4Q22 Paleo Exodus

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Description and Background

Among the scrolls found in Cave 4 at Qumran was a version of the biblical book of Exodus. Known as 4Q22 Paleo Exodus, the manuscript comprises forty-five columns of script, of which forty-three are partially extant (columns 14 and 43 are missing). The good preservation of the parchment suggests that what has survived was at the center of a rolled-up scroll, the outer portion of which deteriorated over time. Scholars assigned to work on this particular scroll have suggested that the outer portion probably consisted of the book of Genesis. Indeed, another scroll from Cave 4, 4Q11 Paleo Genesis-Exodus, is written in the same script and contains portions of Genesis 50:26 through Exodus 36.

On the basis of paleography (handwriting analysis), Paleo Exodus has been dated to 100–25 B.C. Previous studies had suggested a date as early as 225–175 B.C., but the scholars who proposed those dates have since revised their findings. Another Exodus scroll, 4Q17 Exodus, was copied in about 250 B.C. and may be the oldest extant biblical manuscript.

Paleo Exodus is significant because it was written in the older (paleo) form of the Hebrew script rather than in the later “square” form adopted from the Aramaic language during the Babylonian captivity. This scroll is also significant because the text is not the same as that of the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, which forms the basis of the English translations of Exodus. Rather, the text is from the tradition that gave rise to the Samaritan version of Exodus, which contains more material than the Jewish text.

Thus Paleo Exodus is one of many evidences among the Dead Sea Scrolls that there existed, by the second century B.C., variant versions of at least some of the books of the Bible. There is no way to know, however, which of these versions, if any, is the earliest. To illustrate, one might presume that Paleo Exodus is an older version because it is written in a more archaic script. But the oldest Exodus scroll, 4Q17, is written in the square script and is the same as the Masoretic version. Generally speaking, scholars have given up on trying to determine if there exists a so-called authentic or original version of any of the biblical texts. The very fact that the oldest known copies were written centuries after any originals makes such a determination virtually impossible.

The fragment that was on display at the Qumran exhibit comprises column 38, which is a portion of Exodus 32:10–30. A translation follows, with the same passage from the King James Version (KJV) in a parallel column. Subscript numbers in the Paleo Exodus column denote lines in the parchment column, while numbers in the KJV column denote verses. In order that the reader may better compare the texts, I have accommodated my translation to the KJV language. Brackets enclose text that has been restored from the damaged parchment. Ellipsis points indicate damaged portions of the parchment. To facilitate a comparison between the texts, I have italicized words that differ in the two versions.

Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4Q22 Paleo Exodus</th>
<th>KJV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of th[ee] a great nation</td>
<td>10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax</td>
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noted in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:20–3. That it had identified the mountain where Abraham had brought Isaac to offer him as a sacrifice. This conflict is between the Samaritans and the Jews. The Jewish (Aaronic) priests following the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. Thereafter, the Jews sacrificed at the temple in Jerusalem, while the Samaritans sacrificed atop Mount Gerizim, each group believing that it had identified the mountain where Abraham had brought Isaac to offer him as a sacrifice. This conflict is noted in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:20–3.

Commentary

The principal difference between these two texts in column 38 is the additional material in line 1 of Paleo Exodus, in which the Lord is angry at not only Israel but also Aaron, who had made the golden calf. This additional text is found in Deuteronomy 9:20, from which it may have been borrowed. It is also found in the Samaritan version and in some manuscripts of the Greek Septuagint translation of Exodus 32:10. It is possible that the addition of the polemic against Aaron was added to the Exodus passage because of the enmity between the Samaritan priests and the Jewish (Aaronic) priests following the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. Thereafter, the Jews sacrificed at the temple in Jerusalem, while the Samaritans sacrificed atop Mount Gerizim, each group believing that it had identified the mountain where Abraham had brought Isaac to offer him as a sacrifice. This conflict is noted in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:20–3.
Notes


2. The word it is missing from the Masoretic text, from which the KJV derives (hence it is italicized in the KJV), but the word is present in Paleo Exodus.

3. The Hebrew idiom literally means “fill your hands.”