

Sunday School Supplement

Winton Thomas once wrote that "not all Israel's story is told in the Old Testament. It has to be supplemented by the evidence of ancient documents discovered by archaeologists—inscriptions on clay, stone, seals and coins, and writings on potsherds, papyrus and leather." [Documents from Old Testament Times, (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1961), p. v.] In like fashion, not all of the knowledge on the Old Testament is found within the walls of Mormonism. This supplement is an effort to present to the readers selections from a variety of sources; however, a real study of the Old Testament should take

the interested student to the scores of scholarly works available.

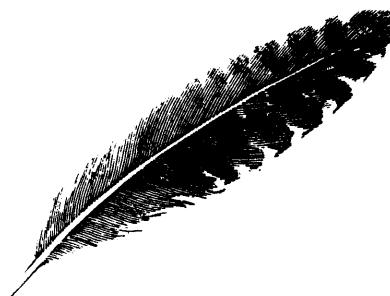
THE PENTATEUCH AND MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The Documentary Hypothesis of Authorship

Why do college and seminary textbooks, commentaries, Bible dictionaries, Bibles with study helps, and Christian education curriculums regard the Pentateuch as composed of legends, myths, folk tales, fiction, and folklores? Why do they represent Moses as leading only a few of the twelve tribes from Egypt through the desert? Why do they consider the tabernacle and the

priesthood associated with Israel in the Pentateuch as a figment of the imagination?

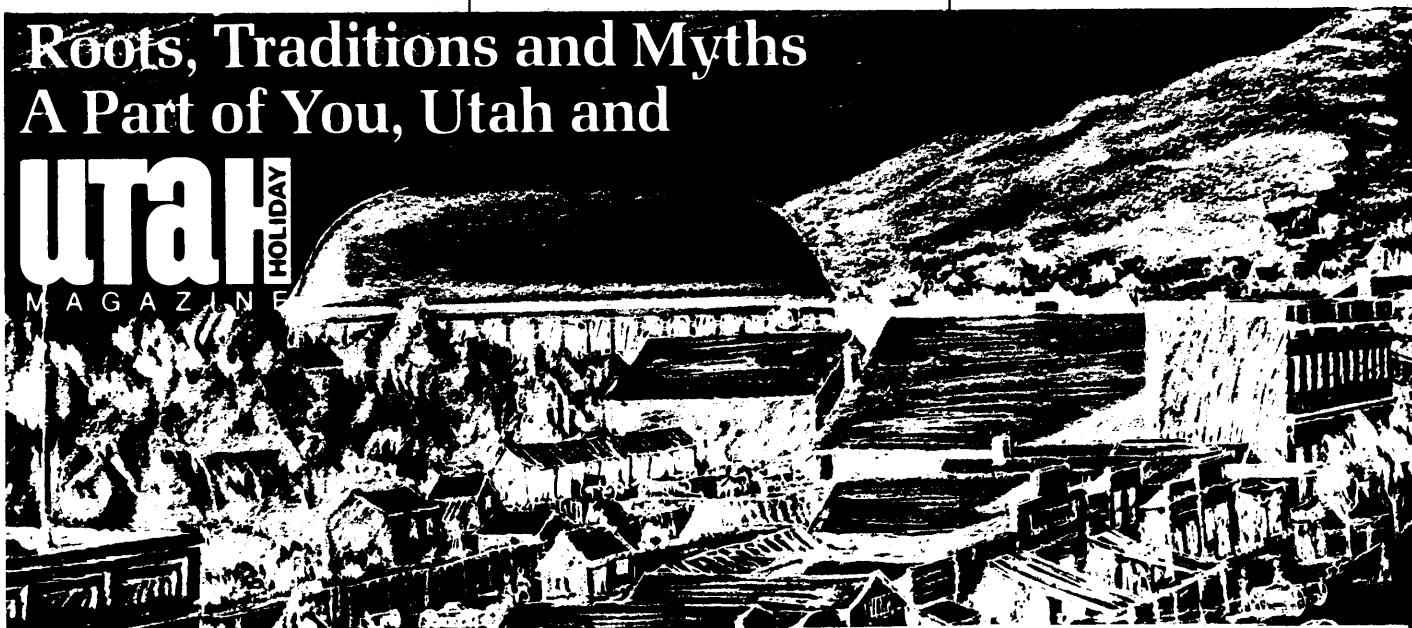
The popular view that the Pentateuch is composed of documents written beginning in the ninth century B.C. and completed by about 400 B.C. provides the basis for these perspectives. The dating of the composition of the first five books of the Bible basically affects and often determines the interpretation of



the content. That the theory of authorship provides the framework for interpretation is willingly acknowledged by authors of textbooks offering an interpretation of the Old Testament. (Cf. R. H. Pfeiffer Old Testament Introduction, 1941; p. 141; Gerald Larue, Old Testament Life and Literature, pp. 31-33; and others).

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The viewpoint that Moses was responsible for the Pentateuch as held by Jewish and Christian scholars was brought into question during the eighteenth century. The literary partition of Genesis was suggested by Witter (1711) and Astruc (1753) on the basis of two names used for deity in the first two chapters. Eichhorn (1775) developed this idea of documents on a scientific basis, identifying literary styles for various documents throughout the entire Pentateuch. Graf (1865) advocated the theory that the laws during Old Testament times developed from the simple to the complex. The classic exposition of this documentary hypothesis in contrast to Mosaic authorship was published by Julius Wellhausen (1878). Using the literary analysis with ingenuity and creativity he proposed four hypothetical documents, each reflecting the times in which they were written—J (Jehovah) composed during Jehoshaphat's reign, ca. 850 B.C.; E (Elohim) written during the time of Jeroboam II, ca. 750 B.C.; D (Deuteronomy) originating during the Josian era, ca. 650 B.C.; and P (Priestly Code) dated in exilic times, ca. 550 B.C.—for the composition of the Pentateuch by about 400 B.C. Wellhausen was influenced by Hegel and Darwin in advocating the concept that Israel's religion evolved from animism to national henotheism and finally under the influence of the prophets and exilic conditions into ethical monotheism. The book of Genesis yielded no historical knowledge. The patriarchs were but primitive nomads and the religion of Israel began with the exodus. The law came in the wake of the prophetic movement which began in the eighth century, while the psalms were largely exilic or later.

The Wellhausen position regarding the composition of the Pentateuch seemed so reasonable, sure, and satisfying to contemporary scholarship that it gained a wide acceptance. Penetratingly influential in the dissemination of this theory was the book by S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, published in 1891 and republished in the Meridian series in 1957. During the early decades of this century many volumes in Old Testament studies were published, not the least of which was *Introduction to the Old Testament* by R. H. Pfeiffer in 1941. Optimism prevailed that this literary-critical method had produced results that were firmly established and assured for all times.

Samuel J. Schultz, *The Gospel of Moses* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), pp. 48-50.

The Mosaic Hypothesis of Authorship
When the Pentateuch is taken seriously against the background of ancient Near Eastern culture as it has become known in recent times, it is reasonable to consider Moses as its author. Being trained in Egypt when the pharaohs extended their control up to the Euphrates River, Moses may have had as classmates royal hostages from the city-states in Palestine and Syria so that the culture and languages of the fertile crescent became part of his general education. His awareness of the divine promises to the patriarchs and his involvement in leading the Israelites out of Egypt to the land of Canaan provided the general circumstances in which he would have been concerned to write an account of God's relationship with man available to posterity. The book of Genesis provided the introduction and background as Moses reminded the Israelites on the Moab plains that God's love for them as a chosen people began with the patriarchs.

The covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai was given in written form in the model of contemporary treaties. Several references—Exod. 17:14; 24:4-8; 34:27; Num. 33:1f.—undeniably credit Moses with writing. When the content of Exodus-Deuteronomy is taken at face value it is apparent that Moses was personally associated with most of the content as leader of Israel and mediator between them and God. It seems reasonable that Moses committed to writing the collection of laws, the details concerning the tabernacle, the instructions concerning various offerings, the installation of the priesthood, the instructions concerning the importance and significance of the feasts and seasons they were to observe, and combined this with an account of the events that occurred under his leadership. All of this was essential for coming generations of Israelites to realize that God had chosen them, manifested His love and mercy toward them in delivering them from Egyptian bondage, and had made known to them through Moses the covenant way of life so that through their personal devotion and commitment they would express their love for God, thereby fulfilling the law. The primacy of writing down important material in contemporary culture certainly is applicable when the revelation of God to Israel at Mount Sinai is recognized.

If there ever was a historic situation where a written document would have been considered important in the ancient Near East, it was the occasion in which Moses gave his farewell to the Israelites on the Moab plains before his death. He

focused attention upon the unique divine revelation at Mount Sinai in which a special relationship between them and God was established. His basic concern was that this unique relationship with God should be maintained in a wholehearted exclusive devotion to and love for God not only by them but also by coming generations. To preserve it for posterity, Moses provided the law in written copies to be kept by the ark, according to Deuteronomy 31. The priests were charged with the responsibility to teach the people and provide copies for future leaders of Israel. Oral dissemination to every household was made through the public reading of the law every seven years. It would indeed have been inappropriate in the light of contemporary practice if Moses had left the content of God's great revelation to Israel to the process of oral transmission to posterity without taking advantage of preserving this in written form.

Based on the witness of contemporary culture and the internal claims of the Pentateuch itself, the present writer regards the first five books as essentially the work of Moses in interpreting the Old Testament, giving emphasis to the basic idea of the God-man relationship. Crucially significant is the Sinaitic revelation in which God spoke to Israel through Moses. Out of this issued the written word of divine revelation marking the birth of the Old Testament canon. With this in written form, the background for the God-man relationship is given in Genesis, which is unparalleled in literature and history as an introduction. With Moses as the great prophet, a written record is provided which was authoritative for Joshua and his generation of Israelites as well as posterity. By God-fearing people the Pentateuch was regarded as God's revelation and was supplemented by the prophets throughout Old Testament times.

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OF MEN & MIRACLES

This miracle consisted of seeing the rod which they possessed become a serpent (v. 9). Following the Lord's instructions they went to Pharaoh, presumably at a royal residence near the Delta Region, and cast down the rod as commanded. The rod suddenly became a serpent (v. 10). This miraculous sign was designed to confirm the fact that the message that Moses and Aaron brought indeed came from the living God, a God whom Pharaoh claimed not to have known—or in any case refused to obey (cf. 5:2). Pharaoh, however, was not convinced that this miracle possessed any uniqueness or was indeed anything different from what Egyptian magicians and sorcerers could duplicate; thus, wise men and sorcerers were called in to perform for Pharaoh, vindicating his suspicions (v. 11).

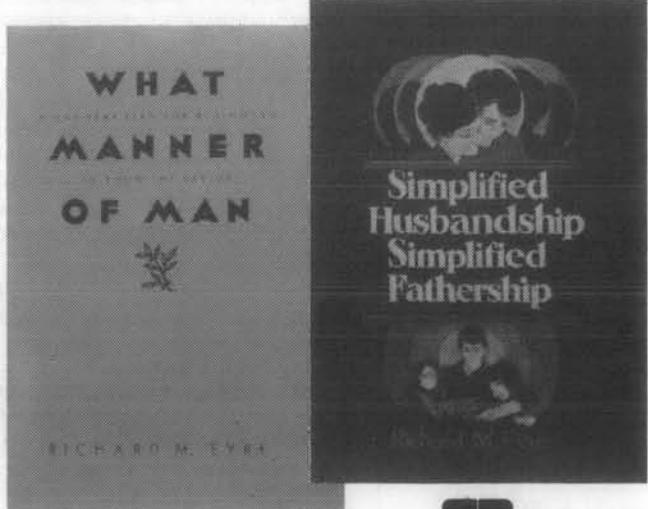
We know from ancient documents that magic and sorcery were not only common throughout the land of Egypt, but played a significant role in the lives of the pharaohs. From the Old Kingdom period comes a very interesting and

informative tale about King Khufu and the magicians (*Papyrus Westcar* in Berlin). While the story related to King Kheops, the builder of the great pyramid, the present papyrus manuscript dates back only to the Hyksos period. The story concerns tales told by the son of Kheops relating to the wonders which magicians had performed in the past. Later one of his sons informed him that he knew a living magician who could work miracles. This magician was brought before the king and worked miracles in the king's presence, and in addition to that predicted the future. What precisely do we mean when we speak of "Egyptian magic?" Included in this multifaceted subject would be

"... cursing (including killing); curing; erotic magic; agricultural (including weather); divination; and resurrection. Since magic and medicine are hard to untangle, and since the Egyptians did not, as a rule, try to untangle them, we will discuss curative magic under medicine."

The question that has long plagued scholars revolves around the nature of the events which followed the miracle performed by Moses and Aaron. Just precisely what did the magicians in Egypt do? The biblical text expresses the

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fact that they "also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents . . ." (vv. 11-12). These verses have received four basic interpretations. The first is that the event was merely an optical illusion; that is:

Moses describes the act of the sorcerers as it appeared to Pharaoh and the spectators . . . They represent the magicians as deceiving the spectators by acting upon their imagination.

Such trickery or deceit is many times attributed either to Satan himself or to evil spirits. This interpretation relies heavily on the Hebrew expression *blatehem* (v. 22) which is variously translated as "with their enchantments" (KJV), "by their secret arts (RSV) or "with their witchcraft" (*Jerusalem Bible*). The verb used in this passage (*lahat*) literally means to "blaze up, to flame." The advocates of this viewpoint argue that the magicians produced a dazzling delusion with the use of their rods thus deceiving those present; however, since the Septuagint translates this word as *pharmakeiai* which means "sorcery, magic, or magical arts" (cf. Gal. 5:20), it may well be that the original root was the Hebrew *lat* or *lat* which means secrecy or mystery.

The second interpretation offered is simply that the magicians performed an effective sleight of hand thus convincing Pharaoh that a miracle had been performed. This view would argue that actual serpents did appear but were produced by a sleight of hand rather than a mere illusion occurring with perhaps no serpents being present at all. Commentators who advocate this view either argue that the magician produced the snakes by the sleight of hand alone or that Satan actually aided in the performance of this event; in other words, the substitution of actual serpents for the rods of the magicians was accomplished by the power of Satan.

The third view which has been suggested for the meaning of this passage is best summarized by James G. Murphy:

It is certain that the charming of serpents has long been practiced in Egypt and adjacent countries. The serpent called *hage* by the Arabs, apparently the asp, can be made to appear as dead or rigid as a stick, and of course, restored to its natural state again.

K. A. Kitchen notes that this kind of conjuring was not uncommon in Egypt. The cobra (Arabic *naja haje*) could be

rendered immobile if pressure was applied to the muscles at the nape of the neck. It is the general viewpoint of the advocates of this position, and the ones discussed above, that men (and Satan) do not have the power to create life. It has been pointed out that the three things duplicated by the magicians—the turning of their rods into serpents (7:12), turning the water into blood (7:22), and bringing up the frogs (8:7)—did not involve the creation of life; whereas, the producing of lice from inanimate dust did require this (8:16-19) which the magicians could not perform and so confessed.

The final view is that the magicians actually did perform some miraculous feat, probably by evil supernaturalism. One writer argues, "it is clearly not mere jugglery nor sleight of hand. It is suggested that men under the influence of demonic power can do things which would fall in the classification of miraculous; therefore, under the influence of satanic power the magicians performed real miracles, thus hardening Pharaoh's heart. It is, of course, understood that God restricts the exercise of such power, and on this particular occasion permitted the magicians to perform in such a way as to guarantee the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

The solution to this problem is not at all easy as indicated by the great division among conservative commentators. What is clear is that whatever the magicians did was sufficiently close to the acts of Moses and Aaron as to satisfy the heart of the wicked king. If Satan indeed does possess the power to create life (or the illusion of life), then the acts of the magicians were miraculous in nature. If, however, it can be argued effectively that evil men and evil spirits do not possess such powers, then the conclusion must necessarily be that the magicians through sleight of hand and deception were able to satisfy the desires of Pharaoh even though what they performed was not an exact duplicate of that which Moses and Aaron had done. Whatever the precise nature of their work, one thing is clear: It accomplished what God intended; namely, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

Jacob J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971, pp. 81-84.

WAS MOSES TRANSLATED?

It may be said that Enoch and his holy city went to heaven, that Elijah was caught up, and that it is generally believed that Moses did NOT die; still the sentence that is passed upon all mankind will come upon them at some time or other.

They must meet this change, to be prepared to enter into the celestial kingdom of our Father and God.

Brigham Young, President of the Church, An Address, June 19, 1859, *Journal of Discourses* 6:333, 7:193.

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. (Deuteronomy 34:5-6.)

Do you think God revealed that? I am satisfied He did not. The person who revised these books added that by way of explanation. How do they know he died, or how do they know the Lord buried him? They simply learned that Moses went out of the midst of the people; they did not know what became of him; so they supposed he died and that the Lord buried him, because nobody else had done so. 'No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.' No wonder; we have learned, *he was treated the same as Elijah was*; not taken up in a chariot of fire perhaps, but TRANSLATED, quickened by the power of God, that he might remain as a witness of the Lord unto the last day. He appeared with Elijah to Jesus in the mount of transfiguration. It is appointed unto all men *once* to die; but some men have been translated, as it was in the days of Enoch, and they will like others pass through the great change.

Charles W. Penrose, An Address, June 25, 1893, *Millennial Star* 55:559, August 28, 1893.

We understand why Elijah and Moses were preserved from death. Because *they had a mission to perform*, and it had to be performed BEFORE the crucifixion of the Son of God, and it COULD NOT be done in the spirit. *They had to have tangible bodies*. Christ is the first fruit of the resurrection; therefore if any former prophets had a work to perform preparatory to the mission of the Son of God, or to the dispensation of the meridian of times, it was ESSENTIAL that they be preserved to fulfill that mission *in the flesh*."

Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Twelve, *Doctrines of Salvation* 2:110-111.

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This book is valuable to the student interested in the role of covenants, blessings, and obedience in Old Testament times.



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