



الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ



*Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the
Worlds;*

Quran English Translation & Commentary

By

Abdullah Yusuf Ali

Appendix II

On The Tawrah

(see [5:44](#), [n. 753](#))

The Tawrah is frequently referred to in the Quran. It is well to have clear ideas as to what it exactly means. Vaguely we may say that it was the Jewish Scripture. It is mentioned with honour as having been, in its purity, a true revelation from Allah.

To translate it by the words "The Old Testament" is obviously wrong.

The "Old Testament" is a Christian term, applied to a body of old Jewish records. The Protestants and the Roman Catholics are not agreed precisely as to the number of records to be included in the canon of the "Old Testament." They use the term in contradistinction to the "New Testament," whose composition we shall discuss in Appendix III.

Nor is it correct to translate Tawrah as the "Pentateuch," a Greek term meaning the "Five Books."

These are the first five books of the Old Testament, known as

- Genesis,
- Exodus,
- Leviticus,
- Numbers, and
- Deuteronomy.

They contain a semi-historical and legendary narrative of the history of the world from the Creation to the time of the arrival of the Jews in the Promised Land. There are in them some beautiful idylls but there are also stories of insects, fraud, cruelty, and treachery, not always disapproved. A great part of the Mosaic Law is embodied in this narrative.

The books are traditionally ascribed to Moses, but it is certain that they were not written by Moses or in an age either contemporary with Moses or within an appreciable distance of time from Moses. They were in their present form probably compiled some time after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity. The decree of Cyrus permitting such return was in 536 B.C. some books now included in the Old Testament, such as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were admittedly written after the return from the captivity. Malachi being as late as 4q20-397 B.C. the compilers of the Pentateuch of course used some ancient material: some of the material is actually named. Egyptian and Chaldeans terms are relics of local colour and contemporary documents.

But there are some ludicrous slips, which show that the compilers did not always understand their material, Modern criticism distinguishes two distinct sources among the documents of different dates used by the editors. For the sake of brevity and convince they may be called

- a. Jehovistic, and
- b. Elohist.

Then there are later miscellaneous interpolations. They sometimes overlap and sometimes contradict each others.

Logically speaking, the Book of Joshua, which describe the entry into the Promised Land, should be bracketed with the Pentateuch, and many writers speak of the six books together as the Hexateuch (Greek term for Six Books).

The Apocrypha contain certain Books which are not admitted as Canonical in the English Bible. But the early Christians received them as part of the Jewish Scriptures, and the Council of Trent (A.C. 1545-1563) seems to have recognized the greater part of them as Canonical. The statement in 2 Esdras (about the first century A.C.) that the law was burnt and Ezra (say, about 458-457 B.C.) was inspired to rewrite it., is probably true as to the historical fact that the law was lost, and that what we have now is no earlier than the time of Ezra, and some of it a good deal later.

So far we have spoken of the Christian view of the Old Testament.

What is the Jewish view?

The Jews divide their Scripture into three parts:

1. the Law (Torah),
2. the Prophets (Nebiim), and
3. Kutub.

This division was probably current in the time of Jesus. In Luke 24:44 Jesus refers to the Law, the Prophets and the

Psalms. In other places (e.g., Matt. 7:12) Jesus refers to the Law and the Prophets to summing up the whole Scripture.

In the Old Testament Book II Chronicles 34:30, the reference to the Book of the Covenant must be to the Torah or the original Law.

This is interesting, as the Quran frequently refers the Covenant with reference to the Jews. The modern Christian terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament" are substitutes for the older terms "Old Covenant" and "New Covenant."

The Samaritans, who claim to be the real Children of Israel and disavow the Jews as schismatic from their Law of Moses, only recognize the Pentateuch, of which they have their own version slightly different from that in the Old Testament.

The view of the school of Higher Criticism is radically destructive. According to Renan it is doubtful whether Moses was not a myth. Two versions of Sacred History existed, different in language, style, and spirit, and they were combined together into a narrative in the reign of Hezekiah (B.C. 727-697). This forms the greater part of the Pentateuch as it exists today, excluding the greater part of Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

In the reign of Josiah about 622 B.C., certain priests and scribes (with Jeremiah the Prophet) promulgated a new code, pretending that they had found it in the Temple (II Kings, xxii, 8). This Law (Torah or Tawrah) was the basis of Judaism, the new religion then founded in Palestine.

This was further completed by the sacerdotal and Levitical Torah, compiled under the inspiration of Ezekiel, say, about 575 B.C., and contained mainly in the Book of Leviticus, with scattered fragments in Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua. We are entitled to accept the general results of a scientific examination of documents, probabilities and dates, even though we reject the promise which we believe to be false, viz., that Allah does not send inspired Books through inspired Prophets.

We believe that Moses existed; that he was an inspired man of God; that he gave a message which was afterwards

distorted or lost; that attempts were made by Israel at various times to reconstruct that message; and that the Tawrah as we have it is (in view of the statement in 2 Esdras) no earlier than the middle of the fifth century B.C.

The primitive Torah must have been in old Hebrew, but there is no Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament which can be dated with certainty earlier than 916 A.C. Hebrew ceased to be spoken language with the Jews during or after the Captivity, and by the time we come to the period of Jesus, most cultivated Hebrews used the Greek language, and others used Aramaic (including Syriac and Chaldee). Latin, or local dialects. There were also Arabic versions.

For historical purposes the most important versions were the Greek version, known as the Septuagint, and the Latin version, known as the Vulgate. The Septuagint was supposed to have been prepared by 70 or 72 Jews (Latin, septuaginta = seventy) working independently and at different times, the earliest portion dating from about 284 B.C. this version was used by the Jews of Alexandria and the Hellenized Jew who were spread over all parts of the Roman Empire.

The Vulgate was a Latin translation made by the celebrated Father of the Christian Church, St. Jerome, from Hebrew, early in the fifth century A.C. superseding the older Latin versions. Neither the Septuagint nor the Vulgate have an absolutely fixed or certain text. The present standard text of the Vulgate as accepted by the Roman Catholic Church was issued by Pope Clement VIII (A.C. 1592-1605).

It will be seen therefore that there is no standard text of the Old Testament in its Hebrew form. The versions differ from each other frequently in minor particulars and sometimes in important particulars. The Pentateuch itself is only a small portion of the Old Testament. It is narrative form, and includes the laws and regulations associated with the name of Moses, but probably compiled and edited from older sources by Ezra (or Esdras Arabic, 'Uzair) in the 5th century B.C. as Renan remarks in the preface to his History of the people of Israel, the "definite constitution of Judaism" may be dated only from the time of Ezra.

The very early Christians were divided into two parties.

- One was a Judaizing party, which wished to remain in adherence to the Jewish laws and customs while recognizing the mission of Jesus.
- The other, led by Paul, broke away from Jewish customs and traditions.

Ultimately Pauline Christianity won. But both parties recognized the Old Testament in its present form (in one or another of its varying versions) as Scripture.

It was the merit of Islam that it pointed out that as scripture it was of no value, although it recognized Moses as an inspired messenger and his original Law as having validity in his period until it was superseded. In its criticism of the Jewish position it said in effect: "You have lost your original Law; even what you have now as its substitute, you do not honestly follow; is it not better, now that an inspired Teacher is living among you, that you should follow him rather than quibble over uncertain texts?"

But the Jews in the Prophet's time (and since) went a great deal by the Talmud, or a body of oral exposition, reduced to writing in different Schools of doctors and learned men. "Talmud" in Hebrew is connected with the Arabic root in Tilmidh, "disciple" or "student." The Talmudists took the divergent texts of the Old Testament and in interpreting them by a mass of traditional commentary and legendary lore, evolved a standard body of teaching.

The Talmudists are of special interest to us, as, in the sixth century A.C., just before the preaching of Islam, they evolved the Massorah, which may be regarded as the body of authoritative Jewish Hadith, to which references are to be found in passages addressed to the Jews in the Quran.

The first part of the Talmud is called the Mishna -a collection of traditions and decisions prepared by the Rabbi Judah about 150 A.C. He summed up the results of a great mass of previous rabbinical writings. The Mishna is the "Second Law". Cf. the Arabic *Thani* = second. "It bound heavy burdens,

grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders";
Matt 23:4.

There were many Targums or paraphrases of the Law among the Jews. "Tagum" is concerned in root with the Arabic Tarjama, "he translated." There were many Targums, mostly in Aramaic, and they constituted the teaching of the Law to the masses of the Jewish people.

The correct translation of the Tawrah is therefore "The Law." In its original form it was promulgated by Moses, and is recognized in Islam as having been an inspired Book. But it was lost before Islam was preached. What passed as "The Law" with the Jews in the Prophet's time was the mass of traditional writing which I have tried to review in this Appendix.

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Zahid Javed Rana, Abid Javed Rana

Lahore, Pakistan

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