (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1956). The one lacuna runs from verse 12 to verse 34 of chapter 6. More recently it has been announced that fragments of the later chapters of the same codex have been identified.

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