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**THE MOST ANCIENT MANUSCRIPT IN THE WORLD.**

"THERE is an intimate relation existing between the word-made scripture and the word-made flesh, or the living and written word." "We must confess that Judaism, as taught by Moses and the prophets, is the foundation on which Christianity is built." "If you separate Christ from the Old Testament, you may get a more or less beautifully painted human ideal, a perfect man according to human or earthly conception, but you have lost the God-man, whom God alone could reveal to man, and who alone could lead man to God." "Israel is not the shadow fulfilled and absorbed in the Church, but the basis on which the Church rests." These and similar other principles which are gathered from THE SCATTERED NATION, June 1, 1867, show the importance of our subject, "The most Ancient Book of the World," being a manuscript written on what is generally called "parchment," in characters of the ancient Hebrew coins, and containing "the law of Moses," in its original form. We will divide the subject in several points.

(1) The place or locality where this book was preserved. When the Children of Israel had crossed the Jordan, under their leader Joshua, they had to proceed on to the centre of the land, described by Moses as "the mountains of Ebal and Garizim," from which central point Joshua conquered the whole land in two campaigns, first to the south and then to the north. It was the place where Abraham, the father of the faithful, after having been called out of Ur of the Chaldees, had chosen his first residence, and had by divine manifestation received the promise, that his posterity should have it for an everlasting inheritance. That portion of the promised land fell by lot to the tribe of Ephraim, whose progenitor Joseph was buried there in the parcel of ground which Jacob gave to his son Joseph, whose tomb is there till the present day. Joshua himself belonging to the tribe of Ephraim, erected there the Sanctuary. (Josh. xxiv. 26). Ever, since, through a length of time of more than 3,300 years, that centre of the land of Canan was inhabited by a body of people asserting to be the descendants of Joseph, the son of the patriarch Jacob. Even at the present time there is a remnant of this people living there who call themselves "Beni Israel," and "ani of Joseph." In this place and by this remnant of a nation, the most ancient book of the world was preserved.

(2) The time when it was written. When Moses had finished writing the book of the law, he intrusted it to the charge and custody of the Priests and Levites who carried the Arc of the Lord and to the elders of the Children of Israel, telling them to put it **מצד** of the ark of the Lord where the tables of stone from Mount Sinai were deposited. About this expression **מצד** was a controversy among the ancient Jewish commentators, one part explained it "inside," whilst the other thought it meant "outside," of the ark. The Bible says there was nothing in the ark but the testimony, the tables from Mount Sinai. And when we consider that the **כפרת** the mercy seat with the cherubim, would have to be removed as often as the priests had to have recourse to the divine book to see what in every instance in the affairs of the nation had to be done, we can believe what the Bible says, that there was nothing in the ark but the ten words on the tables. 2 Chron. v. 10. This accounts for the circumstance we are told in the bible that in King Josiah's time the Priest Hilkiyah found the book **יהוה ביד משה את ספר תורת** (2 Chron.xxxiv.14) in the Temple of Jerusalem, which made so great a sensation in all Jerusalem. If this was Moses' own handwriting, then it must have been brought up from the place where Joshua had erected the Sanctuary, and some one must have it rescued in the great disaster when the temple was burnt by the Chaldees.

Now the book which we call the most ancient book in the world, contains a note at the end of Genesis, which note was written by Ithamar, son of Aaron, son of Ithamar, the High Priest. He does not say that he himself had written the book, but only that it was read according to the appointment in the house of the High Priest, in the ten days of the seventh month, with fear and prayer, being dedicated holy to the Lord. " This note then was written before Jerusalem was taken by King David, and consequently long before Solomon built the Temple. The note indeed is written in the Chaldee language, while the book itself is in old Hebrew, which only shows that Chaldee language is very old, and was understood by the priests in ancient times, as Moses himself gives a trace in his first book, 3147, " Jegar-sahadutha." Now, if Moses understood Chaldee, the Priests after his time may of course also have known that language. That the prophet Jeremiah has written one verse in his book in Chaldee, can be seen by looking into the Hebrew Bible (Jer. x. 11).

(3) The "form" of the book. It is usually supposed that the oldest form of books is the "roll-form," but after a close examination of the matter it may be found that this is not the case. And first of all the Bible tells us that the " tables from Mount Sinia" were written *on both sides*, which circumstance is not a peculiarity of the "roll-form." So then the very oldest written document and testimony of the Bible, which, as Moses says, (p. 50) was God's own work, written by the finger of God, presents us with the "*book-form*" being written on *both* sides. Besides this, Moses himself never, not even once, mentions the word **מגלה** (roll) in all his books, which he certainly would have done, if he made use of the roll-form, he being so faithful in all his dealings.

(4) The appellation " fire-ried manuscript." The most ancient book in the world is called by the people who have preserved it, " The book which was in the fire." The history of this miraculous deliverance from the fire is as follows :—First, the manuscript itself contains several notes, which state that the book was delivered from the fire. The chief note to this effect is at the end of the fourth book of Moses; it says, " It was delivered from the fire by the power of the Lord into the hand of the King of Babel, in the presence of Serubabel the Jew, and not the smallest particle of it was burnt. Thanks be to

the Lord for the Law of Moses (על דת משה)- *The King of Babel* mentioned in this note as being cotemporary with Serubabel, is כורש, Cyrus, who is also in Esra v. 13, called " King of Babel."

The history of this affair with the "fire tried MS.," is also given in a book, originally written in Hebrew, and called "Joshua" (not to be confounded with the book of Joshua in the Bible), which was about one thousand years ago translated into the Arabic language, and into Latin in the last century. Rabbi Kirchheimor at Frankfort-on-the-Maine, has embodied this history into his little work in Hebrew, called כרמי שמרון. According to this authority the " fire-tried MS." was delivered from the fire into which it was cast by Serubabel upon the command of the King of Babel, and that not only once but three times. It also says that Serubabel hesitated in doing so, declaring to the King, " This book belongs as good to us as to them," meaning some of the ten tribes of Israel, who were also present. There seems to have been a controversy about divine books, the ten tribes were not willing to acknowledge the writings of the Prophets, which were not yet known when they (the ten tribes) were led away into Assyria, and the King of Babel (כורש) had finally to decide this question, which turned about Jerusalem. For the King had given permission to the Jews to return and build the Temple in Jerusalem, which some of the ten tribes opposed, as not contained, as they thought, in the divine book of the law of Moses. They did not believe that שלם (Salem), where Melchiscdec reigned, was Jerusalem. This shows that they did not correctly interpret the law of Moses, and worshipped what they did not know, for there is no contradiction between the writings of the Prophets and the law of Moses.

The report of this book of Joshua also says, that when the "fire-tried MS." was not burnt after having been twice cast into the fire, Serubabel greatly wondered about this, and asked the King for permission to throw it the third time into the fire, he, before doing so, opened the book and spit into it three times in three different places, in consequence of which the places spit upon were touched by the fire, and the MS. contains the marks of this circumstance. It is difficult to understand the motive of Serubabel for this transaction, but we may suppose that he thought the book ought to bear some marks, commemorative to this affair.

(5) The Samaritan Pentateuch. So far we kept closely to our subject—" the fire-tried MS." About the subject in general, which was called by some ecclesiastical fathers, " the Samaritan text," we may say that it was neglected, just as it was the ease with the whole study of the Hebrew language and writings for so long a period, similar as Jerusalem was to be trodden down by the nations so long till the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. After the time of the Apostles there were only a few who made mention of this subject, viz., Eusebius of Caesaraea, Cyrillus of Alexandria, Procopius of Gaza, Diodorus and St. Jerome. Afterwards the subject was buried in darkness more than a thousand years, when in the seventeenth century it was a little revived by John Morinus of Paris, and by the Bishops Usher and Walton of England. Amongst the learned in our age, the following had more or less correct ideas about this subject, viz. : Stendel in Bengol's archive, iii. 626; Mazado sur l'origine, l'age et l'etat critique du Pentat. Sam. Geneve, 1830 ; Flug in the 7th part of the periodical of Fribourg, pag. 1, etc., and especially Hengstenberg, Pentateuch i., pag. 1, etc.

(6) The year 1860. The writer of this sketch made a visit from Jerusalem to the ancient Shechem for the purpose of seeing the ספר תורה of Abishua, which is a roll containing in a

kind of acrostic the information that it was written by " Abishua son of Pinechas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Priest, in the thirteenth year of the government of the Children of Israel, in the land of Canaan, with its boundaries round about." This roll, which is half defaced, would perhaps be the first authority with regard to antiquity, if Ithamar, the greatgrandson of Aaron, had written the fire-tried MS., but he only wrote the note bearing his name at the end of Genesis, and therefore we are permitted to say that the fire-tried MS., which is not defaced, because its form may have contributed much towards the good preservation of it, may yet be older than the roll of Abishua. Both are alike in the holy text in every respect, so that there is no difference between them, except in the form and preservation, the one being in book-form (ספר) and not defaced, the other in roll-form (מגילת ספר) and defaced. By a combination of remarkable circumstances, the fire-tried MS. was brought up to Jerusalem, where it was purchased.

(7) The fire-tried MS. being of such importance for the learned, the idea was conceived by the writer of this to make a fac-simile of it, at least of one part of it, and as the first leaf of Genesis is wanted, the second book, Exodus, was chosen, and a number of copies lithographed, or rather authographed, since the text was written on paper and afterwards transferred on the stone. But the climate of Jerusalem being so warm, the printing ink and all the chemical essences were so much affected by the heat, that allowance must be made in several instances, the work of making a facsimile of the whole of it could be better accomplished here, where all the necessary facilities can be easily procured. Still, considering the circumstances, and the condition in which Jerusalem happens yet to be described in the New Testament as "trodden under foot by the Gentiles," and consequently unfavourable to all such undertakings, the fac-simile of Exodus of the fire-tried MS. has turned out pretty well, and we hope that no one who will purchase a copy will ever regret having done so.

(8) Ancient coins. While engaged in writing (p. 51) and lithographing this fac-simile, it happened that ancient Hebrew coins were found on the Mount of Olives under an olive tree, by an Arab, who had to take out that tree with the root, for the purpose of selling olive wood vessels. The coins were brought to the writer of this, who was known in Jerusalem as being able of reading ancient inscriptions. The characters of the inscription of these Hebrew coins were in size and form just like the characters in which the fire-tried MS. is written. The attention was directed towards this subject, and an interest awakened for search after Hebrew coins. This is the connection of the fire-tried MS. with ancient Hebrew coins, which circumstance occasioned a collection of Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, and Roman coins.

(9) Sale of manuscript, fac-simile, and coins. Many English, American, and European travellers and visitors of Jerusalem have seen the fire-tried MS. in the time when the fac-simile was made, as the lithographic press was put up in separate rooms of the hotel, where the writer of this, who made the fac-simile, was living on Mount Moriah. Americans, and especially the English, had a strong desire for acquiring the fire-tried MS. An English nobleman with his lady had resolved to purchase it, and when he was asked why he took such a lively interest in that MS., answered that he only wanted to have the honour of bringing it to England. At last, after seven years, the officials of the Palestine Exploration Society succeeded in causing it to be brought over to England, for the purpose of selling it, together with the fac-simile and coins.

Further inquiry can be made at 8, Prospect place, Cambridge Heath, N.E.

**J. F. KRAUS.**

[I have seen the manuscript, and believe it deserves the greatest attention of the friends of the Bible.—EDITOR S.N.]

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This reference is not located in *A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated*, by **Alan David Crown** and **Reinhard Pummer**, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, **The Scarecrow Press, Inc.** Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005

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