

THE CALL OF MOSES

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OF ALL countries upon the face of the earth Palestine seems one of the least likely to have produced anything striking or world shaking. Nevertheless, in Palestine there appeared a phenomenon the like of which the world has never seen elsewhere.¹ The present day Bedouin of Palestine can hardly be regarded as the bearers of advanced thought and culture and there is not much reason to believe that they differ markedly from some of Palestine's earlier inhabitants.² Yet in Palestine the most sublime ideas of God and, his love to mankind appeared, and in Palestine alone did the truth concerning man and his plight make itself known. What is the explanation of these facts? How are we to account for the large body of prophets, with their teleological message, their declaration of a Redeemer to come, forming a mighty, evergrowing stream that culminated in the person and work of Jesus Christ?

If we accept the Scriptures at face value we find that they are filled with references to Moses whom they regard as the human founder of the theocracy. It was Moses whom God used to bring his people out of Egyptian bondage and to give to them his unchanging law. "He made known his ways unto Moses", we read in Psalm 103, and this is only one of the testimonies that attributes to Moses the claim that Moses received his commission by divine revelation. Can we today, however, simply accept the plain testimony of the Scriptures as they stand?³ Modern scholarship very largely denies that we can, and we must give some attention to its claims.

¹ Cf. "But when we take it all together, from Abraham and/or Moses to Jesus and the apostolic Church, it does cohere together; there is a consistency about it, and as history--not simply some imaginary salvation history--it is without parallel anywhere or at any time in the history of this planet". Christopher R. North: *The Second Isaiah*, Oxford, 1964, p. 27.

² If some modern reconstructions of Israel's history are correct, the Israelites on the whole were little more advanced than some of the present day Bedouin.

³ "Von diesem Bild (i. e., the picture which the Old Testament gives of Israel's beginnings) hat die einsetzende Bibelkritik manches Element

The Sinai "Tradition"

In the discussion of these questions Professor Gerhard von Rad of Heidelberg University has taken a prominent part. The last one hundred and fifty years of critical historical scholarship, he tells us, have destroyed the picture of Israel's history which the church had derived from its acceptance of the Old Testament. According to critical historical scholarship we can no longer regard it possible that all of Israel was present at Sinai or that as a unit the whole nation crossed the Red Sea or achieved the conquest of Palestine. The picture given to us in Exodus, to be frank, is unhistorical.⁴

The account of Israel's origin given in the Old Testament, we are told, is extremely complicated, being based upon a few old *motifs* around which a number of freely circulating traditions have clustered. Both these ancient *motifs* and the separate traditions were pronouncedly confessionalistic in character.⁵ We thus have two pictures of Israel's history, that which the faith of Israel has reconstructed and that which modern historical scholarship has reconstructed. It is this latter which tells of "the history as it really was in Israel", for this latter method is rational and "objective" in that it employs historical method and presupposes the similarity of all historical occurrence.⁶

abgetragen. Viele Erzählungen, sonderlich der Vater- und der Mosezeit, wurden als sagenhaft erkannt und stellten sich demgemäss als Dokumente dar, die zu einer genauen Rekonstruktion der historischen Vorgänge nicht ohne weiteres verwertbar waren". Gerhard von Rad: *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Band I, München, 1957, p. 113 (English translation by D. M. G. Stalker, Vol. I. New York, 1962, p. 3).

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 113 (E. T., pp. 106, 107). "Die historisch-kritische Wissenschaft hält es für unmöglich, dass ganz Israel am Sinai war, dass Israel en bloc das Schilfmeer durchschritten und die Landnahme vollzogen hat, sie hält das Bild, das die Überlieferungen des Buches Exodus von Mose und seinem Führeramt zeichnen, für ebenso ungeschichtlich wie die Funktion, die das deuteronomistische Richterbuch den Richtern' zuschreibt".

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 113 (E. T., p. 107).

⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 113 f. (E. T., p. 107), "Die eine ist rational und objektiv', d. h. sie baut mit Hilfe der historischen Methode' und unter der Voraussetzung der Gleichartigkeit alles historischen Geschehens an einem kritischen Bild der Geschichte, so wie es in Israel wirklich gewesen ist". With-

Yet historical investigation has its limits; it cannot explain the phenomenon of Israel's faith, and the manner in which Israel's faith presented history is still far from being adequately elucidated. It is this question with which the work of theological investigation is primarily to be concerned.

In the second volume of his work, as a result of criticism, von Rad somewhat dulled the alternatives. In the English translation this particular section is omitted, but it might be well to call attention to the most significant sentence. "The historical method opens for us only one aspect of the many layered phenomenon of history (*Geschichte*). This is a layer which is not able to say anything about the relationship of the history to God. Even the best attested event of the 'actual history' remains dumb with respect to the divine control of history. Its relevance for faith can in no wise be objectively verified."

It is upon this foundation that von Rad proceeds to consider the early history of Israel. In his penetrating work *The Problem of the Hexateuch* von Rad had already directed attention to what he called the "Sinai tradition".⁸ In this treatise he made a study of Deuteronomy 26:5b-9 which he regarded as a liturgical formula, the earliest recognizable example of a creed. This summary of the facts of redemption, he held, could not have been a freely devised meditation founded upon historical events. Rather, it reflected the traditional form in which the faith is presented. Of particular

out attempting any complete evaluation of this statement we would challenge anyone's right to assume the "similarity of all historical occurrence". This rules out miracles and special divine revelation. The historical occurrences in ancient Israel were not similar to those of other nations, for God "made known. . . his acts unto the children of Israel" (Psalm 103:7b). To assume otherwise is to adopt an unwarranted presupposition, as Dr. von Rad does, it is to write an apologetic. That the so-called historical method is genuinely objective is an illusion, and hence any picture of ancient Israel which this method creates will naturally share in the weaknesses inherent in the method which produced it.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, Band II, Munchen, 1960, p. 9. In this sentence there appears the influence of Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal. For a thorough discussion see Cornelius Van Til: *Christianity and Bar-
thianism*, Philadelphia, 1962.

⁸ "Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch" in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, Munchen, 1965, p. 20 (E. T., 1966, p. 13).

interest is the fact that in this "credo" there is no mention of the events which occurred at Mount Sinai.⁹

Likewise, in Deuteronomy 6:20-24, which, according to von Rad, is also written after the style of a confession of faith, there is no mention of Mount Sinai, and here the omission is said to be more striking inasmuch as in this passage there is express concern about the divine commandments and statutes. Again, in the historical summary Joshua 24:2b-13 ("shot through", says von Rad, "with all kinds of accretions and embellishments which are immediately recognisable as deriving from the hexateuchal presentation of history") the events of Sinai are said to be completely overlooked.¹⁰ All three texts follow a canonical pattern of redemption; indeed, the passage from Joshua is said to be a Hexateuch in miniature. The canonical pattern is clear, for in each instance it omits reference to what occurred at Sinai. The Sinai tradition is independent, and only at a very late date did it become combined with the canonical pattern. There were two originally independent traditions.

The Sinai tradition has been secondarily inserted into that of the wilderness wanderings. Wellhausen had asserted that

⁹ Von Rad's work has not been without influence. Martin Noth (*Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, Damstadt, 1960, pp. 43, 63-67) finds the Sinai traditions already present in the material available to J. "Erst recht gehört der Einbau der Sinaitradition' zu den von J in G schon vorgefundenen Gegebenheiten" (p. 43). Mention may also be made of H. J. Kraus (*Gottesdienst in Israel*, 2. Aufl., München, 1962, pp. 189-193) who thinks that in the removal of the Shechem cult to Gilgal the fusion of the divergent traditions may have occurred. Cf., also, Leonhard Rost: *Das kleine Credo find andere Studien zum Alten Testament*, Heidelberg, 1965.

¹⁰ "Auch hier ist der Text mit allerlei Floskeln und Zutaten durchsetzt, deren Herkunft aus der hexateuchischen Geschichtsdarstellung sofort erkenntlich ist", *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, p. 14. The English translation given above is taken from the English translation of this work, p. 7. It may be remarked in passing that von Rad's constant use of the term Hexateuch is thoroughly unbiblical. The classification of the books into a threefold division is due to the position of their author in the Old Testament economy. For this reason, the five books of which Moses was the author stand apart, the base and foundation (despite Wellhausen) upon which the remainder of the Old Testament builds. It is biblical to speak of a Pentateuch, but not of a Tetrateuch (Noth, Engnell) nor of a Hexateuch (Wellhausen, von Rad).

after the crossing of the Red Sea the Israelites marched on to Kadesh, which is really reached when the people come to Massah and Meribah in the vicinity of Kadesh.¹¹ Hence, the places in the events before Sinai and those in the narratives after Sinai are about the same and the expedition to Sinai is to be regarded as secondary. There is, as von Rad puts it, a break in the Kadesh tradition, which tradition alone is closely interwoven with the exodus story proper.¹²

In the Sinai tradition the predominating elements are the theophany and the making of the covenant, and with these there are bound up less important traditional elements of an aetiological nature which bore no historical relationship to the account of the theophany and the covenant. What part in the life of ancient Israel did this Sinai tradition play? We may best understand the tradition as a cultic ceremony which was itself prior to the cultus and normative for it. It is the cult legend for a particular cult occasion. The Sinai experience is not something in the past but is a present reality, for "within the framework of the cultus, where past, present, and future acts of God coalesce in the one tremendous actuality of the faith, such a treatment is altogether possible and indeed essential".¹³ Thus, the events of Sinai were actualized in the cult. Later Israel could easily identify itself with the Israel of Horeb.¹⁴ It was the material of the ancient Shechem covenant-festival, celebrated at the renewal of the covenants of the Feast of Booths, and incorporated by the "Yahwist" into the Settlement tradition. Only about the time of the exile did the fusion of the two find popular acceptance.¹⁵

With respect to von Rad's presentation we would remark that the entire Pentateuch does not at all look like a develop-

¹¹ At this point von Rad appeals to Wellhausen, *op. cit.*, p. 21 (E. T., pp. 13, 14).

¹² "Nur der erstere (i. e., the Kadesh tradition) ist aufs engste mit der eigentlichen Auszugsgeschichte verwoben; der andere (i. e., the Sinai tradition) nicht, wie das ja auch der Sprung zwischen Ex. 34 und Num. 10, 29 ff. zeigt" (*op. cit.*, pp. 21 f., E. T., p. 14).

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 36 (E. T., p. 29).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 61, "erst um die zeit des Exils ist diese Verbinduhg popular geworden" (E. T., p. 54).

ment or overworking of the cultic credo supposedly found in Deuteronomy 26:5b-9.¹⁶

With respect to Deuteronomy 26:5b-9 there is no evidence that it was ever recited at the Gilgal sanctuary at the time of the Feast of Weeks. The action described in this passage is to be performed when the nation enters the land which God will give it. The singular has individualizing force. "Yahweh, who is thy God", we may paraphrase, "will give the land to thee". Emphasis falls upon divine grace. The land is not taken by Israel's power but is a gift of her God. Indeed, the word $\etaָלַן$ implies that Israel knew why she was receiving the land. It seems to reflect upon preceding events.

The purpose of the confession is to show that from a small people which entered Egypt and were evilly entreated by the Egyptians the nation became great and powerful. Hence, they cried unto the Lord, and the Lord by mighty wonders brought them out of Egypt unto the place where they now are.¹⁷

Is not the reason for the omission of reference to events at Sinai clear? Moses wishes to stress the great contrast between the nation's present position of safety and blessing and its former state of servitude and to bring into prominence the fact that God has brought this change about by means of a mighty act of deliverance. To have introduced at this point the events of Sinai would simply obscure this contrast.¹⁸

¹⁶ The more one considers von Rad's position, the more apparent does it become that one cannot begin with Deuteronomy 26:5b-9 and from there work as he does to the completed Pentateuch. The whole procedure is based upon fantasy, not fact, and upon acceptance of an unnatural, unrealistic, humorless documentary analysis which does not begin to do justice to the true nature of the Pentateuch. Cf. Oswald T. Allis: *The Fille Books of Moses*, Philadelphia, 1949. There is a unity in the Pentateuch which is best explained as the work of one mind.

Artur Weiser (*The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development*, New York, 1961, p. 85) points out that the Pentateuch is essentially different from an expanded hymn-like prayer or creed.

¹⁷ The priest mentioned is not the high priest but simply a priest in charge of the altar whose duty was to receive gifts of sacrifice. The first fruits constituted a proof that Israel was in possession of her land, and in offering these the Israelite acknowledged his indebtedness to the Lord for giving him the land.

¹⁸ Weiser (*op. cit.*, p. 86) holds that the subject matter of the "Sinai

Von Rad's argument actually proves too much. If absence of the Sinai episode really shows that the Sinai "tradition" was not an integral, original, part of the Exodus "tradition" then the same conclusion follows with respect to the events at Kadesh. Deuteronomy 26:5b-9 says not a word about Kadesh. Are we therefore to conclude that the events at Kadesh were not an original element in the Exodus "traditions"? For that matter the entire fact of the wilderness wanderings is passed over in silence in the Deuteronomy passage, and we are simply told that the Lord "brought us unto this place".¹⁹ Is the entire wilderness episode therefore a separate tradition? If we grant von Rad's premises, we may consistently exclude the whole time of the wilderness journey from the original "tradition" and not merely the events at Mount Sinai.

Von Rad's appeal to Deuteronomy 6 is singularly unfortunate, for this passage does contain an express reference to the events at Sinai. It is intended to answer the question posed in verse 20, "what are the testimonies, and the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God commanded you?" In answer Moses contrasts the period of Egyptian servitude and the present condition brought about by means of the mighty deliverance of the Lord. This time, however, it is expressly stated that "the Lord commanded us to do these statutes".²⁰ When did the Lord give such a command

tradition is not a historical event in the same sense as the historical events of the exodus and entry; it is on the contrary an encounter with God which leads up to the acceptance by the people of the will of God proclaimed in the commandments; and in its cultic setting it represents a particular action in the course of the festival. Consequently it is not mentioned in the same breath with God's acts of salvation in those texts which are concerned only with the latter. . . . it (*i. e.*, no mention of Sinai) is due to the fact that they (*i. e.*, certain texts) restrict themselves to the recital of the saving acts in history on grounds which make it clear that their silence concerning the Sinai tradition cannot be used an *argumentum e silentio* for the reconstruction of the whole contents of the festival cult, as is done by von Rad."

¹⁹ וַיְבִיאֵנוּ אֱלֹהֵי-מִצְרָיִם הַזֶּה.

²⁰ וַיְצַוֵּנוּ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה. The verb need not be understood as denoting action subsequent to that expressed by הוֹצֵיא in verse 23; it may merely set forth a concomitant thought --God brought us out and he also laid upon us commands --irrespective of the chronological relationship of the two actions.

if it was not at Sinai? This very statement is a reflection upon the events at Sinai. True enough, the word Sinai is not mentioned, but is it necessary? The disjunction between the Sinai and Conquest traditions, which von Rad thinks is supported by this passage, therefore, is illusory.

Unfortunate also is the appeal to Joshua 24, for this passage reflects both upon the Sinai "traditions" and also upon the so-called "Conquest traditions". This fact has been clearly demonstrated by Artur Weiser who finds that the two sets of tradition are here already combined and "are clearly regarded as belonging essentially together because they supplement each other".²¹ Verses 2-13 are a recital of God's historical dealings with his people, pointing out how God had been with them since the time of the patriarchs and had brought them unto the present. In verses 14-26, however, we have the response of the nation to the plea to obey the covenant. These latter verses presuppose that God has given his commandments to the nation. Weiser goes so far as to say that this manner of speech (i. e., God speaking in the first person singular) shows "the original connexion between *God's revelation of his nature in his saving acts* in history and *his revelation of his will leading up to the pledge of the congregation*".²² In this passage history and law are bound up together as they are in the Pentateuch generally.²³

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 88. :

²³ In a recent article, "The Exodus, Sinai and the Credo" (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. XXVII, 1965, pp. 101-113) Herbert B. Huffmon, appealing to the Hittite vassal treaties, points out that the Credo of Joshua 24:2b-13 is the historical prologue of the covenant whose conclusion the remainder of the chapter describes. In the more than thirty international treaties recovered from Boghazkoy, Alalakh and Ras Shamra the place where the treaty was concluded is never mentioned. Nor do the prologues (with two exceptions which Huffmon notes) mention documents of investiture, i. e., which specify the granting of a treaty. The granting of a treaty was not considered one of the gracious acts of a suzerain. For this reason, argues Huffmon (p. 108), Sinai, which represents the reception of the Law, is not part of the Credo.

For an introduction to the subject of the relationship of Scripture to the Hittite suzerainty treaties cf. Meredith G. Kline: *Treaty of the Great King*, Grand Rapids, 1963. It must also be remembered that the complete form of a treaty may not necessarily have been recorded upon one document but upon several, cf. Donald J. Wiseman: *The Alalakh Tablets*, 1953, nos. 1-3, 126,456. Exodus 20 itself is largely in the form of covenant

What, however, can be said about von Rad's attempt to separate the Sinai sections from the main body of the narrative? Is there a break in the Kadesh tradition between Exodus 18 and Numbers 10 as Wellhausen maintained?²⁴ Von Rad holds that there was a cycle Kadesh narratives (Exodus 17-18; Numbers 10-14) and a Sinai cycle (Exodus 19-24; 32-34).

If one examine Exodus 19 as it stands, without the pre-supposition that documentary analysis must be engaged in, he will note that it very naturally continues the preceding narrative (cf. especially 17:1). In 19:1 there is a direct reference to the exodus from Egypt and a time reference in connection therewith. Unless we assume then that a redactor has worked over this verse, we must conclude that it constitutes an integral part of the narrative of the Exodus. The mention of Rephidim in 19:2 refers expressly to the previous mention of Rephidim in 17:1, 8 and continues the journey of the Israelites from that point.

In verse two there seems to be obvious reflection upon Exodus three. The word **מִדְּבָר** calls to mind the same word in Exodus 3:1, as does also **הַרְהֹ**. This word is introduced without any explanation, for the reader is supposedly acquainted with it. In the light of Exodus 3:1 it is perfectly understandable; otherwise it is almost without meaning. If there be no preceding narrative, we are without a word of explanation. What mountain is intended? The same is true of **מִדְּבָר**. In the light of Exodus 3 we are prepared for this

directly between God and the individual, a form not attested outside the Old Testament. Whereas in the revelation of his will, God did to some extent make use of covenant-forms extant in the world, his revelation was not bound by these forms. To a certain extent these covenant types may be an aid in understanding the form of certain Scriptures, nevertheless, there is danger in pressing this method too far. It still remains true that the best interpreter of Scripture is the Scripture itself. In refuting von Rad's thesis Walter Beyerlin has quite effectively used the covenant pattern (*Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions*, tr. by S. Rudman, Oxford, Blackwell, 1965).

²⁴ Huffmon (*op. cit.*, p. 111) suggests that the people may have proceeded to Kadesh and then made a pilgrimage to Sinai. But it is also possible, as Huffmon points out, that there may have been two Meribahs, one near Sinai and one near Kadesh. In his masterful study *From Joseph to Joshua*, London, 1952, pp. 105 ff., H. H. Rowley maintains that two accounts of what took place after the exodus from Egypt may have been combined.

word, but if Exodus 19 is to be divorced from what precedes we are left without explanation. Likewise, the phrase, *and God called to him from the mountain brings to mind and God called to him from the midst of the bush* in Exodus 3:4. A similarity exists also between *thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob* and *thus shalt thou say to the sons of Israel of Exodus 3:14*.

When one examines Numbers 10, he notes that here, too, there is reference to what has preceded. In verse 11 there, is a date and an express mention of the cloud being taken up from the tent of testimony. Verse 12 speaks of the wilderness of Sinai, which clearly reflects upon the similar language used in Exodus 19. Unless we engage in drastic excisions we must accept the narrative as it stands, and then it is clear that the break which Wellhausen, von Rad and others thought that they found here is non-existent.

It has been necessary to consider von Rad's assertion that the narratives which recount the events at Mount Sinai are not an original part of the Exodus account, for if he is correct, then it follows that Exodus 3, which narrates the call of Moses, must be abandoned as unworthy of historical consideration. The reason for this is that Exodus 3 is a preparation for the meeting of Moses with God upon the holy mount of Sinai and the revelation of the law. If God did not meet Moses and the law was not revealed, then obviously, the third chapter with its prediction, "ye shall serve God upon this mountain" is not historical fact.

The Unity of Exodus Three

It is now necessary to examine more closely the question of the unity of the third chapter of Exodus. Is this chapter a unified whole or does it consist of a compilation of fragments of various documents, pieced together by a redactor? Modern scholarship is almost unanimous in asserting the latter. Perhaps the latest documentary analysis is that given by Georg Fohrer, who partitions the chapter as follows:

²⁵ Georg Fohrer: *Überlieferung und Geschichte des Exodus*, Berlin, 1964, p. 124. Gressmann (*Mose und seine Zeit*, Göttingen, 1913, p. 21) holds that the chapter is a compilation of JE. "3:1, Horeb E; 2-4a Sinai, bush, Yahweh J; 5 J // 4b. 6 God E; 7,8 Yahweh J // 9-12 E; 13-15 God E, but vs. 15 is of later origin" because in E the name of Yahweh is partly

J 1a, ba; 2-4a; 5; 7, 8; 16-20.

E 1b β ; 4b* 6; 9-15.

N²⁶ 21, 22

Fohrer candidly acknowledges that the presence of the divine names largely guides him in this analysis, although he recognizes that there may be deviations from this analysis. There are, asserts Fohrer, differences in the various documents. According to J Moses comes to the mountain of Yahweh, according to E to the mountain of God. J says that first Moses approached a burning bush, and God spoke to him, whereas E maintains that God spoke to him immediately. From J we learn that Yahweh himself will bring the Israelites out of Egypt; whereas E holds that Yahweh entrusts this task to Moses. Furthermore the deity declares twice that he has seen the affliction of his people. Likewise there are two occurrences of and he spoke (vv. 5, 6) and *and now go* (vv. 9a+16, 10).²⁷ If this minute analysis strikes the unprejudiced reader as somewhat overrefined and possibly lacking in a sense of humor, we can only say that this is what we are asked to accept in place of the narrative as it stands. Refined as such analysis may be, we must nevertheless evaluate it.

According to Fohrer, the words of 3:1, and he came unto the mountain of God, belong to E and not to J. It would seem that a redactor has cut these words out of the E document and inserted them in J (which comprises the earlier part of verse one and continues with verse two), apparently for the purpose of making it appear that Sinai was the mountain of Elohim. That such a procedure is unnatural (great books are not made this way, to say nothing of the question of the

avoided. Vv. 16 ff. probably belong to E; Gressmann regards vv. 18-22 as a later element. Carpenter and Harford (*The Composition of the Hexateuch*, 1902, p. 515) attribute 3:2-4a, 5, 7-9a, 14, 16-18 to J and 3:1, 4b, 6, 9b-13, 15, 19, 21 to E. It should be noted particularly with respect to Gressmann, how determinative a role the divine names play in the documentary analysis.

²⁶ R. Smend (*Die Erzählung des Hexateuch auf ihre Quellen untersucht*, 1912) had suggested the presence of a fifth document in the entateuch (cf. Young: *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1958, p. 15). Fohrer adopts this position, labelling this fifth document N (*op. cit.*, p. 8) because of its nomadic character.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

Bible's inspiration) is evident, but more than that, the true significance of the names is ignored.²⁸

We may note that in 4:27 and 18:5 (English 4:28 and 18:6) there is a similar usage of the word Elohim. In the earlier days of documentary analysis it was simply the presence of the divine name which led to these passages being assigned to what is today known as E. The reason for the usage of Elohim is to show that the mountain belongs to the true God and is thus to be distinguished from other mountains. Psalm 68:17 likewise uses the name (although without the definite article) to distinguish Sinai from ordinary mountains. It is for this reason also that, both in 4:20 and 17:9, the rod is designated the rod of God. This rod is thus set apart from all other rods, as that which belongs to God.

There is a reason for the prominence of Elohim in the early chapters of Exodus, but it is one which modern scholarship largely ignores. Modern scholarship would maintain that the name Yahweh was first made known to the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. In so maintaining, however, it overlooks the deep significance of the name. With the book of Exodus we are entering upon new epoch in the history of redemption. The patriarchal period is past, and the descendants of the patriarchs are now but a slave people in a foreign land. Will their God help them at this juncture of their history? They have known this God under various designations, Elohim, El Shaddai, and Yahweh, yet they have not known the full significance, nor have they experienced the full significance, of the name Yahweh. They must learn that Elohim, the powerful God of creation and providence is also Yahweh, the redeemer God of the covenant. Hence, the

²⁸ The term is here used by way of anticipation. There is no evidence of any kind from any source to support the position that the mountain was regarded as sacred before Moses' calling. The designation Horeb apparently applied not merely to one mountain but to several. Cf. Hengstenberg (*Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch*, Vol. II, pp. 325-327) for one of the earliest presentations of this view. In this passage the term אֱלֹהִים is appropriate in order, to connect with what precedes (e. g., 2:25 where the word appears twice and to show that the true God is the One who appears to Moses. Cf. Gus Holscher: "Sinai und Choreb" in *Festschrift Rudolf Bultmann*, 1949, pp 127-132. The question of the significance of these two names we plan treat in greater detail in connection with the exposition.

frequent usage of Elohim in the early chapters of Exodus (cf., e. g., 1:17, 20, 21; 2:23, 25) prepares the way for the revelation of the name Yahweh. At the same time, although Elohim was regarded as the God of creation and providence, he was also the God to whom Israel cried in the time of her deep need. The usage of Elohim, then, is to call attention and to prepare the way for the approaching epoch of revelation and to indicate that before it the present epoch was about to pass away. Israel must learn the lesson that the God to whom she had turned in her times of need is the Yahweh of redemption who is about to enter into covenant with her.

With verse two the transition begins. Here the angel is designated the Angel of the Lord, which may have been somewhat of a stereotyped expression. The word Yahweh in verse 4, however, clearly points to the transition. We are to learn that he whom the people had worshipped and known as Elohim is truly Yahweh, their covenant God. The term Yahweh appears seven times and in verses 2, 4, and 7 the language is that of the writer of the account. The change, however, is not absolute, for the language reverts immediately to Elohim, and in verse four which contains the first usage of Yahweh as a subject, the word Elohim also occurs. This verse is one of the strongest stumblingblocks in the way of a documentary analysis. God is Yahweh, but he is also Elohim, and so we are still in the state of transition. Thus the way is prepared for the identification of God in verses 6 ff. as the God of the patriarchs.

From this point on to the close of the conversation respecting the significance of the covenant name, Elohim is exclusively employed (cf. vv. 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15). When Elohim has made it clear that he is Yahweh and will make himself known as Yahweh, the designation Yahweh alone is used until the end of the chapter. In fact, Moses is commanded to make known to the Israelites that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, has appeared unto him (v. 15 and cf. v. 18).

It is apparent, then, that there is a very definite reason for the distribution of the divine names in this chapter. Before the people know that Elohim is Yahweh, Moses himself must have that knowledge, and it is the purpose of this chapter to show that God did convey that information to him. As far as the usage of the divine names is concerned, we must

conclude that there is a genuine unity in the chapter, and as a unity, therefore, we shall proceed to study the content of the chapter. Other arguments advanced to demonstrate a lack of unity or the presence of duplicate accounts we shall consider as we turn to the exposition of the passage. As far as the presence of the divine names is concerned, instead of lending support to the documentary analysis, they are strongly opposed to it, and in one particular instance, namely, verse 4, where both Yahweh and Elohim occur, constitute a serious obstacle to documentary partition.

The Burning Bush

Before attempting an exposition of the passage we must give consideration to the question of the burning bush, for this question brings us face to face with the problem of the nature of Exodus 3. Martin Noth claims that it is a favorite explanation of exegetes that the burning bush is a manifestation similar to St. Elmo's fire, and he thinks that, although we cannot regard this as a certain explanation, we must imagine something of the sort.²⁹ Such a phenomenon was regarded as something awesome, a sign of the divine presence. There was a local tradition of a holy place with a burning bush and this has now entered into Israelite tradition to provide a concrete background for the account of the first encounter of Moses with God.³⁰

With this explanation we are in effect asked to regard the chapter as nothing more than an account of ancient traditions of the Hebrews. Nowhere does Noth make it clear that the true God did appear to Moses, as this chapter records. For our part we are compelled to consider the chapter as

²⁹ Martin Noth: *Exodus*, E. T., Philadelphia, 1962, p. 39. During stormy weather discharges of atmospheric electricity give off a glow from the extremities of pointed objects such as ships' masts. The term St. Elmo is a corruption of St. Erasmus (or Ermo), the patron saint of Mediterranean sailors. Has anyone, however, ever mistaken St. Elmo's fire for a burning bush that burned yet was not consumed? Certainly the learned and wise Moses would not have done so.

³⁰ This statement cannot be supported by any evidence. It fits in well with the prevailing naturalistic account of the origin of Israel's religion and hence is almost cavalierly adopted

sacred Scripture and so to interpret it. Without at this point endeavoring to give a defense of the position that the Scripture of the Old as well as the New is a special revelation from God, we shall nevertheless proceed upon that assumption and seek to point out the inadequacy inherent in alternate attempts to explain the miracle of the burning bush other than as a genuine miracle.³¹

Hugo Gressmann has perhaps collected the greatest number of supposedly similar phenomena, and it will be well briefly to consider these. He mentions that some appeal to the phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire, as well as to fire brands or reflexes of light, which must often have occurred in dry lands with an abundance of storms. Gressmann, however, thinks that this is a *contradictio in adiecto*, for where there are many storms, he says, there is fruitful land and much rain. Furthermore, he claims that underlying this theory is the false idea that Yahweh was originally a storm deity, whereas only later on the soil of Canaan did he become such. If Sinai were a volcano, one could he thinks, if he were proceeding upon rationalistic grounds, seek to explain the burning bush upon the basis of volcanic phenomena, or of subterranean fire, assuming that the bush stood near escaping gases from under the ground.

Gressmann tells us that there are accounts of burning bushes or holy trees which fell into flames and were not consumed.³² Thus Achilles Tatius relates concerning Tyre that fire enveloped the branches of a sacred olive tree but the soot of the fire nourished the tree. Thus it is claimed that there exists friendship between fire and tree. Nonnus tells of a burning tree upon a floating rock in the sea, and Georgius Syncellus relates that a tree by the grave of Abraham and Isaac seemed to burn but did not burn. Eustathius speaks of the same phenomenon however in different terms, asserting that when the tree had been lighted it was fully on fire, and when the fire burned out, the tree still stood sound. Gressmann further calls attention to the legend that a pious man once saw the holy walnut tree at Nebk in flames. Believing

³¹ In *Thy Word Is Truth*, Grand Rapids, 1957, we have ought to set forth the reasons why we believe the Bible to be the Word of God.

³² *Op. cit.*, pp. 26-29.

eyes have supposedly seen mysterious fires or lights in trees and pious ears have at the same time heard wondrous music. Gressmann believes that the luster as well as the music belong to the appearance of the holy, and just as the music is not to be explained upon the basis of some naturalistic phenomenon, neither is the light nor the fire.

How are these phenomena to be related to what is given in Exodus? If we assert that they are simply the characteristics of myth and saga then we have relegated the Exodus narrative to the same category as tales of myth and saga. We then have in the third chapter of Exodus an account which is not historically true, but is simply a story which the ancient Hebrews liked to tell. It is a part of their tradition and is probably aetiological in nature, designed to explain why certain things are as they are. Sinai was regarded as a holy mountain, and the saga or myth or call it what one will of the burning bush gives the explanation why this is so. The roots of this story are lost in hoary antiquity. Perhaps there may have been some basis of truth in it; perhaps not. If form criticism tells us that we have here an aetiological saga, then we cannot take the narrative seriously. It is merely an explanation, possibly containing some elements of truth, of the fact that in the day of the writer men regarded Mount Sinai as a holy mountain.

There are those, however, who seek to give a rationalistic explanation of the phenomenon, and Gressmann rightly criticizes them. It is rather difficult to explain a burning bush as the result of volcanic phenomena, for how could this explain the fact that the bush was burning and yet was not consumed? The same is true of subterranean fire. How does anyone know that the bush was close to seeping gases? Furthermore, both of these explanations leave too much unexplained. Moses knew the country intimately, and had Sinai been a volcano or had there been a place where subterranean gases issued forth, he would have known it well, and probably often would have seen the appearances of such volcanic action or subterranean fire. Even assuming that he did not know the country, an assumption that no one who knows the desert would entertain for an instant,³³ when he

³³ The present writer had the privilege of travelling in the Sinai peninsula

approached the bush he would have seen that there was nothing at all out of the ordinary. He would have realized that there was nothing more than volcanic action or seeping gases and he would have known the reason why the bush appeared to burn without being consumed. Furthermore, the discovery of the actual truth of the situation would have destroyed any psychological condition in which he might have thought that he heard a voice speaking to him.³⁴ The naturalistic interpretations do not explain; they create more difficulties than they remove. As the exposition proceeds we shall seek to point out in greater detail what some of these difficulties are.

It remains to insist that the account of the burning bush is *sui generis*. The alleged parallels which Gressmann has adduced in his attempt to show that Exodus 3 belongs to a certain type of literature are really not parallels at all. For that matter there is no parallel to the account of the burning bush. We have but to examine the first of Gressmann's alleged parallels, the account found in the *Erotica*.³⁵ To be noted in the first place is the fact that the olive tree is found on sacred ground, i. e., ground which was commonly recognized as sacred. This was not the case with the burning bush. Moses did not know that the place was sacred and had no hesitation in approaching. Indeed, the reason why he approached was idle curiosity; he merely wanted to know what

in 1930. At one point the goat-skin sack which contained our entire water supply broke open and all the water poured out upon the ground. The Bedouin were not troubled. At a further point on the journey one of them took the sack and walked off into the desert. Five hours later he returned with the sack filled with water. He had remembered an underground spring. The Bedouin know the desert like a book. This is one reason why all naturalistic attempts to explain the burning bush are somewhat ridiculous.

³⁴ Some of the naturalistic explanations are that a flake of gypsum blown against a twig may have set a bush alight. It is said that once a year the sunlight penetrates through a chink in the rocks on the summit of Jebel ed-Deir and falls upon a spot at the foot of Jebel Musa. Hence, it is hinted that this might in some way be connected with the vision perceived by Moses. Cf. the interesting discussion in Joan Meredyth Chichele Plowden: *Once In Sinai*, London, 1940, pp. 48, 147-150.

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 26, τὸ δὲ Χωρίον ἱερόν. Thus the place is introduced as already sacred. It was merely a shrine; the ground mentioned in Exodus 3 only becomes sacred because God has appeared there. Once the theophany was concluded the place would no longer be sacred.

was happening. Only as he drew near did God tell him of the nature of the place. Furthermore, the leaves of the tree were known to be bright or sparkling; nothing similar is related in Exodus.³⁶ Fire was planted with the tree and catches the branches with a mighty flame and the soot of the fire nourishes the tree. Thus, fire and tree are said to be friends.³⁷

A mere reading of this account will reveal the profound differences that exist between it and the narrative in Exodus. In Tatius' account the fire is said to be planted, for the purpose is to show that there is a friendship between what is planted and the fire. The precise sense of soot (αἰθάλη) is not as clear as might be desired but apparently the thought is that the fire somehow gives nourishment to the tree. What strikes one immediately is that in this narrative there is nothing approaching the seriousness of the Exodus account. The burning bush is not a wonder known far and wide, but an event which Moses alone was permitted to behold. Furthermore, it was filled with deep significance, for it revealed that the Holy God was present in the midst of his people and it prepared the way for the revelation of the covenant name of God. The wonder was not to show the friendship between fire and something planted, but to induce in the heart of Moses the proper reverence so that in humility he would be willing to go forth as a messenger of the Holy God who had appeared unto him.³⁸

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 26, φαιδροῖς (bright, cheerful, beaming) τοῖς κλάδοις.

³⁷ Note the passive πεφύτευται, τὸ φυτόν. The meaning of the episode is αὕτη πυρὸς φιλία καὶ φυτοῦ.

³⁸ In the interpretation of Nonnus (see Gressmann, *op. cit.*, p. 26 for references) we are really dealing with an event of magic. Two rocks swim (πλώουσι) in the sea (εἰν ἄλι) on which a pair of self-planted olive trees of the same age grow. From the burning tree (ἀπὸ φλογεροῦ δὲ δένδρου) sparks shoot forth, and enflame the unburned (ἀφλεγέος) olive tree.

Another alleged parallel has to do with a "wonderful terebinth" (τὴν θαυμασίαν τερέβινθον) that grew where Jacob supposedly buried the gods which he had brought. Offerings were brought to an altar by the trunk of the tree, which seemed to be destroyed but was not burned up (ἡ δ' οὐ κατεκαίετο δοκοῦσα).

Eustathius speaks of the same matter, stating that after the terebinth

This brings us to the heart of the problem. If we at all take the Bible seriously we are compelled to assert that there must have been some compelling reason which caused Moses to return to Egypt and to deliver the nation. All subsequent history is based upon the assumption that Moses did in fact bring forth the people from Egyptian bondage. Whence arose the conviction in Moses' heart that he was thus to deliver the people? The Bible gives a clear answer to that question; the Bible declares that God appeared to Moses and charged him with the task of deliverance.

The burning bush was a miracle performed by God himself. It introduced that great period of miracles in Biblical history when God must show his saving power to Pharaoh and perform signs and wonders upon him. Israel must know that the God whom Moses proclaims to them is the God whom their fathers worshipped, the God who is in sovereign control over all the elements of nature. Such a God they may follow and such a God they may worship. In the miracle of the burning bush then, we see no low display of magical power, but rather a manifestation of the holiness of him who was in truth the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

(to be concluded)

was set on fire (ὕφαφθεῖσα lit., lighted from beneath, by whom?) it becomes completely fire (ὅλη φῦρ γίνεται). When the fire is, out (κατασβεσθεῖσα) it is seen to be unharmed. How completely different from the miracle recorded in Exodus!

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