

ARTICLE VII.

BAAL, SHECHEM, AND THE TEXT OF
JOSHUA XXIV.

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IN Gen. xii. 6 we read that Abram on his first arrival in Canaan passed through the land "to the place (מקום) of Shechem unto the terebinth of Moreh." The Hebrew word, like the cognate Arabic, has a special religious significance, and it is generally admitted that it here bears that sense. Thus Skinner *ad loc.* writes: "The historic truth is that the sanctuaries were far older than the Hebrew immigration, and inherited their sanctity from lower forms of religion. That fact appears in verse 6 in the use of the word מקום, which has there the technical sense of 'sacred place,' as in xxii. 4, xxviii. 11, xxxv. 1 (LXX), Ex. iii. 5, 1 Sam. vii. 16, Jer. vii. 12." In this he is merely echoing recent German commentators.

It is obvious that at the time of Abram's first entrance into Canaan a sacred place cannot have been sacred to the God of Israel *eo nomine*. The utmost that can be suggested is that by a kind of religious syncretism the patriarch identified the Deity worshipped at that place with the Being Who had commanded him to leave his home and his family. We find an instance of a similar identification in the words "I am the God of Bethel," etc., in xxxi. 15.

This and similar passages are, however, in defiance of the clear evidence of the text interpreted by the Wellhausen school as later explanations to account for the sacredness of the spots named. Thus Skinner writes: "The original motive of this and similar legends is to explain the sacredness of the principal centers of cultus by definite manifestations of God to the patriarchs, or definite acts of worship on their part" (Genesis, p. 246). To this there are at least three good answers.

First, as already pointed out, the text treats the sacred place as being *already a sanctuary* when Abram immigrated. If we read a statement that A came to the city of London, we should infer that he found such a city in existence, and not that the story was written to account for the city. Similarly if we read that A came to the place of Shechem, we must infer that he found such a place in existence, and not that the story was written to account for the place. Secondly, it has been well shown by Eerdmans (*Alttestamentliche Studien*, II, *Die Vorgeschichte Israels*, pp. 29 f.) that in the period of the kingdom Shechem was not a holy place of importance. Thirdly, we know from Judges viii. 33-ix. 57 that both holy place and tree (ix. 7) were at a later date in fact connected with the worship of Baal-berith, who was regarded by the writer of verses 33 f. as distinct from the God of Israel. So far from thinking that these narratives are correctly explained by the Wellhausen school in their defiance of all the known facts I believe that this and other sacred places were connected with the worship of the local Baal, that the original text told how the patriarchs worshipped the Baal, and that it is the removal of the word Baal from the text by later scribes who treated passages like Hosea ii. 18 f. as canons of

emendation that has obscured the true state of affairs.¹ The only question that appears to me to be open is whether the patriarchs in all cases identified the local Baal with the Baal whom they specifically worshipped, and the passages in Genesis seem to show that at any rate in many instances they actually did. It is difficult, for example, to suppose that in Gen. xxii. the Baal of the "place" that God had told Abraham of was distinct in his mind from the God who gave the command. Further the Canaanites worshipped Baal-Shemaim "Lord of Heaven" (see International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, p. 345), and though this appears to have been a sun-god, the title strikingly recalls the language of Gen. xiv. and xxiv. Would Abraham necessarily have been conscious of any difference? In this connection attention may be drawn to the probability that Baal Sebaoth—Lord of Hosts—was an old title of the God of Israel. The most usual form found in the Massoretic text is the ungrammatical form with the tetragrammaton. It is certain that our Hebrew text has undergone drastic revision in the occurrences of this phrase. Thus it is found in the LXX of Josh. vi. 17, though the Massoretic text does not contain the phrase before Samuel. This is not a gloss as Hollenberg thought, for our Septuagintal authorities give two different representations of the word *Σαβωθ* and *των δυναμεων* (see also Dahse, *Textkritische Materialien zur Hexateuchfrage*, I, p. 12).

For the history of the religion stress should be laid on the

¹It must be remembered that the tetragrammaton is a proper name, and that its appearance in Gen. xii. 7 is as awkward as the phrase "to Thomas that appeared to him" would be in English. A common noun is required as in xxxv. 1. Presumably Baal is the word that has suffered removal. See further *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan. and Apr. 1915.

fact that the patriarchs seem unhesitatingly to have recognized the sanctity of certain preëxisting "places."

In the light of the foregoing observations I turn to Josh. xxiv. It is not my purpose to examine the whole of the not inconsiderable variations in the text presented by the LXX. On the contrary my desire is to concentrate on certain points which are important for the study of the history and religion of Israel not less than for the textual criticism of the Old Testament. First, I wish to emphasize the fact that so far as we know there was at Shechem no sanctuary of the God of Israel *eo nomine*, but that *both before and after* the time of Joshua there was a sanctuary of a Baal. Secondly, this sanctuary at all material times had a celebrated terebinth. Historically there can be no reasonable doubt that this is "*the* terebinth" mentioned in verse 26, and that the sanctuary of the same verse was the sanctuary of the Baal. Certain other facts should be brought into relation with these. The Massoretic text of this verse speaks of "the book of the law of God," the Vulgate of "the book of the law of the Lord," the LXX only of "a book" (not "*the* book"), with the words "law of God" (not "of the law of God" in BA) added, obviously as a later attempt to bring the original Greek text into harmony with the later Hebrew. No Greek scholar could suppose εἰς βιβλίον, νόμον τοῦ θεοῦ to be a rendering of the Hebrew for "the book of the law of God," and though there might at first be a disposition to reject the accusative νόμον for the νόμου of some authorities, the telltale omission of the definite article before book clearly betrays the history of the text. Accordingly we may feel sure that in the earliest text Joshua wrote in *a* book, not in the book of the law.

Next it must be noticed that our textual authorities are

at sixes and sevens as to the Divine appellations in this chapter. It is useless to undertake any inquiry into the matter, pending the appearance of the larger Cambridge Septuagint, but it may be pointed out at once that in verse 1 the Vulgate has 'in the sight of the *Lord*' (*Domini*), and can claim Armenian and other Septuagintal support. It must be remembered that Baal was quite unobjectionable as a title of the God of Israel then and for many centuries later.

Very interesting are certain further alterations of the LXX or its Hebrew original. "It must, however, be mentioned," writes Mr. Holmes (*Joshua*, pp. 8 f.), "that in chapter xxiv. the LXX has a double variation which is consistent and wrong. The translation substitutes Shiloh for Shechem in *v.* 1, and repeats the substitution in *v.* 25. Here the LXX reading is unanimously rejected; no reason can be adduced why M. T. should make any alteration. But a very good reason can be discovered for the alteration by LXX. Shiloh was well known as a sanctuary from the first book of Samuel, from Jeremiah and from Psalm lxxviii. 61, whereas the sanctity of Shechem can only be inferred from incidental notices. The LXX translator made the alteration influenced by the fact that Shiloh was known to him as a celebrated sanctuary of early times and moreover is the only sanctuary so far mentioned in Joshua. Six times in the last few chapters Shiloh is mentioned as the sanctuary. The statement of Bennett that the substitution is a harmonistic alteration with reference to chapter xviii. is imperfect. It is a harmonistic alteration with reference to xviii. 1, 10; xix. 37;¹ xxi. 2; xxii. 9, 12. (In xviii. 8 Shiloh is not in LXX). With Shiloh in his head as the sacred place the Greek translator made his only important deliberate alteration."

¹ This appears to be a misprint for 51. H. M. W.

But this is an understatement, for in verse 25 the LXX not content with altering Shechem into Shiloh "adds, before the tabernacle of the God of Israel, on the basis of Ps. lxxviii. 60" (p. 79). I should rather have said on the basis of xviii. 1.

The reasons for the alterations are clear. In the view of the editor who was responsible for them (whether they were made originally in Hebrew or in Greek) such a transaction as this ought to have taken place at the religious capital for the time being, i.e. Shiloh, the seat of the Ark and Tabernacle. In historic truth it took place at the sanctuary of the Baal in Shechem, a Baal who at a date subsequent to the covenant made by Joshua was known as Baal-berith, baal of covenant.

Leaving aside for a moment the religious questions involved it is natural to ask whether there is reason to think that other alterations have taken place in the text. For myself I confess to a suspicion that the original text told of the sacrifice of peace offerings and burnt offerings. This would be in line with the other covenants of the same type which are recorded in the Bible, the type that I have ventured to call Pillar-covenants (see *Studies in Biblical Law*, pp. 52-75, 81). That Joshua's covenant does belong to this type appears to be established by verses 26 f. If this suspicion be well founded, the narrative of the sacrifices will have been omitted in an age when it seemed a terrible breach of the Law to offer them in the sanctuary of the Baal of Shechem.

The religious questions now fall to be considered. Was this proceeding an act of apostasy to any, and, if so, to what extent? Was it in accordance with the requirements of the

Law? What were its meaning and significance? Such questions are very much easier to ask than to answer.

It seems certain, to begin with, that the proceedings were not in accordance with late views as to the meaning of the Law and the requirements of Israel's religion, and we may even go so far as to assert with some confidence that the author of Judges viii. 33 f. would scarcely have approved of such a narrative. That, however, does not necessarily conclude the matter.

It should be noticed in the first place that the whole character of Joshua's speech is most emphatically one of fidelity to the God of Israel. The whole gist of the transaction lies in verses 14 f., 19-24, the choice of the worship of the Lord alone to the exclusion of the gods worshipped by their ancestors in Mesopotamia and Egypt and the gods of the Amorites, the emphasis laid on the exclusiveness of His cult and the exhortation to put away "the strange gods which are in your midst." That does not look as if the Baal of Shechem was regarded as a strange god. It would be very difficult to hold in the teeth of such language that the transaction was felt to be heretical. Further a very similar scene had been enacted at the same place by Jacob (Gen. xxxv. 2-4), and had in that case been a most indubitable act of fidelity to his God, under whatever name He was known. If Abraham could properly sacrifice at the sacred place of Shechem, if Jacob could properly select it for the great renunciation of idolatry, it is difficult to hold that in the minds of the Israelites of that day the place was associated with any cult that was felt to be antagonistic to the worship of the God of Israel. Given the fact that He was freely called by the title "the Baal," then and for long after, it is easy enough to understand that the deity worshipped under that

title in the 'place' of Shechem may have appeared to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Joshua to be identical with Him. Certainly the putting aside of strange gods can hardly have taken place in what was felt to be the sanctuary of one of them.

There is, however, yet another most remarkable fact to be considered. Deuteronomy itself distinctly commanded the ratification of its covenant in this neighborhood (xi. 29 f.) "by the side of the terebinth¹ of Moreh" without any hint of disapproval of this tree. Consequently the Deuteronomist took the same view as Abraham, Jacob, and Joshua, and regarded this neighborhood as the fit and proper place for the ratification of a covenant between God and Israel. It follows that in his opinion it would scarcely have been covered by the denunciation of Deut. xii. The 'place' of Shechem cannot have been regarded as one of the places where the nations to be dispossessed worshipped "their gods" (within the meaning of the chapter) and performed "all the abominations of the Lord which He hateth." Deuteronomy xxvii. tells the same tale, but it is not attributed by the Wellhausen school to the Deuteronomist and it makes no mention of the terebinth. Joshua viii. 30-35 which is assigned to a Deuteronomic editor gives an account of the fulfilment of the instructions. *Prima facie* a modern reader would have regarded the place with its terebinth as within the terms of Deut. xii., but apparently this is not the view of Deuteronomy itself. It had been the scene of a most emphatic renunciation of idolatry by Jacob, and seemingly its destruction was never intended by Deuteronomy.

Who, then, was Baal-berith? He was the bearer of a name that contains the most unique of all the religious ideas

¹ This and not the plural is the better reading.

of Israel—an idea that is more unique than monotheism itself.¹ I have always had the greatest difficulty in regarding him as other than the God of Israel in spite of the view taken in Judges viii. 33 f. Baal-berith means lord of covenant, covenant-maker. The covenant relationship between God and people is the most distinctive of all the Old Testament ideas, for there is no parallel either to the adoption of a God by a people in this fashion or for the giving of legislation by means of a covenant—i.e. a duly ratified sworn agreement—between a God and a people. Here I may cite some sentences from my article “Law in O. T.” in Murray’s “Illustrated Bible Dictionary.” “The *covenants* constitute the first outstanding feature of the form. Alone among known legislations, large portions of the law are found as terms of sworn agreements made between God and the Hebrew tribes. Other peoples have had laws to which they attributed a divine origin, but the covenant form is unique. . . . The special articles in this volume and their bibliographies attest the fact that there exist numberless parallels to almost every institution and idea contained in the law. Talion and blood-feud, sin and crime, clean and unclean, the priestly order, sacrifice and ritual, all may be paralleled from other races. Nor is it different if we turn to individual rules. With certain striking exceptions (e.g. the law of strangers) it is possible to parallel most of the laws, even such a detail as the permission to pluck grapes, etc., Deut. xxiii. 24 f. [25 f.]; cf. Post, *Grundriss*, ii. 426; Manu, viii. 341 (with character-

¹ See especially the study of covenants which constitutes the second chapter of my “Studies in Biblical Law” (London, D. Nutt). I was much interested to find when that first appeared that the idea was so unexpected that I had some difficulty in explaining to an eminent professor of law that it really was a Biblical representation and not a mere metaphor like the Social Contract.

istic differences), etc. Nor again is this the only legislation that claims a divine origin, or that seeks to regulate extrajural matters. The Hindu law books, for example, deal with faith, penances, purifications, dress, demeanor, etc., as well as jural law. Every ancient legislation is and must be the creation of its age; and as the objects of legislators are everywhere similar, and laws are everywhere directed to moulding human conduct, it follows that every archaic legislation belongs to a family group and differs from other systems belonging to a similar stage of development only within certain more or less defined limits. Naturally, the law of Moses bears the impress of the history, the mind, and the character of the nation for which it was designed; but so does every other known system. And withal it is unique. (i) No other legislation is comparable in *literary form and beauty*. (ii) While many of the rules can be paralleled, there is no parallel to such a *collection of humane rules*: hence the *spirit and general effect* of the whole are different from those of all other legislations. (iii) Perhaps no similar legislation has ever been so *free from rules designed to benefit some privileged person or caste*. Special consideration is shown only to the helpless. But the true *differentia* is in none of these things, though it embraces and accounts for all. It lies in *the attitude towards the divine*. Everywhere the peculiar relation between the one God and the separated people — with all it involved in duty to God and duty to man — is stamped on institutions designed for a race that in its general ideas and primitive civilization differed very little from many other races in similar stages of development. This law centers in and leads to God. Its ultimate problem is not legal or literary or economic or social: it is theological" (pp. 461 a, 466 a).

Now this extraordinary attitude — the special relationship of God and people — is implied in calling a God baal-berith, covenant-maker — as perhaps no other phrase could imply it. But for that one narrative in Judges I should say without hesitation that if it were desired to find the epithet which best distinguished Israel's God and His connection with the people from all other gods, covenant-maker would be the phrase.

This deity 'covenant-maker' thus bore a name that was the most appropriate for the God of Israel that can be conceived. He bore it at a place where apparently the covenant with Israel's God had been ratified once or twice¹ and at a date subsequent to such ratification. He bore it among burghers who in an earlier age had been distinguished from the Israelites mainly by non-circumcision, and had raised no objection to a complete fusion with them (Gen. xxxiv.). His shrine was a place which had been twice chosen by the most zealous and authoritative of the worshippers of Israel's God for an absolute break with idolatry, near the site which had been selected by Deuteronomy itself for the scene of the solemn avouching of God by people and people by God. To my mind the inference is irresistible. Baal-berith owes his name to the covenant made at Shechem by Joshua and to an identification with Israel's God. It may be that his worshippers did not at all times so identify him, and that in the days of Abimelech his cult contained objectionable elements. But from first to last the connection with the God of the patriarchs and of Joshua is manifest.

¹ I write "once or twice" deliberately to allow of the possibility (on which at present I express no opinion) that Josh. viii. 30 ff. is not original. In that case Josh. xxiv. is the mutilated narrative of the only covenant made by Joshua in the neighborhood of Shechem in accordance with the instructions of Deuteronomy.