

## *Yx2 – Questions About the Creation of the Old Testament*

Maybe some progress has been made:<sup>1</sup>

In 1963, two out of three people [in the US] believed that the Bible was the actual word of God. Associated with this belief is the concept that the writings in the Bible are inerrant and infallible. By 1999, the numbers had reversed. Two out of three now regard the Bible as composed of “divinely inspired” texts or ancient fables, legends, and human-recorded moral codes.

But that “progress” (with a substantial fraction of Americans in 1999 continuing to “think” that the Bible is “divinely inspired”) still reveals astounding ignorance – and more recently, it may be getting worse. Thus, in 2004, an ABC News poll found:<sup>2</sup>

... 61 percent of Americans believe the account of creation in the Bible’s book of Genesis is “literally true” rather than a story meant as a “lesson.” Sixty percent believe in the story of Noah’s ark and a global flood, while 64 percent agree that Moses parted the Red Sea to save fleeing Jews from their Egyptian captors. The poll [has] a margin of error of 3 percentage points...

That seems to represent an enormous step backwards in five years (1999 to 2004), but maybe the wording of the questions make the answers incomparable (maybe those asked didn’t know what “literally true” means!) – or maybe the pollsters are kidding themselves about their margin of error. Pity that the people’s “margin of error” wasn’t “3 percentage points”!

Such results reveal that a terrible number of Americans “believe” (i.e., with ‘lief’ the Anglo-Saxon root-word meaning ‘wish’, then a horrible number of Americans “wish it to be”) that the Bible’s Old Testament is, at the very least, “inspired” by no less than the creator of the universe, i.e., the first symmetry-breaking quantum-like fluctuation in the original void that led to the Big Bang. Stated differently and although disagreements about details persist, a terrible number of Jews, Christians, Muslims, Mormons, etc. have been convinced by their parents, their cultures, by their own emotions (including their egotism, conceit, vanity, fear...), by their thoughts warped on hallucinatory drugs, or by whatever, that some omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all knowing), omnibenevolent (all good), omnipresent (present

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<sup>1</sup> Copied from [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_poll4.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_poll4.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Copied from <http://www.washtimes.com/news/2004/feb/16/20040216-113955-2061r/>.

everywhere)... immortal (undying) being (i.e., some god) not only created the universe and controls it but also conveyed to an otherwise unimportant group of primitive people in the Middle East “His” desires and instructions, which are now contained in the Bible (albeit, possibly flawed by human errors).

In reality, not the tiniest shred of evidence supports the idea that any god exists, let alone was involved in the creation of any “holy book”. In contrast, substantial evidence supports that the hypotheses that the Bible’s Old Testament and New Testament (and similarly the Quran and the Book of Mormon) were created by ignorant, power-mongering clerics, using available stories, songs, and speculations concocted by still earlier and even more ignorant people.

For this post, my goal is to review at least a little of that evidence associated with the Old Testament (OT). I’ll provide more evidence in subsequent posts, both for the OT and for the other “holy books” mentioned.

At the outset, however, I should admit that I’m no historian and I’m a novice in the field of Bible ‘exegesis’ (meaning “[critical explanation or interpretation of a text](#)”). For fellow novices, perhaps the most relevant summary of all such studies is as given at the end of the Wikipedia article<sup>3</sup> dealing with the “Documentary Hypothesis”, relating to the authorship of the first five books of the OT, called the Torah (from Hebrew *tōrāh* = “instruction, doctrine, law”, in turn from *yārāh* = “show, direct, instruct”) or called the Pentateuch (from Greek *penta* = ‘five’ and *teukhos* = “implement or book”):

[The verities enshrined in older introductions have disappeared, and in their place scholars are confronted by competing theories which are discouragingly numerous, exceedingly complex, and often couched in an expository style that is \(to quote John van Seter’s description of one seminal work\) “not for the faint-hearted.”](#)

Having spent far more time on the subject than I ever expected (or ever wanted) and admittedly not having my heart in any of it, I certainly agree that the entire business is “[not for the faint-hearted.](#)” But then, as Mark Twain said:

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<sup>3</sup> Available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary\\_hypothesis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_hypothesis).

It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it's the parts that I do understand.

For the Bible's OT, the Documentary Hypothesis (outlined later in this post) apparently started when brilliant people such as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Baruch Spinoza (1632–77), Thomas Paine (1737–1809), and many others, published comments on the Bible, saying (in effect): “Something's amiss”. Such an assessment seems reasonable, even to casual readers of the OT, especially when their attention is called to points such as the following.

- The first few pages of the Bible contain two different and conflicting “creation stories.” As Doug Linder relays:<sup>4</sup>

Most obviously, the order of creation is different in the two stories. In the six-day creation story, the order of creation is plants, birds and fish, mammals and reptiles, and finally man to reign over all created before him, while in the Adam and Eve story, the creation order is reversed, with man coming first, then plants and animals. [Neither of which, of course, is consistent with current knowledge about the evolution of the universe, stars, the earth, or life on earth.] The two creation stories also have different narrative rhythms, different settings, and different names for God. In the six-day story, the creation of humanity occurs through a single act and the creator, seemingly more cosmic than human-like, is present only through a series of commands. In the Adam and Eve story, on the other hand, man and woman are created through two separate acts, and God is present in a hands-on intimate way. The pre-creation setting in the six-day story is a watery chaos, while in the Adam and Eve version, the setting before creation is a dry desert. Finally, in the six-day story, the creator is called “Elohim” [usually translated ‘God’], while in the other version of events, the creator is “the Lord God” (“Yahweh”) [or the four-lettered name YHWH, usually translated LORD, sometimes miscalled “Jehovah”].

According to an (unspecified) author at the blog<sup>5</sup> *Into The Deep*:

This gave rise to the theory that there were two different authors, one called E [for Elohim] and one called J (German for Y [for YHWH]), whose works were somehow combined to form a single text.

Further, one of the founders of both the American and French republics, Thomas Paine, pointed out:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> At <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/gen1st.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> At <http://deepcast.blogspot.com/2007/06/documentary-theory-or-graf-welhausen.html>.

<sup>6</sup> At <http://www.ageofreason.info/prospect - hint to form society for inquiring.pdf>.

With respect to the cosmogony or account of the Creation (in *Genesis 1*), of the Garden of Eden (in *Genesis 2*), and of what is called the Fall of Man (in *Genesis 3*), there is something concerning them we are not historically acquainted with. In none of the books of the [OT] after *Genesis*, are any of these things mentioned, or even alluded to. How is this to be accounted for? The obvious inference is, that either they were not known, or not believed to be facts, by the writers of the other books of the Bible...

The next question on the case is, how did the Jews come by these notions, and at what time were they written? To answer this question we must first consider what the state of the world was at the time the Jews began to be a people, for the Jews are but a modern race compared with the antiquity of other nations. At the time there were, even by their own account, but thirteen Jews or Israelites in the world, Jacob and his twelve sons... The nations of Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, and India were great and populous, abounding in learning and science, particularly in the knowledge of astronomy... The chronological tables mention that eclipses were observed at Babylon above two thousand years before the Christian era, which was before there was a single Jew or Israelite in the world.

All those ancient nations had their cosmogonies, that is, their accounts how the Creation was made, long before there were such people as Jews or Israelites. An account of these cosmogonies of India and Persia is given by Henry Lord, Chaplain to the East India Company at Surat, and published in London in 1630. The writer of this has seen a copy of the edition of 1630, and made extracts from it. The work, which is now scarce, was dedicated by [Henry] Lord to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

We know that the Jews were carried captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, and remained in captivity several years, when they were liberated by Cyrus, king of Persia. During their captivity they would have had an opportunity of acquiring some knowledge of the cosmogony of the Persians, or at least of getting some ideas how to fabricate one to put at the head of their own history after their return from captivity. This will account for the cause, for some cause there must have been, that no mention nor reference is made to the cosmogony in *Genesis* in any of the books of the Bible supposed to have been written before the captivity, nor is the name of Adam to be found in any of those books.

The books of *Chronicles* were written after the return of the Jews from captivity, for the third chapter of the first book gives a list of all the Jewish kings from David to Zedekiah, who was carried captive into Babylon, and to four generations beyond the time of Zedekiah. In *1 Chron.*, the name of Adam is mentioned, but not in any book in the Bible written before that time, nor could it be, for Adam and Eve are names taken from the cosmogony of the Persians. Henry Lord, in his book, written from Surat and dedicated, as I have already said, to the Archbishop of Canterbury, says that in the Persian cosmogony the name of the first man was Adamoh, and of the woman, Hevah.

- The OT doesn't develop a coherent picture of God, starting even in the first three chapters of *Genesis*. Thus, in *Genesis 1*, God (*Elohim*) is depicted as omnipotent (e.g., similar to the Egyptian god Ra – concocted much earlier – able to create things simply by naming them), omniscient (e.g., knowing how to organize the entire universe), and omnibenevolent (e.g., creating the Earth for humans). Yet, in *Genesis 3*, God (called by a different name, i.e., LORD) couldn't find Adam and Eve in a little forest, apparently didn't know that they would eat the apples (or knew, and didn't care), and allegedly punished them for disobeying his orders (even though it was his mistake to prevent them from knowing the difference between good and evil; thereby, preventing them from knowing that it was 'good' to obey his orders and 'bad' not to)!

More incoherency in the picture of God appears in the rest of *Genesis* and in *Exodus*. For example, associated with the Noah flood myth, God admits that he made a mistake by making humans (whereas an omniscient god wouldn't make mistakes) and then, upon mercilessly (not benevolently) killing all life (save for the few survivors in Noah's ark), God allegedly created rainbows to remind himself not to do it again! Some omniscience!

Further, associated with the Tower of Babel myth, he's unable to see from afar what humans are doing (i.e., neither omniscient nor omnipresent), and then, upon seeing that humans are making progress, he purposefully inhibits their progress by creating a "babel" of languages (not benevolently). Similarly, associated with the Sodom and Gomorrah myth, God's unable to see from afar the activities in those cities, and after chatting with God for a while, Abraham is able to convince God to alter his plans (not omniscient). Later, Joseph wrestles with God (and didn't find him omnipotent!), God's supposed omnipotence was reduced to being able to appear to Moses as a burning bush, Egyptian priests matched essentially all of God's magic tricks (not omnipotent), and God resorted to the malevolent tactic of killing all the Egyptian firstborn.

A specific illustration of God's incompetence is available in a weird passage in the OT (at *Exodus 4*, 24–26), in which Moses' wife (Zipporah) stops God from killing Moses. Since this passage doesn't seem to get the press that it deserves, I've added a few notes in brackets to the following quotation (taken from The New English Bible):

During the journey [of Moses back to Egypt], while they [Moses and his family] were encamped for the night, the LORD met Moses, meaning to kill him. [Hello? Moses was on "a mission for the Lord"? Why the change of heart? Why does God now propose to kill Moses? Did the Lord have second thoughts about choosing the murderer Moses as his "profit"? Did God have second thoughts about making the Pharaoh obstinate, so he could kill all the Egyptian firstborn? Did he realize that, once again, he had made a mistake? Or once again, did he just forget what his plan was? Where are those damn rainbows when you need them?!] but Zipporah picked up a sharp flint, cut off her son's foreskin, and touched him with it, saying, "[I'm the fastest draw and the fastest cutter in the

region, and] **you are my blood-bridegroom.**” So [startled by the speed with which she cut the kid and shocked by being whipped across the face with the bloody foreskin of Moses’ son (who was screaming in agony), and yet once again totally fascinated by foreskins], **the LORD let Moses alone.** [But, but: if God is omnipotent, how could he be overpowered by a woman wielding a bloody foreskin? If he’s omniscient, why didn’t he see it coming? And what’s with his sensitivity about being called a “blood-bridegroom”? Is that why he later demanded: “**Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain**”?!]

Now, I admit that, from the above, it’s not clear whom Zipporah zapped with the zipped skin. In the second to last sentence, if the reader goes backward from the pronoun ‘him’ to the nearest noun, ‘him’ seems to refer to her son – but that seems odd: why cut the kid’s foreskin just to whip the kid with it? And although incest is apparently approved in the Bible (e.g., witness the “righteous man” Lott and his daughters), I doubt if Zipporah was claiming that her son was her “blood-bridegroom”.

On the other hand, maybe it’s the way that ancient Hebrews played the game of tag, with instead of saying, “You’re it”, saying, “You’re my blood-bridegroom.” If so, maybe that explains why so many Jews have been so studious. Thus, I can imagine a mother saying (in a sing-song, seductive voice), “Come on, son, it’s time to go out and play”, to which her son responds (after murmuring to himself, “Not with my bloody foreskin you’re not”): “Sorry, mom, I gotta study!”

In any event, recognizing what appears to be an error in the composition (namely, a dangling pronoun – which, come to think of it, seems to be a highly appropriate description of God: a dangling pronoun), readers are probably left with the question: Does ‘him’ refer to Moses or God?

I’ll leave it for readers to decide, but will provide the following “help” by quoting the supposedly identical story in the King James Version of the Bible (*Exodus 4, 24–26*):

**And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, “Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.” So he let him go; then she said, “A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.”**

I trust that that clears up quite a bit: maybe ‘omnipotent’ and ‘omniscient’ are still confusing, but what ‘omnipresent’ apparently means is that you can’t tell his face from his feet. Or maybe it’s a word used to relay the fact that, ever since Zipporah zonked him with her kid’s zipped skin, nobody’s ever seen him: El Zippo. In any case, what remains unclear for me is how any sane person could get a coherent picture of God from such crazy stories.

- In addition, the OT contains a number of statements that are out of time sequence (anachronisms), contradictory, illogical, etc., throwing in doubt, for example, the

validity of the claim that the Pentateuch was written by Moses, that Joseph and Moses were as the OT claimed, that the Exodus ever occurred, etc. For example, in his amazing 1929 book,<sup>7</sup> *The Story of Religious Controversy*, and in particular, in Chapter VII entitled “The Forgery of the Old Testament”, Joseph McCabe gives the following examples (among others):

- *Genesis* claims that Abraham (or Abram) was from “**Ur of the Chaldees**”, but it wasn’t until roughly 500 years after Moses that the area became “the land of the Chaldees” (which then dates the writing to be at least 500 years after the date claimed),
- *Genesis 12, 6 and 13, 7* state that “**the Canaanite dwelled then in the land**” (the obvious meaning of which is that they no longer dwelled there, again dating the writing), and as still another example,
- *1 Chronicles 24, 7* states that money was paid in “**darics**” (i.e., coins of the Persian Emperor Darius); “**so, obviously, this was written long after [521] BCE (the first year of Darius I).**”

Still other indications that “something’s amiss” include Moses describing himself as humble (an oxymoron) and detailing his own funeral and its aftermath (illogical), the statement “**before there were kings in Israel**” (it’s a wonder that the author didn’t write: “**before the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles**!”), and the listing of kings of Edom before those kings existed.

As Paine pointed out near the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (in the article already referenced, entitled “Hints Toward Forming a Society for Inquiring into the Truth or Falsehood of Ancient History...”):

It would be of use to inquire, and ascertain the time, when that part of the Bible called the Old Testament first appeared. From all that can be collected there was no such book till after the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon, and that it is the work of the Pharisees of the Second Temple. How they came to make *Kings 19* and *Isaiah 37* word for word alike, can only be accounted for by their having no plan to go by, and not knowing what they were about. The same is the case with respect to the last verses in *2 Chronicles* and the first verses in *Ezra*; they also are word for word alike... [which the reader might want to check, to confirm that something’s definitely amiss!]

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a society such as Paine envisioned was formed (although not officially, as far as I know), leading to the Documentary Hypothesis (or Document Theory or Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis), outlined in Wikipedia as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> Available at [http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/joseph\\_mccabe/religious\\_controversy/](http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/joseph_mccabe/religious_controversy/).

The documentary hypothesis... proposes that the first five books of the Old Testament (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*, known collectively as the Torah or Pentateuch) represent a combination of documents from originally independent sources. According to the influential version of the hypothesis formulated by Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), there were four main sources, and these sources and the approximate dates of their composition were:

- The J, or Jahwist, source; written c. 950 BCE in the southern kingdom of Judah. (The name ‘Yahweh’ begins with a J in Wellhausen’s native German.)
- The E, or Elohist, source; written c. 850 BCE in the northern kingdom of Israel.
- The D, or Deuteronomist, source; written c. 621 BCE in Jerusalem during a period of religious reform.
- The P, or Priestly, source; written c. 450 BCE by Aaronid priests.

The editor who combined the sources into the final Pentateuch is known as R, for Redactor, and might have been Ezra.

This Wikipedia article<sup>8</sup> summarizes the Documentary Hypothesis as follows:

According to Wellhausen, the four sources present a picture of Israel’s religious history, which he saw as one of *ever-increasing centralization and priestly power*. [Italics added.] Wellhausen’s hypothesis became the dominant view on the origin of the Pentateuch for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Most contemporary Bible experts accept some form of the documentary hypothesis {Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Palo Alto, Mayfield, 1985}, and scholars continue to draw on Wellhausen’s terminology and insights {Gordon Wenham, “Pentateuchal Studies Today”, *Themelios* 22.1 (October 1996)}.

Of course, criticism of the Documentary Hypothesis is extensive, not only from religious fundamentalists (convinced that the Bible is the “inerrant word of God”) but even from many “main-stream” religious people, who commonly claim that “the Holy Spirit” (or similar) was (quite literally) a “ghost writer” for the entire Bible. Illustrative is the Catechism of the Catholic Church (United States Catholic Conference, Inc. - *Liberia Editrice Vaticana*, 1997, #111):

...since Sacred Scripture is inspired, there is another and no less important principle of correct interpretation... Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.

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<sup>8</sup> From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary\\_Hypothesis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_Hypothesis).

Riiiiight. Similar has been said for centuries. Paine's summary in his 1794 book *The Age of Reason* seems to be an appropriate response:

Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon than the Word of God. It is a history of wickedness that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind; and for my own part, I sincerely detest it, as I detest everything that is cruel.

Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899) said similar:

All that is necessary, as it seems to me, to convince any reasonable person that the Bible is simply and purely of human invention – of barbarian invention – is to read it. Read it as you would any other book; think of it as you would of any other; get the bandage of reverence from your eyes; drive from your heart the phantom of fear; push from the throne of your brain the coiled form of superstition – then read the Holy Bible, and you will be amazed that you ever, for one moment, supposed a being of infinite wisdom, goodness and purity, to be the author of such ignorance and of such atrocity... We are told in the Pentateuch, that god, the father of us all, gave thousands of maidens (after having killed their fathers, their mothers, and their brothers) to satisfy the brutal lusts of savage men. If there be a god, I pray him to write in His book, opposite my name, that I denied this lie for Him.

An unidentified author at Religious Tolerance.Org summarizes as follows:<sup>9</sup>

*Writing by various authors, according to the documentary hypothesis:*

**J: a writer who**

- Focuses on humanity in his writing.
- Might possibly have been a woman. His/her writing shows much greater sensitivity towards women than does E.
- Regularly used “JHWH” as God's name.
- Describes God in anthropomorphic terms: God formed Adam from clay; he walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden; he spoke to Moses.
- Lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, during an early period of Israel's history when they followed a nature/fertility religion. May have been a member of the Judean court.
- Wrote a more or less complete story of the history of the Israelites from a Judean perspective.
- J was probably written between 848 BCE (when King Jehoram gained power in Judah) and 722 BCE when the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom Israel and took its people into exile. Some scholars date J to the 10th century BCE.

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<sup>9</sup> Copied from [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_tora1.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_tora1.htm).

**E: a writer who**

- Writes about religious and moralistic concerns.
- In all probability was a man.
- Consistently used “Elohim” as God’s name.
- Lived in the northern kingdom of Israel.
- Wrote a more or less complete story of the history of the Israelites from the perspective of the northern kingdom, including that version of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.
- Probably wrote between 922 and 722 BCE.
- May have been a priest from Shiloh who viewed Moses as his spiritual ancestor.

**D: a writer who**

- Lived after J and E, because he was familiar with later developments in Israel’s history. He lived at a time when the religion of ancient Israel was in its spiritual/ethical stage, about 622 BCE.
- Wrote almost all of book of Deuteronomy, as well as Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. A second writer edited the original text after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE. He added the last two chapters to 2 Kings and inserted short passages elsewhere to reflect the change in circumstances brought about by the Babylonian attack.
- Lived in Judah, probably in Jerusalem.
- Was probably a Levitical priest, perhaps Jeremiah.

**P: a writer who**

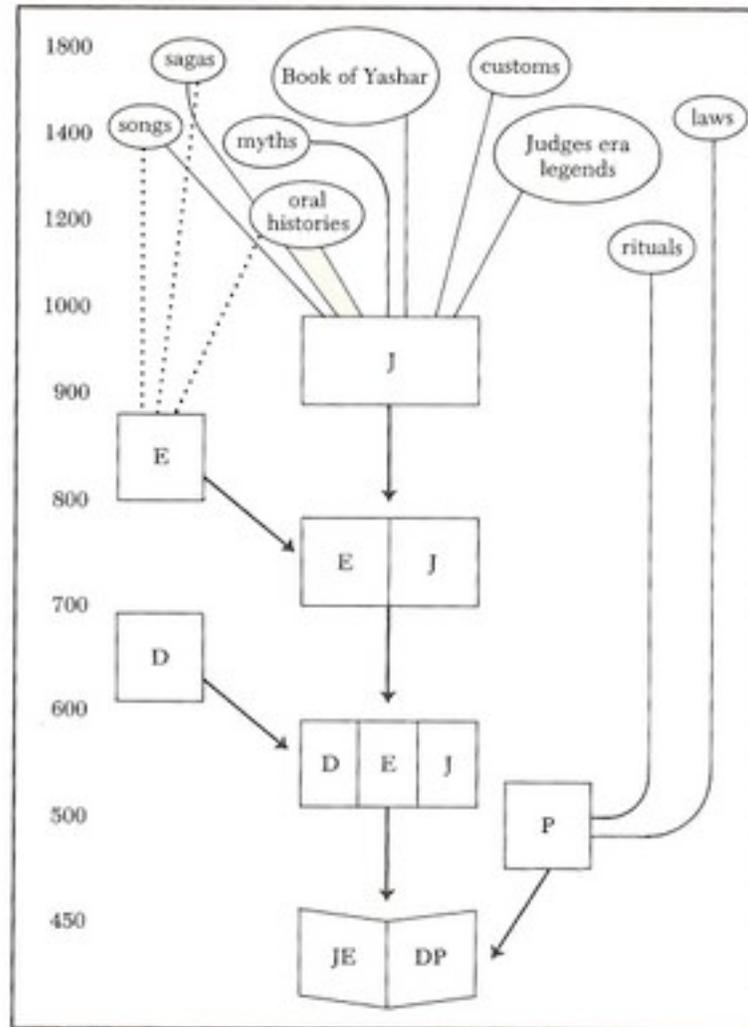
- Focused his writings on God.
- Added material from a priestly perspective. It discusses priests’ lives, religious rituals, dates, measurements, chronologies, genealogies, worship and law.
- Was a priest who identified Aaron as his spiritual ancestor.
- Views God as a distant, transcendent deity, less personal than in J and E; sometimes harsh and critical. The words “mercy,” “grace” and “repentance” do not appear in his writing; they appear about 70 times in J, E, and D.
- Was displeased with the work of J and E and wrote P as an alternative history.
- Rejected the concepts of angels, dreams and talking animals that are seen in J & E.
- Believed that only Levites who were descended from Aaron could be priests.
- Lived after J, E and D, because he was aware of the books of the Prophets, which were unknown to the others. Lived when the country’s religion reached a priestly/legal stage, before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.
- Patterned his writing after the topics in J and E.

**R: a redactor who**

- Was an Aaronid priest and thus definitely a male.
- Joined the writings of J, E, P and D together into the present Pentateuch...

*How the Pentateuch evolved, according to the documentary hypothesis:*

[The envisioned time line, suggesting how at least the first part of the OT was put together, is as shown in the figure below (with time at the left, labeled with dates Before the Current Era, i.e., BCE).<sup>10</sup> Text associated with this figure follows.]



Friedmann {R.E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, CA, 1997, pp. 87-88} suggests that when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom in 722 BCE, many refugees streamed south into Judea, bringing their sacred writing “E” with them. Subsequently, E and J were combined into a single document, referred to as “JE.”

<sup>10</sup> Copied from [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_tora1.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_tora1.htm).

D was written perhaps a century later. It was conveniently “discovered” in the temple by the priest Hilkiah in 622 BCE, shortly after it was written. {See *2 Kings 22, 8*} D was then joined with JE

P was written before the death of King Josiah in 609 BCE, probably during the reign of King Hezekiah. It was written as an alternative to JE.

R combined J, E, P and other documents together into the first four books of the Hebrew Scriptures. To this, he added D’s writings, the book of Deuteronomy, to complete the Pentateuch. By the time that he did the editing, the JE, D and P documents were in wide circulation. Each was supported by various factions. R saw his task as attempting to join these sources together into a more or less cohesive, single document. Friedmann suspects that Ezra was the redactor.

As I reviewed in an earlier chapter (**Qx10**) the OT, itself, contains evidence that Ezra was the “redactor”, R (or one of the redactors). Yet, it might be useful to re-examine the biblical evidence (and associated archeological evidence), if for no other reason than to get a clearer idea of what’s meant by the “sanitized” word ‘redactor’ (or ‘editor’). From the evidence, a ‘redactor’ is someone who apparently “edits” (or better, “forges”) old manuscripts – more commonly called a ‘liar’.

The accusation that Ezra forged historical records can be made quite confidently, because the original of one of the documents that he “redacted” has been found, namely, the Cylinder of Cyrus. Before examining the Cylinder of Cyrus, however, the reader might usefully be reminded of a little history.

In particular, during one of his expansion campaigns, Nebuchadnezzar (the king of the Babylonian Empire) overran Israel (possibly first in 605 BCE and then again in 598 BCE), smashed the temple that the Israelites had built for their chief (but not only) god (Yahweh), and took at least some of the Jews back to Babylon. Approximately three generations later, in 539 BCE the king of Persia, Cyrus the Great (or Cyrus II, who ruled from 559–530 BCE) conquered Babylon – and then treated the Israelites amazingly well. Specifically, as reported in the Bible’s *Book of Ezra 1*, 1–4 (quoted here from the King James Version of the Bible, for reasons to be explained):

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia... the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it also in writing* [italics added], saying:

“Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

“Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem.

“And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

That’s really quite amazing: Cyrus, the King of Persia, finding Israelite captives in Babylon and that their temple had been destroyed by the King of Babylonia, said to them, in effect: “You can go home, now, and rebuild your temple.”

Further, according to *Ezra 1*, 7–11, Cyrus returned to the custody of the Israelites even the “treasures” taken from their destroyed temple:

Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his god. Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, *the prince of Judah* [italics added, for reasons to be explained]... All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

That’s even more amazing: the king of Persia, Cyrus the Great, perhaps the most powerful person in the world at the time (and certainly the most powerful person in the Middle East) not only told the Israelites that they could go home, but he gave to Sheshbazzar (or Shezbazzar), for their return to Jerusalem, 5400 “**vessels of gold and silver**”, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Israelites’ destroyed temple.

As might be expected, the Jews were overjoyed. In fact (if there’s any accuracy in what’s reported in the Bible), the captive Israelites proclaimed Cyrus as “the Messiah”, a title that they never had (and have never since) given to any other foreigner – and didn’t give it even to a famous person of their own bloodline, namely, Jesus (if he ever existed). Specifically, *Isaiah 45*, 1–3 states:

Thus says the LORD to Cyrus *his anointed* [italics added], Cyrus whom he has taken by the hand to subdue nations before him and undo the might of kings; before whom gates shall be opened and no doors be shut: “I will go before you and level the swelling hills; I will break down gates of bronze and hack through iron bars. I will give you treasures from dark vaults, hoarded in secret place, that you may know that I am the LORD...”

First reading of the above quotation might not reveal that Cyrus was described as “the Messiah”, but Sir Laurence Gardner’s lecture entitled “The Hidden History of Jesus and the Holy Grail” explains:

The word ‘Messiah’ comes from the Hebrew verb ‘to anoint’, which itself is derived from the Egyptian word *messeh*, ‘the holy crocodile’. It was with the fat of the messeh that the Pharaoh’s sister-brides anointed their husbands on marriage. The Egyptian custom sprang from kingly practice in old Mesopotamia.

That is, calling Cyrus the Lord’s “**anointed**” is the same as proclaiming him “the Messiah”, i.e., “the anointed one”. But whatever way the passage is read, it certainly was “high praise” for the Jews to give a foreigner.

Apparently, however, not all Israelites were pleased with so much praise for Cyrus. Thus, seemingly in response to criticism, Isaiah responded (*Isaiah 45, 9*):

Will the pot [i.e., you objecting people] contend with the potter [God], or the earthenware with the hand that shapes it? Will the clay ask the potter what he is making? Or his handiwork say to him, “you have no skill”? Will the babe say to his father, “What are you begetting?”, or to his mother, “What are you bringing to birth?”

Thus says the LORD... “Would you dare question me concerning my children or instruct me in my handiwork? I alone, I made the earth and created man upon it; I, with my own hands, stretched out the heavens and caused all their host to shine. I alone have roused this man [Cyrus] in righteousness, and I will smooth his path before him... [and besides, it’s my ball; so, this is the way we’re gonna play – thus sayeth the priests!]

Maybe that response covered the Jews ~2500 years ago, but for the rest of us, questions abound, such as: Does the story make sense? Why was Cyrus so generous? Who was Sheshbazzar (also called Zerubabel), i.e., the fellow who was given the 5400 “**vessels of gold and silver**”? And most significantly: Is the story reliable?

In partial response to such questions, starting with the last one (viz., is the story reliable?), the answer seems to be: only partially. Thus, rather foolishly, Ezra (who comes into the story approximately a century after Cyrus) wrote in the above quotation (or subsequent clerics who rewrote the “Book of Ezra” wrote) that Cyrus “**put it [the proclamation] also in writing**”. If true, and if a person plans to “stretch the truth”, then it’s generally a good idea not to lie about something for which conflicting evidence might become available – which has occurred.

Thus, in 1879 the archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam found what’s now called the “Cylinder of Cyrus” in the foundations of the Esagila, the temple of the chief god of Babylon, Marduk. Photographs of the approximately 10 inch (25 cm) clay “barrel” (or cylinder) are available at many places on the internet, e.g., at a relevant Wikipedia article.<sup>11</sup> Although parts of the cylinder are damaged, the following is the translation<sup>12</sup> (originally translated, I think, by A. Leo Oppenheim) of Cyrus’s proclamation, “**paraphrased from the *Ancient East, Vol. 1: An Anthology of Pictures*, edited by James B. Pritchard.**” To this translation I’ve added the comments in brackets [such as these]; I don’t know who added the comments shown in parentheses (such as these) or “squiggly brackets” {such as these}, but I suspect it was Oppenheim, who thereby was identifying either parts of the text that required interpolation or parts of the text that were missing or damaged.

... {r}ims (of the world)... a weakling [Cyrus is probably referring to Nebuchadnezzar or his son, Nabonidus] has been installed as the enu {Sumerian title for king} of his country {the correct images of the gods he removed from their thrones, imi} tations he ordered to place upon them. A replica of the temple Esagila he has... for Ur and the other sacred cities inappropriate rituals... daily he did blabber {incorrect prayers}. He (furthermore) interrupted in a fiendish way the regular offerings, he did... he established within the sacred cities. The worship of Marduk, the king of the gods, he {chang}ed into abomination; daily he used to do evil against his (i.e., Marduk’s) city... He {tormented} its {inhabitant}s with corvee-work (lit., a yoke) without relief, he ruined them all.

Upon their complaints the lord of the gods [Marduk] became terribly angry and {he departed from} their region, (also) the (other) gods living among them left their mansions, wroth that he [Nebuchadnezzar or his son] had brought (them) into Babylon. (But) Marduk {who does care for}... on account of (the fact that) the sanctuaries of all their settlements were in ruins and the inhabitants of Sumer and Akkad had become like (living) dead, turned back (his countenance) {his} an- {ger}

<sup>11</sup> At [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus\\_Cylinder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus_Cylinder).

<sup>12</sup> Copied from [http://reference.findtarget.com/search/Cyrus\\_cylinder/](http://reference.findtarget.com/search/Cyrus_cylinder/).

{abated} and he had mercy (upon them). He scanned and looked (through) all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him (in the procession).

(Then) he pronounced the name Cyrus (Ku-ra-as), king of Anshan, declared him (lit, pronounced) {his} name to be(come) the ruler of all the world. He made the Guti country and all the Manda hordes bow in submission to his (Cyrus's) feet. And he (Cyrus) did always endeavor to treat according to justice the black-headed whom he (Marduk) has made him conquer. [Incidentally, it's interesting (at least to me!) that, similar to Hammurabi (the King of Babylon ~1300 year earlier), Cyrus refers to his Babylonian subjects as "the black-headed" (people), perhaps suggesting that neither Hammurabi nor Cyrus had black hair. In particular, on the internet I've seen hints that Hammurabi was from what is now Syria and may have had red hair.] Marduk, the great lord, a protector of his people/worshippers, beheld with pleasure his (i.e., Cyrus's) good deeds and his upright mind (lit., heart) (and therefore) ordered him to march against his [Marduk's] city Babylon.

He made him set out on the road to Babylon, going at his side like a real friend. His widespread troops – their number, like that of the water of a river, could not be established – strolled along, their weapons packed away. Without any battle, he made him enter his [i.e., Marduk's] town Babylon, sparing Babylon any calamity. He delivered into his (i.e., Cyrus's) hands Nabonidus, the king who did not worship him (i.e., Marduk). All the inhabitants of Babylon as well as of the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors (included), bowed to him (Cyrus) and kissed his feet, jubilant that he (had received) the kingship, and with shining faces. Happily they greeted him as a master through whose help they had come (again) to life from death (and) had all been spared damage and disaster, and they worshiped his [Cyrus's] (very) name.

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four rims (of the earth), son of Cambyses (Ka-am-bu-zi-ia), great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendent of Teispes (Si-is-pi-is), great king, king of Anshan, of a family (which) always (exercised) kingship whose rule [the gods] Bel [Marduk] and Nebo [or Nabu, the god of wisdom and writing, alleged son of Marduk, after whom *Nebuchadnezzar* and his son *Nabonidus* were named] love, whom they want as king to please their hearts.

When I entered Babylon as a friend and (when) I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord, {induced} the magnanimous inhabitants of Babylon {to love me}, and I was daily endeavoring to worship him. My numerous troops walked around in Babylon in peace, I did not allow anybody to terrorize (any place) of the {country of Sumer} and Akkad. I strove for peace in Babylon and in all his (other) sacred cities.

As to the inhabitants of Babylon, {who} against the will of the gods {had/were..., I abolished} the corvee {the yoke of oppression} which was against their (social)

standing. I brought relief into their dilapidated housing, putting (thus) an end to their (main) complaints. Marduk, the great lord, was well pleased with my deeds and sent friendly blessings to myself, Cyrus, the king who worships him, to Cambyses, my son, the offspring of {my} loins as well as to all my troops, and we all {praised} his great {godhead} joyously, standing before him in peace.

All the kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who are seated in throne rooms, (those who) live in other {types of buildings as well as} all the kings of the West land living in tents [possibly meaning the Arabs], brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon. (As to the region) from... as far as Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-Turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, *I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon to the anger of the lord of the gods [Marduk] unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which made them happy.* [Italics added]

May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me (to him); to Marduk, my lord, they may say this: “Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son...”... all of them I settled in a peaceful place ducks and doves... I endeavored to fortify/repair their dwelling places... (six lines destroyed).

Thus, the original of the proclamation by Cyrus paints a very different picture from the one in the Bible. The picture in the OT is that of Cyrus recognizing the Hebrew god Yahweh as the “chief god”. Thus, as quoted above from *Ezra 1, 2* (but quoted, below, from the New English Version of the Bible):

**This is the word of Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he himself has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah.**

That’s not what Cyrus wrote! In the above-quoted Cylinder of Cyrus, Cyrus clearly states that Marduk was “**the king of the gods**”, and that it was Marduk (not Yahweh) who wanted all the “**lesser gods**” (such as Yahweh) returned to their cities:

*I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon to the anger of the lord of the gods [Marduk] unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which made them happy.*

Therefore, more descriptive than to suggest that Ezra (or whoever wrote *Ezra*) was a “redactor” would be to say that he was a “distorter” or “liar”.

Which then raises additional questions, such as: 1) Did Ezra (or whoever the “redactor” was) deliberately distort the historical record? 2) Was he just mistaken? Did he have access to Cyrus’ original statement? 3) What evidence supports the proposal that Ezra was the “redactor” (or one of the redactors”) of the OT? 4) Do other archeological data support the accusation that Ezra (and co-conspirators) forged historical records? and 5) If there were “priestly fabrications” of the historical records, what was the purpose (or purposes) of such fabrications? In the rest of this post and in posts to follow, I’ll try to address those questions (as well as the remainder of the questions asked a few pages earlier).

With respect to the possibility that the historical record was deliberately distorted, of course we can’t know for sure, not only because it’s not known for certain what historical records were available to “the redactor” (whom, for convenience, I’ll tentatively identify as Ezra) but also because it’s always difficult to determine another person’s intent. But given (as outlined below) that Ezra seems to have had access to the Royal Archives as “minister of Jewish affairs” for the Persian king and given (as also outlined below) that Ezra profited substantially from his writings, suspicion seems appropriate – similar to suspicions that the current President of Iran has ulterior motives in denying the Holocaust.

As to why Cyrus “repatriated” all the lesser gods such as Yahweh (besides Cyrus’ stated desire to make these other gods “happy”), the question could be rephrased as: Why would the repatriation make Cyrus happy? It may be, of course, that similar to modern-day religious people, Cyrus “truly believed” that the world was full of supernatural beings such as spirits and gods, and that, for his own and his son’s welfare, he was required to do whatever he thought those spirits and gods wanted. On the other hand, though, hints suggest that Cyrus was a competent politician who used religion to “manipulate the masses” for his own advantage – similar to the behaviors of essentially all “modern” American politicians.

One such hint can be found by addressing one of the other questions that I listed above: Who was Sheshbazzar (or Shezbazzar)? Above, in the first quote dealing with Sheshbazzar, I quoted the King James Version of the Bible, because in it (in *Ezra 1*, 8), Sheshbazzar is described as “**the prince of**

\* Go to other chapters *via*

**Judah**”. In a later section (*Ezra 5, 14*), recounting what had happened, the King James Version states:

And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he [Cyrus] had made *governor* [italics added].

In the New English Bible (noted for its care in translating original texts) the description of Sheshbazzar is even more explicit. At the same locations in the Bible, Sheshbazzar is called (*Ezra 1, 8*) “*the ruler of Judah* [italics added]”, and at *Ezra 5, 14* it states (essentially as in the King James Version): “**He** [Cyrus] **gave them** [the vessels of gold and silver] **to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor...**”

So, maybe why Cyrus gave all the gold and silver back to the Israelites (and similarly for other groups) makes some sense: basically, he didn't! Instead, in an amazingly astute political move, Cyrus bought the allegiance of the Israelites (and other groups, similarly) by storing “their” (i.e., his!) gold and silver plates in “their” (i.e., his!) land, which was to be ruled by “their” (i.e., his!) assigned “governors” / “rulers” / “princes” (e.g., Sheshbazzar). It was thus a brilliant move by Cyrus: it didn't cost him anything (since all he did was use a new building in newly acquired land, governed by one of his own henchmen, to store some of his enormous reserves of gold and silver), and in return, he received astounding praise and loyalty from the “liberated people” (such as the Israelites) – as well as, of course, annual “tributes” (i.e., taxes). Maybe never has a politician paid so little to gain so much!

More indications of Cyrus' competence are given in the Encyclopedia Britannica article on the history of Iran:

Nowhere did Cyrus display his political and military genius better than in the conquest of Babylon. The campaign actually began when he lulled the Babylonians into inactivity during his war with Lydia, which, since it was carried to a successful conclusion, deprived the Babylonians of a potential ally when their turn came. Then he took maximum advantage of internal disaffection and discontent within Babylon. Nabonidus was not a popular king; he had paid too little attention to home affairs and had alienated the native Babylonian priesthood. Second Isaiah, speaking for many of the captive Jews in Babylon, was undoubtedly not the only one of Nabonidus' subjects who looked to Cyrus as a potential deliverer.

With the stage thus set, the military campaign against Babylon came almost as an anticlimax. The fall of the greatest city in the Middle East was swift; Cyrus marched into town in the late summer of 539 BC, *seized the hands of the statue of the city god Marduk as a signal of his willingness to rule as a Babylonian and not as a foreign conqueror* [italics added], and was hailed by many as the legitimate successor to the throne. In one stride Cyrus carried Persian power to the borders of Egypt, for with Babylon came all that it had seized from the Assyrians and had gained in the sequel.

Additional information about Cyrus can be gleaned from the stories about him in *The History* written by Herodotus in 440 BCE.<sup>13</sup> As my dictionary states, Herodotus is commonly known as “the first historian to collect his materials systematically, test their accuracy to a certain extent, and arrange them in a well-constructed and vivid narrative.” His standards, however, left a lot to be desired. Yet, although a substantial amount of what Herodotus reported is of questionable reliability as history, he did record stories that people reported to him (and did so, during the same time period as when Ezra was “redacting” the OT).

From reading the stories retold by Herodotus, I speculate that maybe Cyrus wasn't religious at all. Thus, although Cyrus the Great (Cyrus II) would have been expected to be a Zoroastrian (as was his grandfather, Cyrus I), the interpretation of his grandfather's dream by Zoroastrian priests (Magi), an interpretation that (so Herodotus' reports) led to his grandfather ordering the infant Cyrus II killed (an execution that he obviously averted, but he was then raised by shepherds), probably led to “no love lost” between Cyrus II and the Magi (and their religion). I wouldn't be surprised, therefore, if when Cyrus conquered Babylon, he found it just as easy to feign religious conviction for the Babylonian gods (whose “chief god” was Marduk) as (I suspect) he feigned being a Zoroastrian, whose “chief god” was Auramazda or Ahura-Mazda or Ahura Mazda, literally “the Lord of Wisdom” or “Omniscient Lord” – and after whom the Mazda car is named.

Some historians, however, suggest that Cyrus was a sincere Zoroastrian. Illustrative is the following written by Richard Hooker:<sup>14</sup>

The Persians throughout their history, such as we know it, lived peacefully in the region just north of the Persian Gulf (modern day Iran). For the most part, they were left unbothered by the epic power struggles broiling to the west in Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Egypt. They were Indo-European peoples who spoke a language

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<sup>13</sup> Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Copied from <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MESO/PERSIANS.HTM>.

similar to Sanskrit and who worshipped gods very similar to the gods of the Vedic period in India. Life was hard in the region they controlled; the coastline afforded no harbors and the eastern region was mountainous. Only a few interior valleys supported the peoples; in part because of the geography, the Persians never really united into a single peoples but rather served as disparate vassal states to the Medes, who, from their capital at Ecbatana, controlled the area east of the Tigris River.

In this state, somewhere around 650 BCE, a new religion suddenly took hold. While we know little or nothing about the Persians in this period, we know the man who invented this new religion. Called Zarathustra (Zoroaster in Greek), his new religion and new gods captivated the spiritual and social imagination of the Persians. In its roughest outlines, Zoroastrianism is a dualistic religion; in Zarathustra's cosmos, the universe was under the control of two contrary gods, Ahura-Mazda, the creating god who is full of light and good, and Ahriman, the god of dark and evil. These two evenly matched gods are in an epic struggle over creation; at the end of time, Ahura-Mazda and his forces will emerge victorious. All of creation, all gods, all religions, and all of human history and experience can be understood as part of this struggle between light and dark, good and evil. Zoroastrianism, however, is a manifestly eschatological religion: meaning and value in this world is oriented towards the end of history and the final defeat of Ahriman and all those gods, humans, and other animate forces arrayed on the dark side of creation.

It is not possible to underestimate how Zoroastrianism changed the Persian world and its sense of its own community. If the world and human history could be understood as an epic struggle between good and evil, a struggle whose ultimate trajectory is the establishment of good throughout the universe and the defeat of evil, then one's own role, as an enlightened people, in the world becomes vastly different. This political role in the world was put together by Cyrus, called The Great.

Cyrus was a first in human history, for he was the first to conceive of an idea that would forever fire the political and social imaginations of the people touched by the Persians. That idea? Conquer the world.

Up until Cyrus, no culture or individual had ever really thought this one up. Territorial conquests, like monarchical power, were justified on religious grounds, but these religious grounds never gave rise to the notion that one's religious duty was to conquer the whole of the world as you knew it. [An idea pursued even today by Iran's president Ahmadinejad.]

In 559 BC, Cyrus became the chief of an obscure Persian tribe in the south of Persia. A devoted Zoroastrianism, he believed that his religious duty was to bring about the eschatological promises of Zoroastrianism through active warfare. If the universe was an epic struggle between the forces of Ahura-Mazda and the forces of evil, Cyrus [saw] his job as personally bringing about the victory of his god. As an extension of this, Cyrus would bring Zoroastrianism to all the peoples he conquered; he would not force them to become Zoroastrian, though. For Zoroastrianism recognized that all the

gods worshipped by other peoples were really gods; some were underlings of Ahura-Mazda and some were servants of Ahriman. Cyrus saw as his mission the tearing down of religions for evil gods and the shoring up of religions of gods allied with Ahura-Mazda...

Other historians, however, don't seem to be so confident as Hooker that they know Cyrus' thoughts. But regardless of Cyrus' motives, the building of a new temple in Jerusalem got underway – and continued by fits and starts. To hint about how historical events influenced the creation of the OT, the following brief summary may be useful.

First, many Jews obviously didn't accept Cyrus' offer, permitting them to return home. With Babylon probably the most dynamic city in the world at the time, it appears to be a case of: “How are ya gonna keep them down on the farm [Judea] after they've seen Paris [Babylon].” In any event, the usual chronology for the return is as follows:<sup>15</sup>

The first return to Judah for the Jews came shortly after the Persian conquest of Babylon, 538 BC (*Ezra 1*, 1), led by Sheshbazzar. The second came 80 years later, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, 458 BC (*Ezra 7*, 7), led by Ezra. And the third came 13 years after the second, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I, 444 BC (*Neh. 2*, 1), led by Nehemiah.

As indicated below, however, some scholars doubt the above chronology.

It also might be useful to display the following historical outline, not only to comment on religious affiliations of the Persian kings but also to indicate why confusion remains about the OT's chronology. When Cyrus died (in 529 BC), his son Cambyses II reigned for 7 years, from 529–522 BCE; in 525 BCE he conquered Egypt; so (I'll note for later use), the Persians and Israelites still in Babylon could easily have become familiar with Egyptian history. The next Persian emperor, Darius I (“Darius the Great”, who ruled from 521–486 and, during that time, attacked Greece) was unquestionably a Zoroastrian, as can still be seen on his many inscriptions that archeologists have found, such as

Darius the King says: By the favor of Ahura Mazda I am King; Ahura Mazda bestowed the kingdom upon me...

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<sup>15</sup> Copied from [http://www.truthnet.org/Biblicalarcheology/11/Israel\\_Restored.htm](http://www.truthnet.org/Biblicalarcheology/11/Israel_Restored.htm).

A great god is Ahura Mazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.

Darius the King says: By the favor of Ahura Mazda I am of such a sort that I am a friend to right, I am not a friend to wrong. It is not my desire that the weak man should have wrong done to him by the mighty; nor is that my desire, that the mighty man should have wrong done to him by the weak.

After Darius I came his son, Xerxes I (486–465 BCE, who conquered Athens but lost subsequent battles with the Greeks). He was also a Zoroastrian, as seen on the inscriptions:

Xerxes the Great King says: By the favor of Ahura Mazda this palace Darius the King built, who was my father. May Ahura Mazda together with the gods protect me, and what was built by me, and what was built by my father Darius the King, that also may Ahura Mazda together with the gods protect...

If you wish to be happy when living and blessed when dead, have respect for the law established by Ahura Mazda and worship him and truth reverently. The man who has respect for the law established by Ahura Mazda and worships him and the truth reverently, such a man becomes happy while living and blessed when he is dead.

After Xerxes I, his son, the relatively unsuccessful Artaxerxes I Macrocheir (Latin = *Longimanus* = “long-handed”, his right hand being longer than his left), ruled the Persian Empire from 465–424 BCE. He seems to have interacted with Ezra – but instead, it may have been Artaxerxes II. After Artaxerxes I came Xerxes II, who reigned for only 45 days (when he was murdered, apparently on order from one of his brother, who then reigned for six months). In turn, Xerxes II was murdered by his “bastard” brother Ochus (son of Artaxerxes I and a concubine), who adopted the name Darius II, ruled from 423 to 404 BCE, and allied with Sparta in the Peloponnesian War against Athens. Darius II was succeeded by his son Artaxerxes II.

I don't know if inscriptions have been found that demonstrate that Artaxerxes I was a Zoroastrian, but it seems highly likely, since inscriptions of both his son and grandson show that they were, e.g.,

Artaxerxes II Mnemon (“the mindful”, reigned 404–358 BCE): “Artaxerxes the King says: By the favor of Ahura Mazda I am king in this great earth far and wide; Ahura Mazda bestowed the kingdom upon me. May Ahura Mazda protect me, and the kingdom which he bestowed upon me, and my royal house.”

Artaxerxes III (reigned 358–338 BCE): “I am the son (of) Artaxerxes the King, (of) Artaxerxes (who was) the son (of) Darius the King, (of) Darius (who was) the son (of) Artaxerxes the King, (of) Artaxerxes (who was) the son (of) Xerxes the King, (of) Xerxes (who was) the son (of) Darius the King, (of) Darius (who was) the son of Hystaspes by name, of Hystaspes (who was) the son (of) Arsames by name, an Achaemenian. Artaxerxes the King says: May Ahura Mazda and the god Mithra protect me, and this country, and what was built by me.”

During this reign of Artaxerxes I (or possibly during the reign of Artaxerxes II)<sup>16</sup> is when Ezra enters the picture. According to the OT (*Ezra 3–6*), the building of the new temple in Jerusalem was stopped by complaints to Artaxerxes (I or II?) that “the Jews... are rebuilding that wicked and rebellious city.” Subsequently, however, “the governor of the province of Beyond-Euphrates” sent a message to King Darius (I or II?), stating (*Ezra 5, 6*):

“To King Darius, all greetings... if it please Your Majesty, let search be made in the royal archives in Babylon, to discover whether a decree was issued by King Cyrus for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us wishes in the matter.”

Such a decree was allegedly discovered – thereby suggesting both that the Persians maintained good libraries and that at least some Jews (such as “the minister of Jewish affairs”, Ezra) likely had access to the Persian libraries.

As a result of the discovery of the decree, the OT states (*Ezra 6, 6*) that Darius (I or II?) issued the order to permit the continued building of the temple in Jerusalem. The OT then reports (*Ezra 7, 1–26*):

*After these events* [italics added], in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia [which then suggests that it was Artaxerxes II, since he followed Darius II], there came up from Babylon one Ezra... He was a scribe learned in the law of Moses... In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes [which would be in 458 BCE if it is meant Artaxerxes I, but seems more likely to be 397 BCE, i.e., in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes II]... the king granted him [Ezra] all that he asked... This is a copy of the royal letter which King Artaxerxes [II?] gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel [quoted here from the King James Version of the Bible]:

“Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven...”

<sup>16</sup> See [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/gerald\\_larue/otll/chap25.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/gerald_larue/otll/chap25.html).

“I make a decree... Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counselors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to *the law of thy God which is in thine hand* [italics added]... And thou, Ezra, after *the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand* [italics added], set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know [the laws] not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.”

If that’s true (and I don’t know if it is – because I don’t know if the original of this “letter” has been found – but I doubt it), then it’s quite amazing: the king of Persia, Artaxerxes (either I or II), who ruled the largest empire that the world had ever known, gave Ezra absolutely sweeping powers, not only to teach the Israelites “the law” [which Artaxerxes said (to Ezra) was contained in a book “*in thine hand*”] but also to enforce this law in any way Ezra saw fit “*whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.*” Thereby, Ezra and fellow priests had Persian approval for almost unlimited power – to create a theocracy.

To his continuing infamy, Ezra’s first theocratic act was to initiate a program of “ethnic cleansing” – and I suspect that it’s Ezra’s racism that permeates the entire OT. At *Ezra 10*, 10 his hideousness is summarized as follows:

*Ezra the priest stood up and said: “You have committed an offence in marrying foreign wives and have added to Israel’s guilt. Make your confession now to the LORD the God of your fathers and do his will, and separate yourselves from the foreign population and from your foreign wives.”*

The OT then describes how the foolish Israelites accepted Ezra’s demands (which, as in all theocracies, are claimed to be God’s demands) and “dismissed” (i.e., abandoned) their “foreign” wives and their children – I suppose to fend for themselves or to starve to death. Thus, Ezra and his fellow theocrats apparently learned nothing from Cyrus the Great about how to rule; they just ruled.

Yet, whatever the exact dates, much occurred during the time period from Cyrus to Ezra, including (apparently) the creation of the Old Testament, complete with a new, “universal” god, similar to the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda (rather than Abraham’s personal god, or the mountain and warrior god with whom Moses allegedly interacted). And as given in OT, the Israelites were stunned by the new stories they learned about their “new and

improved god” as described in the new “**law of thy God**” in Ezra’s new book. Thus, as described in *Nehemiah 8*, 1–10:

When the seventh month came, and the Israelites were now settled in their towns, the people assembled... and Ezra the scribe was asked to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had enjoined upon Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly... He read from it... from early morning till noon... all the people listened attentively to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform made for the purpose, and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah [possible co-authors (or better, co-conspirators)] on his right hand; and on his left [other possible co-authors (or better, co-conspirators) – all needed to show the people that the priests were united in their conspiracy, were] Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchiah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam... And day-by-day, from the first day to the last, the book of the law of God was read...

Then Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who instructed the people, said to them all, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” *For all the people had been weeping while they listened to the words of the law* [italics added]...

It was obviously a very moving set of stories told by Ezra et al. – stories that the people apparently never heard before (or never heard in such detail).

Subsequently, Ezra and other “high priests” proceeded to expand their theocratic rule over the Israelites. Illustrative of their power grab is the report at *Nehemiah 9*:

On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled for a fast, clothed in sackcloth and with earth on their heads. Those who were of Israelite descent separated themselves from all the foreigners; they took their places and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their forefathers. Then they stood up in their places, and the book of the law of the LORD their God was read for one fourth of the day, and for another fourth they confessed and did obeisance to the LORD their God...

“Because of all of this [as given in the new stories about Moses et al.] we [people assembled] make a binding declaration in writing, and our princes, our Levites, and our priests witness the sealing... swearing to obey God’s law given by Moses the servant of God [i.e., swearing to obey the priests!], and to observe and fulfill all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, his rules and his statutes [of course including paying the priests plenty for running their protection racket].”

What a con game! In “Babylon Nurtures the Jewish Priesthood”, Kenneth Humphreys summarizes as follows [to which I’ve added a couple of notes in brackets]:<sup>17</sup>

With the rise of Cyrus, and the Persian conquest of Babylonia, an undreamt of opportunity was presented to the pious ‘elders’ of the Jews. Cyrus was a self-styled ‘Great King’, anxious to have all gods on his side for the conquest of empire. This included a Yahweh cult in the satrap [or province] of Judea. Accordingly, many of the Jews (mostly descendants of the original exiles) were returned to the old homeland...

### **Temple City**

These descendants were sent back under Prince Sheshbazzar to set up a temple to help the Persian war effort. Its design – a succession of courtyards set high on a hill, at its heart enclosing a ‘holy of holies’ – was inspired by the multi-level temple ziggurats (which ‘reached up to heaven’) that the Jews had seen in Mesopotamia. Under the patronage of Cyrus, and despite the local opposition of Jews who had never left, the ‘children of Judah’, established a theocratic colony on the Persian model under an appointed Persian governor. Persian rule of Judah [with the collusion of the priests] would last two centuries.

Before the exile, Jewish religion – such as it was – had Man facing an anthropomorphic, capricious tribal God, who looked for obedience rather than worship to assuage his anger. It was, apparently [or, at least, according to the redactor’s version of the myth] Abraham’s unswerving obedience when asked by Yahweh to sacrifice his son that validated his choice as ‘Patriarch.’ But at least obedience was within the wit of man himself... By abrogating to themselves the when and how of placating/ honoring the gods the earthly power of the priesthood was assured.

### **Monotheism**

The theology changed to reflect the new organization. Yahweh was elevated to sole god and was deemed to require endless sacrifice to placate his wrath. Thus all Jews acquired a duty to bring offerings to the priests (who were thereby freed of more mundane tasks). Not only did this give the priesthood their daily provisions and a major slice of the butchery business but also control over the lucrative leather trades. In time, tribute to the priesthood was extended to include tithes, dispensation fees, and commission on money changing (only the ‘clean’ shekel could be offered at the temple; no other coinage was acceptable).

Taking their cue from Zoroastrianism, the dominant religion of Persia, the returnees brought with them not only priestly monopoly and control over worship (and in a theocracy that implied control over law and social behavior as well) but also the notion of an evil god (Satan) as a counterpoise to good god (Yahweh). Similarly, for

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<sup>17</sup> Copied from <http://www.jesusneverexisted.com/babylon.htm>.

the first time Judaism acquired angels and demons. [Although it appears that these ideas surfaced substantially later, because 1) most biblical scholars date at least the final version of the *Book of Daniel* much later (i.e., after 167 BCE) than the dates in the story, 2) Paine, for example, suggests that the *Book of Job* wasn't even written by a Jewish author, and 3) McCabe, for example, suggests that *Ecclesiastes* was written by a Greek follower of Epicurus (341–270 BCE) – save for the last few lines, which were “redacted” for the benefit of the priests.] At this point appears the curious tale of an idyllic garden (shades of Babylon), a satanic snake and a disobedient female – which nicely explained why life was full of wickedness, why women should be subjugated and why there was death itself.

The Persians made no images of their dual gods, but for them fire represented purity and was an incarnation of the light god [Ahura] Mazda. On the other hand, matter (including the human body) was created by the dark god Angra Mainyu. In stark contrast, therefore, to the earlier influence of fertility rites of the Canaanite and Phoenician cities – the celebration of life – the Yahweh cult now became at heart hostile to the body. Human sexuality was to cause the priests more distress than any amount of bloodshed.

And bloodshed there was, as the colonizers (the ‘Golan’) drove out (and de-Judaized!) the original inhabitants (the Am Ha-Aretz or ‘people of the land’), whom they were forbidden to marry. The arrival of an organized priesthood acted as a brake on secular development which might otherwise have produced a local monarch, albeit one under Persian dominance. Both Nehemiah, ‘cup-bearer’ to the Persian king [i.e., taster, to determine if the cup contained poison], and Ezra, his ‘minister of Jewish affairs’ [and therefore, probably with access to Persian libraries] introduced interpretations and refinements of ‘the Law’ which kept Jewish piety compatible with the interests and security of the empire. With a brutal ruthlessness, for example, Ezra commanded Jews to ‘send away’ their foreign wives and children. “Membership of Israel was now confined to the descendants of those who had been exiled in Babylon.” (Karen Armstrong, *A History of Jerusalem*, Harper Collins, 1999, p.102).

All the above, however, barely begins to describe the clerical skullduggery involved in concocting a new (Zoroastrian-style) religion for the Jews, but to thoroughly expose the skullduggery is a humongous task. In the next post, I'll tackle a little of it, again relying essentially exclusively on investigations done by others.

In summary, what the Jewish priests got out of their collusion with the Persians was power. What the poor Israeli people got out of the experience was a theocracy – and a book: a book that told them that the creator of the universe, no less, had chosen them, but because their forefathers had been so wicked (i.e., had disobeyed the priests, or so the stories go), the people had been punished (never mind any theory that people should be punished only

for their own mistakes and never mind the obvious explanations for all the Israelites' troubles, namely, that their forefathers had chosen to live on land that was little more than a military route between major powers).

The new book told the people about their (fabricated) history, heroes, and laws. The new book told the people their purpose in life. And most importantly of all (according to the book and the priests), the new book told the people to obey their parasitic priests – to carry their useless carcasses. And any protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, the people learned that their true God, the one they truly worshipped, wasn't YWHY (whose name they weren't permitted even to speak or write!) but was their book.

And similar is still true for all the Abrahamic religions. Thus, and regardless of their claims, Christians don't love Jesus; they love, they bury themselves in, they become delusional over, they killed to protect... their book (the New Testament). Similarly, Muslims don't love Allah (or Muhammad); they love, they bury themselves in, they become delusional over, they still kill to protect... their book (the Quran). And similarly for the Mormons: madly in love with their Book of Mormon. In turn, in all cases, they love their books because they love themselves – since all such books tell the “true believers”, the “chosen people” that their otherwise miserable lives have no less than “cosmic significance” and that they (and they alone) are “the good people”, in “cosmic conflict” with the horrible “evil doers” (the unbelievers, infidels, atheists...), exactly as Zarathustra speculated, without a scrap of evidence to support his wild speculations.

It's crazy; as someone else said, “**It's egotism gone berserk.**” If people want to bury themselves in books, how about Mayo's *Jefferson Himself* or Thoreau's *Walden* or Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* or Edberg's *At the Foot of the Tree* or Watts' *Cloud-Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown* or Hardin's *The Tragedy of the Commons* or Russell's *The History of Western Philosophy* or Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* or Harris' *The End of Faith*... or Morse and Feshbach's *Methods of Theoretical Physics*?

Or how about Feynman's *Lectures on Physics*? Now there's a series of books (Feynman's) for which people should receive a prize for studying so intensely that they essentially memorize them, able to quote “chapter and verse”! In fact, they would receive an astounding prize: in contrast to religious kooks, they'd gain some understanding about reality.