

THE POSITION OF THE TENT OF MEETING.

It is well known that the passages relating to the position of the tent of meeting present great difficulties, and a theory has been formed to account for them. It is supposed that in one document (E) the tent of meeting stood outside the camp, and that the Ephraimite Joshua resided in it as a permanent priest, while in another (P) the tent was situated in the middle of the camp and was served by the Levitical priesthood. There is supposed to be a third document (J), but this does not mention the tent of meeting at all. It regards the ark as preceding the people on the march (at any rate sometimes), but it agrees with "P" as to the position of the ark in camp (Num. xiv. 44). Either therefore "E's" tent of meeting is not the abode of the ark or else "E" must differ from "J" and "P" as to the position of the ark. After prolonged study of the question I have found that various facts displace this theory, and also that the data point to another view as being correct.

1. A very important passage in "E," the document that (on the theory) locates the tent outside the camp, has been overlooked. This is Exodus xviii. That chapter by universal consent describes an episode that belongs to the end of the period spent at Horeb. It therefore refers to a later incident than Exodus xxxiii. 7-11, which is the first mention of the tent in "E." From verses 13-16 it appears that Moses sat as a judge with all the people standing about him because they came to him "to inquire of God." The presence of the people shows that the scene is laid in the middle of the camp. Yet this inquiry of God is the very business that was transacted in the tent outside the camp at the period to which Exodus xxxiii. refers, and at that time Moses was not surrounded by the people. On the

other hand, it will be noticed that Exodus xviii. is in entire agreement with "P," which also represents Moses as sitting at the door of its tent of meeting in the centre of the camp for the purpose of transacting judicial business. This passage seems to be fatal to the theory. In August, 1908, I asked an eminent continental adherent of the theory how he explained the fact that at the later date Moses was found transacting judicial business in "E" in the centre of the camp, surrounded by the people, contrary to the representation of "E" in Exodus xxxiii., and he could give me no answer. He promised to let me hear from him some day in reply, but no reply has reached me. I believe the point to be quite unanswerable by those who adopt the current critical hypothesis.

2. The R.V. rendering of Exodus xxxiii. 7 is incorrect. It should run: "And Moses used to take *a* (or the) tent and pitch it *for himself* without the camp, etc.," the Hebrew article being often used where English idiom requires the indefinite article. Now this proves decisively that we are not dealing with the abode of the ark, and also that Joshua was not its minister. It is inconceivable that Moses should have taken the shelter of the ark and removed it to a distance from the camp for his private use, leaving the ark itself bared and unguarded. If he had done so, Joshua could not have been in charge of the ark, seeing that he was in this tent, while the ark (*ex hypothesi*) remained alone in the camp. In point of fact the ark had not been constructed yet, and this passage of Exodus in no wise refers to it.

3. That Joshua was not a priest in "E" may be proved with certainty by the following facts: (a) In the book of Joshua the passages assigned to "E" show us "priests" who were quite distinct from Joshua himself and had charge of the ark. (b) In another passage of "E" Joshua, as Van Hoonacker has acutely pointed out, is not resident in

the Tent of Meeting, but has to be summoned thither with Moses (Deut. xxxi. 14). (c) "E" recognises the priesthood of Aaron and Eleazar (Deut. x. 6, cp. Joshua xxiv. 33). (d) It is not recorded that Joshua performed any priestly function whatever. The idea that he was a priest rests merely on inference from Exodus xxxiii. That passage only tells us that in the capacity of minister of Moses he used to remain in a tent pitched by Moses for himself on occasions when Moses left it, just as a modern private secretary might stay in his employer's study. There is no hint of his giving *torah* or burning incense or doing any other priestly work of any kind.

4. The only other passage which represents {Joshua as present at the tent of meeting is Numbers xi. 28. The true meaning of the verse is doubtful; if he is there described as "one of his chosen men" that would make him one of the seventy elders, and in any case he would naturally be in attendance on his master Moses.

5. Numbers xi. 24-30, xii. distinguish between tent and camp, but in language which may just as well refer to the tent as being the centre of a hollow square formed by the encampments. These passages therefore are not decisive.¹

For these reasons the theory must be rejected. What clues have we to guide us to a more satisfactory view?

1. Exodus xxxiii. 7-11 is manifestly out of place in its present context. It is therefore natural to try a transposition. It cannot stand at any later point because of the testimony of Exodus xviii. Therefore we must see if it can stand earlier.

2. In verse 11 the words "his minister Joshua the son of Nun, a young man" come strangely after the previous mentions of Joshua (Exod. xvii. 8-14, xxiv. 13, xxxii. 17).

¹ For detailed proof of this see *Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism*, pp. 100-102.

They would form a better introduction for his first appearance than any one of these passages. On the strength of his it has been suggested that Exodus xvii. 8-16 should stand later than it does at present, but to this there are several answers : (a) No such transposition could remove the difficulties created by the fact that xxiv. 13, xxxii. 17 at present precede xxxiii. 11 ; (b) Deuteronomy xxv. 17 f. shows that the Amalek episode should stand in its present early position ; (c) so does the mention of Rephidim in Exodus xvii. 8 ; (d) the words " then came Amalek " in the same verse suggest that the Amalekites were not very near their own territory, but had marched some distance to attack Israel. Consequently it would seem that it is Exodus xxxiii. 7-11 which must be transposed, not Exodus xvii. 8-16.

3. With Exodus xviii. removed to a later position the arrangement for the interim transaction of judicial business in xxiv. 14 seems strange. It would be natural that we should be told of the ordinary judicial arrangement first before learning of the exceptional procedure in a special emergency, but nothing has yet been said as to this. If, however, Exodus xxxiii. 7 ff. originally preceded this passage the strangeness disappears. *A priori* one would expect that some arrangements would have been made immediately on leaving Egypt. Exodus xxxiii. 7 f., xxiv. 14, xviii. in the order named give an intelligible and connected account of the original arrangements and their subsequent modifications to meet varying circumstances : in any other order they leave the mind in bewilderment as to the actual course of events and the causes for the successive changes. Let the experiment of reading them in this order be tried, and the natural sequence will be easily apparent.

4. There is only one earlier place where Exodus xxxiii. 7-11 can stand, but there it fits into the context marvellously

and removes another group of difficulties, viz., those relating to the cloud. The place in question is after Exodus xiii. 22, for the statements as to the pillar in xxxiii. 9 f. attach naturally to those in xiii. 21 f.¹

5. The story of the tent of meeting is then as follows : Immediately after the departure from Egypt, Moses instituted the practice of trying cases in a tent outside the camp. Here the cloud used to descend and he received revelations. This lasted till after the arrival at Sinai, where Moses was instructed to make the tent which should shelter the ark. " And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee " (Exod. xxv. 22). From the time of the erection of the abode of the ark the earlier tent ceased to be the tent of meeting and the court which formerly sat there transferred its seat to the door of the new Tent of Meeting in the centre of the camps. Thus a simple transposition enables us to remove one of the most inveterate perplexities in the Pentateuchal narrative and to restore an intelligible and harmonious history.

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¹ For a detailed examination of the difficulties relating to the cloud see *op. cit.* pp. 82-90, 102.