

## ***Sanctuaries (Central and Local) in Pre-Exilic Israel, With Particular Reference to the Book of Deuteronomy\****

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Discussions on the central sanctuary in the cultus of Israel have tended to make the reformation of Josiah their starting point. The 'Book of the Law', discovered while the Temple was in process of restoration in the year 622-621 BC, which most scholars would identify with the whole, or at least part, of our present book of Deuteronomy, is held to have influenced profoundly the future course of the Reformation, particularly with regard to the centralization of worship at Jerusalem. It is proposed in this article to begin with the traditional view of a Mosaic background to the Book of Deuteronomy, and then to trace the main strands of evidence down to the period of the Exile. A generation or two ago such an approach would have caused raised eyebrows in many quarters, this article would have been neatly labelled 'fundamentalist' and, in all probability, it would have remained unread. However, a number of circumstances have combined to cause a considerable modification of this attitude, including the following:

a. *Revised opinions on the date of Deuteronomy.* The date of composition of Deuteronomy is now no longer regarded as irrevocably fixed at 621 BC, although it must be conceded that a majority of scholars still hold that Deuteronomy first saw the light of day in this year. The view that it was a pious fraud perpetrated on an unsuspecting Josiah, probably with the connivance of Hilkiah the High-priest, has been replaced by the more realistic view that it was a blue-print for reform produced in the early decades of Manasseh's reign, probably by a group who had noted the limitations of the reformation of Hezekiah. In the dark and desperate years of Judah's worst king it was genuinely lost, and when discovered subsequently, it was received as an authentic work of Moses. The proponents of this view readily admit that this 'Book of the Law' was not something absolutely new: H. H. Rowley, for example, notes that 'a seventh century re-codification of Israelite law would naturally embody many old laws'.<sup>1</sup>

This view has been widely challenged in recent years, as a selection of attitudes will illustrate, the limits of time and space precluding a fuller investigation. On the one hand, there is the view that Deuteronomy was a product of the post-exilic period, the deposit of Josiah's reform rather than its programme. The chief exponents of this view, which has found few followers, are R. H. Kennett<sup>2</sup> and G. Hölscher.<sup>3</sup> Their main reason is that the idealism of Deuteronomy is out of place in the later monarchy. Against this it has to be said that it would have been not only a sheer waste of time on the part of its proponents, but an

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\* The Annual Public Lecture of the College given in the Summer Term, 1965.

<sup>1</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament*, 1960, 44.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Kennett, *Deuteronomy and the Decalogue*, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> G. Hölscher, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1921.

even greater anachronism in the impoverished post-exilic period! Moreover, this view involves a denial of the historicity of Josiah's reformation as noted in 2 Kings xxiii., which is quite unwarranted.

A far more influential group of scholars have suggested a date before the seventh century. The scholarly work of A. C. Welch<sup>4</sup> has had a considerable influence in Britain. He maintains that Deuteronomy is concerned with the purity of the cult, not its centralization, but to support this he concludes that Deuteronomy xii. 1-7 is a later inclusion. Any attempt to support a theory by the excision of evidence which seems to contradict it must be viewed with reserve. Welch sets Deuteronomy before the emergence of the great eighth-century prophets, probably in the earlier period of the monarchy. Other scholars have suggested a connection with the reformation of Hezekiah.<sup>5</sup> More recently, the studies of G. von Rad have commanded wide support. His theory is that Deuteronomy is composed of a number of well-defined groups of laws; 'apodeictic series of commandments and cultic and ritual truth of the priests deriving from the specifically religious tradition; legal material, the transmitters of which were the courts of lay judges who sat at the gates; ancient traditions and customs once observed by the army in the Holy War...';<sup>6</sup> the whole being fused together by the interpretative comments of the editor. Its final production is held to be the work of country Levites soon after 701 BC. R. de Vaux, somewhat similarly holds that it is a collection of Levitical traditions emanating from Israel and brought to Jerusalem after the fall of Samaria, and he suggests that the reference to a central sanctuary could have an original application to a Northern sanctuary, such as Shechem or Bethel, thus accounting for the ambiguity of the references in Deuteronomy.<sup>7</sup> One difficulty in the acceptance of a late date for Deuteronomy is, as von Rad himself points out, its complete freedom from the broad popular eschatological conceptions that were characteristic of Israel in the period of the monarchy.<sup>8</sup> This fact, combined with others, seems to set Deuteronomy either before or after the period of the monarchy, and the former is the more feasible.

E. Robertson argued for such an earlier date. In his view Deuteronomy is the product of a committee directed by Samuel's 'ecclesiastical councils'.<sup>9</sup> This committee is conceived to have combined the various traditions which had developed in the period of the Judges, in view of the closer unity demanded by the introduction of the monarchy. While the speculative nature of this hypothesis is apparent, much of his reasoning for an earlier date remains cogent.

R. Brinker, following Robertson, holds that the main purpose of Deuteronomy is not centralization but the protection of Israel from the influences of Canaanite idolatry. He demonstrates the impossibility of a Josianic dating of Deuteronomy, and posits a nucleus of Mosaic legislation amplified by the traditions of the sanctuaries, notably Shechem.<sup>10</sup>

G. E. Wright, while allowing that the book appeared 'in its final form probably in the sixth century BC,' comes still closer to the traditional view when he writes: 'any investigation into the origin of Deuteronomy, however, will lead ultimately to the figure of Moses himself.

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<sup>4</sup> A. C. Welch, *The Code of Deuteronomy*, 1924.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. G. Westphal, *The Law and the Prophets*, English translation, 1910, 304.

<sup>6</sup> G. von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, English translation, 1953, 23.

<sup>7</sup> R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, English translation, 1962, 338, 339.

<sup>8</sup> G. von Rad, *op. cit.*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> E. Robertson, *The Old Testament Problem with two other Essays*, 1950, 42.

<sup>10</sup> R. Brinker, *The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel*, 1946, 189-212.

Though it cannot be proved, it is nevertheless not improbable that the book rests on the tradition of an actual address of Moses before his death.<sup>11</sup>

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Two points emerge from this discussion:

1. There is a definite tendency to accept an earlier date than 621 BC, for Deuteronomy.
2. Even where the traditional view is rejected, it is allowed that Deuteronomy contains much ancient material.

b. *Renewed acceptance of the significance of Moses as a historical figure.* There is a willingness to allow Moses a far larger place in the history and traditions of Israel than would have seemed possible a generation or two ago, when some denied his very existence. Even those who admitted that Moses was a historical character showed a marked reluctance to allow him a major contribution to the Pentateuch; some attributed to him only the 'Ritual Decalogue' of Exodus xxxiv; others the 'Ethical Decalogue' of Exodus xx., possibly in a shortened form, others the 'Book of the Covenant'. Moses still appears as a shadowy, nebulous character to a scholar like Martin Noth.<sup>12</sup> But the general tendency today is to trace Israel's faith in all its major aspects back to Moses. The view of John Bright would command considerable support that '...there can be no doubt that he was, as the Bible portrays him, the great founder of Israel's faith. Attempts to reduce him are subjective in the extreme. The events of Sinai and Exodus require a great personality behind them. And a faith as unique as Israel's demands a founder as surely as does Christianity—or Islam, for that matter. To deny that role to Moses would force us to posit another person of the same name!'<sup>13</sup> On this side of the Atlantic, H. H. Rowley, in a typically thorough study in *Moses and the Decalogue* writes: 'He (Moses) gave an altogether new quality and character to the religion, established it in Israel on a basis that was unique among men, and set a new standard before his people. The originality of his work—or, as I should prefer to say, of the work wrought by God through him—remains unaffected, and of the unmatched significance of his work for the world, and of the fact that before the days of our Lord no other of equal stature arose, I am fully persuaded.'<sup>14</sup>

Our knowledge of conditions in Egypt during this period allows for the possibility of a Semite like Moses rising to a position of authority and leadership. Once the basic facts of the story in Exodus i., ii. are accepted, then the young Moses may be seen growing up, probably in one of Pharaoh's maintained harems, and, in preparation for state service, being educated with a literary and administrative background.<sup>15</sup> In the course of God's dealings with mankind, in both Old and New Testament periods and subsequently, we have many illustrations of the unique way in which He prepares a man for a distinctive service, be he an Isaiah, a Paul, an Augustine or a Martin Luther. In the providence of God, overruling the events of history and working through two humble people who braved Pharaoh's wrath in an endeavour to save

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<sup>11</sup> G. E. Wright, *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1953, II, 314, 326.

<sup>12</sup> M. Noth, *The History of Israel*, 1960, 135.

<sup>13</sup> J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 1960, 116.

<sup>14</sup> H. H. Rowley, *Men of God*, 1963, 35, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. K. A. Kitchen, *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962, art. 'Moses'.

their child from his cruel decree, there was raised up a man who was miraculously prepared for his mission of deliverance and leadership.

c. *Influence of study in other areas of Old Testament thought.* It should also be noted that a movement towards a traditional view in other areas of study predisposes scholars to treat the Mosaic narratives with greater respect than was formerly accorded to them. A clear illustration of this is the patriarchal period of Israel's history. The view of a century ago, that little credence could be given to the patriarchal narratives since they were subjected to distortion for

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centuries before they were permanently recorded in the ninth or eighth centuries BC, has been abandoned in the light of careful scholarship,<sup>16</sup> and particularly in view of the flood of illumination cast on the patriarchal period by archaeological research at such places as Mari, Nuzi, Alalakh and Ugarit. No one would expect the absolute identity of the patriarchs to be established as a result of excavation, but scholars now appreciate that the Biblical picture of this period is an accurate picture, fitting in with remarkable precision with what we know of the contemporary scene in the Fertile Crescent. Thus Abraham's purchase of a field from Ephron the Hittite (Genesis xxiii.) is being seen against similar Hittite estate transactions; the wife/sister relationship between Abraham and Sarah (Genesis xii., xx.) is being examined in the light of the Hurrian fratriarchal system;<sup>17</sup> Rachel's theft of the teraphim has obvious connections with the Nuzian laws of inheritance (Genesis xxxi., 19 ff.). Other illustrations could be given, but the point may be stressed that scholars today are studying the patriarchal narratives with a new respect. Is it possible that the traditional view of Deuteronomy, connecting it with Moses, a man vitally concerned to leave behind him adequate guidance for every conceivable contingency, will one day be seen in the same light?

d. *Comparison of the structure of Deuteronomy with other early documents.* The structure of Deuteronomy has received attention in recent years, and some have viewed it against the background of the Hittite suzerainty treaties.<sup>18</sup> The basic structure of these treaties is as follows:

1. A preamble, setting out the attributes of the king and reciting his mighty deeds and the benefits bestowed upon the vassal king.
2. the stipulations to be observed by the vassal king, particular stress being placed on the need for absolute loyalty.
3. the pronouncing of blessings on the obedient and imprecations on the disobedient.

The connection of Exodus xx. 1 ff. with this type of covenant have been observed by many.

In Deuteronomy i.-xxviii. also there are all these elements, and it has been argued that the whole book of Deuteronomy has been constructed on this pattern and that therefore the book

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<sup>16</sup> E.g. A. Alt, *Der Gott der Vater*, 1929, in the field of patriarchal religion.

<sup>17</sup> E. A. Speiser, art. 'The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives', in *Biblical and Other Studies* 1963, edited by A. Altman.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, 1955.

must be dated early. For example, 'Taking Pentateuchal history at its face value, we discover that the Book of Deuteronomy exhibits precisely the legal form which contemporary second millennium BC evidence indicates a suzerain would employ in his rule of a vassal nation like Israel at such an historical juncture.'<sup>19</sup> While we would agree that Moses would be familiar with this form of treaty and could conceivably have produced a major work like Deuteronomy on such a pattern, it appears that there is one major difficulty. It is that in the structure of Deuteronomy there is a certain lack of order which a student of homiletics is quick to notice! Welch is perhaps too disparaging when he remarks, 'while any order into which the laws may be placed is sure to be unsatisfactory, none can be quite so bad as the order in which they appear in Deuteronomy today.'<sup>20</sup> There is frequent repetition legislation on servitude is found in xv. 12-18; xxiii. 15, 16; xxiv. 7; xxiv. 14, 15 ; on matters of jurisprudence in xvi. 18-20; xvii. 8-13; xix. 15-21; xxiv. 17, 18; xxv. 1-3. Some scholars, as we have already noted, have sought to explain this by regarding the book as an amalgamation of traditions, basically similar but

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with minor variations. It would appear to weigh heavily against Deuteronomy being viewed as the work of one man *at one precise time*, and is certainly a strong factor against the view that it was produced as a 'blue print for reform' in the seventh century.

But we are not driven away from the traditional view. Rather we must examine the circumstances which lie behind Deuteronomy, as well as its structure. Accepting the historicity of Moses and his leadership of the Israelites, can we imagine him making but three main discourses to his people (i. i-iv. 40; iv. 44-xxvi. 19; xxix. i-xxx. 20)? And, on any estimate of the numbers involved, can we imagine all the Israelites hearing him on such occasions? Deuteronomy i. 1 lists a number of places, some of which cannot be identified with certainty, but which appear to cover a very wide sweep of territory, and Deuteronomy i. 3 gives a precise date to the first discourse. Taking these two verses together, and considering the probabilities of the situation, it seems a reasonable assumption that in this discourse we have the *kind of thing* which Moses had been saying over and over again to his people, impressing upon them the lessons of the past and preparing them for the task which lay ahead. In Deuteronomy iv. 45, 46, we have a reference to the location of the second discourse, but no reference to time. In view of the contents of this discourse and the nature of the occasion, it may be observed that Moses would use every opportunity to impress upon his people the need for loyalty and obedience; the need for understanding the uniqueness of the deliverance which God had wrought for them and of the relationship into which He had brought them. Moreover, he would wish to give precise instructions and warnings concerning their life following the settlement, for (assuming again the basic historicity of the career of Moses) he alone, because of his training, would be conversant with the political, economic and religious situation in Canaan. It appears to us that the second discourse in Deuteronomy is, in fact, composed of two types of material: legislative sections, which could have been written down by Moses; and extracts from a number of 'sermons' amplifying and underlining the legislation. This would explain the apparent disorder and the frequent repetitions (particularly the exhortations to faithfulness and obedience) which would hardly characterize a more formal address. Motives of reverence would possibly preclude any subsequent reshaping of the material. Our increasing knowledge of the diverse and elaborate types of literature in the

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<sup>19</sup> M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 1963, 20 (footnote).

<sup>20</sup> A. C. Welch, *op. cit.*, 23.

world of the thirteenth century BC, prevents us from ruling out such a suggestion as impossible.<sup>21</sup>

e. *Re-examination of the theories of the origin of Deuteronomy.* It is realized that careful attention needs to be given to each of the many theories concerning the origin of the Book of Deuteronomy. It is not sufficient to say with some conservative scholars that the divergent views expressed 'cancel each other out', for such a view can too easily become an excuse for intellectual laziness. Each view needs to be taken and examined carefully. It is obvious that such an examination is beyond the scope of our present survey, but it may be that from the point of view of scholarship, and not only that of faith, enough has been said to show that a basically Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy is defensible and that it, in fact, creates fewer difficulties and makes better sense of all the evidence than any other view.

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## I. AN EXAMINATION OF EXODUS XX. 24 AND DEUTERONOMY XII. 1-7

It has been widely held that Exodus xx. 22-26 and Deuteronomy xii. 1-7 are at variance with each other, the variation being explained by the fact that the Deuteronomic law was promulgated about five centuries after the legislation of Exodus xx. The crucial verse in Exodus is xx. 24: 'An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in every place where I record my name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.' This verse is held to countenance a multiplicity of altars, although it should be observed that this is not to be indiscriminate, but in 'every place where I record my name': i.e. the erection of an altar is limited to places hallowed by a theophany. It may also be observed that the phrase 'altar of earth' is singular, not plural, and that the building of such an altar on a specific occasion does not necessarily imply that a sanctuary was subsequently erected there: it may have been used only once. The immediate outworking of this is seen in Exodus xxiv. 4, 5, where Moses builds an altar, and a covenant-ceremony is observed in which all the tribes participate. Fairly general agreement has been reached by scholars that places like Shechem, Hebron, Beer-sheba and Bethel and those places where the Ark, the symbol of Yahweh's presence, rested, may be regarded as legitimate Yahweh sanctuaries. A minority have dissented, and would interpret 'in every place where I record my name' as referring to succession, not plurality, i.e. that not more than one altar could be in use at any one time.

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<sup>21</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament*, 45, and others have pointed out that Deuteronomy (D) shows no knowledge of that portion of the Pentateuch which literary criticism terms the Priestly Code (P). This, of course, is not conclusive evidence that P followed D, there are equally grave difficulties when the Priestly Code is regarded in isolation, e.g. the very slight place given to Aaron. It must be admitted that we do not know precisely the conditions under which the Pentateuch was written. It is pointed out in the *New Bible Dictionary* (in the excellent article on the Pentateuch) that while both Old and New Testaments attribute substantial parts of the Pentateuch to Moses, neither ascribes the whole work to him. The problems may be eased if we cease regarding Moses as an autocrat, jealously guarding the right to legislate in every single department. If he was the wise leader we believe him to have been, surely he would have used the immense resources available in the talents of Aaron, Miriam, Joshua and Phineas, to name but a few! While the overall genius and guiding spirit was Moses himself, others may also have shared in drawing up some of the legislative sections which could account for differences of style. This, of course, can no more be proved than the documentary hypothesis, but since the latter has run into such heavy weather lately, it is worthy of consideration.

The Deuteronomic legislation centres upon xii. 5: 'But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come.' In the chapters which follow, the expression 'the place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there' occurs several times. This is held to modify the earlier practice and to command a single central sanctuary, although it would be strange for such a major modification to be introduced without explanation. However, a number of reasons have been advanced against the view that Deuteronomy legislates for a single exclusive sanctuary:

a. *The command in Deuteronomy xxvii. to build an altar.* A major stumbling block is the command in Deuteronomy xxvii. 2 ff. to build an altar after the pattern of Exodus xx. 22-26. Clearly this is not the central sanctuary of Deuteronomy xii. which is to be erected only when they have occupied the land and the Lord 'giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety' (Deut. xii. 10). In Deuteronomy xxvii. no such delay is envisaged in the erection of the altar on Mt. Ebal, a command which was executed as promptly as possible by Joshua and the tribes (Josh. viii. 30-35). The plain implication is that the sanctuary of Deuteronomy xii. does not exclude other legitimate sanctuaries.

b. *The delay in building the sanctuary.* In view of the delay envisaged in the building of the sanctuary referred to in Deuteronomy xii. it may well be asked how the religious life of the community was to be sustained if all other sanctuaries were declared illegitimate.

c. *Practical impossibilities.* The practical impossibilities arising from a single sanctuary have frequently been observed. Deuteronomy i. 7 indicates the

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extent of the Promised Land from the Negeb to the Euphrates. One single sanctuary serving this whole area would lead inevitably to a spiritual vacuum in the outlying areas which would be destructive of faith. Moreover, it would appear to be incompatible with the provisions of Numbers xxxv. 1-8, which notes the dispersion of the Levites in the forty-eight Levitical cities, surely for the needs of local worship! Further, Deuteronomy xvi. 16 directs: 'Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles.' Thus explicit provision is made for the centralization of worship for the purpose of observing three major feasts which, in the cultus of Israel, were more than harvest festivals, being also the celebration of their past history and the great acts of God on their behalf. This is what we might expect to take place at the national shrine on such special occasions, but what is possible three times a year would be impossible for the regular, continuing cultic life of the community.

d. *Destruction of Canaanite altars.* The context of the command of Deuteronomy xii. 5 ff. should be noted. The first three verses in the chapter order the complete destruction of all the altars, mazzebot, asherim and images associated with the worship of the Canaanites. Many scholars have wondered why, if Deuteronomy was a seventh century production designed to centre worship in one sanctuary, so little prominence should be given to the fact of centralization. Surely if this was the vital purpose behind it, it would have been made crystal clear. As it is, xii. 5 is the only verse in the book which appears to speak with clarity, and a whole dogma has been raised on this one verse which does scant justice to other aspects of the

evidence. An examination of Deuteronomy xii. 1-7 shows that the essential contrast is not between the many and the one, but between the Canaanite sanctuaries and the legitimate Yahweh sanctuary. As G. T. Manley observed, 'It is not their number, but their character, which is in question'.<sup>22</sup>

e. *Necessity of the Divine sanction.* A. C. Welch insists that with the exception of Deuteronomy xii. 1-7 the legislation of Deuteronomy does not demand one central sanctuary, but recognizes only those sanctuaries which have the sanction of Yahweh's choice. We have previously drawn attention to his contention that this crucial section is a later interpolation, 'inserted with the intention of laying down a general caveat as to the principle in the light of which all the rest must be read'.<sup>23</sup> He holds that the section constitutes a unity, not connected with what precedes or what follows; that it is written in the second person plural, while most of the other legislative portions are in the second person singular; and that it is demonstrably late. His reasoning does not appear convincing, and we would prefer to regard the passage as original and face an apparent difficulty rather than excise on insufficient grounds what appears to be an inconvenient passage. But not all scholars agree with Welch that Deuteronomy xii. 1-7 unquestionably demands the centralization of the cult. Brinker<sup>24</sup> demonstrates that linguistically, the crucial phrase 'the place which the Lord your God shall choose' can mean 'in every one' clearly defined place. On the basis of this and other internal evidence, he seeks to prove that a substantial number of authorized Yahweh shrines are envisaged. Our interpretation of the evidence would be that, while God intended a central national shrine, He

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never intended it to be the only one. In view of the lack of specific reference elsewhere to an exclusive sanctuary and the considerable evidence which mitigates against a narrow view, some such interpretation of Deuteronomy xii. 5 is virtually demanded.

f. *Ambiguity of the emphasis on the central sanctuary.* G. T. Manley asks 'If the author's aim is to abolish the high places, why does he never mention them? If he wanted to centralize worship in Jerusalem, why not make it clear? Jerusalem is neither mentioned nor hinted at'.<sup>25</sup> H. H. Rowley deals convincingly with the second point and we entirely agree with him that any mention of Jerusalem in Deuteronomy (viewed by Professor Rowley as a production of the early seventh century BC) would be anachronistic.<sup>26</sup> Jeremiah vii. 12, 114; xxvi. 6; cf. Psalm lxxviii. 60, make it clear that Shiloh was recognized in the time of Jeremiah as the central sanctuary before Jerusalem. But we are not convinced that Professor Rowley deals adequately with the first point when he writes, 'The demand for a single sanctuary implied the condemnation of the high places to the author's readers, without anachronistically expressing it.' If the principle concern of Deuteronomy was to establish the law of the one central sanctuary, would not this have been made clearer? And if its necessary corollary was the destruction of the high places, would it have been left to the questionable deductive powers of the readers? Would not such a vital matter have been made crystal clear, even at the risk of being anachronistic? In any case, since it is unquestionable that there were 'high places' in

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<sup>22</sup> G. T. Manley, *The Book of the Law*, 1957, 132.

<sup>23</sup> A. C. Welch, *op. cit.*, 194.

<sup>24</sup> R. Brinker, *op. cit.*, 199, 200.

<sup>25</sup> G. T. Manley, *New Bible Dictionary*, 1962, art. 'Deuteronomy'.

<sup>26</sup> H. H. Rowley, *From Moses to Qumran*, 1963, 198 (footnote).



Canaan before the arrival of the Israelites, would the mention of them be, in fact, anachronistic? The non-mention of the high places, as a technical term, in the legislative sections in Deuteronomy, is a powerful argument against the commonly accepted view of the late origin of the book. The word for 'high places' occurs only twice in Deuteronomy (xxxii. 13; xxxii. 29), and in both places it means simply 'lofty heights'. This is its early connotation before it became connected with a particular type of altar sanctuary which probably took the form of a raised platform on which cultic objects were placed. Indeed, what is noted of the religious observances of the inhabitants of the land is no more than Moses could be expected to know. If the basic historicity of the narrative be allowed, then we have a man, conscious of the origin of his people in a land which according to their tradition was the Promised Land, in a unique position to discover the details of every aspect of the life of that land. Such knowledge would be refreshed and brought up to date by the visit of the spies (Num. xiii.) who included Joshua and Caleb, two of the leaders of the nation. It may be surmised that Moses had adequate knowledge of the conditions which would confront the tribes in Canaan, and this knowledge would be considerably strengthened following the defeat of the Canaanite kings Sihon and Og and the occupation of their territory before his death. Conditions in Transjordan were basically similar to those west of the Jordan. If the complexity of the ordinances contained in Deuteronomy be raised as a difficulty, it must be remembered that the community life of the Israelites was not to *begin* in Canaan, it was already a fact, and as such, legislation would have developed throughout the wilderness period, including the prolonged stay in the semi-arable area of Kadesh-barnea.

g. *Correspondence between Exodus and Deuteronomy.* There is, in fact, a remarkable correspondence between the legislation of Exodus and Deuteronomy.

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A danger of distortion occurs when a verse or a passage is taken in isolation. Passages like Exodus xxiii. 14-17, and xxxiv. 23 presuppose a central sanctuary and are closely parallel to similar passages in Deuteronomy. The implication of Exodus xxxiv. 24 is that attendance at the central sanctuary is limited to the occasions of the great national feasts. Exodus xxiii. 24, and xxxiv. 13 command the destruction of the Canaanite sanctuaries and show a marked correspondence to the Deuteronomy legislation. All these passages in Exodus are, on any estimate, early. We conclude, therefore, with the assertion that it is incredible that Exodus xx. 24 should be held to countenance a multiplicity of sanctuaries to the exclusion of a central sanctuary, or that Deuteronomy xii. 1-7 should be held to legislate for a central sanctuary to the absolute exclusion of all other legitimate sanctuaries.

## II. THE EVIDENCE FOR A CENTRAL SANCTUARY

a. *The Amphictyonic League.* It is well known that in ancient Greece there was an assembly comprised of representatives from the twelve leading states. These delegates were called 'amphictyons', they met in the 'Amphictyonic Council' and the union of states was designated an 'Amphictyony'. Recent research has shown that there are a number of close parallels to this system in other areas of the Mediterranean, and the Israelite confederation of tribes is being viewed in this light. The number of the tribes; the religious nature of the bond which united them; and the centralization of their life in a definite place for purposes of worship and inter-tribal administration; all these meet the requirements of this pattern and are

consistent with the oldest Israelite traditions. This subject has obvious connections with the question of a central sanctuary.

It is questioned when this league came into being. Any answer to this must take into account the composition of Israel at the time of the Conquest. Some scholars, denying that all Israel was in Egypt, have postulated three phases by three separate groups in the occupation of Canaan; an invasion from the East over Jordan, in which the 'Rachel tribes' (notably Ephraim and Manasseh) figured prominently; infiltration and conquest from the South by the 'Leah tribes' (Judah, Simeon, the Kenites and others); occupation of the land north of the Esdraelon Valley by the 'handmaiden tribes'. Those who hold this view maintain that the northern (or 'handmaiden') tribes were not worshippers of Yahweh until Deborah (c. 1125 BC) gathered the tribes together for united action in His name. The Amphictyonic League is held to have come into being after the victory won by Deborah, Barak and their forces (Jud. iv., v.).

This view must be regarded with grave doubts. On the surface it appears unlikely that the northern tribes would accept *en bloc* the religious traditions of their neighbours. Moreover, it rather ignores the seductive power of Canaanite worship and the political and geographical factors making for disunity. If the League was not in existence at the Conquest it is difficult, if not impossible, to account for it at a later date. Bright's view appears to be the only realistic one, 'A league of clans of some sort must be presumed to have antedated the conquest.... Further, not only was the Amphictyony aware that its God had come from Sinai (e.g. Judg. v. 4 f.; Deut. xxiii. 2) but the very events celebrated in its cult were those of exodus, wilderness, and conquest (Deut. vi. 20-25; xxvi. 5-10a; Josh. xxiv. 2-13). This would be passing strange had Israel's definitive

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constitution actually originated in Palestine.<sup>27</sup> While general assent may be given to Albright's view that there were 'pre-Israelite Hebrews' it is clear that their numbers were limited and their influence upon the tribal traditions negligible. The evidence supports the view that the Amphictyonic League has its origin in the covenant event at Sinai.

A tribal structure of this kind would demand a central sanctuary, where the Amphictyonic Council could meet, and where the great national festivals, celebrating the chief events in Israel's tradition, could be observed. This fits in with the requirements of Deuteronomy, and leads us to consider the location of the Central Sanctuary.

b. *The Location of the Central Sanctuary:* (i) *Shechem*. Shechem has a strong claim to be considered as the first centre of the Amphictyonic League. Reference has already been made to Joshua viii. 30-35 where Joshua leads the tribes in the solemn ceremony of ratification of the Law commanded in Deuteronomy xxvii. 1-8. The minor differences in detail attest the independence and authenticity of the record. Shechem lay in the valley between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, which featured in this ceremony, and moreover, it had strong patriarchal associations (Gen. xii. 6, 7; xxxiii. 19). It was thus a centre of considerable importance, and it is not surprising to discover it again at a slightly later date as the place where a covenant-renewal ceremony is presided over by the aged Joshua (Josh. xxiv.). The ark of the covenant is mentioned in Joshua viii. 33, but is not referred to in Joshua xxiv. The silence in the latter instance may be accidental, on the other hand it may indicate that Shechem did not long

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<sup>27</sup> J. Bright, *op. cit.*, 145.

remain as the Amphictyonic shrine. There is strong evidence that it was a city which was assimilated by the Israelites rather than conquered; nowhere is its capture noted, and it appears to be under the influence of Canaanite religion and culture in the Judges period (cf. the mention of Baal-berith—'the lord of the covenant' in Jud. ix. 4).<sup>28</sup> But while this may have mitigated against its continuance as the central shrine, it is likely, as Martin Noth observes, that the old ceremony continued to be observed there, since customs tend to cling tenaciously to a particular place.<sup>29</sup>

(ii) *Bethel*. The evidence points to Bethel becoming the next central sanctuary of the tribes. The ark was located there (Jud. xx. 27), and it was to Bethel that the tribal representatives went to obtain guidance (Jud. xx. 18, 26 ff.; xxi. 2 ff.). The assembling together of the tribal levies at Mizpah (Jud. xx. 1, 3 ; xxi, 1, 5, 8) is probably to be accounted for by the fact that Mizpah was more conveniently situated for dealing with the trouble in Gibeah, a Benjamite city. The reason why Bethel was abandoned is not clear. The suggestion advanced by Noth, that 'the Ark was formerly a travelling shrine which it was not intended should become the object of a local cult after the manner of the Canaanites' seems to assume a nomadic background for Israel.<sup>30</sup> This is called into question by the facts: the Patriarchs themselves nowhere appear as true nomads, their origin is traced to the great centres of civilization and they are always portrayed as moving in the vicinity of cities; the Israelites, even in the wilderness period, spent a considerable time in a sedentary state in the proximity of Kadesh-barnea; archaeology too, indicates that the Israelites settled down immediately after the conquest of Canaan.

Nor is there any definite evidence for Noth's suggestion that Gilgal at one

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time functioned as the Central Sanctuary. It certainly had important associations with Israel's crossing of the Jordan; a new generation of Israelites was circumcised there in a ceremony which inferred that the covenant, broken by their fathers' disobedience, was now restored; the first Passover in the land was also observed there; Gilgal subsequently became the base for future operations (Josh. v. 9, 10; vi, 11, 14 ff.; ix. 6 ff.; x. 1 ff., etc.).<sup>31</sup> But the part played by Shechem in the earliest period warns us not to attach too much importance to Gilgal.

(iii.) *Joshua xxii. 9-34*. Before passing on to the importance of Shiloh it is well to look at the peculiar incident noted in Joshua xxii. 9-34 in which the action of the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh in building a 'great altar' by the River Jordan provoked the remainder of the tribes to immediate hostile action. The two and a half tribes convinced their brethren that their altar was not for sacrifice but for a witness to the unity of the tribes. Whether this explanation was genuine or a piece of quick thinking to escape from a dangerous predicament is immaterial, although the weight of probability favours the former, otherwise the altar would surely have been built in their own portion to the east of Jordan. What is of interest is the prompt reaction of the remainder of the tribes and the extremely serious manner

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. my article in *Vox Evangelica* III, 1964, 49.

[[http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol03/monarchy\\_cundall.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol03/monarchy_cundall.pdf)]

<sup>29</sup> M. Noth, *op. cit.*, 92.

<sup>30</sup> M. Noth, *op. cit.*, 94.

<sup>31</sup> Some scholars have suggested that that Gilgal near Shechem, not Gilgal near Jericho became Joshua's permanent camp cf. R. Brinker, *op. cit.*, 145.

in which they viewed this action as one of rebellion against the Lord (xxii. 12, 16 ff.). Verses 19 and 29 suggest that the reason for this is that the altar of witness was in fact regarded as in opposition to the 'altar of the Lord our God that is before his tabernacle.' A further fear is expressed in verse 19 which compares their action with the incident at Baal-peor, when many Israelites indulged in the licentious orgies of the Canaanite Baal worship (Num. xxv). Combining these two reasons, it is clear that the tribes westward of Jordan viewed the building of this altar as a breach of the Amphictyony by the establishment of a separate sanctuary for the two and a half tribes, with the added danger of a reversion to the Baal-worship of Canaan. In view of the essential unity of the tribes, this twofold act of rebellion against both the people and Yahweh (v. 19) would, it was feared, involve the whole congregation of Israel in punishment. This incident illustrates that the national worship of Israel was centred in the Amphictyonic shrine and that the Amphictyony exercised a conservative influence, preventing the indiscriminate erection of altars. We agree with Noth that 'the central shrine no more excluded the use of other shrines than it did in other tribal associations,'<sup>32</sup> although we would not admit that the worship conducted at other shrines deviated in any marked way from the worship at the central shrine; major irregularities would clearly be dealt with by the concerted power of the tribes.

(iv.) *Shiloh*. In the incident referred to in the preceding section Shiloh is mentioned as the place of departure of the two and a half tribes and the assembly point of the west-Jordan tribes (Josh. xxii. 9, 12). An earlier mention is found in Joshua xviii. 1 which notes that the tent of meeting was located there and that there also the tribes assembled themselves. It would appear that Shiloh became the Central Sanctuary soon after the settlement, possibly for a limited period, and then later on, in the Judges period for an extended period. W. F. Albright, in his assessment of the evidence, rejects the view that the Amphictyonic shrine was first at Shechem, and then at Bethel. He maintains

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that Shiloh from the first was the focal point of the tribes, but his reasons are not convincing.<sup>33</sup>

It is not clear what claim Shiloh had to this place of honour. It had no patriarchal association nor any other claim to prominence; possibly, as Bright suggests, it was chosen because of 'its lack of extraneous associations.'<sup>34</sup> It appears in Judges xxi. 19, cf. 12, as the centre of an annual festival (possibly the Feast of Ingathering) in which dancing played a prominent part. However, as already noted, it would appear from Judges xx. 18, 26, 27; xxi. 2 that the central sanctuary at this time was at Bethel. It is admitted that while this is most likely it is not conclusive. Some scholars regard Beth-el as referring to the tabernacle itself, not to the place of that name, but while the tabernacle is called the 'house of Yahweh' or the 'house of Elohim', nowhere is it called the 'house of El'. Others have suggested that the tabernacle was moved to Bethel during this emergency, so that it would be in closer proximity to the army at Mizpah. Judges xviii. 31, which refers to the house of God being in Shiloh, is not determinative, since there is no clear indication of the chronological relationship of Judges xvii., xviii. to Judges xix.-xxi. The probability is that Judges xvii., xviii. follow Judges xiii.-xvi. because they deal with a similar situation, viz. the increasing Philistine pressure reflected

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<sup>32</sup> M. Noth, *op. cit.*, 96.

<sup>33</sup> W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 1953, 103.

<sup>34</sup> J. Bright, *op. cit.*, 147.

in both the Samson narratives and the Danite migration from their tribal portion adjacent to Philistia. This points to the later period of the Judges period, in which case the mention of Shiloh in Judges xviii. 31 connects up with the information given in 1 Samuel. Chapters xix.-xxi., therefore, probably belong earlier in the period of the Judges.

By the middle of the eleventh century BC, a permanent centre for the centralized worship of Israel, described in 1 Samuel i. 9 as the 'temple of the Lord', was established at Shiloh. It had doors and doorposts (1 Sam. i. 9; iii. 15), the ark of the Lord was located there, and there was a regular attendant ministry under the supervision of Eli and his two sons. Thither the tribes resorted for an annual festival (1 Sam. i. 3, 21), and 1 Samuel ii. makes it clear that there was a continuing ministry also. The ark of the Lord was removed from the sanctuary and carried into battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. iv. 4), but this appears to have been a desperate expedient rather than regular procedure.

The actual destruction of Shiloh is not mentioned in Scripture, but reference is made to this event in Psalm lxxviii. 60 and Jeremiah vii. 12, 14; xxvi. 6, 9; where it is regarded as an act of judgment upon Israel's iniquity and misplaced trust. Archaeological excavations at the site of Shiloh have confirmed its destruction c. 1050 BC, and this supports the view that the Philistines, having captured the ark and defeated the Israelites a second time, were emboldened to destroy the Amphictyonic shrine of their enemies. The years that followed were turbulent and difficult ones, with Philistine pressure making orderly community life difficult, and it is not easy to determine where the centre of worship was during this period, or indeed, whether it was possible to establish anything like a permanent centre of the Amphictyony during this period of foreign domination. Samuel's circuit included Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Ramah and 1 Samuel x. 3 tells of 'three men going up to God to Bethel', which suggests that the worship at these well-established sanctuaries continued. A comparison of 1 Samuel xxii. 11 with 1 Samuel xiv. 3 indicates that some part of the priestly circle at Shiloh transferred to Nob following the destruction of Shiloh. But

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the threat from Philistia to any united action of the Israelite tribes, and the absence of the ark of the Lord, would make for de-centralization. We can understand Samuel's neglect of the ark, even after its return to Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam. vii. 1, 2), if we assume that it had been used talismanically in the battle against the Philistines; such a false faith would be abhorrent to him. In the case of Saul, the ark was probably regarded as a discredited symbol and therefore ignored.<sup>35</sup>

(v.) *Gibeon*. It is not known with certainty when the sanctuary at Gibeon originated. Gibeon and its three confederated cities had successfully deceived the Israelites at the time of the Conquest, and henceforth were incorporated by treaty into Israel (Josh. ix.). Joshua ix. 27 records that 'Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, unto this day, in the place which he should choose.' The precise meaning of this is not clear; the confederate cities would be in reasonable proximity to Bethel, but not to Shiloh or Shechem, possibly the Gibeonites performed their duties at the current Amphictyonic shrine in some system of rotation.

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<sup>35</sup> In 1 Samuel xiv. 18 read 'ephod' for 'ark' with LXX. cf. 1 Samuel vii. 1 ff.; 2 Samuel vi.

1 Kings iii. 4. describes the sanctuary at Gibeon as 'the great high place', where Solomon worshipped after his coronation. Supplementary information is given by the Chronicler, who informs us that the 'tent of meeting' of the wilderness period (also described as 'the tabernacle of the Lord') was there and a brazen altar, but not the ark of the Lord (1 Chron. xvi. 39; xxi. 29; 2 Chron. i. 3, 6, 13).<sup>36</sup> These references suggest that Gibeon had some claim to be regarded as the major sanctuary in Israel after the sack of Shiloh, but it is doubtful whether it can be regarded as the centre of the Amphictyony in the same way as Shechem, Bethel or Shiloh, at least during the period of Philistine domination.

(vi.) *Jerusalem*. When David, following his first abortive attempt, brought back the ark of the Lord from Kiriath-jearim, it was to Jerusalem that he brought it, not Gibeon. If, as the Chronicler records, the tent of meeting was at Gibeon it would appear to be a more appropriate resting-place for the ark than the tent which David pitched at Jerusalem (2 Sam. vi. 17; 2 Chron. i. 4). However, there was a wise purpose behind the action of David. The Philistine supremacy had been broken and he was now king of a united Israel. His immediate concern was to heal the breach between north and south. Two of the steps which he took to achieve this are of direct concern to us:

1. He captured the Jebusite fortress of Jerusalem which lay in neutral territory on the dividing line between the northern and southern groups of tribes. This he achieved by the use of his own standing army, without calling upon the tribal levies (2 Sam. v. 6-9). He then made it his capital. It was David's gift to the nation and was acceptable to both north and south, illustrating his political astuteness and diplomacy.

2. He brought the ark of the Lord to the new capital (2 Sam. vi.). Martin Noth comments, 'the position in world history which Jerusalem has occupied ever since is due to this very act.'<sup>37</sup> David's motives may have been to claim that Jerusalem was the legitimate successor to Shiloh as the Amphictyonic shrine; to deepen the sense of unity in the tribes by stressing the religious nature of the bond which linked them; to allay the fears of those who regretted the

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adoption of the monarchical system by providing this connection with the Judges' period. Bright's comment, like that of Noth, is no over-statement: 'It was a master-stroke. It must have done more to bind the feelings of the tribes than we can possibly imagine.'<sup>38</sup>

The step which David had taken was a decisive one. In the latter portion of his reign he conceived the plan of building a permanent structure to house the ark of the Lord. This he was not permitted to do, but with the Lord's refusal Nathan also brought the Lord's promise that the king's son would erect such a sanctuary (2 Sam. vii.). Thereafter the historian notes the fulfilment of this promise in 1 Kings v., vi. in the construction of that magnificent edifice known to posterity as the Temple of Solomon. This confirmed the place of Jerusalem to be the central sanctuary, the Holy Hill of Zion, the House of the Lord, a place which it occupied until the fulfilment of the prophetic word, when the Lord made 'this house like Shiloh... a curse to all the nations of the earth.' (Jer. xxvi. 6).

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<sup>36</sup> On the reliability of the Chronicler see D. F. Payne, *Faith and Thought* Vol. 93-2, 1963, art. 'The Purpose and Methods of the Chronicler.'

<sup>37</sup> M. Noth, *op. cit.*, 191.

<sup>38</sup> J. Bright, *op. cit.*, 180.

### III. THE EVIDENCE FOR OTHER ISRAELITE SANCTUARIES

a. *Before the Disruption.* First, in the Book of the Judges we have evidence of two altars being used in connection with theophanies. In the case of Gideon (Jud. vi. 24-26) this altar continued in existence up to the time of the recording of the incident. In the case of Manoah and his wife (Jud. xiii. 19, 20) the altar seems to have been an improvised one; there is no warrant for viewing it as a formal rock-stepped altar, and there is no suggestion of its continued existence. In neither case is there any evidence that permanent sanctuaries were established on the sites.

Secondly, at the time of Samuel it must be remembered that the Central Sanctuary at Shiloh had been destroyed by the Philistines, who had also captured the Ark. We have already noted that these events and the continuing pressure of the Philistines made for a certain disorder in this period, which must be borne in mind when assessing the evidence, for it is unscientific to take incidents which occur in a time of crisis and confusion and regard them as normative. Further, it may be pointed out that this was a time of transition. Saul has been regarded as the last of the judges as well as the first monarch and Samuel himself appears as the connecting link between a judge and a prophet.

The men of Beth-shemesh made a sacrifice of the two milch-kine which the Philistines had employed to return the Ark to the Israelites (1 Sam. vi. 12-18). This sacrifice (following the variant reading of the Septuagint and the Targum) was offered on a great stone, which remained as a witness to the occasion till the day of the writer. The incident was clearly one of national significance, and the sacrifice offered may be viewed as parallel to sacrifices offered on other events of such importance, e.g. after the victory gained over the Amalekites (Ex. xvii. 15).

While there is evidence that some of the priestly functions continued in the family of Eli (1 Sam. xiv. 3), it would appear that Samuel, who had been apprenticed to Eli and was generally believed to be established as a future prophet of the Lord (1 Sam. iii. 20), was *de facto* if not actual high priest. Some of the functions normally carried out at the Amphictyonic shrine seem to

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have attached themselves to him, therefore, as the leading representative of Yahweh in the land. He offered sacrifice on national occasions: before a battle at Mizpah (1 Sam. vii. 9); following a victory over the Philistines (1 Sam. xiv. 35). On another occasion (1 Sam. xiii. 8 ff.) Samuel was expected to offer sacrifice in a further national emergency, but was anticipated by Saul, impatient of the prophet's tardiness, but possibly also laying a personal claim to be a priest-king similar to those in other kingdoms of the Fertile Crescent, and thus able to offer sacrifice. Samuel also built an altar at Ramah, probably for the regular observances of the cultus, and went to Bethlehem to offer sacrifice (1 Sam. xvi. 1-5). This has frequently been viewed as a subterfuge, but 1 Samuel xx. 6, 2.9 makes reference to an annual feast of David's family group at Bethlehem, and this may have been the occasion of Samuel's visit. In any case, the concealment of the primary motive of anointing David, whose very life would depend upon secrecy, can hardly be called deceitful. The annual family festival was

probably arranged in conjunction with the usual new moon festival (Num. x. 10; xxviii. 11-15), which would normally require David's presence at the court.

Thirdly, one further incident may be observed. David erected an altar on the site of the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite (2 Sam. xxiv. 16-25) which was the place where David perceived the angel of the Lord about to smite Jerusalem. Solomon's temple was subsequently erected on the site of this theophany.

Fourthly, before we conclude this section one interesting archaeological fact may be noted. There is abundant evidence for a multiplicity of temples and sanctuaries in Canaan during the Late Bronze Age,<sup>39</sup> i.e. in the period immediately before the Israelite occupation. It is against this background that the commandments of Exodus xxiii. 24; xxxiv. 13; and Deuteronomy xii. 2, 3 must be seen. No such archaeological evidence for true Israelite sanctuaries has yet been discovered. While this cannot be regarded as conclusive, since the Israelite occupation shows a lower architectural level, it does suggest that there was not a widespread erection of sanctuaries. This confirms what evidence is preserved for us in the Old Testament, evidence that shows a remarkable consistency which may be summarized thus: there was a central shrine of the Amphictyony and, apart from this, altars were erected at times of national peril or rejoicing; at the place of a theophany; and in connection with the normal demands of the cultus.

b. *In the Northern Kingdom subsequent to the Disruption.* There will be no necessity for an extended discussion on this subject, since the religious observances of the period deviated so considerably from the normal. When Jeroboam ben Nebat became the king of the northern tribes (1 Kings xii. 20) the urgent problem confronting him was to secure the complete independence of the newly-created kingdom. An essential feature of this was the breaking of the extremely powerful centripetal force exercised by Jerusalem. Jeroboam's position would be insecure if the religious unity of the two kingdoms was perpetuated by the recognition of Jerusalem as the joint central sanctuary. Jeroboam acted swiftly in establishing two major sanctuaries in the Northern Kingdom: at Dan in the extreme north, a place with no apparent religious associations; at Bethel, in close proximity to the southern frontier, a place with an established tradition as

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a major sanctuary. At each of these sanctuaries Jeroboam placed a golden calf-image. These are not to be viewed as representations of Yahweh, but as analogous to the cherubim or ark of the Jerusalem cultus, as the visible throne or pedestal of the invisible Yahweh. However, the symbol of the bull, the cult animal of the Canaanite fertility cult, was bound to encourage, intentionally or unintentionally, a syncretism with Baal-worship. Jeroboam went beyond this in appointing priests who were of non-Levitical lineage; in changing the date of the autumn festival (Tabernacles); in an indiscriminate multiplication of sanctuaries and in officiating himself in the cultus (1 Kings xii. 25-xiii. 1). Clearly he was claiming a degree of absolutism not practised by David and Solomon, possibly claiming to be a 'sacral-king', the embodiment of deity, as is found elsewhere in the Fertile Crescent. His policy of isolating Israel from Judah was aided by the state of hostility which existed between the two kingdoms for almost half a century, until the accession of Omri in Israel.

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<sup>39</sup> W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, 1960, 103.



The northern tribes had always been more susceptible to Canaanite influences than their southern neighbours, mainly because the Canaanite cities of the coastal plain and the Valley of Esdraelon had not been occupied at the time of the Invasion by Israel (Jud. 1.), but had been conquered or assimilated over a period of centuries. In addition, Israel's advantageous place on the trade routes exposed her to these influences more than the more remote, largely agricultural Judah. Jeroboam's actions accelerated this process of syncretism, and most of his successors did nothing to remedy the situation. Ahab (869-850 BC) married the Phoenician princess, Jezebel, a marriage which was probably intended to strengthen the anti-Assyrian coalition. The price paid was a fearful one. The 'seven thousand in Israel... which have not bowed unto Baal' (1 Kings xix. 18), probably less than one per cent of the population, reflects the landslide towards Baal-worship. Archaeological research has brought to light numerous horned altars of incense, presumably connected with the pagan cults, in Israel from the tenth to the seventh century BC,<sup>40</sup> while in the Samaria Ostraca (778-770 BC) the name of Baal is incorporated in more than half as many names as those compounded with Yahweh,<sup>41</sup> indicating that Jehu's purge had not eradicated the deep-rooted syncretism in Israel's religion. All this is indicative of the movement from true Yahweh worship and warns us that we must not expect orthodoxy in this period. One might well ask where the true followers of Yahweh worshipped when all the regular sanctuaries were tainted with Canaanite influences. Doubtless many adopted the expedient of building their own altars, which, while strictly irregular, were a sheer necessity in an apostate age. Elijah laments that 'the children of Israel have... thrown down thine altars' (1 Kings xix. 14), and 1 Kings xviii. 30 observes that it was one such altar which he repaired on Mount Carmel. To charge Elijah with irregularity appears unrealistic.

Hosea and Amos, the two prophets whose ministries were directed against Israel, proclaim their message against this background of a Canaanized worship. Hosea speaks out against the multiplicity of altars (viii. 11; x. 1), not on the basis of the 'Law of the Central Sanctuary' (which, as we have attempted to show, was never meant to be interpreted in an exclusive sense), but because of the kind of worship practised there, which he describes vividly as spiritual adultery. Amos specifically names the great sanctuaries (Am. iii. 14; iv. 4-6;

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v. 4-6). In the latter reference, 'Seek ye me' is virtually in antithesis to 'seek not Bethel'; Yahweh has departed from the great sanctuaries. The reason given corresponds to that advanced by Hosea, that the worship there is absolutely corrupt (Am. ii. 7, 8; iv. 4.).

The evidence of the historical books and the prophets shows clearly that religion in Israel was debased by the adoption of Canaanite cultic practices throughout the period of the divided monarchy, a fact supported by archaeological evidence. It seems highly conjectural, therefore, and contrary to the evidence, that Deuteronomy, which is generally regarded as one of the most spiritual books of the Old Testament, should have originated in the Northern Kingdom at this time. It is even more conjectural that its aim was the centralization of worship at Shechem or Bethel. The Book of Deuteronomy, with its clear call to a pure, spiritual faith, points to an origin in an individual or a group characterized by the same lofty impulse. The traditional view of a basically Mosaic authorship meets this demand, there is not the slightest

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<sup>40</sup> W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 1957, 310.

<sup>41</sup> W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 1953, 160.

evidence of such a group in the Northern Kingdom, where the darkness of apostasy deepened until its inevitable end in judgment and destruction.

#### IV. THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH AFTER THE DISRUPTION

a. *From Rehoboam to Ahaz (922-715 BC)*. The Southern Kingdom, which was largely agricultural and somewhat isolated, was also dominated by the Temple at Jerusalem, which undoubtedly exercised a conservative influence in matters of religion. Thus the impact of Canaanite religious customs was not so great as it was in the North, at least until the end of the period, particularly in the reigns of Manasseh, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. The main source of Canaanite influence seems to have been the Judaeen court itself. Thus Rehoboam, who had mismanaged affairs so badly at his accession, also failed to check the movement away from true Yahweh-worship. 1 Kings xiv. 23, 24 notes that they 'built them high places, and pillars, and Asherim, on every high hill, and under every green tree; And there were also sodomites in the land: they did according to all the abominations which the Lord drave out before the children of Israel'. This was an adoption of all the customs associated with the fertility cult: high places, which had no claim, either by theophany or national association, to be considered as legitimate sanctuaries; the mazzebot and asherim, symbolic of the male and female elements in the deity; and the practice of ritual prostitution. This was the type of religion with which the Israelites were commanded not to compromise, and which was to be eradicated.

From this point on there were two classes of sanctuaries in Judah: those which had a claim to legitimacy, such as Hebron and Beer-sheba, and those which were associated with heathen customs, and therefore illegitimate. The editor of the Books of the Kings, who in the early days of the Exile traced the course of his nation to its final catastrophic end in the desolation of the land and the destruction of Jerusalem, saw that the judgment which had fallen was on the apostasy of the nation, an apostasy which had been encouraged and expressed at high places. Doubtless there is a measure of hyperbole in the recurring expression 'on every high hill, and under every green tree', but it graphically illustrates the editor's awareness of the proliferation of these sanctuaries, where

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a syncretistic worship was carried on, and their evil effect. In his assessment of the reigns of the individual kings he gives particular attention to their attitude to the high places. There is even a slight hint of disapproval of the worship at outlying sanctuaries before the building of the Temple, although it may be assumed that the 'high places' of 1 Kings iii. 2 were legitimate sanctuaries, and not to be confused with the 'high places' that were later synonymous with Canaanized shrines.<sup>42</sup> However, this verse may be simply factual, noting the concentration of worship at sanctuaries other than the national shrine, the successor to the Amphictyonic sanctuary, which was shortly to be built.

Asa, the grandson of Rehoboam and the first of the reforming kings, purged the high places of their heathen customs but did not remove the high places themselves. This fact is noted by the historian in a mild censure, since he is perfectly aware that in a later period the abominable heathen customs would return to those shrines which had no genuine claim to legitimacy. This minor blemish does not affect his final estimate of the king (1 Kings xv. 11-14). It appears

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. G. T. Manley, *The Book of the Law*, 1957, 129.

that during these years Yahweh-worship continued at the regular sanctuaries and at those high places which originated in Rehoboam's reign. Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, was also commended by the historian who also notes that 'the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places' (2 Kings xxii. 43), indicating that the worship itself was somewhat irregular, although the king continued the eradication of specifically Canaanite practices (1 Kings xxii. 46). A similar comment with regard to the high places is made concerning Joash (2 Kings xii. 3), but the preceding verse contains a hint that when the priest Jehoiada died the king deviated from a course which was right in the eyes of the Lord. This finds amplification in the Chronicler's account (2 Chron. xxiv. 15-22) which records that after Jehoiada's death, the king, under the pressure of his princes, reintroduced many of the features of the Canaanite religion, and forsook the strict Yahweh-worship of the Temple. The editor continues to trace the history of the high places during the reigns of the good kings Amaziah and Uzziah (2 Kings xiv. 4; xv. 4) in similar terms to those used of their predecessors.

The reign of Ahaz marked a new departure. His refusal to accept the offer by Isaiah of a sign from the Lord, and his appeal to Assyria to intervene on his behalf against the alliance of Syria and Israel (Is. vii.; 2 Kings xvi. 5-9) were indicative of a rejection of Yahweh, not simply a lack of faith in Him. The subjection to Assyria would involve the acknowledgment of the gods of Assyria, and in addition to this the Canaanite practices, which had been suppressed in the previous reigns, came in like a flood. Obviously they had never been very far from the surface. This was rank apostasy and was roundly condemned by the prophets (Is. ii. 8; Mic. i. 5-7), who also condemned the complete abandonment of moral standards which made the official Yahweh cultus an empty sham, totally unacceptable to Yahweh Himself (Is. i. 10-17; Mic. vi. 6-8). It is against this background that the reformation of Hezekiah must be set.

b. *The Reformation of Hezekiah.* The historicity of this event was often denied by scholars of an earlier age, and the Biblical account was regarded as a reflection of the later reformation of Josiah. Most modern scholars accept the reformation at its face value and seek to establish its connection with Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian attitude, pointing out that any attempt at reform was bound to

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involve the expulsion of Assyrian religious influences, which would be construed as rebellion. This is not the place to enter into a full discussion on the problem of the chronology of Hezekiah's reign, but all the facts can be harmonized if a co-regency with Ahaz is assumed for the period 728-715 BC. Some of the dates in Scripture refer to the beginning of his co-regency (e.g. 2 Kings xviii. 9, 20), others to the beginning of his sole reign (e.g. 2 Kings xviii. 23). This would allow for the beginning of his reformation in his first year as sole king, as indicated by the Chronicler (2 Chron. xxix. 3 ff.). He sought to purify the religious life of the nation and to abolish all the heathen customs which had been allowed to multiply during the reign of his father. Probably the adoption of these practices was considerably more prevalent during this period than before, and the situation may have been aggravated by the cessation of the Temple cultus with its conservative influence, as suggested in 2 Chronicles xxix. 3 ff. It was not sufficient for Hezekiah to 'clean up' the worship at the high places as Asa had done; the situation demanded stronger treatment, and Hezekiah not only removed the heathen trappings of the high places, but the high places themselves (2 Kings xviii. 4). Up to this point

we have been able to distinguish between the sanctuaries which could claim to be legitimate by their Yahwistic traditions and those which had no such claim but were simply high places after the Canaanite pattern. In Hezekiah's reformation we have no evidence as to the fate of the traditional Israelite sanctuaries. The only clue is to be found nearly a century later in the reformation of Josiah, where a distinction is made between the idolatrous priests (*kemarim*) of 2 Kings xxiii. 5 who were 'put down' and the priests of 2 Kings xxiii. 8, 9 (*kohanim*) who were brought to Jerusalem, and, while not permitted to officiate at the altar, (cf. Deut. xviii. 6-8) 'did eat unleavened bread among their brethren'. This suggests that in Josiah's time there were sanctuaries in Judah which could claim legality if not purity. But we have no knowledge concerning these 'legal' sanctuaries during and after Hezekiah's reformation, and we can do no more than infer that they continued until Josiah closed them down. However, Hezekiah's forthright destruction of the brazen serpent (2 Kings xviii. 4) indicates that no half-measures would be tolerated in his reform.

While there was a profoundly religious basis in all these actions, there were undoubtedly political undertones as well, indeed, to separate the secular from the religious in ancient Israel is difficult, since the whole of life is within the provenance of Yahweh. We have already noted this in the beginning of the previous paragraph, and it may be further observed that the fall of Samaria would imply Yahweh's rejection of Israel's syncretistic faith, a point often made in anticipation by the prophets of the North. The prophets of Judah spoke in similar terms, and the close relationship between Isaiah and Hezekiah may have encouraged the latter to take appropriate and decisive action at the earliest possible moment.

Was Hezekiah's reform based upon Deuteronomy? As we observed in the first section of this article, there are those who hold that Deuteronomy was brought to Jerusalem from the defunct Northern Kingdom after the fall of Samaria. But no clear connection between Hezekiah's reformation and Deuteronomy can be traced, and it would be hazardous to assume that Hezekiah's policy was to centralize religion in Jerusalem, and even more so to assume that

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such a policy was based upon the provision of Deuteronomy xii. 1-7. The policy was to purify rather than to centralize. The only clear word concerning centralization comes from the lips of the Assyrian general (2 Kings xviii. 22) who could not be expected to distinguish between the essentials of Hezekiah's reformation and its accidentals and who would, moreover, be concerned to make political capital out of anything. There was a measure of truth in his words in that since the time of David Jerusalem had been the centre for the national worship of the tribes.

One final fact may be observed which was to have a bearing upon the matter of centralization. Following Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BC, and the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem, a new outlook was created. For after all, only Jerusalem itself had been spared. Sennacherib himself claims to have destroyed forty-six major cities, and there is no reason to doubt that the whole land was systematically ravaged. One can well imagine that those who escaped from the Assyrian terror would be duly impressed. Jerusalem had been spared, surely (so it would be reasoned) because the Lord's House was there, which He would not allow to be touched. So the dogma of Jerusalem's inviolability developed, a dogma which was superstitious and basically irreligious; namely, that God was not concerned with people, only with the Temple (cf. Jer. vii. 4, 10, 14). Attention would thus be focused upon Jerusalem,

which alone had escaped the Assyrian scourge, and an attitude would be fostered which would facilitate Jerusalem becoming not simply the central sanctuary but the only sanctuary, to the exclusion of all others.

## V. THE REFORMATION OF JOSIAH

The tendency mentioned in the closing sentences of the previous section must not be overstressed, for the main purpose of Josiah was similar to that of Hezekiah, the abolition from the cultus of all foreign and idolatrous elements. The task which confronted Josiah was, in one aspect, greater than that of his predecessor; in other aspects it was easier. It was greater in that conditions had deteriorated steadily during the reigns of the two worst kings of Judah, Manasseh (c. 687-642 BC) and Amon (642-640 BC). The wealth of detail provided in 2 Kings xxi. indicates that the editor lived soon after the events narrated, when abundant evidence was still available. This chapter tells of the complete reversal of Hezekiah's reformation, which was doubtless linked with Manasseh's policy of subservience to his Assyrian overlords. Canaanite customs and modes of worship were observed in greater measure than at any other time in the history of Judah; connections with Assyrian and Babylonian cults are apparent, and with these was allied the abandonment of the moral requirements of the Law. 2 Kings xxi. 16 illustrates the despotic vengeance taken on those who opposed the royal policy. This was the appalling situation which confronted Josiah. But the young king's task was made easier by the fact that it coincided with the decline of Assyrian power. The account of his Reformation in 2 Kings begins with the discovery of the Book of the Law in the Temple (2 Kings xxii. 8), but as work on the restoration of the Temple was in process at this time the account of the Chronicler may be given full weight (2 Chron. xxxiv. 1 ff.). This suggests that the first tentative movement, probably confined

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to the court circles, took place in the eighth year of the king's reign (632-631 BC). A second movement, occurring in Josiah's twelfth year (628-627 BC), was characterized by a radical purge of idolatrous practices, a programme which was extended to the Northern state. As the eclipse of Assyrian power was such that Judah was virtually independent by 628 BC, there was no fear of Assyrian reprisals against Josiah's measures. The third movement noted by the Chronicler coincides generally with the narrative of the official historian.

We have already noted our belief that the Book of the Law discovered in the Temple was the whole, or at least part of, the Book of Deuteronomy. This discovery gave impetus and direction to Josiah's policy of reformation. But, as already observed, we would oppose the view that Deuteronomy was written to promote this reform. Allusion has already been made to the absence of any specific reference to the 'high places' in Deuteronomy. Other significant features of the Josianic reformation are likewise conspicuous by their absence. The idolatrous priests (*kemarim*), were singled out for annihilation by Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 5) and were clearly a major source of evil in this period (cf. Hosea x. 5; Zeph. i. 4, 5); the custom of burning of incense to Baal was prevalent at this time: neither finds mention in the Book of Deuteronomy. The legislation of Deuteronomy xviii. 6-8 (the 'Law of the Wandering Levite') states that Levites from the distant areas are to be allowed to serve in the central sanctuary, but 2 Kings xxiii. 9 records that the priests of the outlying sanctuaries were not allowed to participate in the worship at the Temple. Admittedly there is no close parallel between the two sections, but a date for Deuteronomy in the time of Josiah seems to be precluded.

It may also be questioned whether Josiah's policy of concentrating the worship in Jerusalem was based on Deuteronomy. A similar policy has already been observed in the case of Hezekiah together with the absence of specific reference to the fate of the authorized Yahweh sanctuaries. The situation which confronted Josiah was considerably more serious than that which confronted Hezekiah, because the apostasy of Manasseh and Amon was more serious in both its depth and duration than that of Ahaz. The simplest and most probable explanation of Josiah's action is that he perceived the need for a strict control of worship. The outlying shrines, including those which had a claim to legitimacy, were so corrupted that it was necessary to deal decisively with them all, which Josiah proceeded to do in a thoroughly uncompromising manner: the heathen sanctuaries were desecrated and their priests slain; the Yahweh sanctuaries were closed down and their functionaries brought to Jerusalem, where they found sustenance but were debarred from service. It was a policy of despair, based upon the seriousness of the situation, a gravity vividly illustrated by the presence of an Asherah and cult-prostitutes in the precincts of the Temple itself (2 Kings xxiii. 6, 7). As a long term policy it had its difficulties and dangers, the principal one being the creation of a spiritual vacuum in the outlying areas. But in fact the policy was of short duration. The reformation was superficial, a fact attested in the first six chapters of the Book of Jeremiah, which may confidently be dated during the reign of Josiah (Jer. iii. 6 cf. iii. 10; iv. 3, 4).<sup>43</sup> With the death of Josiah in 609 BC the reformation died also. Jehoiakim followed the policy of his great-grandfather Manasseh, the prophet Jeremiah again being our best witness to the process of deterioration and disintegration that led inevitably

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and inexorably to the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in 587 BC. The prophetic word concerning the Central Sanctuary had been fulfilled (Jer. vii. 14; xxvi. 6).

## VI. THE ATTITUDE OF THE HISTORIAN

Our belief is that the Books of the Kings were compiled by a single editor in the early years of the Exile in Babylon, using a variety of documents and sources which were in many cases contemporary with the events described. He himself stood at the end of the events narrated, and to him we are indebted for the integration of the histories of the two kingdoms, the formulae which open and close the reign of each king, and probably also for many of the sections which form commentaries on the history (e.g. 2 Kings xvii. 7-23, notice the incidental allusion to Judah in v. 19). The editor may be assumed to have belonged to that group which accepted the destruction of their capital and its shrine as the judgment of God. His history is interpretative history, and, as we observed earlier, he saw with remarkable clarity the apostasy which was the underlying cause of the catastrophe which had overtaken the nation. This apostasy sprang from the failure to protect the cultus from the corrupting influences which emanated from the heathen sanctuaries and eventually contaminated the legitimate sanctuaries, including the Temple, and the whole nation. It is not surprising, therefore, that this process is followed with particular interest by the historian, after the incidental reference in 1 Kings iii. 2 the introduction of the 'high places' which were to have

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<sup>43</sup> C. F. Whitby, *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. xiv-4, 1964, art. 'The date of Jeremiah's call'. In this article an attempt is made to show that Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry after the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. This involves textual emendations in i. 2, 3; iii. 6. Apart from this difficulty, chapters i.-iv. at least, and probably v., vi. fit better into the reign of Josiah than into any other period.

such a devastating effect is noted in 1 Kings xii. 27-xiii. 2 (Israel) and 1 Kings xiv. 23, 24 (Judah). Thereafter the reference is carefully carried through, even in the cases of the two reforming kings, Asa and Jehoshaphat, where a generally favourable judgment is unaffected by this reference. When we understand the situation of the editor we may also appreciate his motives. Some credit must be given to the editor of Kings for the fact that never again was idolatry to be a snare to Israel. It had learnt the lesson which he, with others, was concerned to impress upon it.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

1. Exodus xx. 24 and Deuteronomy xii. 1-7 are not at variance with each other, nor need they stand at widely separated places in the development of Israel's traditions.

2. There is a consistency in the sections which deal with sanctuaries in Israel. It is possible to trace the history of the Central Sanctuary in Israel in the major portion of the period from the Settlement *c.* 1225 BC until the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. This was not the only sanctuary; other sanctuaries were permitted, particularly in places where a theophany had occurred or where some event of national significance took place.

3. The consistency is not an absolute one, since man's obedience was an inconstant factor. There were deviations from the normal, and it would be as dishonest to deny this as it would be unscientific to place undue stress upon the aberrations. In Israel after the Disruption the deviation was so marked that the

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religious history of the Northern Kingdom cannot be regarded as typical of true Yahweh-worship.

4. The great danger came from the heathen sanctuaries. These were not eradicated following the Conquest of Canaan and were eventually to infect the whole religious life of the community. This process is reasonably well-documented and, in the later stages, even the legitimate sanctuaries and the Temple itself were contaminated.

5. Deuteronomy was not promulgated in the seventh century BC in the interests of cultic reform in general, or the centralization of the cult in particular. Centralization of a kind was a fact from the earliest period of Israel's history. The explanation of the origin of Deuteronomy which is more free from difficulties is the traditional one, that it is basically Mosaic, originating in the period immediately preceding the settlement in Canaan.

Arthur E. Cundall, "Sanctuaries (Central and Local) in Pre Exilic Israel, With Particular Reference to the Book of Deuteronomy," *Vox Evangelica* 4 (1965): 4-27. even greater anachronism in the impoverished post-exilic period! Moreover, this view involves a denial of the historicity of Josiah's reformation as noted in 2 Kings xxiii., which is quite unwarranted. A far more influential group of scholars have suggested a date before the seventh century. The scholarly work of A. C. Welch<sup>4</sup> has had a considerable influence in Britain. Interestingly, and somewhat paradoxically, a certain writing, such as the book of Jeremiah, may contain both cult-critical prophecies and passages that promote sacrifices. Divergent interpretations of this ancient debate have engendered an intense scholarly debate. They contended that Amos and the other canonical pre-exilic prophets stood for a wholesale rejection of the entire sacrificial cult. The critique delivered by Amos and Jeremiah was not limited to local sanctuaries; it concerned the central, royal sanctuaries in Israel (Bethel) and Judah (Jerusalem); (b). The following list of biblical references to rejected sacrifice is more comprehensive, but it may nonetheless turn out to be somewhat incomplete: Genesis: 4:3-7 (Cain and Abel, see below).