

Source Essay: Exodus 1-4

One of the most well known stories in the Bible is the story of Moses. It is the story of a Hebrew child, raised by the royal family of Egypt, who would eventually speak directly with Yahweh, and bring the Hebrews out of slavery. This is a common story in all of the traditions ~~the~~ in the Hebrew Bible, but most are not aware of some of the significances of the writing. In the book of Exodus, there are three main writers: the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), and the Priestly (P). Each of these authors or scribes has specific writing styles and reasons for including what they have written, and even though some of the ways in which are tied together seem confusing, ~~by breaking them~~ down by source, ~~observations can be made as~~ ~~to~~ ~~we can discover~~ their purpose and each writer's individual concerns.

The oldest of these four sources is ~~that of~~ the Yahwist (J) source. As far as Chapters 1-4 of Exodus is concerned, the Yahwist source is the second most prevalent. The Yahwist author is recognized by a few things, some of the most frequently used being ~~their~~ ~~his or her~~ use of the name Yahweh for God, the personification of Yahweh, and ~~their his or her fondness for use of~~ patriarchal stories. In Exodus, the first line of the Yahwist writers is, "And Joseph and all of his brothers and all of that generation died" (Exodus 1:6). From the get-go, the focus on the patriarchal society can be seen. ~~By simply announcing~~ ~~this one line in between~~ two non-Yahwist verses, the ~~writer helps the~~ reader ~~can~~ understand that once these patriarchal groups, the tribes of Israel, died off things started to get worse for the ~~Hebrews~~. After the one verse of chapter one, the J source seems to take over the story for chapter two. In this chapter, the author seems to act as a filler for the other

Comment [1]: Well written and clear. Good use of evidence and explanations about that evidence. Work on dangling modifiers.

Comment [2]: Dangling. The subject of "breaking" has to be the subject and nearest noun of the main clause

Comment [3]: You can probably get away with just saying "his," although Harold Bloom argues that J was a woman. Don't use "they" with a single antecedent.

Comment [4]: dangling

Comment [5]: Good

sources, telling of the early life of Moses to keep from jumping straight from Israel's enslavement to Moses' first encounter with Yahweh (Exodus 2:1-23). This bit shows the Yahwist's use of dramatic story telling to help the reader better understand the life of Moses. The use of the name Yahweh is something else that sets J apart from the other authors. In J, the name Yahweh is used throughout the story, which tells us that ~~they~~ J preferred this name, God's personal name. "And an angel of YHWH appeared to him in a fire's flame from inside a bush" (Exodus 3:2). This example shows that J used this name in the story before God revealed his true name to Moses, meaning that they recognized God as Yahweh from the "beginning of history".

Comment [6]: transpose (or in this case, just leave out the quotes)

The next and most heavily used source in this section of Exodus is that of E, the Elohist writer. The E writer is known to recognize God as much less "humanlike," which can be seen by ~~their~~ E's use of the word Elohim, an ambiguous plural form of the term eloah (God). The first instance ~~that we see of~~ E in this part of Exodus occurs after the telling of the end of the tribes of Israel. When E begins, it appears that the main focus is on Israel's relationship with Egypt and the beginning of the Israelite enslavement. Pharaoh seems to be afraid of the power of the Hebrews, so he ~~sentences for~~ commands the midwives to kill any boy born of a Hebrew woman. The midwives, being God-fearing individuals, won't obey Pharaoh, and instead allow the males to be born. This seems to be a bit of foreshadowing as to what will come later in the book, proving that the Hebrew's are a strong people and will rise against the powers that be. What seems to be the most important part of E in this section of Exodus is when God reveals his name, Yahweh, to Moses. "And

God said further to Moses, 'You shall say this to the children of Israel: YHWH, your fathers' God, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered for generation after generation'" (Exodus 3:15). This proves that the Elohist, unlike the Yahwist, does not recognize God as Yahweh until this moment, believing that God doesn't reveal his personal name until Moses' encounter with the burning bush.

Throughout the entire first four chapters of Exodus the Priestly writers only are included three times. The P source is very well known for establishing certain aspects of legal practice in Israel, and they also included great detail in regard to genealogies and dates. It only makes sense that the P source is not very heavily used in this section of the Hebrew Bible because the laws of Israel had not yet been established! It was Moses who established the laws after the Hebrews fled Egypt. So why are these three instances incorporated? It seems to me that the Priestly writers wanted the reader to understand what Israel as a whole was feeling during this time, rather than what the individuals of the story were experiencing. Though the other writers do speak of how Moses needs to deliver the Hebrews from Pharaoh's bondage, if these three verses were not included then Israel as a nation would not be mentioned. This is seen here: "All the children of Israel groaned from the work, and they cried out, and their wail went up to God from the work. And God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the children of Israel. And God knew!" (Exodus 2:23-25) This also recalls God's promise to make a great nation out of Abraham's offspring, proving the covenant is still in effect.

Comment [7]: Yes, the covenant is the guiding principal of post-exile life. The P writer emphasizes similarities between the Egyptian Exile and the Babylonian exile so that his audience will know that they too can expect deliverance.

The three different writers of Exodus show many different ideas and positions on the story of Moses and his leading the Hebrews to freedom, but what would this story be without the intertwining of the three? Though it seems that certain aspects may be repeated or even contradictory at times, without the three there would be uncertainty on many things. By incorporating the many authors into one story, the Hebrew bible is able to better tell the story of what made Israel what it is. Though the different groups may have some differing opinions, the one thing that is common is their recognition of Yahweh as their true God.