

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

some time. It was extirpated by establishing firmly the authority of the officials and forbidding all amateur teachers ; and Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians derives its importance largely from its having been accepted as settling finally the principle of obedience to the Church officers as such.

W. M. RAMSAY.

THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT AND THE DECALOGUE.

IN the EXPOSITOR for August and October, 1908, I tried to show that the Hebrews, as pictured in the narratives of Genesis, were semi-nomads, which were familiar with agriculture. I hinted that this might be of importance for the date of the laws designed to regulate the social life of old Israel.

It is generally accepted by the critical scholars of the school of Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen that the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant originated in the period of the monarchy. According to Professor Driver "it is reasonable to suppose that the teaching of Moses is preserved, in its least modified form, in the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant" (Exod. xx.-xxiii.).¹ This opinion, however, is rather conservative. Most scholars assume that the teaching of Moses could not possibly have any bearing upon agricultural life, the Israelites then being nomads. They suppose the Book of the Covenant to represent the law of the early monarchical period and assign it to the ninth or eighth century B.C. Some of them think it probable that the Decalogue was given by Moses in a much more concise form, as is now preserved in Exodus xx. and Deuteronomy v., but a large majority of critics assume with

¹ Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 1897, p. 153.

Kuenen and Wellhausen that the Decalogue originated in the eighth, seventh or even in the sixth century B.C.

In the following pages I intend to argue that the Book of the Covenant and the Decalogue may be assigned with great probability to the Mosaic period.

The argument for the later origin of these laws is two-fold. It is rightly thought improbable that agricultural laws were given to nomad tribes, which were living by the products of flocks and herds. This part of the argument has been dealt with in the previous articles quoted above. Here we have to deal with the other part of it, viz., the result of the critical analysis of the narrative about Israel at Sinai.

It is a well-known fact that the structure of the narrative is very complicated. According to the opinion that prevails among scholars the result of the analysis is that the oldest forms of the various traditions about the events at Mount Sinai cannot have contained the Book of the Covenant. The original place of this book in the Elohist work was in the fields of Moab, where Deuteronomy is found now. When Deuteronomy was published it was removed by an editor to this earlier point in the history of the legislation. The Decalogue of Exodus xx. is also assigned to the Elohist. The Jahvistic work also contained a Decalogue (Exod. xxxiv. 14-26). The ceremonial character of these commandments seems to prove that the ethical Decalogue of Exodus xx. is the younger one. The ceremonial Decalogue of Exodus xxxiv. is not yet touched by the prophetic ideas which we find in the Decalogue of Exodus xx. Evidently the ethical Decalogue is based on the teaching of the great prophets of the eighth century B.C.

I.

The narrative about the events at Mount Sinai is a diffi-

cult problem for the critical analysis. "Much has been written upon it; but though it displays plain marks of composition, it fails to supply the criteria requisite for distributing it in detail between the different narrators," says Driver (*Introd.*, p. 39). I will not enter in this article into a discussion about the probability of the usual analysis of the Hexateuch. Personally I am convinced that critics are on the wrong track, and that we never shall be able to explain the composite character of the Hexateuch, if we do not do away with the Jahvistic, Elohist and Priestly works and the numerous younger Jahvistic, Elohist and Priestly writers, which are indicated by J²⁻³, E²⁻³, P²⁻³, etc. But the remark of Professor Driver shows that the different attempts of numerous scholars have not been able to offer a probable solution of the various difficulties which the narrative contains. Therefore it seems justifiable to discuss the origin of the Book of the Covenant and the Decalogue from a wholly independent point of view.

Evidently the argument of the critical analysis is not merely analytical. A good deal of belief in "Evolution" is involved in it. The prophets of the eighth century are supposed to have reached an ethical standard that was unknown in former ages. Formerly the Israelites believed that the bond between Israel and Jahve was a natural one, to the prophets this bond was not natural but moral and spiritual. The real demand which Jahve made of His people was righteousness and purity of national life. The cultus, therefore, was to the prophets an affair of quite subordinate importance. To the old Israelites "holy" meant "taboo," to them the holiness of God meant righteousness. The development of religious thought in Israel is supposed to be a confirmation of the word of St. Paul (1 Cor. xv. 46), "First is that which is natural, then that which is spiritual."

One of the greatest contradictions in the Hexateuch is the difference between Exodus xx. and Exodus xxxiv. It is believed that according to the original form of the tradition the Decalogue of Exodus xx. was written upon the tablets of stone. Strangely enough the law that is written upon the second tablets of stone in Exodus xxxiv. is totally different from the contents of the first tables. The latter was chiefly of an ethical character, the former was purely ceremonial. Consequently the ceremonial Decalogue of Exodus xxxiv. 14-26, must be the older one, whereas first is what is ceremonial (natural), then that which is ethical (spiritual).

The history of religion teaches us that this view is entirely false. Religious ceremonies never are the sole contents of the will of God. Social and ethical commandments are always connected with religion. Everybody will admit that the Babylonian religion was full of ceremonies, yet we find in the oldest times, even in the superstitious incantations of the Shurpu-series, a large number of ethical commandments that may be compared with the Decalogue of Exodus xx. The famous Laws of Hammurabi were the will of the Babylonian god of justice, Shamash. It was his will "that the strong might not oppose the weak, and that they should give justice to the orphan and the widow. . . . By the command of Shamash, the great judge of heaven and earth, righteousness must shine forth on the land." The 125th chapter of the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" shows that righteousness and justice were demanded in the same way by the Egyptian gods; and every book on so-called "primitive religion" shows that the conception of a god as an ethical being is not confined to the religions of the people of old civilization. Every religion has its ethical side, even among the savages. The theory that the ceremonial cultus is anterior to the worshipping

of the gods by obeying their ethical commandments is mere assumption.

If natural religion has been depreciated by Old Testament scholars, the religion of the prophets has very often been over-estimated by them. It is perfectly true that the prophets emphasize the ethical side of the will of Jahve, but they were not the heralds of a perfectly spiritual religion. They did not preach things new and unheard of. Everybody admitted that righteousness was the will of Jahve. On the other hand, the prophets did not regard the cultus in itself as superfluous and without significance. Otherwise Hosea would not have told his nation that it would be punished by the absence of sacrifices, pillars, ephod and teraphim (Hos. iii. 4), nor would he have referred to the written laws of Jahve (Hos. viii. 12), which Jahve wrote in ten thousand precepts, and which must have contained also ceremonial duties, nor would the temple of Jerusalem have been the centre of the kingdom to come (Micah iv. 1 seq.; Isaiah iv. 1 sqq.).

The ceremonial laws of the Priestly code are supposed to be of post-exilic origin; the contents of older laws, of the Book of the Covenant and of Deuteronomy, however, is chiefly of a social and ethical character. How is this to be accounted for if the ceremonial laws are to be the older ones and the ethical precepts the younger ones? Is not the Book of the Covenant that is assigned to the ninth century full of ethical commandments? But it contains at the same time ceremonial laws (Exod. xxiii. 10-19).

The ethical Decalogue of Exodus xx. also contains some ceremonial commandments: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"; and "Thou shalt have none other gods before me . . . thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God," imply a certain ceremonial worship of Jahve.

These remarks do not aim at denying that the prophets of Jahve were great personalities ; my only design is to point out that it is not justifiable to claim the ethical conception of Jahve for the prophets only. The ethical feeling of the priests was by no means inferior to that of the prophets. Otherwise the ethical contents of the laws (Exod. xxi.-xxiii.) is a mystery that cannot be explained.

A comparison between the Decalogue of Exodus xx. and the teaching of the prophets shows further that it is highly improbable that the Decalogue depends upon the religious conceptions of the prophets of the eighth century, as is supposed by Kuenen and others (as, for instance, W. Addis, *Hebr. Religion*, p. 181 sqq.). They assign the Decalogue to the reign of Manasseh. Addis restores the text of the Decalogue that originated in this time as follows : " 1. Thou shalt have no other gods but one. 2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. 3. Thou shalt not take the name of Jahve thy God for a vain end. 4. Remember the Sabbath day to hallow it. 5. Honour thy father and thy mother. 6. Thou shalt not kill. 7. Thou shalt not commit adultery. 8. Thou shalt not steal. 9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house. Even in this reduced form the Decalogue must be the result of the prophetic teaching. By a refinement of thought which must have been slowly evolved it forbids the covetous thought as well as the unjust deed."

Now the conspicuous trait of the preaching of the prophets is that the poor must be protected against the extortions of the wealthy. The Lord will punish the Israelites because they have sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes (Amos ii. 6, 7 ; iv. 1 ; v. 7, 11-17 ; viii. 4-6). Relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (Isaiah i. 17 ; ii. 12 ; iii. 12-15 ; v. 8, etc. ; cf. also

Hosea v. 1, 10 ; vii. 16 ; Micah ii. 1-4, iii.). Nearly every page of their prophecies contains a complaint against the mighty and wealthy people. How is it that there is not the slightest allusion to this part of their preaching, if we have to assume that even the reduced form of the Decalogue must be the result of the prophetic teaching? If the ethical precepts of the Decalogue had originated among the prophets a commandment to have mercy upon the poor and needy necessarily would have been classed among the commandments of the Lord.

Further, scholars overrated the meaning of some of the commandments. In consequence of this it seemed impossible to assign the Decalogue to the oldest period of the history of Israel. Addis translates the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other god but one." He finds here monotheism, otherwise he would not have explained the expression of the Hebrew text *עַל פְּנֵי*, before me, by "but one." Now it is evident that monotheism did not exist in the period of the Judges and the early Kings. It is supposed to be an achievement of the religious thought of the prophets of the eighth century.¹ The Decalogue, therefore, must be posterior to them. Both theses, however, are false. Neither the prophets of the eighth century were absolute monotheists, nor does the first commandment imply the worship of Jahve only. The oldest text teaching absolute monotheism is Deuteronomy iv. 35. But Amos ascribes the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah to "the gods" (Elohim) and not to Jahve, as is shown by the right interpretation of Amos iv. 11, "I have overthrown you as the gods (Elohim) overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (cf. also Hosea xii. 4 ; Micah iii. 7). To the prophets Jahve, the God of Israel,² is the most exalted of all the gods, but they

¹ W. E. Addis in *Enc. Bibl.* 1051.

² Hosea always uses the name Jahve for the God of Israel, but in refer-

believe in the existence of other gods. This is not what may be called "ethical monotheism."

Besides this it is to be remarked that the meaning of "Thou shalt have none other gods before me" is generally misunderstood. What is the bearing of "before me"? I do not think that this means "Thou shalt have no other gods at all." This could not be expressed by *על פני*, before me, in my presence. In this case "before me" would be entirely superfluous and confusing. Exodus xx. 23 shows that these words are not accidental. There it is forbidden to make gods of silver or gold "with" Jahve (Ye shall not make gods of silver or gods of gold *with me*). *אִתִּי*, with me, does certainly not mean thou shalt not make them, at all. We know that the teraphim were images. Nevertheless David and Hosea did not know anything about their being forbidden by the law of Jahve. The meaning of the commandment is just what it says. It is not allowed to place the images of other gods in the temple or holy tent of Jahve, and it is not allowed to worship other gods in His presence. It does not follow from this commandment that the possession of household gods, protecting the house and the stables, is forbidden. In Egypt and Assyria the images of several gods were placed in the same temple. Other gods are standing "before" and "with" the chief god of the temple. It is not allowed to do so in Israel. Jahve is the solitary God, no goddess is placed beside Him, no divine son is ever mentioned, as in Egypt or Assyria. He is the exalted one in whose shrine there is no place for any other god but for Himself. From this conception of Jahve evolved practical, and afterwards also theoretical, monotheism.

ring to the wrestling of Jacob with God at Beth-El he uses Elohim. Wherefore would he use xii. 3 and xii. 6 Jahve and xii. 4 Elohim if Jahve was the god he referred to? It is to be remembered that Hosea xii. 4 does not refer to Genesis xxxii. (where Elohim also is used), for Hosea states that Jacob struggled with Elohim at Beth-El and not at Penuel.

We easily understand how this simple meaning of the Hebrew text could be overlooked. For this interpretation seems to be inconsistent with Exodus xx. 4, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." Here it is forbidden to make any image at all and the existence of household gods is made impossible by this commandment. Here we are on the ground of absolute monotheism. But this verse does not belong to the original form of the Decalogue. It separates v. 5 from v. 3. "Thou shalt not bow thyself *unto them* nor serve them" (plur.) refers to the "other gods" of v. 3, and cannot possibly be connected with the graven image (sing.) of v. 4.

This verse, therefore, must be a later addition to the text, dating from the time of Deuteronomy (sixth century B.C.). The law of Deuteronomy introduced monotheism into Israel. It abolished the household gods and put the mezuzah in their place. It opposed even the worshipping of Jahve at the various local sanctuaries and abhorred every image (Deut. iv. 16-18; vii. 25).

The tenth commandment is interpreted as forbidding the covetous thought as well as the unjust deed. It is called the result of a refinement of thought which must have been slowly evolved. I think this interpretation entirely mistaken. We cannot understand this word without transplanting ourselves to the sphere of oriental thought. If we find a thing, we know that we are not entitled to keep it. If we see an empty house, we also know that we are not allowed to take possession of it. The conviction of the oriental man, however, entitles him to keep what he finds, supposing he likes it; and if he sees abandoned goods which he thinks desirable, there is for him not the least objection to taking them. Everybody who knows the customs of

primitive life will admit that the theoretical difference between property and possession is an achievement of social civilization. It is probable that the original form of the tenth commandment was "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house." To the Israelites this meant that he should not take anything of his neighbour's possessions that were momentarily unprotected by their owner. Exodus xxxiv. 23 seq. shows that this is the right interpretation of לֹא תַחְמֹד, thou shalt not desire. "Three times in the year shall all thy males appear before the God of Israel. For I will cast out nations before thee and enlarge thy borders: *neither shall any man desire* (חָמַד) thy land, when thou goest up to appear before the Lord thy God three times in the year." Evidently desire here does not only mean to have a covetous thought, but also to take possession of the unprotected houses and fields. The significance of the tenth commandment is, according to this interpretation, that it regards a category of acts that is not covered by the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." To steal means to rob things that are in the possession of another; to desire means to take things that seem desirable, in case of finding them or seeing them without the protection of the owner or of one of his people. If this is the right exegesis of the tenth commandment, we must assume concerning this precept what Addis rightly accepts about "some of the precepts—e.g. the prohibition of murder, theft and adultery. They must have descended from a prehistoric antiquity."

Sometimes the beginning of the Decalogue is interpreted as an introduction. Jahve is supposed to introduce Himself to his hearers: I am Jahve thy God. This introduction, however, is altogether superfluous, as the Israelites were fully aware that they were encamped in the neighbourhood of the mountain of Jahve. This word really is the first

commandment. It is not to be translated as "I am Jahve thy God," but as "I, Jahve, am thy God," i.e., I, Jahve, am the God you have to serve and to worship. Jahve proclaims Himself to be the national God of Israel. This is the only interpretation which derives a proper sense from these words and their context. If there is to be any historical truth in the narrative about the encamping of the Israelitic tribes near Mount Sinai, it is this, that the various Israelitic clans and Hebrew families were united into a religious alliance that was patronized by Jahve, the God by whose aid they were able to make themselves free from the Egyptian oppression. It is reasonable that one of the first things the allies have to remember is that Jahve, their Saviour, is to be their national God.

It is accepted by many scholars that the precept "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," must be of recent origin. The problem of the origin of the Sabbath is not yet solved. As far as we can trace the day in Israel it was a day of rest. Therefore it was supposed that the commandment must be posterior to the settlement of Israel in Canaan. In the nomad state of life a Sabbath day would have been impossible. The shepherds have no opportunity for resting on certain days. If we are right in denying that the Israelites were nomads before entering into Egypt, there evidently is no reason why the precept to remember the Sabbath should not be a commandment of the Mosaic period.

Thus none of the commandments is inconsistent with the historical circumstances and the state of life of the Hebrews on their way from Egypt to Palestine.

Thus far we have only dealt with the general contents of the Decalogue and have not entered into a discussion on the original form of this document.

I hold, with Professor Driver (p. 33) that the form of the

Decalogue of Exodus as a whole is older than the recension of Deuteronomy. He is quite right in stating, "The principal variations in the recension of Deuteronomy are in agreement with the style of Deuteronomy, and the author's hand is recognizable in them." Nevertheless some influence of the text of Deuteronomy upon the recension of Exodus cannot be denied.

Exodus xx. 5 says: "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren, to my haters (לשנאי), and shewing mercy unto thousands, to them that love me (לאהבי)." The usual translation of these words hides the fact that the words "to my haters" and "to my lovers" contain some difficulty. The common translation is "of my haters" and "of them that love me." This could be the right translation of the first part, but it is not allowed to translate לאהבים לאלפים by "to thousands of my lovers." Of course the meaning of the verse must be that God shows His mercy unto *everybody* that loves Him and not unto a great many of those who love Him. It is very remarkable that the words "to my haters" and "to my lovers" are not found in the various parallels to our verses, Exodus xxxiv. 7, Numbers xiv. 18, Jeremiah xxxii. 18. This can hardly be a mere accident. Exodus xx. 5, 6 we get a better Hebrew text if we omit the words. We easily see why they were introduced into the text. The teaching of the Decalogue that God punished the children for the sins of the fathers was inconsistent with the doctrine of Deuteronomy. "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. xxiv. 16; cf. also vii. 10, "God will not be slack to him that hateth him; he will repay him to his face"). Evidently the words "to my haters" and "to them that love me and

keep my commandments" are introduced by the writer of Deuteronomy in order to express [that God punishes the children if they hate Him. If this is right, we see at once that the recension of Deuteronomy has been of influence upon the text of Exodus.

Probably the text of Exodus originally did not contain the reference to Genesis ii. 3. There seems to be no reasonable ground for the thesis that the writer of Deuteronomy will have omitted Exodus xx. 11. As far as we can see he cannot have had any objection to the theory that Jahve created the world in six days and that the Sabbath was a holy institution from the beginning.

The difference between the recension of the tenth commandment seems to me to be of no significance. Perhaps Exodus xx. 17*b* is an explanation of what is to be understood by "house" in verse 17*a*.

So the original form of the Decalogue of Exodus may have been xx. 2, 3, 5 (except "to my haters"), 6*a*; vii. 8, 9, 10, 12-17.

Now we must face the question, Which was the original place of this Decalogue in the tradition of Exodus?

B. D. EERDMANS.

STUDIES IN THE PAULINE THEOLOGY.

VII. THE END OF THE LAW.

(1) THIS Christian salvation, the deliverance of man from both the guilt and the power of sin in Christ Jesus, Paul offered to Jew and Gentile alike, for the necessity for it was as universal as the sufficiency of it. The right to make this offer to the Gentiles without any other condition than its acceptance in faith was, however, quickly challenged. When Paul and his companions returned from their first missionary journey to Antioch, "they rehearsed all things