

## TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

The late Professor Umberto Cassuto ל"י — Magnes Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University — had originally planned to write in Hebrew a monumental commentary on the Bible that would comprise a series of detailed expositions of the Book of Genesis, and less elaborate commentaries, consisting of one volume to each book, devoted to the remaining four books of the Pentateuch. It was also his intention to compose a compendious Introduction to the Torah as a whole, and a comprehensive commentary on the Book of Psalms. Unhappily the author died after completing only three of his commentaries (two on Genesis and one on Exodus), preceded by a smaller work dealing, in the form of lectures, with the Documentary Hypothesis as a whole, in which he summarized his larger Italian book *La Questione della Genesi*. The present volume, *A Commentary on The Book of Exodus*, is the last of the commentaries to be rendered into English.

The untimely demise of Cassuto was undoubtedly a major tragedy in the field of Biblical scholarship. The few commentaries, however, that the great savant was able to bequeath to the world constitute a veritable storehouse of Scriptural learning and lore, whose value for both the student and lay reader of Holy Writ cannot be overestimated. It would be invidious, and in truth pointless, to compare the respective merits of the exegetical works that Cassuto has left us. Each book serves its assigned purpose with profound erudition and consummate expositional skill. Yet the Commentary on Exodus is unquestionably outstanding in a number of respects deserving of our special attention.

The contents of the second book of the Pentateuch, apart from all other considerations, endow this volume with exceptional importance. In the words of our author: 'we must realise that is the book whose significance is so great in the history of Israel and all mankind.' It is in Exodus that we find the initial description of the Revelation on Mount Sinai and the first version of the Decalogue. The spiritual concepts inherent in the Ten Commandments are fundamental to the entire structure of Biblical religious and ethical teaching, constituting, as it

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were, the base of a pyramid whose apex is love of God expressed in loving-kindness towards man.

The form of this commentary also differentiates it from the two exegetical volumes on Genesis. It is larger and at the same time briefer than the books entitled *From Adam To Noah* and *From Noah To Abraham*. It is more voluminous since it covers the entire *ḥumash* of that name, whereas the other two commentaries deal with one pericope each. However, the annotations on Exodus are much more condensed, taking the form of a running commentary. But this brevity must not be misunderstood; it is not symptomatic of an unscientific treatment of the text. Cassuto himself makes this pellucidly clear in his Preface: 'I endeavoured to make my commentary as succinct as possible. At times I compressed into a single line, and even into a single word, the results of research or meditation that could fill pages, trusting that the thoughtful reader would infer the unstated from the stated.' These words find corroboration in almost every line of this commentary.

At the same time it should be noted that Cassuto's comments have a vivid quality seldom found in the exegetical writings of other Biblical expositors, who all too often prefer a jejune and lifeless approach to their subject. Our author succeeds in injecting a sense of dramatic excitement into his interpretations. Without neglecting the scientific data provided by archaeological and philological research, he makes us conscious of the literary attributes of the Bible. By his insights into the refinements of Biblical style and grammar, he enables us to view the Scriptural writings as immortal classics whose Divine inspiration in no way diminished the beauty of their expression. Cassuto was an exegete with the soul of a poet.

While not overlooking the question of the sources, which are not in his opinion those recognized by the Documentary Hypothesis, Cassuto seeks primarily to explain the existing text to the reader. His encyclopedic learning is evident on every page, and his penetrating analytical comments, which are marked by a brilliant and resourceful originality, lend a colourful significance to the Biblical narrative not often paralleled in other commentaries. Above all he endeavours with compelling scholarly arguments, many of them of a completely unprecedented character, to demonstrate the underlying unity of the Book of Exodus. But he remains throughout wholly objective, following the truth irrespective of the conclusions to which his investigations may lead him. He resists with equal determination the 'vivisection' of the Higher Critics and the 'plastic surgery' of the apologists. He thus

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blazes a new expository path, which I am convinced future scholars will tread in increasing numbers and with growing conviction.

Unlike the volumes dealing with the first two pericopes of Genesis, the present work does not separate the annotations from the Biblical text, but forms a continuous, unified commentary in which the Scriptural citations are interlinked with the exposition. This type of commentation requires a special technique, and caused the author, wherever possible, to fit his 'comments into the words of Scripture, so that the nexus between the annotations and the text should be close and direct, and the reader would have no need constantly to refer to the Pentateuchal wording.' The effect of this exegetical method has been to make the entire book a mosaic of Scriptural verse and comment. The elements are so closely and artistically interwoven as to form a new literary entity — not a text with notes, but a homogeneous expository work, which must rank among the finest modern contributions to the treasury of Biblical learning.

In the translation of this volume I have followed the principles that I adumbrated in my Foreword to the English version of *From Adam to Noah*. But the external form of the present commentary, its 'mosaic' character as a running commentary, has necessitated certain changes in my translation methods. In so far as the Scriptural passages are concerned, I have, where possible, continued to give preference to modern English usage. Thus I write 'eighty' instead of 'fourscore', 'listen' rather than 'hearken', 'to' and not 'unto'; but 'Thou' has been retained for the Deity. At times the expository nature of the work has compelled me to resort to very literal rendering of the Biblical texts in order to make the annotations fully comprehensible. I have in consequence not confined myself to any particular English version, but I have laid under tribute various translations (such as *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version*; *The Holy Scriptures* [Jewish Publication Society of America]; *The Torah* [JPS]; and *A New Translation of The Bible*, by James Moffatt), and on occasion I have given my own rendition, my invariable guide-line being the requirements of the context.

To distinguish the Biblical text from the commentary, the former is printed in italics; but where a Scriptural passage is quoted from a part of the Bible outside the Book of Exodus, or even from a section of Exodus that is not the immediate subject of commentation, the quotation appears in roman type and between inverted commas. For technical reasons, however, I found it advisable to omit the inverted commas in the case of Scriptural *oratio recta*, following in this respect the example of the Authorized Version.

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In regard to the annotations, I have adopted a dual method: comments that are of a supplemental character simply follow the Biblical citation as a continuous part of the sentence; but expositions that are purely explanatory are placed between dashes. I have also interpolated in this volume, as in my translation of the Genesis Commentaries, a number of glosses in square brackets to elucidate for the English reader what the translation alone might have left obscure. On the other hand, I have in certain instances omitted an explanation that was necessary in the Hebrew but was rendered redundant in the English version, since the translation implicitly incorporated the interpretation. Occasionally, for the sake of smoothness, I have added 'in the words of Scripture', or a similar phrase, before a quotation, although the Hebrew text was content with a colon only. To make reference easier, the verse numbers are placed opposite the initial quotation from each verse, and not, as in the original, at the head of the relevant paragraph. Hebrew words retained in the text are given in Hebrew characters and in English transcript; they are also fully vocalized except in the case of stems, which are left unvocalized wherever the vowels are omitted in *BDB*.

Having now completed, after many years of intensive labour, my translation of Cassuto's Biblical commentaries, I wish once again to express my abiding gratitude to Mr. Silas S. Perry for having made it possible for me to execute this work under the auspices of the Foundation that bears his name. Without his unfailing encouragement and support my onerous undertaking could not have been begun or completed. The Book of Exodus has, I am aware, a special significance and attraction for him in as much as it enshrines the Decalogue, which, in a sense, stands at the heart of Judaism and is the ultimate foundation on which alone the structure of world civilization can endure. I earnestly and confidently trust that Mr. Perry's high hopes for the wide circulation and far-ranging spiritual influence of this great commentary in its English garb will be fulfilled in fullest measure.

My appreciative thanks go out to Professor S.E. Loewenstamm and to Professor Ch. Rabin for the scholarly advice they have given me in the course of my work; it has served to enhance the scientific value of my rendition.

I am also grateful to Professor D. Ayalon and Professor J. Blau for their learned guidance on Arabic words and stems appearing in this volume, and to Dr. M. Spitzer for his counsel on various typographical questions.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Milka Cassuto-Salzman for the

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painstaking care with which she revised the proofs of this book and prepared the Indexes, for the many valuable suggestions that she made, and for the outstanding devotion she displayed in seeing the volume through the press in all its stages.

It is likewise my pleasurable duty to thank Mr. Ch. Toren, of the Magnes Press, for the interest he took in the publication of this commentary and for his ever-ready assistance in overcoming the inevitable problems and 'gremlins' that beset the printing of a major work of this nature. But for his help publication would undoubtedly have been considerably delayed.

The task of the Printer has also in many respects not been an easy one. I take this opportunity of thanking all the members of the staff of the Central Printing Press who participated in the production of this volume for their patience, courtesy and cooperation.

Last, but by no means least, my grateful thanks are due to the Hebrew University for leading its distinguished name to the publication in English of the Cassuto Biblical Commentaries. I voice the conviction that in thus honouring the scholarship of the illustrious author of these exegetical works the University of Jerusalem will have made a notable contribution to the advancement of Biblical knowledge and to the spread of Scriptural ideas and ideals throughout the English-speaking world.

ISRAEL ABRAHAMS

Cape Town.  
April, 1967.  
Nisan, 5727.

## KEY TO THE TRANSLITERATION

### HEBREW

#### (a) CONSONANTS

<p>א = ' <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ל = l</span></p> <p>{ ב = b <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ם, מ = m</span></p> <p>{ ב = bh <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ן, נ = n</span></p> <p>{ ג = g <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ס = s</span></p> <p>{ ג = gh <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ע = °</span></p> <p>{ ד = d <span style="margin-left: 100px;">פ = p</span></p> <p>{ ד = dh <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ף, פ = ph</span></p> <p>ה = h <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ץ, צ = ś</span></p> <p>ו = w <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ק = q</span></p> <p>ז = z <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ך = r</span></p> <p>ח = ḥ <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ש = ś</span></p> <p>ט = ṭ <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ש = š</span></p> <p>י = y <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ת = t</span></p> <p>{ כ, כּ = k <span style="margin-left: 100px;">ת = th</span></p> <p>{ כ, כּ = kh</p>	
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- Note: (1) Unsounded ה at the end of a word is not represented in the transcription;
- (2) the customary English spelling is retained for Biblical names and rabbinic works and authorities.

#### (b) VOWELS

Long		Short
ָ (Qāmeṣ gādhōl) = ā		= a
ִ (Hīreq gādhōl) = ī		= e
ֵ = ē		(Hīreq qāṭān) = i
ֹ = ō		ָ (Qāmeṣ qāṭān) = o
ֺ = ū		ּ = u
	ֶ (Šēwā) = e	
	ִ = ä	
	ֹ = ö	
	ֶ = ě	

Note: Capital *E* represents ֶ, ִ and ֹ; thus אֱלֹהִים is transliterated 'Elōhīm, and אֵל is transcribed 'El.

#### ARABIC AND OTHER LANGUAGES

The method commonly used in scientific works was followed in the transliteration of Arabic, Akkadian, Egyptian and Ugaritic words.

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## PREFACE

THIS commentary on the Book of Exodus is entirely new, being based on new exegetical principles.

Its aim is to expound the Book of Exodus scientifically, with the help of all the resources that modern scholarship puts at our disposal today. To achieve this purpose, its approach differs considerably from that of the majority of contemporary scientific commentaries. The primary differences between the present commentary and others are, in the main, three, to wit:

(a) The commentaries written in our generation on any book of the Pentateuch are, in most instances, chiefly devoted to investigating the sources and to determining the process by which they have been fitted together. They annotate the documentary fragments that they discern in the book rather than the book itself. The great importance attached by exegetes to the question of the sources diverts their attention from the study of the work that has grown out of these documents. In their opinion, the study of the sources takes precedence over that of the book as we have it. To my mind, the reverse view is the more reasonable. A scientific exposition of any literary work should aim at elucidating and evaluating the work itself; whereas the dissection of its sources is only a means to this end. Admittedly it is an important means, and I, too, have accorded it no small place in my commentary, but at no time have I lost sight of the fact that my main task was to explain the book before us. Ultimately we must realize that this is the book whose significance is so great in the history of Israel and of all mankind, and that it alone has factual existence, not the imaginary work that rests on mere conjecture. Consequently my commentary can be of interest to every type of reader, irrespective of his views on the history of the Book of Exodus. Those who accept the documentary hypothesis will find here an interpretation of the work of the last editor, the final R; for those who hold other opinions regarding the origin of Exodus, my annotations will likewise provide an exposition of its latest recension; whilst those who

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are concerned solely with the received form of the text will find here a straightforward answer to their requirements.

(b) The sources of the Book of Exodus are not in my view those recognized by the current hypothesis, namely, P (Priestly Code), E (Elohist), J (Jahwist) and their different strata. One of the principal sources — possibly *the* principal source — was, if I am not mistaken, an ancient heroic poem, an epos dating back to earliest times, that told at length the story of the Egyptian bondage, of the liberation and of the wandering of the children of Israel in the wilderness. In the course of my commentary I frequently indicate, in detail, the use made of this poem, and I point out the traces of the epic still perceptible in the Scriptural text.

(c) Owing to the fact that the origins of the scientific study of the Pentateuch go back to a period anterior to the new discoveries relating to the culture of the ancient East, and that the methods of investigation which crystallized in that epoch continue to exert a fundamental influence on the work of scholars to this day, modern Biblical commentaries do not make adequate use of our current knowledge of the literature and culture of the neighbouring nations of Israel. In this commentary, on the other hand, I have paid constant attention to the literary works of these peoples, as well as to all that archaeological research has taught us regarding their cultural achievements, for it is impossible to gain a correct understanding of Scripture without continual reference to the environment in which the Israelites lived and worked, and in which the books of the Bible were composed.

My commentary is concerned with the plain meaning of the text. I have aimed to explain the natural sense of Scripture according to its original import, eschewing interpretations based on *דרשׁ* *d'raš*.<sup>\*</sup> This type of exegesis also has intrinsic importance, particularly for halachic purposes; but the Talmudic sages already taught that 'a Biblical verse never loses its primary sense.' Our task is obviously to search out, to the utmost of our capacity, the true meaning of the Scriptural text. Noteworthy in this respect are the observations of Rashbam [R. Samuel b. Meir] in his introduction to pericope *משפטים* *Mišpāṭim* [Exod. xxi–xxiv].

To enable us to comprehend the words of Scripture fully, I have invariably given consideration to their aesthetic qualities as well.

\* This term, which means literally 'exposition', is used broadly for any kind of exegesis that is not in accord with the simple or actual sense of the Biblical text. More specifically, it is the method that characterizes the interpretations of the Midrashim (both halachic and haggadic) and the Talmudim. *Tr.*

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The Book of Exodus is not only a sublime religious document; it is also a literary masterpiece, and our understanding of any literary work depends on our understanding of the artistic criteria which governed its composition, and on our appreciation of the beauty with which it is imbued.

For this purpose I sought, in the first place, to determine the inherent divisions of the Book down to its smallest subdivisions. I discerned in it three major parts, each of which is separable into sections, and each section into a number of paragraphs. In this very analysis, and in the titles that I have given the parts, sections and paragraphs, there is to be found, as it were, a general commentary and an elucidation of the architectonic structure of the work. In annotating the details of the passages, I have endeavoured to clarify the way in which the literary techniques of the ancient Orient have been applied, explaining the Eastern concept of 'order', which is unlike the Greek and modern concepts, the principles underlying the sequence of the sections, the repetitions (of words, phrases, paragraphs or complete sections), the numerical symmetry, the symbolism of the numbers according to the sexagesimal and heptadic systems, and so forth.

With the general question relating to the origin of the Book of Exodus, the date of its composition, its history and all the other problems that are usually discussed in an 'introduction', I shall deal in detail in the Introduction to the Pentateuch that I intend publishing at the end of my series of commentaries.\* But even in the present volume I took the opportunity, on a number of occasions, of alluding incidentally to many matters of this nature.

I also paid attention to the various recensions, which, even after the final form of the books of the Torah has been fixed in its essential aspects, still differed in textual particulars, as we clearly see from the Samaritan Pentateuch and the ancient versions, as well as from citations in Talmudic literature and in MSS discovered in modern times, like the Nash Papyrus. Apparently the position with regard to the Torah was similar to that which obtained in the case of the Book of Isaiah, according to what we have learnt from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which comprise two divergent recensions of Isaiah, which existed side by side. There were also, it seems, different versions of the Pentateuch, namely, a recension intended for the sages and scholars, on which the Masoretic text is mainly based, and along with it, like

\* It is to be regretted that the untimely demise of the author prevented him from carrying out his intention. *Tr.*

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the Isaiah MS I, a number of popular editions (one of which was preserved by the Samaritans) the traces of which are discernible in the ancient translations.

Seeing that this book is designed primarily as a textual *commentary*, I did not deal — or I dealt only incidentally — with historical problems, such as the date to be assigned to the Exodus from Egypt, and the like; and in general I did not touch upon the question of the historical evaluation of the Scriptural records. Historical discussion of this kind is the function of the historian not of the commentator; the duty of the exegete is only to furnish the historian with material for his study by the proper elucidation of the text.

I endeavoured to make my commentary as succinct as possible. At times I compressed into a single line, and even into a single word, the results of research or meditation that could fill pages, trusting that the thoughtful reader would infer the unstated from the stated. Likewise I have nearly always refrained from controverting, or even citing, the views of other expositors, unless there was a special reason for doing so.

And now a few words about the external form of the commentary. Wherever possible I fitted my comments into the words of Scripture, so that the nexus between the annotation and the text should be close and direct, and the reader would have no need constantly to refer to the Pentateuchal wording; italics are used to mark the Biblical citations. On occasion, when I deemed it necessary, I added prefatory notes at the beginning of the sections or paragraphs, or concluding remarks at the end.

After seeing this volume through the press, I propose, *Deo Volente*, to start work immediately on the publication of the third volume of my commentary on Genesis, in accordance with the scheme that I outlined in the preface to the second volume, entitled *From Noah to Abraham*.\*

JERUSALEM, ELUL, 5711 (1951)

U.C.

\* Unhappily the author's sudden death prevented him from realizing his intention. He succeeded in completing only a small part — perhaps a fifth — of the third volume. This fragment has been added, in reprints of the Hebrew edition and also in the English version, as a supplement to the second volume, *From Noah to Abraham. Tr.*