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MS-763: Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman Collection, 1930-2004.

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"Lecture on Moses." undated.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the
American Jewish Archives website.

I. Important Events in Life of Moses

Born in Egypt

Killed an Egyptian slave driver

Escaped into wilderness, in early manhood

Married daughter of Midianite priest

Saw God in Burning Bush

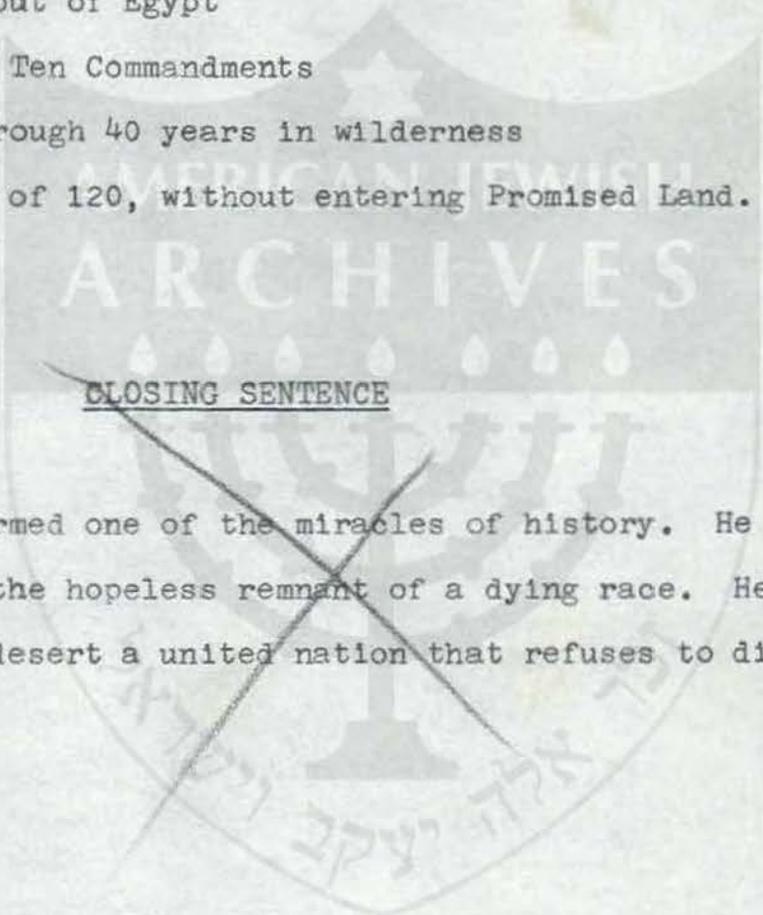
Returned to Egypt at age of 80, to rescue Hebrew slaves.

Led people out of Egypt

Gave people Ten Commandments

Led them through 40 years in wilderness

Died at age of 120, without entering Promised Land.



CLOSING SENTENCE

Moses performed one of the miracles of history. He took into the desert the hopeless remnant of a dying race. He brought out of the desert a united nation that refuses to die.

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GILBERT BOND

Living Biographies of Religious Leaders -

References - ~~Thomas Biographies~~

Henry Thomas

There are those who deny the existence of Moses, just as there are those who deny the existence of Homer, of Shakespeare, of Jesus. Unable to explain the great men of the world, the little men of the world try to explain them away. But Mark Twain with his logical humor has disposed of all these cynics who doubt the reality of Moses. "If the Ten Commandments were not written by Moses," observes Mark Twain, "then they were written by another fellow of the same name." And Heine, with equal humor and with even greater logic, remarks that if Moses was not created by God, then the writers of the Old Testament did well to remind God of His oversight by creating Moses themselves. For the early Hebrews needed an extraordinary type of prophet to weld them into a living nation under the leadership of God. And the one prophet who succeeded in doing this was Moses, either as a man of flesh and blood who existed in Egypt, or as a fictitious national hero who to this day exists in the hearts of his people. A facetious lecturer once remarked that Moses was the greatest historical character who never lived. Whereupon a member of the audience corrected him. "What you really meant to say, sir, is that Moses was the greatest fictional character who forever lives,"

There is no scientific proof as to the actual historicity of Moses. Yet the living personality of Moses has inspired a veritable library of creative thought. And it is this personality - one of the enduring influences in human progress - that we shall here try to re-create.

III. Achad Ha-Am - "Moses" - 1904

- 307 - Every man who leaves a perceptible mark on the social life of mankind, though he may be a purely imaginary figure, is a real historical force; his existence is an historical truth. (Cf. Jesus)
- 309 - Even if you succeeded in demonstrating conclusively that the man Moses never existed (or that there were two Moses-Freud), or that he was not such a man as we supposed, you would not thereby detract one jot from the historical reality of the ideal Moses.
- 310 - Moses was created in the spirit of the Jewish people - and in its image. Moses was the embodiment of the Jewish ideal. What was he essentially?
- A military hero? No. At battle with Amelek, he stood and gave moral support.
- A statesman? No. In battle with Pharaoh, he needed Aaron.
- A lawgiver? No. He made no laws for his own age, but for the future.
- 311- He was a PROPHET.
- Prophet has two fundamental qualities.
- a.) He is a man of truth
- b.) He is an extremist
- c.) He is a man of absolute righteousness.
- 314 - He fought battle of justice
- a) Egyptian smiting the Hebrew
- b) Two Hebrews quarreling
- c) Shepherds oppressing women of Midian.

"The creator," I have said, "creates in his own image." And in truth, our people has but expressed itself, at its highest, in this picture of Moses. Well have the Cabbalists said that "Moses is re-incarnated in every age." Some hint of Moses has illumined the dark life of our people, like a spark, in every generation. This needs no lengthy proof. We have but to open our Prayer Book, and we shall see almost on every page how constant has been the striving after the realization of the prophetic ideal in all its world-embracing breadth, constant throughout the blackest periods of the Jew's history, when his life has been most precarious, and persecution has driven him from country to country. Israel has never lived in the present. The present with its evil and its wickedness, has always filled us with anguish, indignation, and bitterness. But just as constantly have we been inspired with brilliant hopes for the future, and an ineradicable faith in the coming triumph of the good and the right; and for these hopes and that faith we have always sought and found support in the history of our past, whereon our imagination has brooded, weaving all manner of fair dreams, so as to make the past a kind of mirror of the future. Our very Hebrew language, the garment of the Jewish spirit, has no present tense, but only a past and a future. The question has been much debated, whether the fundamental characteristic of the Jewish spirit is optimism or pessimism; and extreme views have been propounded on both sides. But all such discussion is futile. The Jew is both optimist and pessimist; but his pessimism has reference to the present, his optimism to the future. This was true of the Prophets, and it is true of the people of the Prophets.

Leo Baek said:

A purer knowledge of God can be traced back to Moses. All who came after Moses depend on him. He is the "father of all the prophets."

IV

THE MAN MOSES

Reference Personalities of the Old Testament by Fleming James

If we can believe in the possibility of any miracles, two facts in the field of history and in the complex world of today may well bear that name. One is the Jewish people. Since 70 A.D. they have had no nation of their own, but have been scattered throughout the earth, mingling with all peoples yet remaining distinct, existing everywhere as sojourners, generally discriminated against and often persecuted; yet everywhere teeming, aggressive, vigorous, brilliant, a force to be reckoned with; today kept under here and there only by violence, and probably not to be kept under long; a phenomenon seemingly unique in history. The second fact is Judaism, the religion by virtue of which this people are what they are. Both facts trace their origin to one man.

There is also a third fact, more astonishing than either, which proceeds from Israel and therefore from this same man: the world-religion of Christianity. We may add a fourth fact. Islam, the religion of the Mohammedan peoples, likewise goes back ultimately to Moses.

Our study of the Personalities of the Old Testament ought to begin with Moses, the founder of Israel and its religion. Without him there would, humanly speaking, be no Old Testament, no Jewish people, no Judaism, and no Christian church; perhaps also no religion of Islam.

p. 4 - Story of Moses begins with oppression in Egypt. He founded a religion of redemption.

p. 6 - Oppression is usually dated in reign of Ramses II (1301 - 1235). Albright thinks Exodus should be placed 1290. Others think as late as 1200.

Moses is Egyptian name. Royal baby?

p. 7 - Story of slaying Egyptian, then fleeing after learning that he was seen, show Moses' traits:

1. identification of self with Hebrews
(man being flogged was "one of his brethren")
2. anger at sight of wrong
3. Impetuous intervention
4. heavy hand
5. impulse to arbitrate (between two Hebrews)

p. 10 - James accepts the theophany of the burning bush. The God described has all the traits of Israel's God.

(God who meets Moses is very like Moses himself.)

a) He is going to do something about the oppression.

He enters the struggles of earth on behalf of the oppressed. He is a redeeming God, a lover of the poor, a maker of history.

b) He works through men, calling them to action, not to contemplation.

c) He demands faith.

Summary of Moses' qualities

What a man he must have been who wrought this pattern and stamped it upon a few thousand half-nomads more than three millennia ago! Tradition has preserved him to us - hot, impetuous, an inter- venger on behalf of the oppressed, an adjudicator, shrinking from his hard commission, slow of speech, rising to the challenge of faith, a worker of miracles, a fighter grappling even with the Pharaoh and prevailing, a bearer of his people in his bosom, a provider, an intercessor, humble, selfless, prodigious in his power to work, never resting, never giving up. Yet none of these quali- ties, nor all of them can account for his enduring impress on man- kind. There was at work in Moses something more than Moses, some- thing transcending man. The ancient tradition puts it simply and sufficiently: "And Yahweh said unto Moses, Lo, I come to thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may believe thee for ever".



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The RELIGION of MOSES

Oesterley & Robinson

A. Beginning of Worship of Yahweh among Hebrews

Two events brought about acceptance of Yahweh by Hebrews.

1. Events of the Passage of Red Sea

"Since Mt. Sinai was believed to be the special abode of Yahweh, we can fully understand that the volcanic eruption, the earthquake and its effects upon the water of the Yam-Suph, resulting in the destruction of the Egyptian pursuers, were all ascribed to the direct action of Yahweh, the god of Sinai. The incandescent cloud blazing, as it seemed, with fire, was believed to be the manifestation of the deity.

2. Yahweh was originally the tribal god of the Kenites, a clan of the Midianites, and Jethro was his priest. Moses became the son-in-law of Jethro, and adopted his god.

B. The Religion of Israel in the Wilderness

"There is thus no reason to doubt that the ethical standard of primitive Israel stood high. The fact is of the greatest importance in the history of the nation, because in Israel, almost alone of ancient peoples, much of the tradition and outlook of the primitive days was preserved, at least in a section of the community. The time was to come when, amid the breakdown of the social and political order, there was to be a revival of the old views. The men who, more than any others, gave to the religion of Israel that peculiar position which made it of supreme significance in the spiritual history of man were the prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries, and the moral passion which inspired them was a direct inheritance from the days of Moses."

Albright - Pre-Mosaic Religious Background

- p. 186
1. The principal deity of the pre-Mosaic Hebrews was a mountain god and was invested with mountain imagery.
 2. The second fact is that the Hebrews, like their nomadic Semitic forefathers, possessed a very keen sense of the relationship between a patriarchal group (clan or family) and its deity, who was an actual member of the clan and could be addressed by a mortal Kinsman as "father", "brother" and even "Kindred". All the members of the clan were accordingly children, brethren or kinsman of the god, who was the head of the house (family)

Albright draws much evidence from names (see 186)

Early Hebrew popular religion may have had a father El, a mother whose name is obscure (Elat or Amath), and a son who appears as the mountain-god, probably named Shaddai.

Historical Foundations of Israelite Tradition

"We may confidently assume that Moses was a Hebrew who was born in Egypt and reared under strong Egyptian influence."

The tradition in Ex. 1 that the Israelite were forced to labor at Pithom and Raamses in Eastern Delta is supported by archeological findings.

The account of the start of the Exodus given in 12:37 and 13:20

is perfectly sound topographically, and one writer has withdrawn his objections.

"Many additional pieces of evidence for the substantial historicity of the account of the Exodus and the wanderings in the regions of Sinai, Midian and Kadesh can easily be given, thanks to our greatly increased knowledge of topography and archeology. We must content ourselves here with the assurance that there is no longer any room for the still dominant attitude of hyper-criticism toward the early historical traditions of Israel."

Even the long contested date of the Exodus can now be fixed within reasonable limits - probably 1290 BCE.

Moses and Monotheism

196 "It is absurd to deny that Moses was actually the founder of the Israelite commonwealth and the framer of Israel's religious system. This fact is emphasized so unanimously by tradition that it may be regarded as absolutely certain."

197 "There is absolute unanimity in our sources about the name given his God by Moses. The spelling YHWH (pronounced Yahweh) is always found."

198 Many different meanings have been attributed to Yahweh by scholars who recognized it relative antiquity, but only one yields any suitable sense: "He causes to be."

The engimatic formula in Ex 3:14 which in biblical Hebrew

אֲנִי אֲהֵי אֲשֶׁר אֲהֵי

means "I am what I am " can only become "He causes to be what comes into Existence."

199 Another original characteristic of Yahweh is that he is not restricted to any special abode. As the lord of all cosmic forces, controlling sun, moon and storm but not identified with any of them, His normal dwelling-place is in heaven, from which He may come down, either to a lofty mountain like Sinai, to a shrine like the Tabernacle, or to any spot which He may choose.

201 Yahweh was anthropomorphic - not animal, planet, etc.

202 "It was precisely the anthropomorphism of Yahweh which was essential to the initial success of Israel's religion. All the human characteristics of Israel's deity were exalted; they were projected against a cosmic screen."

207 "Was Moses a true monotheist?"

If the term means one who teaches the existence of only one god, the creator of everything, the source of justice, who is equally powerful in Egypt, in the desert, in Palestine, who has no sexuality and no mythology, who is human in form but cannot be seen by human eyes and cannot be represented in any form - then the founder of Yahwism was certainly a monotheist.

p 214 "It was fortunate for the future of monotheism that the Israelites of the Conquest were a wild folk, endowed with primitive energy and ruthless will to exist, since the resulting decimation of the Canaanites prevented the complete fusion of the two kindred folk which would almost inevitably have depressed Yahwistic

standards to a point where recovery was impossible. Thus the Canaanites, with their orgiastic nature-worship, their cult of fertility in the form of serpent symbols and sensuous nudity, and their gross mythology, were replaced by Israel, with its nomadic simplicity and purity of life, its lofty monotheism, and its severe code of ethics. In a not altogether dissimilar way, a millennium later, the African Canaanites, as they still called themselves, or the Carthaginians, as we call them, with the gross Phoenician mythology which we know from Ugarit and Philo Byblius, with human sacrifices and the cult of sex, were crushed by the immensely superior Romans, whose stern code of morals and singularly elevated paganism remind us in many ways of early Israel."



Composite scientific theories about Yahweh

1. Midianite or Kenite deity
2. Mountain god
3. Associated with volcano at Sinai
4. Intervened at Red Sea
5. Entered covenant with Hebrews
6. Abode became universalized
7. Anthropomorphic
8. Ethical
9. Solitary

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Mordecai Kaplan's ideas of Yahweh:

1. He was exclusively the god of Israel, intolerant of other gods, permitted no colleagues.
2. The ark of the Covenant was a symbol of His presence, used in war.
3. Religious practices of Canaanites were transformed by the high standards of His religion.

Hear O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.

FINAL ESTIMATES

MOSES

"How small Sinai appears when Moses stands upon it! This mountain is only the pedestal for the feet of the man whose head reaches up to the heavens, where he speaks with God."

The artistic spirity was directed by M_oses, "as by his Egyptian compatriots, to colossal and indestructible undertakings. He built human pyramids, carved human obelisks; he took a poor shepherd family and created a nation from it - a great eternal, holy people; a people of God, destined to outlive the centuries, and to serve as pattern to all other nations, even as a prototype to the whole of mankind. He created Israel,".... a people that has "fought and suffered on every battlefield of human thought."

Heinrich Heine

Moses performed one of the miracles of history. He took into the desert the hopeless remnant of a dying race. He brought out of the desert a united nation that refuses to die.