

**PRE-EXILIC WRITING IN ISRAEL:  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF SIGNS OF  
LITERACY AND LITERARY ACTIVITY IN PRE-  
MONARCHICAL AND MONARCHICAL ISRAEL**

by

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Above all, I thank the almighty God who gave me strength to continue even in hard times.

## **DECLARATION**

I DECLARE THAT **PRE-EXILIC WRITING IN ISRAEL: AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF SIGNS OF LITERACY AND LITERARY  
ACTIVITY IN PRE-MONARCHICAL AND MONARCHICAL ISRAEL** IS MY  
OWN WORK AND THAT ALL THE SOURCES THAT I HAVE QUOTED HAVE  
BEEN INDICATED AND ACKNOWLEDGED BY MEANS OF COMPLETE  
REFERENCES.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The thrust of this work is to study Israelite pre-exilic writing of religious literature. The beginning of literacy is considered from an archaeological perspective; especially, in the pre-exilic Israelite community. The study of scribes and their services assist in the quest for understanding pre-exilic religious writing in Israel. The Bible attests to pre-exilic religious writing despite the often inferred ‘anachronism.’ The issue of post-exilic composition of all Old Testament books is a matter of debate as opposed to pre-exilic writing of some religious sources which is a matter that can be historically verified.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The date of the authorship of every biblical book is of critical and pivotal importance with regards to its interpretation. Unfortunately not all biblical books have clear-cut indications or clues of their date of authorship. Often, it sounds like there is a method of studying biblical books thoroughly which permits the expositor to decide whether to believe its contents or not. Sometimes it appears that some scholars prefer to study themes or biblical books that they doubt most; so much that it appears that areas of controversy are more appealing than uncontroversial areas. Somehow, being positive about something is not scholarly enough, thus even the positive things are challenged in pursuing scholarly respect.

Of greatest concern among theologians that seek to interpret the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is the assumption that almost nothing written in the Old Testament was composed, compiled or written down prior to the exilic period or prior to the Babylonian empire. It is clear that some biblical books were actually produced after the exile. Certainly, pre-exilic biblical literature may have not been organized in terms of sequence or chronology; however, it should be figured out whether indeed some pre-exilic literature, in any form, was written or not.

This dissertation focuses on the question whether some pre-exilic religious literature was useful to the Bible editors of the post-exilic period when writing about pre-exilic events. Furthermore, the other question would be why these editors are regarded as original authors, thus displacing the original authors?

## **1.1. Methodology**

The research to establish whether some religious literature was written during the pre-exilic era should be organized in a way that leans on archaeological findings and corresponding historical and biblical data.

It is here envisaged that the origin and development of literacy will be studied from an archaeological and historical perspectives especially around the Israelite experiences or the Levant prior to the exile. The purpose of this study of literacy is to determine the use of writing and reading among Israelites in the pre-monarchic and monarchic periods.

The general functions and services of scribes will be looked at in order to determine that the nature of scribal work evolved with time and thus the recent or New Testament perspective of scribal services in the Israelite or Judaic cult will be figured out to improve the perception of pre-exilic writing activities.

The biblical books concerned with pre-exilic events will be considered especially texts that have to do with reading and writing. Of course, anachronistic reasoning or understanding should be questioned and weighed to determine its objectivity and presumptuousness. Some of the sources referred to by Bible authors as they write about monarchic events of the monarchic period will be considered to suggest that post-exilic Bible editors and writers used earlier written sources to write.

**1.1.1. Conservative theological books.** The argument that almost all Old Testament material was written beginning from the Persian period sounds militant in that it challenges the conventional wisdom that believes what the Bible says about itself. One of the proponents of post-exilic writing of all biblical literature is Thompson (2000: xv) who claims: 'Our history of biblical tradition has come topsy-turvy. It is only a Hellenistic Bible that we know: namely the one that we first begin to read in the texts found among the Dead Sea scrolls near Qumran.' The author further asserts: 'We can say now with considerable confidence that the Bible is not a history of anyone's past.' Generally,

earlier theological sources do not raise arguments that basically challenge the ancient authorship of biblical books. The exegetic reasoning of theologians developed with time as the authorship of biblical books became problematic, while being of paramount importance in interpreting biblical texts. Generally, conservative theological books hardly emphasise doubt as to when the material was actually written, but emphasise on understanding the original languages of certain biblical books.

**1.1.2. Liberal theological sources.** Much argument is inspired by, among other things, the determination of authorship dates as one of the most complex endeavours of studying biblical books. Furthermore, the redaction assumptions of our days have doubted almost anything enshrined in the Bible. The more we rapidly advance as human beings in technology and other things, the more we think that civilization is not an old phenomenon, thus doubt grows in our minds. Dating the authorship of biblical books seems to reduce belief in the fact that the art of writing, not on paper or papyrus, but on rocks or pottery is quite old. Furthermore, some authors of our days do not seem to believe simply that Moses could read and write, as a result of being caught up in Pentateuch theories that have not been proved by history at all. Thompson (2000: xv) posits: 'There was never a 'United Monarchy' in history and it is meaningless to speak of pre-exilic prophets and their writings.' This is a typical liberal source that denies historical facts.

**1.1.3. Doubting ancient civilization.** To a certain extent civilization can be traced convincingly with archaeological findings. Among other things concerning Old Testament literary activity is the art of writing. Proponents of post-exilic authorship of most of the biblical literature prefer to claim that the Israelites or Judeans of the time were not prone to writing, but prone to memorize, and thus found no need to write almost anything that was passed on orally. However, MacDonald (2005: 51) reasons: '... just as one can have illiterates in a literate society, so one can have literate individuals within an oral tradition.' The history of literacy should be studied independently from an archaeological point of view that considers epigraphic findings.

**1.1.3.1. Relevant epigraphic findings.** The extent of literacy should be substantiated with a necessary study of ancient seals, ostraca and inscriptions. The study of epigraphic material should cover the relevant area of the Jews and Israelites including some surrounding areas, since civilization has a way of spreading slowly or rapidly from one area to another.

**1.1.4. History of scribes and their work.** Usually scribes are thought of as the literate persons of the ancient world. Generally, it is assumed that only scribes could read and write. The history of scribes should be studied in order to establish as to when they began to exist. There were royal scribes indeed, but it is yet to be known whether there were temple scribes or not. The very temple or sanctuary services should be studied in order to figure out the level of literacy in the operations or services of the Israelite cult. The questions are: were there scrolls in cultic places or not? On special Judean occasions, who would read relevant scrolls? Was there any public reading of scrolls prior to the Babylonian exile? Answers to these questions will shed more light as to how literate priests and Levites were.

**1.1.5. Biblical evidence.** The Bible itself as an interesting source of religious history does refer to acts of writing, recording and reading. These acts should be studied and various Bible commentaries consulted to update our thoughts about pre-exilic authorship of biblical literature.

## **1.2. Archaeology and Hermeneutics**

Generally, all biblical archaeologists have an interest in the art of interpreting the Bible though they may not be perceived as scholars majoring in hermeneutics. Naturally, it is disconcerting that hermeneutics and archaeology seem to be divergent disciplines. In one way or another biblical archaeology is inseparable from hermeneutics. Mature Bible interpreters consider and use all principles and methods of biblical interpretation including archaeological findings.

Burrows (1957:30) states, 'Before we can tell what the Bible means, we must know what it says. The first step toward a true understanding of the Bible, therefore, is to establish

the earliest and most accurate form of the text which can be ascertained. Assistance toward this end may fairly be sought from archaeology.’ Especially when it comes to the question of when the earliest religious texts were written, archaeology seems to be the final source of answers which many scholars have ignored in making their conclusions.

**1.2.1. Reconstruction of the past.** A lot has been said about the past based purely on speculations and conclusive reasoning. In order to reconstruct the past, the facts used should be augmented by archaeological findings, since not all history is actually written down about every moment of every day.

Burrows (1957:42) posits: ‘Much greater and more significant is the contribution of archaeology when we come to questions of interpretation...the best reconstruction of the text which the manuscripts enable us to establish...This requires first of all that we understand the language.’ To reconstruct a tangible thing in a reliable manner requires that more tangible things should be seen for the reconstruction to be credible. Theory alone constitutes an opinion, not a good reconstruction, because it is not substantiated by tangible facts of archaeology. Furthermore, history might assist scholars to trace language changes and date them, but archaeology has a way of resurrecting the past such that Bible interpreters find it very easy to make their conclusions. In a nutshell, archaeology is one of the relatively safe and realistic factors used in the reconstruction of ancient texts or situations.

**1.2.2. Understanding and expositions.** The task of the biblical expositor should be complete, if in the quest of seeking to understand the text all avenues including archaeology are used. When all angles of a text are considered, the expositor’s findings are usually informed, well considered and balanced and considerate. Wright (1962) talks about the task and interests of the biblical archaeologist in archaeology and postulates: ‘His central and absorbing interest is the understanding and exposition of the scriptures.’ However, Finkelstein (1995: 351) says: ‘The Biblical account of Early Israel, which dominated past archaeological research... has been dramatically diminished in recent years. Its relatively late date and its literary-ideological character make it irrelevant as a direct historical source....’ From time to time, more conservative archaeologists are

shocked by outspoken scholars like Finkelstein who are not keen on understanding archaeological findings that have to do with their work.

On the subject of pre-exilic authorship of religious literature that is clearly affirmed by the Bible itself, some scholars find logic in rejecting it. One of these scholars is Benjamin (2004: 9-11) who features a section entitled 'Who wrote the Bible.' In the section the author presents storytelling as the practice of the day prior to the exile. He further indicates the birth of the JEDP and emphasises that no copy of such storytelling traditions exists even though other scholars have identified them and separated them from each other. Interestingly, the J and E traditions are said to be monarchic stories during the reigns of David and Solomon. The Deuteronomist tradition is said to have existed beginning from Josiah's reign. Then the priestly tradition is presented as post-exilic. On page 11, Benjamin (2004) states: 'The survival skill that the exiles used best was their ability to tell a story. Performance, however, gave way to preservation. The stories were no longer told; they were written.' Such a proposition may be plausible, but in its core it doubts the authenticity of any pre-exilic historical information in the Bible which is a rejection of what the Bible says. Furthermore, these scholars parade the idea that some of the authors of the Bible wrote literally out of memory and no document of reference was used at all including ancestor's names and other finer details. Is there an answer as to why these writers refer to other sources?

**1.2.3. Balancing the hermeneutic equilibrium.** The understanding and acceptance of the Israelite as it is in the Bible is questioned by using the proposition that there was no religious writing prior to the exile in Babylon. Among such scholars is Watts (1974: 167) who intimates: 'Neither Israel nor Christianity was originally a "book religion"' Furthermore, he continues to say: 'Although written documents of covenants played important roles in Israel from earliest times, no "book" as such appears until the reform of Josiah....' Here the author clearly argues against the tide, because the book of the law was only discovered during the time of Josiah and not written at that time. That suggests that it had been written earlier.



Then the other author is Deist (1978:41) who argues: 'The religion of Israel prior to the exile was never a book religion. The problem of the word of God was in those days very largely confined to the question of true and false prophecy.' Further on he claims: 'By the end of the exile, Judaism had become a book religion.' (Deist 1978: 42) It is interesting that such a phenomenal practice of writing religious material could have only emerged in very unfavourable conditions in which some key persons were exiled without any pre-exilic precedence of writing religious literature. Anything to do with books does not characterise the Ancient Near East. Judaism did not choose not to use books when they were available. Furthermore, the author (1978: 42) indirectly concedes to writing of the law prior to exile thus: 'But not that this written law, which had probably been canonized by then, still needed to be interpreted.' Interpretation is for us who did not live in the ancient context and not necessarily for those who lived in those days.

Vos (1977:15) blows the trumpet of warning to proponents of such extreme views by declaring: 'Archaeology in Bible lands also provides guidance as to methods of interpreting Scripture. As information has rolled in, it has shown that some of the extreme views of the Old Testament in particular were unwarranted.' The use of archaeological findings in hermeneutics would certainly bring about moderation in reasoning the past and cultivating the necessary receptiveness to what the Bible says about itself without hiding behind what is called anachronism when faced with real facts opposing upheld propositions.

## 2. LITERACY

### 2.1. Introduction

Among other reasons used to claim that there was little or no writing of religious literature prior to the time of the Babylonian empire in Israel or Jerusalem, is the perceived development and spread of literacy. The general argument leans on the assertion that an agrarian lifestyle was one of the characteristics of the Israelites upon arrival in Canaan. The Israelites are generally portrayed as a nation that was highly uncivilized, because it seems they were rearing livestock and minimally produced crops. Furthermore, the fact that they came from slavery in Egypt is construed by some scholars that they could have not known how to read and write.

The settlement period of the Israelites in Canaan is understood to have taken a long period and thus not enabling them to learn to read and write. The wars that they had to fight against other nations may have made it difficult for them to learn anything (including literacy) from other nations or to trade easily with them. Some archaeologists like Mazar (1990: 348) present the Israelites as a nation that was undeveloped looking from the material findings of the period of their arrival in the Promised Land. Historically, it is easy for some scholars to doubt what is written in the Torah about accounts that indicate that somebody had to write down something.

The development of literacy should be studied in order to weigh the speculative yet conclusive ideas about the pre-exilic levels of literacy. Archaeological finds should be scrutinized; especially, the epigraphic discoveries. Literally, anything relevant that has

some writing should be dated and studied in order to determine the levels of literacy especially in ancient Israelite lifestyle.

## **2.2. Beginning of literacy**

It is interesting that in the debate about the development of literacy there are scholars who consider literacy from its beginning in a manner that pays attention to details, while other authors resist pre-exilic writing without considering the matter of the development of literacy. Schniedewind (2004:36) states: 'Writing seems to have first developed in Mesopotamia, during the fourth millennium, in connection with accounting practices of the city states, probably to meet the administrative and economic needs of Mesopotamian cities.' It is fascinating to remember that around the fourth millennium B.C.E. a character like Moses had not come into the Israelite historical picture with the accounts of writing or recording some messages. Before the time of Moses, literacy began. Moreover, the Mesopotamian city states would rarely keep a good accounting system to themselves without spreading it in doing trade with other nationalities. Schniedewind, writing in our days, is an author who may not be said to be ignorant of some scholarly debates on literacy, yet he is the one who presents the beginning of literacy as an ancient phenomenon. Basing the argument on the fourth millennium B.C.E. as the time during which the art of writing only began implies that if the Israelites existed at all, then they must have been a small nation. Furthermore, little could have happened to require recording since it only occurred during the leadership of Moses according to the biblical record.

Harrison (2004:201) argues against Wellhausen who propounds the notion that literacy only emerged during the time of the monarchy. He declares: 'From at least 3100 B.C. in the ancient Near East, writing was regarded as one of the high-water marks of culture and human progress.' Harrison is in harmony with Negev and Gibson (2003: 452) who expound on seals and indicate that they '...spread with expanding trade networks,

accompanied, from around 3100 B.C., by the early stages of writing.’ Probably, by 3100 B.C.E. there was not much talk about Israelites, which means that when Israelites actually emerged and became a nation that grew out of the tribe of Jacob, the practice of writing, reading and recording was already in existence in the ancient Near East.

Black and Rowley (1967: 61) assert: ‘Writing had already reached the cursive stage in both Egypt and Mesopotamia by about 3000 B.C; we find clay tablets covered with rapidly impressed wedges in Babylonia well before the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium and in Egypt we find cursive hieroglyphs written with ink as early as the 29<sup>th</sup> century B.C.’ At the beginning stages of writing alphabets had not been developed, but whatever symbols or pictures used were good to pass on messages.

Albright (1957:20) talks about the Akkadian language as the most ancient lingua franca used by different nationalities. The author further indicates that in the entire Mesopotamia a corruption of the Akkadian language was learned with some dilution of the Babylonian language and he finally dates the practice back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. and says: ‘...as we know from the Mari archives.’ The use of a particular language as a lingua franca would certainly make literacy to spread much easier if that particular language could actually be written down.

Some of these scholars who date the beginning of literacy have said almost nothing about Israelites. The Bible, in Genesis 15: 13, indicates that Israelites would stay in a foreign country for four hundred years only and then they shall be released. Generally there is a consensus that the Israelites arrived in Canaan around the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. meaning that they could have arrived in Egypt around the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. If the development of literacy started towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C E. , though many may have not been literate, the art of writing and reading was widely present in the ancient Near East.

However, McCarter (1974: 56) points out that Proto-Sinaitic was the most ancient form of writing evident on some inscriptions defined as ‘rock-cut graffiti from the ancient

turquoise-mining community of Serabit el-Khadom in the Sinai peninsula.’ The author goes on to refer to Cosmas of Alexandria, who around the 6<sup>th</sup> century, ‘in his monastic old age... described the inscriptions as the earliest form of the letters of the alphabet, taught by God to the Hebrews on their journey through the Sinai and later learned from Israel by Cadmus of Tyre (!), who carried them to Greece and thus, eventually, the rest of mankind.’ This statement sounds like a story which is hard to believe or easy to ignore, although McCarter claims: ‘This opinion was so widely accepted....’ However, the point that should be considered is whether the Israelites on their journey to Canaan had anything to learn or all they did was travel or walk every day and night. They may have not been taught by God Himself, but along their way according to Exodus 22: 21 there were individuals who joined them hence the admonition not to oppress them, but live with them kindly. Moses spent some time outside Egypt where he could have learnt more about reading and writing in addition to his knowledge acquired in Egypt. After his exile he never spent enough time in Egypt to learn anything significant. This argument clearly indicates that the Israelites, though not all of them, knew something about reading and writing even before arriving in Canaan. If only Caleb and Joshua left Egypt and managed to enter Canaan, the rest were born along the way and others who joined from other nationalities could have learnt to write in Hebrew along their way or one of the accomplishments of the sojourn to Canaan could have been the development of literacy to a certain extent. However, the argument relating to pre-exilic writing is not to be based on such reasoning.

Mazar (1990: 224) traces literacy to have emerged way before 1000 B.C.E. during the Middle Bronze Age. It seems to be clear that by the time of the monarchy literacy was in existence. However, Schniedewind (2004: 24) minimises his earlier statements thus: ‘In modern society, writing is common. It is a mundane part of our existence. We sometimes forget that writing is an invention. It is a relatively recent development in human history.’ Schniedewind is one of the authors who write about matters that imply that historical facts about literacy in the Ancient Near East were ignored or taken lightly. The claim that writing is a modern development is not clear because his work was published recently in 2004. When could the beginning of this ‘modern period’ have been? Usually after how

long would anything cease to be labeled 'modern?' On page 25, he continues to make another statement: 'We usually discuss writing from the view point of the literate. Yet, early writing was controlled by the king and the priest.' Kings and priests may have needed scribes, but to say they controlled the art of writing is way off the mark, because it is not substantiated as to who were actual kings and priests who restricted the art of writing to themselves or their scribes. Some authors can only trace literacy to have been in existence only in palaces and temples. The fact is that at that time the ability to read and write may have been luxurious to have and thus such persons could easily be employed by kings to keep records for them and write letters. In the temple, literate persons could read publicly on certain occasions.

### **2.3. Development of literacy**

The art of writing evolved over a longer period and had different phases. The point about literacy is that its purpose has always been to convey a message in absentia, to notify passers by or to identify self or property in a way that is understandable to few or many. The numbers of literate persons increased with time and of course it was a useful, yet rare skill especially as it was developing.

Negev and Gibson (2003: 241) postulate: 'The first scripts were pictographs, such as the Egyptian hieroglyphs and the earliest Sumerian script which developed into the Mesopotamian cuneiform. As time went on the pictographs lost their primary form and began to represent syllables; the hieroglyphs even included some consonants. In fact they evolved into an alphabetic script.' The authors here present some guidelines which indicate that literacy never developed only in one place until it reached its indispensable alphabetic form. Therefore, literacy is not a one nationality development at the exclusion of the rest. This inter-nationality development may have been enhanced by trade above all things.

The alphabet is viewed by Schoville (1978: 127) as the ultimate accomplishment or the climax of the evolution of literacy when he intimates: 'The alphabet was the result of a three-thousand-year development starting with pictures conveying a message in a more or

less ambiguous way, and ending in a system of writing in which each symbol tends to represent one sound or phoneme of the language in question.’ The author further indicates that it took about two thousand years for the art of writing to move from its latent form to an alphabetic form. In addition, the author ascribes the alphabet to the Semitic people and the alphabet is identified as Phoenician or Canaanite.

In a clearer manner, Yearsly (1933: 33) portrays writing to have developed in four stages being memory aids, pictorials, symbols and phonetics. He further explains memory aids as ‘knotted cords’ used ‘for reckoning, sending messages, keeping records, accrediting messages, or money.’ It should be understood that this ancient method of communicating was used by people who had an understanding of how it actually works. On pictorials, the author says that they ‘were used as records, of deeds of great chiefs, for messages, and, as tattooing, for personal identification.’ This was an earlier development even before the most common hieroglyphs. The art of writing was bound to develop from one place to another and from one form to another. On symbols, the author argues that picture writing deteriorated or was corrupted into symbols that looked less like the original picture yet bearing the same message. The Egyptian hieroglyphics is an example of writing with symbols. Furthermore, according to the author, the final stage of development was phonetics in which, ‘The picture became a conventional sign representing the sound either of a word, a syllable or a letter. In this stage an alphabet comes into existence.’ The use of writing which puts sounds of pronunciation in a written form was generally found to be useful and different alphabets developed as a result even though some alphabets had some similarities and different stages.

Crenshaw (1998: 29) explains: ‘The revolutionary shift from an oral to a written culture was prompted by more than a sense of the artistic or a feeling for the power residing in signs and symbols.’ The art of writing was bound to emerge in humanity as creatures with more artistic skills than the rest. Before going into finer details of the development stages of the art of writing, it should be made clear that literacy (the availability of persons who could read and write irrespective of scarcity or abundance) is not merely a matter of faith or acceptable belief, but a matter of fact. This is meant to help expositors not to rely on subjective and less informed speculations about literacy and how it evolved

to what it is today. The perception that Israelites remained largely illiterate until the time of the exile should be informed by the study of literacy from an archaeological point of view.

**2.3.1. Primitive writing.** Humankind has always had an urge to express itself in various ways besides speaking. Ideas, experiences, feelings and religious expressions have been made visible and considerable by humans since time immemorial. Diring (1960: 27) calls the ancient form of writing 'embryo-writing' which he defines as '...scratched, drawn or painted by men of the Upper Paleolithic on the walls of caves....' This kind of writing is found in different places of the world including South Africa. On page 30, the author recognises that this kind of writing made sense to people who did it, but to us or everyone else '...they cannot form the single, static impressions into a discourse.' He further says: 'We could perhaps say that in embryo-writings the nouns are present, but that verbs, adverbs and prepositions are lacking.' In addition, Yearsley (1933:33) posits: 'Palaeolithic man scratched pictures on slate, ivory, bone or his cave wall, and from picture-drawing writing is derived, for man has for long ages been a sign maker, and primitive men draw pictures "for magic" now.' The author continues to mention other nationalities which are fond of drawing either on rocks or 'barks' and posits: 'None of these drawings is made for art's sake, but records slain animals, game, or for magic.' For Schoville (1978: 128) these, 'Prehistoric rock carvings and paintings which show animals and human beings in action have been discovered ...one of their functions was to communicate a message, either confirming an achievement in hunting or in battle, or providing directions to guide others in their activities.' Furthermore, the author talks about using knots for counting days and using some colours to convey necessary messages.

In our days we use traffic robots which are easy to be understood by drivers and pedestrians of diverse languages. We also use signs to indicate public toilets whether they are meant for female or male use and such signs can easily be understood by men and women of different languages. The use of drawings and colours for public communication purposes has proved to be without language barriers. We also have road sign posts which indicate availability of different facilities or the existence of certain



animals along the road. The primitive writing in drawings is international in nature and cannot be ignored or left out.

Among the nationalities that practiced this kind of writing, according to Schoville (1978: 129), are the North American Indians, Chinese and other nations. On page 130, the author explains about picture writing in Mesopotamia and singles out a particular tablet dated about 3100 B.C. which had drawings of cow heads accompanied by some other explanatory signs. The author claims: 'this tablet...does not tell the same story...but it represents the same stage in the development of writing.' Today it is hard to interpret or make sense of such drawings, but it meant something real in those days to the people of the time. Hooker (1990: 6) emphasizes that pictographs which were used by farmers or hunters on rocks were not a language, but the pictographs conveyed a message 'by means of a series of drawings.'

**2.3.2. Hieroglyphic and pictographic writing.** From the primitive method of writing which was basically not regulated there emerged hieroglyphics which was to a certain extent regulated and studied to find its limitations and to come up with improvements. Davies (1990: 82) indicates that the word *hieroglyphica* is a Greek word meaning 'sacred carved (letters).' Further on page 86, the author says Egyptians called it 'writing of divine words' or 'divine words.' Barrera (1998: 82) says: 'Hieroglyphic writing arose in Egypt towards the end of the third millennium B.C.E.' The author further claims that it did not go through stages of development or modification like the subsequent cuneiform. Although, Barrera maintains that hieroglyphics was only restricted to Egypt yet he ascribes the development of the Proto-Sinaitic consonantal writing to the Egyptian hieroglyphics. The Egyptian hieroglyphic writing may have not been adopted by other nationalities, but it may have helped individuals who were exposed to it to come up with another way of writing outside of Egypt. Davies (1990: 99) claims that only the elite knew how to read and write it and decipher it especially administrators in 'civil, military and religious' professions or realms. Hieroglyphics had an influence in the development of writing.

Oscar (1948: 28-30) shows different pictures of hieroglyphics and states two problems of picture writing being that two individuals in drawing the same picture might draw it differently and that such different drawings may be interpreted quite differently. The author goes on to actually mention some symbols and what they meant. He shows that the spear meant hunter; cane meant old man. On page 32, the author further illustrates that some symbols were actually combined to denote a certain emotion or action as this kind of writing was developing. The combination of an eye and water meant to weep and the combination of a mouth and bread meant to eat, according to the author. In a nutshell, hieroglyphics had problems in deciphering and thus needed to be improved to avoid such problems.

The pictures of hieroglyphics were not real exact pictures, but representations of certain objects which could be quickly drawn or written. Morsley (1963: 79) indicates that hieroglyphic writing was not a strictly Egyptian phenomenon, but in Sumer also it was existent. He contrasts the Egyptian and Sumerian picture writing thus: 'as in Sumeria it began as picture-ideas, but developed into signs which we now call hieroglyphics.' The author also mentions the material used in writing hieroglyphics in Egypt as pen, wood, pottery and papyrus. Such material helps determine the level of civilization especially the use of pens which imply that ink had been invented already. The author dates the earliest hieroglyphs on papyrus from 3360 B.C.E and further says that such was found at Sakhora in 1893. Schoville (1978: 131) also refers to the dated artefact thus: 'An early example of Egyptian writing comes a little closer to our Indian story. It is found on the palette of Narmer, dug up at Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt, and describes a historic defeat that happened before 3000 BC.' The finding is said to portray a king 'beating' a defeated adversary. The author finds Egyptians and Sumerians to have been people who developed writing skills and finally 'paving the way for the invention of the alphabet.'

The hieroglyphic and pictographic writing had difficulties as far as interpretation is concerned which include, according to Schoville (1978: 129), leaving out some details. However, the author, on page 134-136, says that the problems were not just left unattended, but '...adding determinations to ideograms was a big step forward, but it was not enough to end the confusion.' In fact the hieroglyphic writing went through some

stages of modifications in order to eliminate or solve its problems. Nevertheless, with time it became apparent that a different system altogether had to be adopted which did not have confusing limitations. It should be clear that the evolution of hieroglyphics and Sumerian pictographs led to another way of writing.

**2.3.3. Cuneiform writing.** This form of writing was necessitated by the pitfalls of hieroglyphics as it replaced a more artistic form of writing which naturally could hardly be replaced. Naveh (1994: 6) indicates that writing began with pictographs which evolved into cuneiform writing. The fact is, even one artist may not draw the same thing or picture twice in an exact similar way. With cuneiform writing, some writing could at least be copied.

Schoville (1978: 131) explains that as picture writing developed, some signs were actually used to cut short the time consumed by pure drawing. Scratching signs on clay or stone was probably a hard work to do. To make writing easier, according to the author, an instrument called 'stylus' was invented. This instrument had a handle or part to be held by the hand that uses it and the most important part of it was the one that would be impressed on wet clay. This important part looked triangular with one angle being smaller than the other two angles. In fact it looks like a sharp arrowhead.

It is interesting that the use of this device was linked to picture writing because a particular set of impressions would actually represent pictures. This kind of writing was called cuneiform. Walker (1990: 17) states: 'When man first began to write he wrote not with pen and ink on paper, but by scratching signs onto damp clay with a pointed stick or reed.' Although it seems to have solved hieroglyphic and pictographic problems, it had its problems also. Schoville (1978: 131) continues to say that as a result of the invention of cuneiform, it became even more difficult to understand the message communicated, thus prefixes called 'determinants' were developed to indicate plurality and royalty. Nevertheless, confusion and difficulty continued with more technicalities.

Morsley (1963: 70) complicates the matter of cuneiform writing thus: 'The art of writing is very old indeed...written records were found which are dated from before the Flood.' The 'wedge-shaped writing,' cuneiform, is ascribed by the author to the Sumerians who also used hieroglyphic or pictographic writing. Furthermore the author indicates that a lot of clay tablets have been found with cuneiform writing on, because the clay tablets would be baked or dried in the sun in order to guarantee durability. Barrera (1998: 81) claims that by the third millennium B.C.E. this kind of writing had been 'adopted' by the Akkadians. Cuneiform writing seems to have succeeded the hieroglyphic writing and it was in use during the third millennium B.C.E.

Cuneiform had its advantages and disadvantages. The greatest advantage of it was the fact that it was 'versatile' according to Barrera (1998: 81) as it could be used in different languages. The author mentions the Hittites as people who 'adopted' it to their own language. Diringier (1962: 37) says, 'Some time around the middle of the third millennium B.C. , a thousand years after their entry into Mesopotamia, the writing of the Sumerians was taken over by the Semites who lived in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley - the Akkadians, i.e. the Babylonians and Assyrians.'" Later on when the Akkadian language became the *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East, writing developed at the same time in all nationalities and literacy was bound to spread widely.

Barrera (1998: 81) demonstrates that cuneiform writing was actually very technical in nature. He says that writing with the stylus done vertically from top to bottom beginning from the far right of the clay tablet and later on writing in horizontal lines was introduced. Morsley (1963: 71) states: 'The whole art of writing was complicated that many scribes were maintained for the purpose, and boys had to go to school to be taught how to read and write.' Just like hieroglyphics, cuneiform had pitfalls and in trying to solve them a system that has to do with pronunciation was born or imminent. Diringier (1962:37) says: 'It was first a form of picture-writing; and then without a break, became what we have defined as a transitional script.' On page 40, the author expounds on the so called 'determinatives' which were introduced by Sumerian scribes in order to avoid the conveyance of dual or multi-meaning combinations of symbols. These determinatives,

according to the author, helped classify impressions into ‘...birds, numbers, male proper nouns, deities, countries, plural form...’ categories. The author also shows that in addition to such determinatives a ‘phonetic complement’ was used to help pronounce some stylus impressions.

Cuneiform writing with its difficulties helped scribes to discover that writing should be about pronunciation as opposed to different combinations of stylus impressions which may not be pronounced as such. Gradually, the use of cuneiform writing was phased out in favour of phonetics or alphabets which have to do with pronunciation and thus culminated in the use of alphabets which are letters which represent sounds.

**2.3.4. Alphabetic writing.** The alphabetic writing which is the system of our days came into existence as a result of the evolution of writing systems which could be used in different languages to a certain degree. Though there are different alphabets today, none just emerged as a system of writing before the hieroglyphics and cuneiform were naturally phased out. This is confirmed by Barrera (1998: 81) thus: ‘The alphabetic script developed in Syria-Palestine, probably in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Before that, other writing systems existed: cuneiform in Palestine and hieroglyphics in Egypt.’

The transition into alphabetic writing was precipitated by the improvements made on the cuneiform writing system. Healey (1990: 218) asserts: ‘There is no doubt that the cuneiform alphabets disappeared and the other branch of alphabetic tradition, that of the forms descended from the Proto-Sinaitic / Proto-canaanite script, replaced it.’ In addition to Healey’s expression, Naveh (1994:5) claims that Canaanites came up with the first Alphabet ‘in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC ....’ On page 17, Naveh (1994) further posits: ‘The Proto-Canaanite script ...was the source of all alphabetic scripts which later spread throughout the entire world.’ Sass (1988:167) states: ‘All alphabets are imitations or descendants of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet, and nowhere was the invention of the alphabet repeated independently.’ Schoville (1978: 136) asserts that picture writing became eventually unpopular as the art of writing developed and the formulation of writing sounds, ‘phonetization’ phased out picture writing and introduced emphasis on

the writing of syllables. Most authors cite Egyptians and Sumerians as nations that had a greater role in the development of writing; however, the author points out that the Hebrew writing system emerged as a result of exposure to the two major systems in Egypt and Sumeria. Schoville (1978: 139) argues that the Canaanites were the first to have an alphabetic writing system and yet he says that the development of the Canaanite writing system is uncertain. Surely, it should be uncertain because it is logical when viewed in the light of the development of writing in general. However, Albright (1957: 253-254) claims that the Hebraic alphabetic writing was in use in Canaan and the surrounding areas which, in a way, also presents this development as an independent one. The understanding of trade trends assists scholars to see the development of writing as a purely international phenomenon especially in the ancient Near East.

As far as dating the use of the alphabet, Albright (1957: 253-254) posits: 'It is clear that the Hebrew alphabet was written with ink and used for everyday purposes in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C....' In agreement with Albright is Mazar (1990: 363) who postulates: 'The direction of writing had not crystallized in this period...letters were far more advanced than those of the Late Bronze Age...They represent an important stage of the advancement toward the mature forms of Hebrew-Phoenician alphabet in Iron Age II.' The history of the Israelites should be considered alongside the development of writing into an alphabetic system.

According to Mazar, the Israelites began to settle in Canaan around 1200-1000 B.C.E. During this time the Bronze Age had just passed and the Iron Age had come and alphabetic writing was largely a Bronze Age (3300-1200 B.C.E.) development. This means that while they were in Egypt, alphabetic writing developed out of Egypt where Moses spent some years and while on their way to Canaan, alphabetic writing further developed and probably some of them like Moses could have had an idea of writing and reading. Furthermore, the sanctuary system which was instituted prior to their entry into Canaan as a system could have made use of writing and reading.

Some scholars prove the practice of writing from archaeological findings in order to make their work quite considerable or valid. Schoville (1978: 141) claims: 'Inscriptions found in 1905 at Serbit el-Khadim in the Sinai Peninsula, not far from the coast of the Gulf of Suez and less than fifty miles from the traditional site of Mount Sinai, date to the period from 1800 to 1500 B.C.' In his further enunciation the author hints that Egypt was a dominant economical force at the time and thus alphabetic writing could only spread throughout the region. Again the author refers to other findings when he says, 'Very recently at Gezer several Middle Bronze store jars were found with what appears to be alphabetic signs scratched on their shoulders.' The author further accounts on 1929 archaeological findings in northern Syria, ancient Ugarit, which are tablets showing eight various ways of writing that are dated to the Late Bronze Age. Schoville is not the only writer who presents archaeological findings to ascertain the date of alphabetic writing. Morsley (1963: 90) declares: 'Specimens of the new writing were found also on a bowl in the temple rubbish, and more at Gezer in 1929, one pot dating from 1300 B.C.' On page 91, he claims that archaeology shows that there were written trade correspondences, contracts, ownership documents etc and '...even before the end of the third millennium, and by the beginning of the second millennium the ability to read and write was common in Syria and Palestine.' There is evidence which shows that by the time of the conquest of Canaan by Israel, literacy was acquired by some persons or about any nationality in the Levant had persons who could read and write including the Israelite nation. The argument here is not about how many could read and write, but that literacy had developed to alphabetic writing already around the time of the exodus from Egypt.

There is general consensus that alphabetic writing developed during the second millennium B.C.E. However, the bone of contention is whether literacy was only used in palaces and in trade excluding religious institutions. Schniedewind (2004: 35) says: 'The invention of the alphabet was one of the critical developments leading to the spread of writing outside state-supported institutions.' This implies that alphabetic writing could not easily be limited to royal realms, because some individuals outside royal realms may have wanted to know how to read and write. There is the assumption supported by Schniedewind that literacy did not increase immediately with the invention of alphabetic

writing. The point is not about the spread of literacy, but it is more about the existence of literacy at a certain point in time or history. Furthermore, if literacy was only for royal purposes according to the orders of certain kings, it should be remembered that the first palace of Israelites was the sanctuary with God as the King of the nation and when kingship started it simply copied the writing practices from cult or sanctuary. The art of writing could have not been a religious development, but religious persons did not shy away from using it in their cults.

#### **2.4. Ancient Schools**

The question as to how widespread literacy was among Israelites prompts interested persons to wonder as to how those who were literate learnt how to read and write such that only few persons could read and write. Walker (1990: 43) enunciates about schooling during the time of cuneiform writing and posits: ‘The first thing the schoolboy had to learn was how to make a tablet and handle a stylus.’ Even during the time of cuneiform writing there were schools in the places where such writing prevailed for some time. Naveh (1994: 18) claims: ‘The first list of letters in alphabetic order (a so-called abecedary) known till now was found in Ugarit.’ Barrera (1998: 109) talks about different abecedaries including the Hebrew one dated 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. and emphatically says: ‘The theory has been proposed recently that Hebrew abecedaries contain student’s exercises at an elementary level, showing there was a school system in Israel in the monarchic period.’ Niditch (1996: 45) argues differently about abecedaries thus: ‘One basic variety “short text” found by archaeologists is the so called abecedary, a string or list of Hebrew letters of the alphabet, an early example of which from Iron Age I (1200-1000 B.C.E.) was discovered on an incised ostrakon...at Izbet Sartah. Later examples of abecedaries have been found as well.’ Furthermore, the author says that these abecedaries have been regarded as proof ‘of school book exercise....’ There’s little argument about schools existing during the monarchic period. It does not seem to surface as to why scholars or learners would not exist prior to the monarchy period if abecedaries dating back to 1200-1000 B.C.E. have been found.



Crenshaw (1998:86) reports about the discovery of a cuneiform script for writing Akkadian at Ugarit. He further states: 'Royal administrative texts were deposited at Ugarit for consultation and safekeeping.' Such places according to the author render the question of whether schools existed or not as 'incontrovertible.' Though the author seems to be certain about the existence of schools or learning places, he assumes that such schools were meant for character building using the oral tradition system and these schools were run by families. If learning how to read and write started during the time of cuneiform writing, then during alphabetic writing time schools of literacy should have increased in number especially in Sumer or the Levant. Moreover, even if the purpose of schools was to build character, at least the teachers could have been literate.

It is evident that during the Iron Age people learnt how to read and write, but it does not seem clear as to how they actually learnt. Although Niditch (1996: 69-70) hardly makes a statement of her own about whether schools did exist or not, she quotes Carol Meyers who says that writing skills could have been learnt either in schools or 'in a family setting passed on from parents to children....' Otherwise, there seems to be consensus that during the time of the monarchy there were schools especially during the time of king Solomon. Why is it so easy for some scholars to purport that no religious material was actually written prior to the exile despite the discovery of the law book or scroll during the time of Josiah which had been written earlier on? In fact, among the early written documents in Israel, there were religious documents kept in the sanctuary or temple such as the Ten Commandments and the book of the law kept alongside the ark.

### **2.5. Objects with writing on**

Archaeology is one of the sources of the study of literacy in order to augment historical information. Datable epigraphic material is useful in determining and confirming when literacy could have started, developed and matured. Among other epigraphic materials there are seals, bullae, various inscriptions, papyrus, leather scrolls and tablets.

Blenkinsopp (1995:5) elaborates on seals, inscriptions and potsherds in relation to what he calls 'the problem of sources' and he emphatically says that basically all ancient

material should be considered including inscribed or artifactual material ‘...in the archaeological record.’

**2.5.1. Seals.** Among all epigraphic findings, seals stand out as the most ancient objects with some writing on. Deutsch & Heltzer (1999: 29-59) present a myriad of seals with picture inscriptions, some with pictures combined with words or names. The authors present the seals to have been made with different materials such as stone, bronze, ivory, limestone, and bone. According to Ben-Tor (1992: 350) who clearly demonstrates and explains that earlier seals did not bear any writing at all until ‘After the eighth century the artistic motifs decorating the seals gradually decrease in favour of written inscriptions.’ The author defines seals thus: ‘The seals are usually scaraboid, with a convex back and a flat base. On the base, the name and patronym of the owner was inscribed in mirror writing; ....’ Generally they were used to impress inscriptions on then onto a lump of clay for personal or business purposes. In fact, the use of the stylus for cuneiform writing could have been learnt from the use of seals on clay. Whatever the function of seals could have been, communication is above all.

**2.5.1.1. The inception of seals.** The point here is to show that seals are the most ancient objects though they developed with time. Negev and Gibson (2003: 452) declare: ‘Seals have been used administratively since before 5000BC to mark property in order to indicate ownership, the provenance of goods being traded and as a protection against theft.’ The seals used prior to 5000 B.C.E. may not have had any alphabetic writing on them, but they served the function that alphabetic writing serves. Horn (1979: 997) says: ‘Seals were used in the patriarchal age, and numerous ones have been found in Palestine from that time onwards.’ This implies that during the time of patriarchs there was an inclination to communicate in writing, art and pictures of any form.

In Genesis 38: 18, reference is made to the use of seals. A man called Judah committed adultery with his daughter-in-law who had been estranged and as a pledge for rewarding the daughter-in-law later on the man’s seal was given to the woman who would return it upon receiving the reward in future. It is not important as to who this Judah was or what

was actually inscribed on the seal or even the material used to produce the seal, but of great significance is that seals were in use during patriarchal times.

Wright (1962: 200-201) claims: 'Between 3500 and 1500 B.C. some of the finest art-work in the Near East was put into seal engraving...Israelite seals are probably adaptations of Canaanite or Phoenician work.' Furthermore, the author indicates that Israelite seals manifest Egyptian and Syrian influence. The writer here relates seal inscriptions with art-work which precipitated the ability to read and write. As much as art-works did spread from one nation to another, so did literacy.

Seals were commonly used from time immemorial, yet to decipher them is quite a hard task. Wright (1962: 160) postulates: 'It is during the Dynasty of Jehu that the first Israelite inscribed seals which can be dated with certainty are encountered.' However, the author further mentions Judah's seal in Genesis 38 which was used in a sensual deal between Judah and Tamar. However difficult it is to date seals, the authors explain that datable seals have the owner's name and that of his father. Davies (2005: 165) states that *lmlk* seals and private jar-handle seals were prevalent in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

**2.5.1.2. Use of seals.** In our days in various parts of the world we use signatures, pin codes, identity documents and stamps to transact business authoritatively. In stead of all these things that we use, seals were used in the past in the Levant or ancient Near East and may be in use still. Dever (2001: 204) admits that the word 'seal' appears several times in the Bible from the very book of Genesis. The writer fathoms the use of seals as 'symbols of wealth or authority that were used in a practical way to designate ownership.' About anything that had an attachment of a seal impression on clay usually the impression served to identify the owner of the material or object. In case producing a seal was expensive, surely the writer would be right to say that seals were symbols of wealth or indicated sealed properties or documents belonged to a wealthy person.

Horn (1979: 997) posits: 'They were used to seal letters, official papers, contracts, scrolls, tombs etc.' It appears that seals were used for business purposes which is one of the factors that helped a great deal in the spread of literacy. Crenshaw (1998: 34) argues:

‘...reference to impressions on clay seals suggests a singular way in which written words touched the daily lives of many people engaging in official business.’ The use of seals relates directly to the development of literacy in that they portray a level of literacy whether such seals could be identified or not. Niditch (1996: 48) affirms that seals served a communicative role thus, ‘Perhaps, the largest corpus of brief message texts is sealings.’ Seals had a message that in our days is born by letter-heads, stamps or documents which clearly identify the involved party.

On a petty note Negev and Gibson (2003: 452) indicate that seals were used as ‘jewelry’ or ‘protective amulets.’ The jewelry seals would be rings made especially of metal which very well served as seals impressed on clay from time to time. Protective amulets could have been normal amulets with inscriptions on. It could be speculated that the use of rings and amulets could have been an earlier practice and later these objects came to be used as seal bearers.

Niditch (1996: 49-50) explains: ‘Another use of seals impressed in clay involves the utilization of another writing material, papyrus. A written document would be rolled, a string wound around it, and a lump of clay pressed on the document and string; a seal was then impressed upon the clay.’ Many sealed papyrus have perished leaving the seal impressed clay that was attached to it. Even though so many documents have vanished, the identifying seals remain and suggest to us not to claim that there was no religious or secular written material prior to the exilic period in Israel. Today, ancient seals help us according to Mazar (1990: 518) as ‘...an important source for the study of personal names, official titles, the administrative system, and the iconography of the period...’ We may also use discovered seals to determine the advancement of literacy or to interpret them in order to glean more information about the period during which they were made and used.

**2.5.1.3. Seal features.** Generally seals had two forms: the one had a cord with which it would be hung on the neck and the other a ring form to fit on one finger. The material used to make seals changed from stone to metal with time. Millard (1972: 107) writes

about the engravers of seals and wonders whether they could write or not. He continues to present two assumptions to answer the question. Firstly, he assumes that even illiterate people or artists could make seals without letters or alphabets or words featuring on the seal and in this case literate persons would help the engravers. The second sensible idea is that these 'seal cutters' could have been '...a specialized class of craftsmen' who could have been literate, of course extrapolating thus due to the fact that the engravers seemed to have made no mistakes.

Wright (1962: 161) claims: 'There is only one inscribed Hebrew seal now known which must be probably dated 9<sup>th</sup> century. On it is a bull, and above and below the animal are the words: "To Shemaiah, son of Azariah."' Mazar (1990: 507) expounds on Hebrew seals of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and presents them as bearing foreign images for decorative purposes only. The images drawn or cut on seals, according to Mazar (1990: 507) would be '...roaring lion, cock, horse, bull, gazelle, cow nursing a calf, monkey and locusts... The more complicated scenes depict humans in various attitudes – such as priests in praying posture, and a figure presenting the symbols of government to the owner of the seal.' Generally, earlier seals have a sign or signs unique according to the request of the owner to the engravers. Later on signs, symbols or pictures were featured together with some writing of the owner's name. There is a corpus of seals which were for royal purposes with the inscription of the word or phrase *lamelech* or "belonging to the king" on them. These were used to mark royal property or official tax. Burrows (1957: 32-33) expands on a text inscribed on a seal which is basically recorded in Jeremiah 48: 11. He goes on to indicate that such a seal is actually in the museum of the "Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago....' In fact the words of Jeremiah 48: 11 are good words of pride about Moabites which somebody may have found to be good to inscribe on a seal. Davies (2005: 168) indicates that seal features would include a name or names, date or a place name. All in all, seal features changed as the art of writing was developing, thus bearing witness to the evolution of writing.

**2.5.1.4. Speculation.** A lot is speculated about seals due to the difficulties that are experienced in deciphering them. Dever (2001: 205) mentions two difficulties of seals

being the difficulty of dating the seals and whether all who had seals could read and write. There is a general concerted effort to water down the witness of seals to the development of literacy. However, Ben-Tor (1992: 348) elaborates that the date of the *lamelech* seals has been agreed upon as 701 B.C.E. as a result of the discoveries of plenty 'stamped jars at Lachish and Tel Batash.' The author further asserts: 'There can therefore be no doubt that the *lamelech* jars were used during the reign of Hezekiah, late in the eighth century.' Whether seal owners could read and write, it is immaterial because the fact is that the seal engravers probably could read and write and that such seals served their purpose in the absence of the owner of the material or documents. We have gone beyond the period of speculation on the dating of seals with words or alphabets on and there is no such thing as anachronism on seals which is inferred on biblical texts by some scholars at will.

**2.5.2. Ostraca.** Ostraca are potsherds or pieces of broken pottery with some writing on them. The ostraca bear witness to the fact that there was a good spread of literacy prior to the Babylonian exile. Almost anybody could write on potsherds and nobody could tell as to who may have written on them; whether they were rich or poor, well learned or not, official or unofficial writing etc. There might be some room for speculation, but ostraca indicate basically how widespread literacy was.

**2.5.2.1. Date of use.** Dever (2001: 213) clearly reports: 'A number of individual ostraca are also now known, enough to show beyond doubt that extensive written material did exist in ancient Israel besides official archives that is, that many besides elites could read and write.' Furthermore, the author refers to a certain ostrakon dated 7<sup>th</sup> century which is written in Hebrew with Egyptian symbols for numbers apparently readable to literate Israelites. Such ostraca suggest that Israelites had trade contacts with Egypt which enhanced literacy, because some messages or terms of business had to be written. Furthermore, these pieces of evidence may be used to render the Torah texts about the writing of laws on doorposts, writing of Ten Commandments and probably the readability of seals referred to in the Torah as historical truth.

Davies (1998: 78) reports: 'We have some ostraca from Samaria, totaling 66 sherds, probably dating from eighth century B.C.E. and recording deliveries of wine and oil.' Dever and Davies, though they differ on the issue at stake refer to older bullae to substantiate their cases than some other authors who turn a blind eye to any ancient evidence of writing prior to the exile.

Burrows (1957: 32) intimates: 'Inscribed potsherds contemporary with the prophets have been found ...yet none found thus far bears any text of the Old Testament.' By the way, prophets existed even before the exile to Babylon. Suffice it to say some ordinary persons could read and write during that long time of prophets. Pritchard (1975: 122) expounds on the discovery of the abundance of ostraca by excavators since 1962 dating from the beginning of the exile to Babylon. By the beginning of the exile literacy had advanced quite significantly and this informs us that literacy could not have grown only after the exile. The dating of ostraca that have been discovered clearly suggests that quite a number of Israelites could read and write let alone the Levites and priests who were custodians of written words from the LORD in the sanctuary service.

**2.5.2.2. Availability.** The notion that literacy was for the elite and royal scribes is clearly refuted by the existence of ostraca throughout the Levant. Probably any household had some pottery and perhaps by mistake broke some of them and the broken pieces usually may not have been sold, saved or mended. Anyone could take such broken pieces and use them as they saw fit. Mazar (1990:515-516) posits: 'The ostraca were written in black ink ...on potsherds, a cheap and readily available material ...and rough drafts of text which were to be copied onto papyrus or parchment....' The potsherds were 'notebooks' for everybody. Dever (2001: 209-210) in his explanation says that potsherds '...were lying about everywhere on the ground...and came conveniently to hand.' The author further indicates that some ostraca had biblical texts written on them. Draft writing was generally done on potsherds and then later written on papyrus; however, some writing of religious material on papyrus could have not been preceded by potsherd writing. Some students could have reproduced what they had learnt on potsherds. Some of the poor persons could read and write according to the evidence given by the existence of ostraca.

**2.5.2.3. Reflection on development of literacy.** Niditch (1996: 50) refers to 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century ostraca which were found somewhere around Jerusalem. The author goes on to admit that ostraca were found in Lachish. As a result of the author's scrutiny on the ostrakon, it is made lucid that older ostraca had symbols and pictures while later ostraca had more text and no symbols. Naveh (1994: 26) postulates that the ostraca prior to the exilic period had Hebrew cursive writing indicating that common people may have known how to write. This demonstrates that ostraca were used while the art of writing was in its development stages and later on which may have not excluded the poor or the less significant. In a nutshell, ostraca attest to the practice of writing and reading before the exilic period.

## **2.6. Inscriptions**

Since the time of primitive writing generally done by artistically talented individuals, inscriptions were done on caves and rocks. Scratching pictures or alphabets on objects such as clay, stone and walls was simply done probably with sharper and harder objects such as chisels. All kinds of inscriptions testify to the fact that literacy developed around 3200-3100 B.C.E. The inscriptions would have been hardly done if illiteracy was rampant because it would serve no purpose. Somehow, I conjecture, public inscriptions may have encouraged individuals or cultures to value the importance of writing and reading.

**2.6.1. Age of the practice of inscribing.** Wiseman (1958: 25) considers the writing developments of the Middle Bronze Age (1750-1550 B.C.E.) and says: 'More than one hundred thousand inscribed clay tablets dated to this period have been found.' Further it is stated that the cuneiform writing format was the 'medium of international communication.' Negev and Gibson (2003: 242-243) refer to the so called 'Execration Texts' which date back to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. The writers further explain that Egyptians had a practice of writing the names of their enemies in terms of cities or nationalities and believed that if they break the objects on which such names have been



written, as a result they would definitely conquer such enemies. It is also claimed that some inscriptions actually augment some biblical texts or facts. Inscribing words on objects is quite an old phenomenon that clearly shows that there were a number of literate persons to read or interpret inscriptions.

**2.6.2. Monumental inscriptions.** There were inscriptions that were meant for the public to read and understand. Generally such inscriptions served a memorial purpose.

***2.6.2.1. Inscriptions on tombs.*** Wiseman (1958: 34) writes about some of the experiences of Joseph in Egypt including the titles, ‘chief of butlers’ and ‘chief of bakers’ which are ascertained by inscriptions in Egyptian tombs. This simply tells us that even during the time of Israelite slavery in Egypt, some writing was practiced and Joseph being a popular figure in Egypt could have learnt how to read and write. Niditch (1996: 47) refers to an inscription dated towards the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. of which the author says: ‘Written elegantly in black ink by a “trained hand” on a huge column-shaped stalactite within a natural cave near En Gedi in the Judean Desert ...’ Some inscriptions were painted with ink in order for them to be more visible.

These tomb and cave inscriptions may have served a purpose of identifying the buried persons or expressing some allegiance to them as their ancestors. It may have been an attempt to communicate with the dead. Whatever the purpose that such inscriptions served, these inscriptions simply show that literacy was not restricted to royal or temple services.

***2.6.2.2. Houses and stones.*** Seemingly, even private homes and other stones, perhaps public or private, had some inscriptions on them which established the fact that the art of writing was used for private purposes as well, thus freeing literacy from the control of kings and other institutions such as the temple.

Wiseman (1958: 23) enunciates about the time of the patriarchs which was the Middle Bronze Age and states: ‘The high standard of living is reflected both in the fine private

houses of the period...and in the numerous inscriptions recovered from the ruins of Ur and recently published.' Nevertheless, the author hastens to highlight that the era of the patriarchs may not be clearly dated. Niditch (1996: 54) regards and explains such inscriptions as a '...category of epigraphic evidence for reading and writing that contains longer inscriptions hewn on walls, drawn on plaster or inscribed upon free-standing stone monuments. It would appear that the art of writing was highly appreciated as to inscribe on walls and rocks for memorial purposes or for everyone to see. Mazar (1990: 515) shows that there were royal inscriptions on stones especially in capital cities. The writing on stones could have served the purpose served currently by public boards on roads, streets and businesses the very public nature of some inscriptions indicate that such inscriptions were useful to the public and visitors.

**2.6.2.3. Gezar Calender.** In Barrera's (1998: 88) own words: 'Among the Hebrew inscriptions, the so called Gezer Calendar (10<sup>th</sup> cent BCE) is written in an archaic southern dialect. It is not a true calendar but rather a list of eight months of the year and the corresponding farming activities.' The author emphasises that the calendar's meaning is being debated. Negev and Gibson (2003: 243) date the calendar from about 950 to 900 B.C.E. during Solomon's reign.

There is consensus that the calendar is about agricultural seasons and activities. This inscription may have been intended for farmers who probably could read to do their work accordingly. This calendar could have been written with the king's instruction. This calendar argues against the assumption that kings actually subjugated literacy to be a royal practice only. The calendar must have been inscribed with the understanding that it would help remind the farmers of the relevant duties in the annual farming cycle. Literacy was a real public means of communication. Whether the debate about its meaning will ever or never comes to a conclusion, the Israelite public was exposed to writing around the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

**2.6.2.4. The Siloam tunnel inscription.** Negev and Gibson (2003: 244) refer to the Siloam inscription which was inscribed on the wall of Hezekiah's tunnel in Jerusalem.

Many writers agree that the inscription is actually about the expression of joy experienced by workers who were digging from different directions until they met in the middle of the tunnel. Barrera (1998: 88) dates the inscription to have been done in 700 B.C.E. As to who actually did the inscription, it is not clear, but it is likely that the workers actually did the inscription and if they did not do it, some of them must have been able to read it, if not what would have been the point of doing the inscription. Reading and writing during the time of the kings was quite common. The monumental inscriptions testify to the fact. If workers did the inscription or agitated for it, how could priests and Levites just keep quiet about the wonderful or breath taking revelations of God in their sanctuary services, though this point is a necessary diversion.

**2.6.3. Other inscriptions.** There are other epigraphic artifacts which were not necessarily meant for public consumption or memorial purposes. These other inscriptions were engraved on smaller material which could have been more or less private. Such inscriptions indicate that some people were not only able to read, but probably even able to write for private purposes. Some of such inscriptions may have been royal in nature, but there are other inscriptions which were not royal, thus proving that literacy was not for royal purposes only.

***2.6.3.1. Amulets and lintels.*** Such inscriptions could have been sanctioned by the words found in Deuteronomy 6: 8, 9 which says: ‘And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write upon the posts of your house, and on your gates.’

Waalder (2002: 31) explains about the amulets which are said to have been found at Ketef Hinnom from 1975-1989. They were found in ‘cave 24, chamber 25, in a repository under the tomb, where the remains of the bodies were moved, when new bodies needed the space in the tomb.’ On page 32, the author indicates that a priestly blessing was inscribed on the amulets. He further dates amulets around 650-600 B.C.E. Of course, anything found in the tomb could be dated to an earlier period when the deceased were still alive. Furthermore, looking at the similarities between the amulet inscription and the

actual priestly blessing, on page 53, the writer posits that there was 'a continuous written tradition before the inscription of the amulets (700-650 BC).' Oral tradition may have existed, but to insist that it was practiced without any writing whatsoever might be presumptuous.

Crenshaw (1998:35) mentions the fact that the inscriptions were made on lintels as per instruction in the book of Deuteronomy. However, the author claims that such inscriptions may not be traced to their original authors. Whether they are traceable or not, the inscriptions could be dated during the period of the monarchy. When the Torah was being organized by some scribes or authors, such inscriptions as amulets could have been used as sources to write the Torah. The pieces of material that could have been used as sources of information were actually made or engraved way before the time of the exile. On the basis of Waaler's assertion, it is presumptuous to say the writing of religious material was only done during or after the Babylonian exile.

**2.6.3.2. Pottery and graves.** Most domestic assets of the ancient people were made of clay or pottery and in the graves especially in the ancient Near East there were anthropoid coffins made of clay. On some of these clay products inscriptions have been noticed and dated prior to the exilic period.

Dever (2001: 214) elaborates about 'pottery vessels' with inscriptions of the owner's names on them and he dates such vessels to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Niditch (1996: 46) reports: 'From Kuntillet Ajrud in the Sinai come other early brief text inscriptions on decorated large storage jars and a stone vat. These texts, perhaps from the beginning of the eighth century B.C.E., include brief formulaic dedications of blessings.'

Pottery was generally imported and exported and practically every household had pottery vessels and some may have looked similar such that an inscription of its owner's name would clearly help to identify it. This practice was common during the monarchic period and it refutes the insinuations of scholars who seem to undermine the Israelites of the 8<sup>th</sup>

century B.C.E. Even though not everybody could have been literate, quite a number of persons might have been literate.

Dever (2001: 214) considers inscriptions on tombs and assumes that such inscriptions were helpful in identifying the person or family to which belonged the tomb. Of course, such inscriptions clearly imply that at least some people could read and write.

**2.6.3.3. Royal inscriptions.** In addition to monumental royal inscriptions, there were inscriptions that were not meant for national consumption, but for record keeping purposes. The good thing about inscriptions is that they were usually done on durable material such as pottery, stone and metal. Although written texts on papyrus may have been lost when the papyrus perished, various inscriptions have remained. Lemaire (1998: 11) makes reference to the Tel Dan Stela which is an inscription about the victories of Hazael, king of Damascus, against Israel and Judah. The author further says: ‘This stela is still more fragmentary than the Mesha one and the text we have is only part of the beginning of a summary royal inscription,’ probably engraved in the second part of Hazael’s reign c. 826-805/3 BCE.’

Most scholars are in agreement with anything written for royal purposes because it is generally believed that kings controlled literacy. It is hard to believe any king or institution can actually manage to keep any development within its bounds. In our days even persons who serve in the reserve bank can learn how to make money notes and coins and actually make fake money that very few can identify as fake. We also have engineering students or qualified engineers robbing banks or bank clients because they know how the system works. Nothing that is done by human hand will be held within bounds. It may be that kings tried to restrict literacy to their services only, but they certainly failed.

**2.6.3.4. Arrow-head inscriptions.** Millard (1972: 18) says: ‘Of much earlier date are the copper arrowheads found near Bethlehem, generally agreed to belong to the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.’ Mazar (1990: 362) dates the same arrow-head inscriptions to the 11<sup>th</sup> century and

claims that they had to do with David's experiences. Subsequent to a thorough scrutiny of the inscriptions, Millard (1972: 18) observes that the engraver was not a professional one because '...many of the letters were impressed with the sharpened end of an instrument like a narrow chisel, accounting partially for their accentric shapes.' The author here indirectly says that writing was being learnt and actually done by learners or just about anybody who had limited ideas about writing. It could be that the owner of an arrow-head meant to mark his tool or asset or only engraved what was on his mind at the time. Whatever the correct explanation may be, the art of writing was being learnt and used since time immemorial. Mazar (1990: 362) dates such arrows prior to David's reign or during the early monarchic period. When alphabetic writing was known in Israel; according to Mazar (1990: 363) it should be easy to assume that at this time writing was done on any possible object by anybody who could read and write.

## **2.7. Writing materials**

As the art of writing was being developed with time a number of different writing materials were used. Not only did the art of writing develop, but also writing materials changed from time to time. Some of the writing materials were innovations, inventions or improvising.

**2.7.1. Civilization.** Writing materials relate with civilization and this fact disputes the often mentioned assumption that agrarian life-style was not conducive for literacy to develop. 'Cultures can exist and flourish without writing, but there is no civilization without the art of writing' according to Horn (1979: 1184). Naveh (1994: 6) states: 'Language distinguishes man from animal, but the knowledge of writing is the hallmark of civilized man.' Almost all traces of civilization have to do with the art of writing. Civilization is also seen in the use of some writing materials like ink (especially the ink used on ancient rock paintings) which dates back to time immemorial.

The Time-Life Books Editors (1975:11), although it is a less academic source, it is used here for its harmony with other academic sources. The source expounds on the settlement

of Israelites in the Promised Land and indicate that the kingdoms that were established ‘...fostered the elements of higher civilization: wide-ranging trade, monumental building, writing, codes of law.’ Although Israelites may have not acquired many objects that imply a lot about their state of civilization, they were not necessarily cut or left out of civilization at all, but as for the knowledge of writing and reading, some persons among them might have had it. Perhaps they may have not used advanced or latest materials of writing, but they did write on other known and available materials.

**2.7.2. Actual writing materials.** Writing was done under different circumstances and for various purposes. A monumental writing would have to be done on a durable object while private writing could be done on a wide range of materials whether durable or not. The production of some common domestic assets such as pottery vessels enhanced the development of inventions for writing since they (pottery) had to be decorated with ink paintings and traded to other nationalities. The decorations speak volumes like the colourful Ndebele wall painting in South Africa.

***2.7.2.1. Stone.*** According to Negev and Gibson (2003: 543) stone is one of the most ancient materials on which writing was done. The authors intimate: ‘Tablets for writing on were in use throughout all periods.’ It is further enunciated that these tablets were made of clay or stone to enhance the use of the stylus on them. The authors also state: ‘Stones could be chiseled and smoothed, as with the tablets of the Ten Commandments were written....’ Some authors claim that this kind of a stone which was used for writing was not one of the hard stones, but it was one that could easily be inscribed with a harder tool. Wigoder (1986: 1037-1038) explains that a hammer and a chisel called stylus were used to engrave alphabets on stone. My little knowledge of stones does not allow me to imagine that it could have been any kind of stone that was used, but I am inclined to the idea that the kind of stone used could be handled with a chisel and hammer. Such a stone could be like the one used by some artists to make curios in Africa. Stone is the most ancient writing material and it has always been there.

**2.7.2.2. Papyrus.** The most popular writing material is the papyrus which is said to have been predominantly produced in Egypt. Actually, papyrus is a name of a reed-like plant from which the writing material also called papyrus was produced. Barrera (1998: 89) elucidates that strips from the papyrus plant ‘...were placed upon each other in layers crosswise until they formed long strips which were rolled up to form what in Latin was called a volumen....’ The author continues to indicate that earlier on writing was done on one side and ‘only the horizontal fibres... were written on....’ Later on the reverse side was also written on. The author dates the oldest papyrus from 2470 B.C.E. It appears that ink was used to write on the papyrus.

Crenshaw (1998: 30) claims that writing on papyrus succeeded writing on clay. Unfortunately, the papyrus material is not so durable and many scholars claim that humid weather of the Levant accounts for the destruction of perishable papyrus. Davies (2005: 164) says : ‘Many of the Hebrew bullae that are known have on their back side the impression of the cord which tied up the document and the papyrus fibres themselves.’ The papyrus preceded the paper of our days and the papyrus was a more advanced writing material invention than stone, wood or clay that could not be folded and somewhat bigger in size.

**2.7.2.3. Leather and parchment.** These materials seem to have been used during the same time as the papyrus. The difference was that leather and parchment were more scarce and expensive. Barrera (1998: 89) dates writing on leather back to the ‘third millennium BCE.’ The difference between leather and parchment is that parchment was softer leather of sheep or goat skin or smaller antelope skins and this parchment could be well folded and it was portable. Not much is said about leather in terms of archaeological findings, but probably it is assumed that if writing could be done on parchment, then it could be done also on heavier and larger pieces of leather. However, some leather scrolls were found in Qumran caves.

**2.7.2.4. Wood.** Like stone, wood has always been available even though it needed to be prepared for writing. It is imaginable that probably there were no regulations forbidding



the cutting and use of just about any tree anywhere. Miller & Miller (1967: 137) write: 'Letter-writers used wooden tablets before and after the invention of papyrus. They whitewashed the tablets or covered the surface with mud or wax to receive the imprint.' The author further states that the wooden tablets were used until the time of the New Testament; this is made in reference to Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, who asked for a tablet on which to write the name of the newly born baby boy.

Prior to the invention of ink, a harder tool called stylus was used to imprint the writing. This stylus may have been the one used to write cuneiform or not. It is not indicated as to what kind of wood was preferred for writing on and why. However, if the wooden writing material is called tablet, then it was flattened on one side or both to make writing on it easy. Wigoder (1986: 1038) indicates that ink was used to write on wood. He further generalizes that on softer materials a pen and ink were used to write while on solid materials like stone, wood and clay a stylus was used. Unfortunately, wood is one of the perishable materials prone to decay and exposure to fire can burn it out of recognition. Not much is said about wooden tablets especially when dealing with archaeological finds.

**2.7.2.5. Clay.** It is the most ancient means of making vessels that can withstand fire and it could be used for cooking. From time to time, it appears that any object or property that came as a result of human development sooner or later some writing would be done on it. So, there could hardly be any civilization that could preclude writing. Clay was used while wet to write on with a stylus and then dried with fire or in the sun. Furthermore, scrolls of papyrus would be rolled up well and tied with a string attached to wet clay on which a seal impression would be applied to mark the papyrus with some writing on. It also appears that for all sealing purposes at an earlier age, clay was needed. The art of writing is quite old; this is proved by all materials that have ever been used to write with or not.

**2.7.2.6. Ivory and slate.** The art of drawing could not advance alone without having an impact on writing. Ivory is generally known as a material that was used by artists to make

some artistic pictures or drawings for decorating purposes. The very art of writing is actually ascribed to artists by right.

Mazar (1990:505) and Miller & Miller (1967: 106) make mention of one ivory find dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. which has an inscription of king Hazael of Damascus. Not much is said about ivory as a writing material, because it has always been used for purposes of decorating in palaces, since it is not readily available for everybody. Almost any ancient art work, if studied carefully, would communicate something which is the purpose of writing. Crenshaw (1998: 30) discusses a number of writing materials and in passing mentions ivory and slate. If stone was used for writing purposes, it would hardly be impossible to write on slate, though not much is said about writing on slate. As much as writing is done on any invented item today, so it could be in the past.

**2.7.2.7. Potsherds.** There is a lot said about potsherds as writing material. Potsherds with writing on are called ‘ostraca.’ These were used a lot for private purposes. Writing on potsherds was done with ink or inscriptions could be made on them. About anything that was written on papyrus could have been prepared or written first on potsherds. Serious business transactions were quickly written on potsherds.

Writings on potsherds have helped scholars to study and date the level of literacy. Ostraca prove that the wealthy and peasants could read and write even though clues of statistics are not given. Since ostraca have been discussed as far as the development of literacy is concerned, the only point that may be reiterated is that writing is an ancient phenomenon proved by ancient writing materials.

**2.7.2.8. Metal.** Some work of artist was done on metals like bronze, gold and silver. The writing on copper arrow-heads has been mentioned. Crenshaw (1998: 37) makes mention of, among other writing materials discovered at the Qumran caves, copper on which names of all hidden treasures were written. On page 38, the author postulates: ‘Even a priestly blessing occurs in tiny letters in a silver amulet from a tomb...’ in Ketef Hinnom. As much as we write on anything, so in the past writing was done even on metal. The

inscriptions on metal may have been done with a hard sharpened metal instrument and it was done prior to the Babylonian exile. Writing on metal is not a very simple thing to do, so it means that there was enough understanding of writing and intense interest and use of writing for it to be done on metal.

**2.7.2.9. Ink.** We may be using different kinds of ink today, but ink as a medium was invented long ago. Ink made writing very easy in that there was no use of more energy compared to energy used in making inscriptions. Wigoder (1986: 1038) says: ‘This was a thick sticky substance, so that the scribe could easily carry it in an ink pot in his belt.’ The ink in the past may have been used like we use paint today, but it could be referred to as the wings of literacy. Since the invention of ink, there was nothing that could thwart the spread of literacy in the Levant. Ink could be used on potsherds, leather, parchment, wood, papyrus and rocks.

## **2.8. Sanctuary literacy.**

Too often the perception of oral tradition is taken to extremes and used to preclude any practical practice of writing. The Pentateuch; generally, accounts about the religious history of the Israelites centered in the tabernacle. Of course, there is a scholarly belief that all or some words of the Torah could have been written later after the death of Moses. That is pure belief as much as anything about evolution is. The testimony of the history of religious activities in the lifetime of Moses still stands, if there is no concrete evidence that justifies the declaration of anachronism on the contents of the Pentateuch. Furthermore, the other idea or thought is that the emphasis that was placed on the importance of reciting religious principles and other matters actually suppressed the spread of literacy. It could be that the practice of reciting was encouraged to enhance singing and poetry. Even among some South African cultures we have seen some poets reciting poems that sound like music in parliament or public meetings graced by the president of the country. Poetry and music do not discourage literacy at all.

There is some justification of ignoring the use of writing in the temple to an extent of doubting or disbelieving the accounts of the Torah that report that some things were actually written down for memorial purposes. Generally, some proponents of exilic or post-exilic writing of religious literature doubted whether God indeed wrote the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. The general argument about the Decalogue is that God pronounced the commandments and they were later written by Moses or some other person. The other reports of the Torah about Moses writing some commands from God are generally said to have been included in the Torah by Deuteronomists. There is belief against evidence that some pieces of literature existed.

The complicated theory of sources for the Torah or Pentateuch which are the common Jahwists, Elohist, Priestly source and the Deuteronomists are carelessly used; especially, speculation on Deuteronomists to doubt any practice of writing prior to the exile in Babylon. Interesting enough among the sources mentioned there is the Priestly source which is said to have been a written religious material in a modified or moderated way at a later stage. The assumption is that priests used sources that were not clear like the Jahwists and the Elohist to write a clearer or an interpreted version. Kaufmann (1960: 153) regarding the dating of these sources says : 'JE was combined and edited in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.; D was composed in the age of Josiah...P during the Exile and the restoration....' Ceresko (1992: 62) claims: 'The Yahwist, or J, who wrote between 960 and 930 B.C.E. was most likely a member of Solomon's court.' The author further presents the E as a northern (Israel) source precipitated by the division of the monarchy. The author dates the source 'somewhere between 900 and 850 B.C.E.....' Ceresko (1992: 62) categorically demonstrates that J and E are pre-exilic sources while P and D are post-exilic sources. Presented like this, it is clear that some material was written prior to the writing activities of the priests after the exile. Furthermore, the claimed later writing of priests may not necessarily have been only after the exile, but even prior to the exile in the days of Jeremiah and other prophets. It should be stated that the theories of Torah sources are generally speculations emerging from analytic studies of the seemingly hard to understand Torah. The most abused theory is that of the Deuteronomists who are said to have been supportive of a centralised temple system in Jerusalem. Whatever

centralisation that they may have advocated, the question is, was it pre-exilic or post-exilic? One always finds that this centralisation date if quite late it would be during the time of David. By the time of the exile, David was dead and some religious material had already been written down.

The other argument is that writing was only done in royal realms. The fact that there is evidence of royal written messages or accounts (trade records) does not necessarily imply that the holy sanctuary or holy tabernacle was characterised by illiterate service. It is often forgotten that the sanctuary at an earlier stage did serve for royal and spiritual purposes concurrently until the adoption of the practice of having kings in Israel. The possibility is that the royal services did relate with spiritual or sanctuary services. The sanctuary had some records like the Decalogue and other written regulations written by Moses per instruction from God.

Nielsen (1954: 46) in discussing oral tradition indicates that the law was recited publicly and thereafter it would be 'written down, and ...this document is deposited in a sanctuary of YHWH. So the tradition of a law-book found in a temple of YHWH, II Kings 22 f, does not come upon the reader of the Deuteronomic history without the necessary preparation.' The author continues to show that even after the writing of the law and storage in the temple, the law would be recited anyway. Emphasis is placed on the fact that writing was used hand in hand with recitation. In as far as the recitation of the Torah is concerned, Blenkinsopp (1995: 39) elaborates on the Torah in contrast with wisdom instruction. He emphasises: '...the Deuteronomic torah is confided to levitical priests who are charged with its public recital on stated occasions and must see that the ruler is familiar with it....' Here the sanctuary service of priests overlaps with royal realms which are said to have used the art of writing.

Davies (1992: 110) points out that the Decalogue was kept in the ark which was in the temple, the book of the law which was found in the temple and some other examples actually proves that biblical literature originated in the temple. On page 111, the author states: "It is in the palace or the temple ...that the written scrolls will have been deposited. We should not rule out the possibility of private copies.' Davies, in a nutshell,

simply dispels the notion that literacy could have only been a palace or royal phenomenon. As much as there was literacy in the palace, so there was in the temple prior to the exile.

Crenshaw (1998: 33) concludes the matter of sanctuary literacy thus: 'Writing also had religious significance, whether communicating priestly prayers to the deity or reducing myths to the written word. Ritual thrived on its use, and priests transmitted sacred lore from generation to generation in writing.' The sanctuary service or system was highly organised to be surpassed by the palace or royal service which among Israelites only arose after the establishment of the Levitical or priestly work. Bigger and smaller pieces of evidence that there was writing in the temple have been found like the book of the law to support the assertion that the writing of religious material did exist even prior to the exilic period.

## **2.9. Spread of literacy**

There is epigraphic evidence that supports the fact that literacy was a somewhat common phenomenon in the Levant prior to the Babylonian exile. However, there are scholars who argue that very few persons could read and write and that those who could probably did it for kings in keeping records of trade and expenses. Among such scholars is Davies (1998: 77) who claims that during the time of the monarchy or the pre-exilic period '...literacy did not spread very far.' Generally, Davies sees traces of literacy to have been in royal circles and on this matter he is supported by Crenshaw (1998: 31) who dates Egyptian literacy to the Early Bronze Age manifest in inscriptions made on 'jars and in seal impressions.' Furthermore, the author finds literacy in Palestine to have been minimal and useful or necessary in royal realms.

To further assert that literacy did exist prior to the exile, Millard (1972: 98) posits: 'The epigraphic discoveries of recent decades have shown beyond any doubt that writing was well-known in Palestine during the period of the Israelite rule.' On page 102, the author refers to W.F. Albright who said: 'The 22 letter alphabet could be learned in a day or two by a bright student; hence it could spread rapidly. I do not doubt for a moment that there

were many urchins...who could read and write as early as the time of Judges, although I do not believe that the script was used for formal literature until later.’ It is interesting that some scholars put emphasis on belief when faced with evidence of pre-exilic literacy. The date of literacy is not a problem thus far, save whether there was religious written material prior to the exile and how far literacy actually spread.

**2.9.1. Outside of Israel.** Literacy did not begin to develop in Israel, but outside and due to economic trade of some vessels it could not be restricted to a particular nationality, but it did spread to other nations. The Time-life Books editors (1975: 7) say: ‘The Israelite sojourn in Egypt is somewhat easier to corroborate, through records from Egypt itself and neighbouring territories. Settlement in Canaan after the exodus can be dated fairly accurately to the beginning of the Iron Age, around 1200B.C.’ When the time Israelites arrived in the promised land, literacy had been spreading from Egypt and throughout the other surrounding arrears.

Schniedewind (2004: 65) postulates: ‘Assyria moved the Near East toward globalization: one polity, one economy, one language.’ Moreover, the author points out that Aramaic was chosen as the language of the Assyrian empire. On page 66, the author ascribes urbanisation to the Assyrian Empire which is said to have eliminated ‘smaller states.’ Further on page 67, the author declares: ‘Urbanisation would be the catalyst necessary for widespread literary activity.’ Civilization enhanced the spread of literacy to cover a wider area. The question is whether Israel would indifferently disassociate herself from the spread of literacy?

Mazar (1990: 274) attests that during the Late Bronze Age the Akkadian language ‘...continued to be the lingua franca of the entire ancient Near East.’ The author further discusses various developments of writing and on page 276, exclaims: ‘...literacy spread like wild fire....’ Would this spread of literacy like wild fire spread only without the boundaries of Israel and be resisted by Israelites who wanted to be like other nations that had kings and other idols which they worshiped?

**2.9.2. In Israel.** There are authors who have taken it upon themselves to engage against arguments that undermine the development and spread of literacy within the Israelite nation. Crenshaw (1998: 39) speculates that the economic situation did not enhance the spread of literacy, because families were engaged in crop farming and stock farming which may have not needed literacy at the time. However, the author also says: ‘The simplicity of the Hebrew alphabet encouraged literacy....’ Barrera (1998: 84) also utters the same sentiment thus: ‘The alphabet contributed to the spread of writing among the population over a wide range of classes... The simplicity and adaptability of the new system ensured that it spread quickly at the expense of other systems, from the beginning of the Iron Age.’ Furthermore, the author indicates that the Israelites adapted the Canaanite alphabet like other nations and ‘From the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent CE, Hebrew was written in the Phoenician or *Paleo-Hebrew script*, which is still used in some MSS from the Dead sea....’ The spread of literacy in Israel was not in isolation from other writing systems alphabets, but rather in harmony with international writing dynamics. The development of the alphabet fueled the spread of literacy everywhere in the Ancient Near East.

Barrera (1998: 110) states: ‘As for the matter of the level of *literacy* in the Israelite population, one may state that in the ancient Near East the number of those able to read and write was very small. They were the few professional scribes who after hard training in the hundreds of logographic signs, performed their duties in the principal cities of Mesopotamia and Egypt.’ On page 111, the author says: ‘...at least during the last two centuries of the monarchic period (750-689 BCE) written culture was found quite widely in this society.’ The reference that is often made to the work of scribes usually undermines the spread of literacy. Prior to the development of alphabetic writing, certainly very few could have understood the writing systems of the time. Millard (1972: 111) concludes on the issue of literacy thus: ‘The questions of literacy and its extent inevitably follow from thoughts on the use of writing, but we have been concerned to show simply that it was, in fact, quite widely practiced.’ In a nutshell, prior to the exile, the royal and sanctuary systems used writing and some individuals who were not serving those systems to read and write.



## **2.10. Summary**

Tracing the earliest date of literacy in the Levant is inevitable in theological realms due to interpretation of texts on the basis of philological dynamics. Literacy is often presented as a fairly recent phenomenon from a speculative point of view or just hinted as such in passing.

Around the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.E. began the early stages of literacy which evolved from time to time due to the limitations of earlier pictorial writing forms until the alphabetic systems were finally invented. The alphabetic writing system was in use around the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. which was more or less the exodus period.

Hebrew abecedaries have been found and dated to the monarchic time indicating that the art of writing was being advanced. Archaeological findings such as seals, ostraca, inscriptions on different objects and bullae do assist in dating the stages of the development of writing or literacy especially among Israelites. Furthermore, writing materials that have been discovered such as stone, bone, slate, parchment, potsherds, papyrus, stylus, ink, metal, clay and others indicate that writing or literacy is not a recent phenomenon and that as civilization continued, writing also was improved and more individuals were taught how to read and write.

The sanctuary system when well studied has a bearing on literacy. How rapid literacy did spread it is not well agreed upon in scholarly realms. The capacity to have written some religious material for private or public consumption prior to the exilic period is clearly evident in the study of stages of literacy

## 3. SCRIBES

### 3.1. Introduction

The notion of the existence of scribes who were professionals with regards to the art of writing and keeping records has been used to distract theological scholars and students from following and understanding clear cut historical statements. Furthermore, when this idea of the contribution of scribes in writing just about any epigraphic material discovered by archaeologists is advanced, preference is given to royal scribes and there is hardly any mention of the existence of scribes in the sanctuary or cultic area.

However, Schniedewind (2004: 68) posits: 'Indeed, the first moves to collect the literary traditions of Israel (and Judah) must have been sponsored by the institution of the monarchy and the temple.' The author here mentions the temple as an institution which had to do some writing, it is clear that this temple is actually the one built by Solomon, because it is mentioned alongside the monarchy.

A lot has been generalised about the existence of scribes. However, Van der Toorn (2007: 52) asserts: 'The fact remains that whatever the complexity, or lack of it, in Israelite society, the presence of professional scribes cannot be contested. Private seals from the monarchic and the Persian periods designating their owner as "the scribe" ... confirm the actual existence of a profession that is repeatedly referred to in the Bible.' During the time of picture writing, a writer had to have some degree of artistic talent and indeed scribes could have been fewer, but the advent of alphabetic writing made literacy to be easily acquired even by persons who had no intention of actually writing for profit. The writing of religious material or literature was not only dependent on the formal writing

done by scribes in palaces, but the Levites or priests and pre-monarchic leaders recorded divine revelations at times by the instruction of God Himself as Moses was instructed to write. Somehow, to be a scribe, an individual never had to forsake any other title or responsibility they might be bearing. Thus a priest could be a scribe by choice or appointment due to his ability to write.

### **3.2. Definitions of scribes**

The issue or practice of having scribes in Israel is understood differently by scholars and this is manifested in their definitions of scribes. Schniedewind (2004: 7) states: ‘The scribes were first of all administrators or bureaucrats; they were not authors.’

Nevertheless, the author continues to say that in the Hebrew language there is no such thing as a writer, but a scribe or *sofer* which is an individual or title that can best match that of an author. In fact, the nature of scribal services changed with time. Davies (1998: 17) also reasons like Schniedewind thus: ‘The scribe was ...the administrator, the “civil servant” ...Among the diplomatic activities of the scribe, the composing of inscriptions, annals and treaties...related to the main activity of the ruling class, that is, warfare is not to be overlooked.’ Seemingly, so far these scholars or such arguments seek to emphasise that the scribes were royal officials.

However, Horn (1979: 988-989) outlines a number of definitions. The first definition presents a scribe as a freelance person helping people to prepare their documents according to proper standards and these scribes earned a living by so doing. The second definition goes: ‘A government official, who either had clerical duties or was a recording minister of state....’ The third definition simply says: ‘A man who copied the Law and other books of the scriptures ...a man who was proficient in teaching and interpreting the Bible.’ Furthermore, the author postulates that in our days such persons are called ‘theologians’ or ‘religious scholars.’ In addition to the fact that the functions or the nature of scribal duties changed with time, a scholar’s preferred definition should be actually dated and not just be used as a generalised understanding of scribes since the beginning of literacy until to date.

Suggesting that anyone who can read and write is a scribe would be hard to believe as much as it would be hard to accept that a scribe may not be able to read and write. The title of a scribe seems to have been an official one or a well respected one. To subject the development of writing and reading under the guidance of scribes is not convincing, because the art of writing neither necessarily developed in royal circles only nor was it developed by scribes, but in trade and legal marking of objects. Ancient writing or early biblical documents or sources were not written exclusively by scribes whose main occupation was writing.

### **3.3. Functions of scribes**

The royal scribes according to Blenkinsopp (1995: 30-31) had to 'draw up official edicts....' He further says: 'Other functions probably included supervision of the royal commissariat and tax returns.' Still further the author says they had to supervise temple revenue and to participate in 'diplomatic missions....' Such functions are said to have been performed around the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Here the scribes seem to have been royal servants competent among other things in the art of writing.

Scribes of the New Testament seem to have been individuals who were knowledgeable as far as the Torah was concerned. This understanding of scribes is misleading for Old Testament students. Prior to the exile in Babylon, scribes were not really individuals who specialized in studying the law. The writing of religious literature before the Babylonian empire may not be gleaned from the history of scribal work. The literate religious leaders were not necessarily scribes. Seeking answers from the study of scribes and their work may not yield much fruit. The scribes performed tasks that required literacy especially for the monarchy, but they were not really the only persons or individuals who could read and write.

### **3.4. Specialised service**

Generally, the perception of scribes and their role in rendering their services in ancient institutions or communities may be confusing. Nevertheless, such perceptions should be considered in order to portray the actual situation regarding Israelite life prior to the exile and compare the situation with the post-exilic one. The general assumption is that hardly anyone wrote religious material, because of oral tradition.

Davies (1992: 106) explains that writing was done impulsively or as literate individuals wished to and says: 'Writing is an economically supported activity, which requires the specialized knowledge of writing and, not least, a purpose... The biblical literature is the product of professional writers.' The author is very correct about the scriptures as we have them today, but these professionals used older sources which were probably not written or presented in a professional manner. The final chapter of this work will shed more light on this point.

The confusion on the work of scribes as a special task deepens when dates are not attached to explanations about such services. Matthews and Benjamin (1993: 243) present scribes and sages as storytellers and regarding the reign of Josiah, claims: 'The ability to read and write allowed storytellers to work both as the monarch's book keepers and book readers.' Yearsley (1933: 35) intimates: 'Among peoples in a high state of civilization, as Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, large numbers of scribes were kept at work copying important books or documents.' The author further shares light thus: 'Writing done by scribes was called "scripture"... these men were powerful and important; to hurt or kill a scribe was serious and punishable by death.' As for the Greeks and Romans and their power or fame, it all came after the exile and thus they are not part of the discussion. The Egyptians played a greater role in developing writing and they practiced writing much earlier than other nationalities. It would be interesting to know the date during which murderers of scribes would be executed. The so called scribes who were powerful may have been individuals who had some other responsibilities including

the interpretation of earlier writings or documents. Benjamin (2004: 11) later on writing alone claims that the scribes were priests who had been charged with the responsibility of taking care of traditions of Israel which were merely storytelling until the time of the exile. The author (Benjamin) is correct in saying some priests were also scribes, but in implying that religious writing never occurred prior to the exile is speculative.

During the time of advanced alphabetic writing around 1200-1000 B.C.E. the art of writing was not as difficult as during the time of hieroglyphics and early cuneiform writings. However, Nielsen (1954: 56) speculates: '...writing belonged to the craftsman, even when it was a case of the relatively simple Canaanite alphabetic writing...even men of authority were illiterate...as it always has been in the east.' It may have been that some leaders were illiterate, but the author does not necessarily make a sweeping statement here.

Schniedewind (2004: 37) also pursues this line of argument thus: 'The scribes were not independent, but served at the discretion of the ruling groups who brought them into existence, provided for their sustenance, and controlled their access to the public.' It would be fascinating to know the exact ruling groups that controlled their access to the public or enslaved them.

The notion of scribes being the only group of persons who could write does not hold water at all. Unless if the art of writing was developed by them particularly. There is hardly any piece of legislation or policy among epigraphic finds to the effect that not everyone was allowed to write except the scribes and the literate were not allowed to teach others to read and write. The discoveries of abecedaries do not necessarily uphold the idea that learning to read and write could not occur, because the literate were kept out of contact with other individuals. The study of how scribes worked and what their duties entailed may not give us answers as to when religious materials were actually written. However, the argument is that pre-exilic religious material was not in a book form as we have it now. True, but what does it mean? Does it undermine the pre-exilic sources which were not in book form or the authenticity of the contents of the biblical books concerned

with pre-exilic material or history? The actual pre-exilic religious material and the one that we have concerning pre-exilic events should not be undermined under the shadow of oral tradition. Both materials are fully authentic as much as any document may be even if it is not a book. The understanding that redaction and reorganisation took place does not mean that biblical books about pre-exilic events are riddled with error and thus faulty and unreliable .

### **3.5. Most ancient scribes**

It is imperative that a shift of focus from royal to religious scribes be exercised in order to find some answers about early religious writing. It is not safe to talk about scribal work while actually not dating their work or practice of writing. Diringier (1962: 37) indicates that by 3200 B.C.E. there were scribes in Sumeria, and on page 39, he further shows that such scribes were instrumental in devising the practice of impressing symbols on clay from scratching symbols on harder materials or objects. Here the scribes are not said to have related to temple or palace services.

With time, the Israelites came into being. Wiseman (1958: 37) talks about the good reign of Joseph in Egypt which utilised recording, taxation and reporting to the Prime Minister, Joseph. The author further exclaims: ‘One official of this time ...Ptah-mose, bore the title “royal scribe and overseer of the grain supply of the Lord of two lands.”’ A long time before Israelites could be released from Egypt; there were scribes according to their titles in Egypt. Schniedewind (2004: 47) talks about writing done in the city of Ugarit even before Israelites moved out of Egypt. As the author explains further, it becomes clear that by the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. there were Israelite scribes. The author says: ‘The affinities between Ugarit and biblical poetry especially early biblical poetry-thus point to Canaanite tradition as the heritage of early Israelite scribes.’ The linguistic similarities between Ugarit and biblical poetry imply that there was freedom of writing as much as there was freedom of speech on a general note that excludes political utterances or protests.

Enoch, Moses and Elijah, according to Barrera (1998: 111) were regarded as considerable scribes of Israel. Enoch and Elijah are not spoken of as scribes by many scholars except Moses. The author's perception of scribes embraces palace and sanctuary duties. Furthermore, the author asserts: 'The Bible often refers to the character of the scribe, in the monarchic period and also the period after the Exile, when the duties of priests, Levites and scribes often overlapped.' The simple point here is that among the Israelites, scribes served in the sanctuary even before the first Israelite king was chosen. What could these scribes have written in addition to commercial and legal texts other than religious material in any possible format.

Schniedewind (2004: 11) profoundly posits: 'Widespread literacy is a relatively modern phenomenon. Ancient Israel was primarily an oral culture. Although an eloquent defence might be made for the literacy of a figure like Moses, it is difficult to imagine the hordes of slaves Moses led out of Egypt as *reading books*.' Moses is clearly numbered among the most ancient Israelite scribes who never lived on earth under a particular Israelite monarch. Some authors like playing with words or extremes like Schniedewind who knows that books had not been invented during the Israelite sojourn to Canaan. Suppose all Israelites who crossed the Red Sea could not read and write but Moses and there was no one learning to read and write, could writing anything be necessary? The existence of a few literate persons does not mean that there should be no writing at all. What could have mattered back then was the availability of one who could read for the audience. All in all, there were scribes in Israel before the inception of the system of the monarchy, so the argument that scribes were only at the disposal of rulers does not fully apply to Israelite history. The final chapter will shed more light especially regarding the use of writing by pre-monarchic priests.

### **3.6. Priests and Levites as scribes**

When the Israelites adopted the culture of having kings, other nations already had had kings and literacy had been developed and used in their royal systems and as for Israelite priests who had served with God in dealing with the affairs of Israel. The Urim and



Thummim were used by priests to settle cases which lacked witnesses to seek the intervention of God. Van der Toorn (2007: 85) emphasises that the temple and the state in ancient Near East were not separate entities or divided. The author further postulates: 'The Jerusalem temple started as an annex of the royal palace.'

Prophets were used by God to help pass His instructions, exhortations and encouragements to the people. God Himself did give instructions for writing the commandments. God did write or engrave the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. Taking away the writing of the Decalogue from the Sinai account, nothing remains, though the Decalogue (original) is not available as a witness of the story. It is hard to imagine that God would write something that priests could not read then or ever in future. Van der Toorn (2007: 82) says: 'Scribes in Israel were attached to the palace or the temple....'

**3.6.1. Oral and written traditions.** There is a perception that oral tradition naturally precluded writing for a long time especially among priests and Levites. The Levites and sons of Aaron were set apart from birth to serve in and around the sanctuary for the rest of their lives. Some of their services in the sanctuary were public especially on particular special feasts done in commemoration of some revelations of God in the past. Barrera (1998: 105) enunciates that in teaching learners books or scrolls and reading were not allowed. However, he says: 'For private study the use of texts and the taking of notes was permitted which the pupil could consult outside the room in which the master was teaching.' Oral tradition did exist, but those who were involved in it, the teachers and learners, may have been able to read and write outside the learning classroom or setting. Barrera (1998: 105) further says: 'The text of the sacred books is usually divided into sections for recitation or reading aloud in liturgical assemblies.' On page 104, Barrera (1998), emphasizes that the oral and written transmissions '...always had to go together.' So oral tradition at the time of the tabernacle into the monarchic time included some writing. Writers that harp on oral tradition as a reason for doubting any pre-exilic written religious material are proponents of fallacious interpretations of the Bible.

**3.6.2. Liturgy.** The services of priests and Levites were at times public and these sanctuary servants had to pronounce some commandments or story that relates to a particular special day of gathering. Van der Toorn (2007: 51) posits: ‘Texts reached the people by being read out loud by someone from the literate elite...and the Bible came into being through the agency of the scribes.’ Most authors prefer to believe that recitations were done in accordance with oral tradition. Albright (1957: 250) elucidates about the Documentary sources especially JE and indicates that their contents were ‘recited by Levites or rhapsodists...’ He further states: ‘...the two recensions J...and E were separately transmitted, being written down not later than 750 B.C and combined in the JE recension during the eighth or seventh century B.C.’ It is not made clear whether the two documents were surely recited from one person’s memory and imparted to the other until writing was done around 750 B.C.E. Nevertheless, the 750 B.C.E. date of the probable writing of the documents was prior to the exile. Davies (1992: 106) postulates: ‘Reading was not a major leisure activity in the ancient world; though certain groups and individuals did cultivate it ...it is possible that sometimes scrolls were written in order to be read out in liturgical or possibly legal contexts....’ The notion of liturgical pronouncements being recitations only is here disputed. Barrera (1998: 105) elaborates on the modern reading practice which is private and quiet. The author contrasts modern reading with ancient reading especially reading of the Torah thus: ‘they were not meant to be read in private in a low voice, but to be declaimed in a loud voice and even accompanied by Psalmody in a liturgical assembly.’

Clearly the priests and Levites, though not all of them, had some writing and some public reading to do which is clear evidence against a perception of an illiterate oral tradition prior to the exile. The regular feasts which Israelites had, present the sanctuary service to have been literate and the priests and Levites functioned as scribes who wrote some of the written oral transmissions and probably even copied some documents for purposes of preservation.

**3.6.3. Temple records.** It is astonishing how some scholars actually undermine or ignore the use of writing in the sanctuary service. As one reads the work of some scholars it

appears that the temple or sanctuary was just as good as not being there and not affected by waves of civilisation especially the development of writing. Davies (1992: 107) emphasises that scribes were generally employed by courts or the temple to write certain things. Further elaborating on the composition of scribes, the writer posits: 'Many will no doubt have been priests or perhaps Levites....' It may not have been the case of priests and Levites only writing religious literature, but any records of significance for them.

Shanks (2003: 41) reports: 'One of the most outstanding inscriptions to surface in recent years records a donation of three shekels to the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.' On the dating of the record, the writer says: '...between the ninth and seventh centuries B.C.E.' Furthermore, it is reported that a certain scholar found such an inscription to be 'genuine.' How was it found to be genuine? The author explains '...the authenticity of the ostraca was also supported by laboratory tests on the pottery and the ink used for the inscription and on the white patina that had formed on them.' If this evidence is completely true, why would the Levites or priests keep their records without including significant commandments of God and some other special events? There was a lot of scribal work in the tabernacle or temple even prior to the exile.

Niditch (1996: 74) explains about papyrus and leather material that could have been used to write larger records or accounts. The author reflects on the availability of leather for writing purposes and finds it hard to ignore the role of priests in the provision of leather for writing since the priests performed sacrificial rituals which involved slaughtering animals. The author finally states: 'I do not make this argument to lead up to a suggestion that the Bible is a priestly or scribal work, though it does seem likely that such a small group is responsible ultimately for preserving the written collection we now have.' In the temple or sanctuary, records were kept which included religious literature. Otherwise, it would be strange to claim that the writing of religious literature took place outside the sanctuary which had a way of keeping records as much as the royal system did. Why should some scholars find it wise to search for religious texts in the palace or make religious conclusions on the basis of palace findings? Religious literature should be

searched around the cult areas first before palaces are considered or religious epigraphic findings in palaces should be compared with cultic epigraphic findings.

**3.6.4. Literacy partially originating from the cult.** Some scholars portray the spread of literacy to have been a phenomenon that started in the royal palace and then was adopted by priests in the temple until individuals became literate. Perhaps it may have been the case in other religious groups whereby the cultic culture was based on forms of divinity which were man made like idols of wood, clay or metal. In such cases there would be limited writing for religious purposes. However, in Israel, way before the adoption of the monarchy, God had revealed Himself in different ways including writing or ordering that some things be written down. Of course, in other religions like Ugarit, writing was involved. Why would it not be used in the Israelite religion?

Blenkinsopp (1995: 1) exclaims: 'In the context of ancient thought ...it is not easy to make a clean separation between the religious and the intellectual spheres.' A lot of writing as a form of civilization could have been done by priests who were among intellectuals. The author further comes closer to home (Israel) on page 2 and posits: 'But even in Israel, the priest discharged tasks outside the cultic sphere, serving for example, as scribe and magistrate.' The Israelite priest may have been basically serving in the sanctuary, but they were used by the nation where need arose to assist as neutral parties in other public services. Their ability to read and write was cherished and often made them to serve even out of their realms. It appears that the practice of institutional writing actually began from the temple then it was also used by the palace or royal institution. Yearsley (1933: 35) poignantly intimates: 'For ages writing was kept a secret art by priesthoods. Not used by kings or nobles, it was confined to scribes, usually priests, or connected with the priesthood.' Despite the lack of proper dating, the author goes on to indicate that kings and their close associates could not write, but could only use their 'seals' to authenticate written documents. The reasoning that presents literacy or record keeping as a royal scribe's phenomenon especially prior to the exile is clearly refuted here. From time to time priests had a role to play in royal services and when reference is made to scribes, a learned historian or theologian would immediately think of priests.

It is clear that scribes in general cannot exclude priests and Levites who were the first public servants in Israel. The art of writing seems to have been under the custodianship of priests before it could be utilized by kings according to Yearsley. So, partially in Israel the art of writing could have been refined in the tabernacle or temple by priests before it could be used by kings. In tracing the development of literacy in Israel, the first institution to be studied is the tabernacle or cult then the royal institution; if it were possible.

It should be made clear that literacy did not completely originate from the cultic cultures of the Levant, but from trade, international communication and art. In Israel cult services were not dull and unwelcoming to the development of writing. For purposes of writing and record keeping the kings of Israel most likely drew from cult human resources. At a certain stage, writing may have been used concurrently in the palace and temple, but it was used first in the sanctuary.

**3.6.5. Writing for internal purposes.** The use of writing in the Israelite sanctuary could have been liberal in the sense that not only religious literature was written, but some documents or records that were deemed necessary could have been kept. So some written things in the temple were not for public consumption at all. Van der Toorn (2007: 51) indicates that those who came up with documents did not consider themselves as writers or authors, but felt that they were doing their work according to their skills. Schniedewind (2004: 85) expands on royal scribes and cannot just ignore the existence of temple scribes, like other scholars, and claims: 'The temple would also have had scribes, but there is no reason to assume that temple scribes were suddenly interested in writing for public consumption.' Very seldom would theologians, historians and archaeologists imagine that there was any piece of literature in the temple which was up for sale or distribution to the public like the sale of Bibles in our days to everyone. Whether the writing that was done was meant for internal purposes or not, the bottom line is that there was writing done in the temple by priests or temple scribes prior to the exile in Babylon and the date of editing and reorganisation does not necessarily substitute older sources,

because they are erroneous. Schniedewind (2004: 84) says: 'The temple too had its scribes but temple writing was still an internal affair... cogent arguments have been made suggesting that the priests were also busy composing some of the priestly early compositions.' At least Schniedewind, although he wants to align himself with scholars who doubt pre-exilic authorship of religious material, is mindful of the facts that are widely propounded upon like the priestly sources of the Torah. In a way, the author is a very good link between the opposing schools of thought, because he also says: 'Separation and dating of the layers of priestly literature are however, difficult. Any precise schema is unlikely to be compelling. So, I will retreat to generalities.'

**3.6.6. Organised nature of sanctuary service.** The nature of the operations of the temple was an organised one which could have had a constant teaching provision. Van der Toorn (2007: 56) in elaborating about ancient schools in Babylon, posits: 'A sixth-century text from Uruk, published in the 1990's, contains evidence that the temples did indeed serve as centers of scribal training.' Haran (1978: 60) considers the duties of Levites during the sojourn from Egypt to the Promised Land. Specifically, he shows that their varied duties were to be performed around the tabernacle suited to their different ages. The author points out that older Levites had to assemble and carry the ark. If it is acknowledged by some scholars that there were sanctuary scribes and that some priests were scribes, then there could have been an organised system of teaching younger Levites how to read and write and if so, writing may have been common in the sanctuary.

However, Blenkinsopp (1995: 67) claims: 'We also observe that the cultic and ritual prescriptions in the Pentateuch, the compilation of which we owe to the clergy of the Second temple....' Further on this argument, Dever (2001:26-28) mentions Phillip R. Davies, Thomas L. Thompson, Niels Peter Lemche and Keith W. Whitelam as 'spokesmen` of 'revisionism.' The author says that these scholars ascribe 'All the texts of the Hebrew Bible in its present form to Hellenistic era....' The compilation of the Pentateuch as we have today may be attributed to the Second Temple clergy, but the composition of the Pentateuch should be ascribed to the pre-exilic clergy. Of course, the argument is not whether the priests or Levites of the second temple contributed in writing

the Bible or not, but that it all started prior to the exile due to the organized nature of the temple service. All in all, the Temple, First and Second, contributed to the writing of the Bible and priests and Levites served as scribes in and out of the Temple.

### **3.7. Manuscripts**

After the exile to Babylon, the priestly system had been greatly shaken even though it was revived. Quite a lot of religious writing was exercised and the people of God were generally called Jews since the other ten tribes were subject to Assyrians except the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. From the time of the Persian Empire through the Greek or Hellenistic empire and down to the Roman Empire politics greatly affected the Jews and they split into different groups on the basis of culture and religious beliefs. Almost all these groups had access to religious literature or manuscripts. Religious manuscripts were not a temple asset only, but some could be found outside the temple or even outside Jerusalem since literacy had spread widely among the Jews. Some persons had personal copies which they may have copied or bought for themselves. The manuscripts of the time had slight or glaring differences depending on the owner's preferred wording or interpretation. There are reports about the Qumran caves. The Masoretic scrolls were refined and well edited and conventionalised scrolls from which the Hebrew Bible was printed.

**3.7.1. Qumran scrolls.** These manuscripts definitely do not date back to the pre-exilic period. However, some of them are actually similar with some biblical books. When the Qumran scrolls were written, it was not a special thing to be a scribe. Vos (1977: 75) shows that the community that lived in Qumran had denounced the temple system in Jerusalem and lived aloof from the rest of the Jews. Perego (1978: 72) identifies the group as Essenes who had a culture of copying manuscripts probably in older forms of Hebrew and other languages like Greek and Aramaic. It is not clear as to how they got hold of older manuscripts from which to copy. But as they copied, they may have also edited and thus render the argument of the authorship of the biblical books dubious or based on edited material which may not determine the interpretation of the contents of a particular biblical book. What exegetes may talk about is the date of the latest redaction and not the date of authorship or composition. The point is that pre-exilic material was

used in compiling biblical literature which had to do with pre-exilic religious experiences and from then on editing and copying occurred. So issues of authorship dates do not include composing the material, but only editing.

Of course, a lot of religious literature was written on papyrus which was a perishable material and thus very little information has been preserved on papyrus. It so happened that the Qumran scrolls were stored in jars and left in caves in the bone dry desert of Judea, hence a lot of them could be found. Horn (1979: 993) considers thoughts expressed by some scholars on the DSS (Dead sea scrolls) as to whether they were genuine or not since there was a long time of archaeological research in the Bible lands that yielded no fruits. The author expresses a reason for such a lack of scroll discoveries thus: 'The destruction of literature such as accompanied persecutions and wars, and the custom of the Jews to destroy any worn-out Hebrew MS for fear that the name of God, which it might contain, would be misused and blasphemed, were believed responsible for this lack.' Then Horn (1979: 993) further says: 'However, accumulating evidence has proved the scrolls to be genuine ancient documents. With this practically every scholar agrees. Too many manuscripts may have been destroyed for customary reasons meaning that the earliest less edited scrolls are actually rare to find.'

The Qumran scrolls demonstrate that with widespread literacy and no copyright regulations manuscripts were copied and liberally edited for religious or political reasons. All in all, the date of the Qumran scrolls is utterly immaterial since they were copies of a number of some Old Testament books copied by Essenes who stored them in the Qumran caves, demonstrating freedom to possess and copy any literature and editing at will.

**3.7.2. Masoretic text.** The Masoretic text is basically the text of the conventional Hebrew Old Testament which has been translated into our different languages. This work is actually the latest of all, but regarded as Hebrew standard text or scroll. This material could have been made in order to canonise the ancient Hebrew scrolls in the light of the existence of some scrolls copied at different times under various circumstances. Vos (1977: 65) posits: 'Ancient scribes exercised meticulous care in copying the Old



Testament, reverencing it almost to the point of worship.’ The writer continues to indicate that such care was exercised by Masoretes who kept in written form the contents of what is called oral tradition. The Masoretes would vocalise the text in order to preserve it despite the lack of written vowels in the writing of the time. Vos (1977: 77) says: ‘The new information...shows that there were three or four families of texts, of which the Masoretic type was one.’ It may be argued that the Masoretic text was written down with care, but it was not completely free from human error.

It is not claimed at all that such literature was composed or compiled at a particular date even though its production was in harmony with oral tradition’s recitations. So, issues of pre-exilic or second temple writing do not apply here. All scholars who use the Masoretic Hebrew Bible and begin to try to date it, are unfortunately inconsiderate or do not know what they do or perhaps are trying to do the impossible. The pre-exilic religious written material had long been used to shape or organise the Hebrew scriptures by the time the Masoretes came up with a standard Hebrew Old Testament. The Masoretic text was meant to be the genuine material or a more reliable text as much as the King James version of the Bible is said to be closer to the Hebrew Bible. The decay of Hebrew scriptures was curtailed by the Masoretic text. As it were the Masoretic text or our conventional Old Testament Bible may not be used to determine dates of authorship, composition and compilation at all, because it is clearly work done later to avoid dangerous or unlimited perversions of the Old Testament.

### **3.8. Editing and copying**

Deist (1988: 39) indicates that ‘copyists’ were hired in ‘sanctuaries.’ He further explains that two methods could have been used to carry out copying. The first method could have been the loud reading of a manuscript while others write down what is pronounced, while the second method could have been one person quietly reading and writing on another scroll. In further elaboration, in the whole chapter, Deist (1988) indicates that hearing problems would become a hindrance in the first method, while sight problems could result into mistakes being written down. Deist (1988: 35-36) postulates: ‘Texts were

living entities in ancient times, that is they were not protected by laws of copyright and authorship and could be reworked and changed at will. In another source, Deist (2000: 230) talks about written literature not being as common as oral literature and posits: 'This circumstance makes it possible for literate people to be selective regarding the past. They may ignore, avoid or adjust the past and in that manner shape the present... also for the illiterate.' Deist (2000: 230) further considers the authors of the books of Kings who refer to the 'Annals of the Kings' as having written selectively from comprehensive sources.

The editing and copying of biblical material prior to the production of the Masoretic text was done almost without fear since it was work done at times privately. A copying person would not easily copy anything that goes against their particular school of thought. As mentioned before, there were a number of families of texts including the Masoretic one. The question to consider is what brought about such families of text? The practice of manual copying and liberal editing made it easy for such families to exist. Probably, Judeans who were exposed to such variations of written material on similar subjects could actually do better scholarly work that gives clear reasons for such variations. We may try in our days to determine from one family (Masoretic text) the issues of authorship, composition and compilation, but it appears that we are out of the right context, because we are not so readily exposed to other families as Masoretes were. The work that we read and study is just too refined for us to think that we argue regarding real dynamics that were experienced for the Masoretic text to be imperative. Therefore, it may be that the Bible as we have from the hands of Masoretes, is not to be credited to Second Temple scribes due to different editing and copying done after the second temple scribal work. The best position is to give credit to everyone who contributed from the pre-exilic period to the Masoretes.

**3.8.1. Copying versus photocopying.** Burrows (1957: 7) asserts: 'Now historical documents from ancient times have rarely been preserved in their original forms; they have usually been copied many times, so that the earliest extant manuscripts come from a time considerably later than the date when their contents were first written.' The author further cautions: 'Modern scholars who make use of such documents for historical

purposes must therefore investigate carefully the history through which the sources themselves have gone since they left the hands of their authors.’ However, what happens is exactly opposed to the author’s caution. Scholars work hard and produce definite propositions on material that has been edited and refined a lot as if it were original when it is a result of numerous editions. The original or non-edited sources should be recognised as lost and thus humility and cautiousness should characterise any academic propositions.

Photocopying is a good invention which helps reproduce an exact copy of a document or picture, but unfortunately such an invention was not in existence in the ancient world instead manual copying was the order of the day. Burrows (1957:30) highlights that theologians have been looking forward to the discovery of ancient manuscripts and posits: ‘What would we not give for a first edition, so to speak of Isaiah or of one of Paul’s letters! Unfortunately no such treasure exists, so far as we know.’ He further declares: ‘The great manuscripts on which textual critics are mainly dependent for the reconstruction of the text of the Bible are very much later.’ Textual critics or theologians deal with copied and edited documents as if they are dealing with the original manuscripts. This is a futile exercise especially when scholars look at the text with a very critical eye. We are dealing with copies produced manually which are bound to look and read differently in certain areas. However, it does not mean therefore that everything in the OT text should be doubted or easily taken by faith, but an attitude of gratitude should be exercised that at least we have something to ponder upon.

**3.8.2. Deliberate changes.** Sundys-Wunsch (2005: 3) states: ‘Then there is always the problem of deliberate changes made by a copyist who decides that what he or she sees is not what ought to be there....’ The author (2005: 4) further says: ‘After one or two thousand years of copying, a certain number of mistakes inevitably creep into the manuscript tradition.’ Deist (1988: 51) elaborates that deliberate changes were done ‘...on linguistic, moral or theological grounds.’ Some changes could have been errors in writing or due to failure to decipher what is accurately written.

Burrows (1957: 30) postulates: 'The great care taken in copying and correction since the first century ...has preserved with ...accuracy and uniformity the Hebrew text as known at about 100 A.D.' Prior to the birth of Jesus it seems that deliberate alterations made in copying had not been standardised according to a particular framework. Only after 100 A.D. copying had been unified. Probably these deliberate formal or informal changes in editing have been done since the time of the Persian Empire right down to the end of the B.C.E. era.

On page 42, Burrows wishfully says: '...archaeological evidence may help us to restore an original reading which has been corrupted by a scribal error at some time in the past.' He goes on to say that archaeology does not alter the Bible in any way, but the findings have shown that '...the exact words of the authors were not handed down from generation to generation without many errors and alterations in detail....' Robust scholarly arguments could be justified if reasons were written down for any changes made in copying. There are probably some phrases which are ascribed to the imagined authors when they could have been introduced into the text by those that actually did the copying. Analyzing the text which went through centuries of editing should be done with an understanding that where mistakes in the flow of thought occur or where diction seems to have been a later one, it could be due to the editing of scribes or copying persons and not necessarily the original expression of the author, compiler or composer. This understanding of changes made for a long time should help humble expositors, exegetes and Bible commentators not to hinge some propositions squarely on the conventional text of the Hebrew Old Testament.

**3.8.3. Second temple sources.** It is generally agreed that during the second temple period religious literature was organized and the Old Testament was canonised since some of Old Testament books report about the activities of the Persian period. However, the bone of contention is whether in organizing literature, pre-exilic written material was recognised or not. Davies (1998: 79) posits: '... from the existence of the canonized literature all of which reached its canonical shape in the Second Temple period, much of which was revised and edited substantially at that time, and some of which was

composed then ... a good deal of scribal literary activity was taking place....' The shaping, editing and revision of the said material occurred on the substance that was in existence.

Bosman (1992: 25) discusses the concept of authorial intent and intimates: 'Higher criticism acknowledged that the identities of most of the Old Testament authors were unknown and that the vast majority of the books were compiled from diverse sources.' Some of these diverse sources must have been pre-exilic material. The work of the second temple is quite remarkable in as far as organising the Old Testament scriptures is concerned, but it was not the beginning of religious writing. Some first temple resources were used.

### **3.9. Language dating.**

Generally, the dating of Old Testament books is determined by using philological considerations which affect the interpretation of the message. So many Old Testament books have been given later dates as their authorship dates because of their understanding of how the Hebrew language changed from time to time. Davies (1992: 102-103) explains that some seem to claim that they understand the evolution of Hebrew so clearly as to date the contents of each biblical book by its language. The writer continues to emphasise that there are few individuals in almost every culture who would prefer using older forms of language even when the language has evolved remarkably. He further states: 'Dating biblical literature by its language is a useful exercise, but requires certain sophistication.' In addition to this sophistication, an understanding that editing and correction go without dates in the manuscripts may help the language enthusiasts to moderate their extrapolations. Davies (1992: 104-105) deals with some assumption made in the context of dating some Old Testament books. The first assumption, according to the author, is that there is what is called Biblical Hebrew which is generally misconstrued to be the Hebrew used after the exile. To correct the assumption, the writer points out that Biblical Hebrew is a 'scholarly construct ...we might say that it is no more than the imputed language of the scholarly 'ancient Israel and thus part of a larger fabrication.'

The second assumption is presented by the author as the notion that Hebrew was spoken prior to the exile and Aramaic was spoken after the exile. The author stresses that those that remained in Jerusalem still spoke Hebrew except the ‘immigrants’ who came from Babylon although originally they were Jews. In a nutshell, the scribes had to write for all to understand not that Hebrew and Aramaic smoothly followed each other as predominant languages used in Jerusalem.

When it comes to language dating, it should be clear that there are some biblical books which have to do with post-exilic events over which there is no controversy. However, books that have to do with pre-exilic events may not be dated post-exilic because of their language and diction. Some scholars don’t seem to be willing to understand the difference between an author’s work and an editor’s work. There is hardly any Old Testament book which has not been edited, almost all of them have been edited and bear no more their original forms and language. In fact, the dates of editing may be given through the study of the language used, but not the actual date of the first composition. Language dating may be good, but it is not precise or exact.

### **3.10. Summary**

Scribal work changed from time to time since it began with the development of literacy. Although some biblical books may be ascribed to some scribes, not every passage was written by scribes as per their title. Writers of the biblical books were never under compulsion from royal realms.

Some priests were scribes and did write internal cultic documents even before the inception of the monarchy in Israel. The title of a scribe could be borne by any other person who bore some other title without having to relinquish it.

Looking at the history of the Qumran scrolls and the Masoretic text, it is clear that the biblical text as it stands has been worked by many scribes or redactors until the Masoretic text became a necessity.

The scribes of the second Temple and beyond did a good job in organising the pre-exilic material into logical books as we have them today. However, the same amount of credit is due to the pre-exilic scribes who wrote the fundamental text about pre-exilic events. None should be more appreciated than the other. The composer and the compiler complement each other; no one is smarter.

## **4. PRE-EXILIC WRITING IN THE BIBLE**

### **4.1. Introduction**

The Bible itself does refer to instances where writing was done under different circumstances and by different persons, yet there is an argument that such references should be ignored or regarded as later additions to the content of some Old Testament books concerned with pre-exilic events. There is a general belief that prior to the exile writing was only exercised in palaces and not in temples especially in the Israelite context. There is no doubt about the Bible indicating that some religious literature existed prior to the exile, but there are reasons advanced to undermine or doubt what the Bible testifies about pre-exilic religious literature. However, Van der Toorn (2007: 82) affirms: 'The biblical evidence intimates that the scribes behind the Hebrew Bible were attached to the temple as an institutional and intellectual center; they belonged to the clergy.' The same author (2007: 87) says: '...the Torah was written by temple scribes.'

Schniedewind (2004: 47) is among the scholars who propound the perception that the writing of religious material only began after the Babylonian exile. The author presents the Israelite community as one that was by and large living an agrarian life-style which entailed hunting, limited or subsistence farming and a nomadic pattern of life. It is assumed that later on crop and stock farming were improved and thus under such conditions the ability to read and write could not have been developed. However, the author, on page 49, posits: 'Writing was not unknown in early Israel, but the level and sophistication of early Israelite literature was necessarily tied to the development of the state.' In his struggle to consolidate his argument, the author on page 47, says '...the



affinities between Ugaritic poetry and Israelite poetry indicate that ancient Israel was part of a larger cultural context that continued even after the destruction of the great Late Bronze Age city-state at the end of the second millennium B.C.E.’ Here it is conceded that the Israelites were exposed to some writing as much as other nations were prior to the exile.

The point is not about the general use and spread of literacy, but particularly the writing of religious material. Schniedewind (2004: 10) emphasizes that prophets were instructed to pronounce certain words by God and not to write them. The author further claims: ‘... until the later periods there was little to write things down.’ On page 11, Schniedewind (2004) emphasizes that what counts most is when the Bible was written and not who wrote it. The author assumes that a clear cut date can be figured out about the authorship of some authentic religious material. Unfortunately, only the compilation date or the editing date can be figured out clearly, not the authorship dates, because different pieces of information were used by compilers to come up with one biblical book.

Niditch (1996: 40) presents writing in the pre-exilic days to have been somewhat primitive by indicating that literacy was meant for purposes of being able to ‘read a list, a name or some numbers.’ The author continues to criticize other authors who hint on proof artifacts to substantiate the fact that reading and writing was exercised prior to the exilic period. The author believes that seals and other inscriptions that have been unearthed were only in existence towards the end of the monarchic period. Furthermore, the author quotes Rosalind Thomas who claims that prior to the exile literacy might have only meant to read only and not including the ability to write. This is a clear attempt to undermine pre-exilic writing of religious material in order to ascribe almost all writing of biblical material to Persian and Hellenistic periods. Such intimations should be tested and weighed.

Nonetheless, despite the large cloud of scholars who propound post-exilic authorship of religious material, there are few who recognize what the Bible itself has to say about pre-exilic writing. Adler (2000: 47) leans on Dever who among other things believes that

‘...most of the early books of the Bible were indeed written ...during the First Temple period and not during the era of the Second Temple.’ Nielsen (1954: 39) quotes Nyberg thus: ‘The written Old Testament is a creation of the post-exilic Jewish community; of what existed earlier undoubtedly only a small part was in fixed written form.’ There is no argument about a formal organisation of religious literature during the second temple era. The argument is whether there was any pre-exilic written material that was used. Crenshaw (1998: 34) explains: ‘Although writing seems to have flourished in Israel during the last century and a half of the monarchy... just before the collapse of the capital city of the north, Samaria, in 722 until the fall of Jerusalem to Babylonian soldiers substantial written evidence from earlier times has survived.’ So, when the material that was written prior to the exile indicates that somebody had to write something, it is indeed true and believable. It is not clear as to how organized was the pre-exilic material, but some of it was used to write unified biblical books about pre-exilic events.

Of much interest is the fact that from the Pentateuch to the monarchic biblical accounts, there is reference to situations where somebody had to read or write something religious in nature. Some details about royal activities are found in written religious literature to indicate that the royal and temple systems were intertwined or somewhat related. Furthermore, as a developed form of writing was used in palaces, it was used also in the temple.

Whether it is believed or not, what the Bible says about the writing of religious material, should be considered in order to establish whether there was writing of religious material prior to the exile or not. The pre-monarchic, undivided monarchic and divided monarchic periods should be considered from a biblical point of view to demonstrate that these periods could not have been the same in that through all these periods there was some writing of religious material. It should be demonstrated also that the Bible itself does refer to particular sources which might have more information about some historical matters which only relevant portions of such stories were included in the biblical books. The second temple compilers had some first temple material to use in their endeavour to organise Old Testament books or literature.

## **4.2. Pre-monarchic writing**

Despite the arguments advanced by some scholars to the effect that all writing of Israelite religious literature was only done during the Persian and Hellenistic periods, there is some reasonable argument recognised by some of these scholars that during the monarchic period; especially, the divided monarchy there was some writing of religious literature. It seems pre-monarchic writing is regarded as a non-starter. However, scholarly arguments about the Pentateuch do indicate that there were religious written documents or sources.

**4.2.1. Pentateuch sources and their dates.** Yearsley (1933: 48) argues that the Pentateuch has contradictory stories on similar accounts and such stories were written before the exile time. The author further refers to the sources used to compose the Torah to have been named on the basis of words to pronounce God's name. The author further posits: 'These names being used at different periods, they give clues to the time the documents were written.' The method used to name these sources may be presumptuous and speculative, but the point at stake is that some pre-exilic sources were used to compile the Torah to take its conventional shape.

Alter (2004: x) refers to the commonly held idea that the Torah was produced from a number of sources and intimates: 'Some extremists in recent decades have contended that the entire Torah was composed in the Persian period, beginning the late sixth century B.C.E or even later, in Hellenistic times, but there is abundant evidence that argues against that view.' The JEDP sources as the general acronym are the center of scholarly arguments about the Torah. The J and E sources are so named because one uses the name Yahweh for God and the other uses Elohim for God's name. The D source is the Deuteronomic product and the P source is the priestly written and organised material. Almost all these sources can be traced back to the time prior to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel.

Waalder (2002: 30) considers the JEDP sources and attempts to date them. The author dates them against the backdrop of the discovery of the book of the law during the reign of Josiah. He dates the J source 10<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E, the E source 9<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and the P source after the exile. Interesting enough is the observation that the D source is here not given a date. It is common that the JEDP sources do not all suit a particular analytic system or line of reasoning. Albright (1957: 250) explains about the date of the J and E sources in referring to Wellhausen who would date the J source around 850 B.C.E and the E source around 750 B.C.E. The author further says: ‘...since the discovery of the Lachish letters (1935) has proved that such fine classical Hebrew as we find in the JE narrative must be considerably much earlier than the end of the pre-exilic writing of religious material. It is clear that the J,E and D were written during the monarchic period, some other earlier sources must have been used. It must be made clear that the reasons advanced to warrant the monarchic dating of the sources are generally speculation and even fabrications.

The Priestly document may be dated much later even after the exile, but Albright (1957:252) enunciates: ‘...it belongs to a scribal circle which was interested in questions of Chronology and topography, ritual and liturgy, and which unquestionably had access to early written documents.’ The argument of Pentateuch sources proves that the Pentateuch is much of a compilation from various sources as opposed to a later composition. These arguments do not seem to recognise the contribution made by Moses in writing the Torah. Of course, the Torah may have been subject to a number of redactions.

**4.2.2. Date of Torah.** The basic material of the Torah may be much less than it is had it not been for later interpretations and additions to the Torah. The basic material would have been written during the life-time of Moses. Thompson (1982: 60) asserts: ‘It has been widely held that the Exodus took place around 1440 B.C. on the basis of the statement in I Kings 6: 1....’ The writer claims that by that time Moses himself was literate. When the Israelites entered Canaan, according to Finegan (1959: 150) ‘...it was not far from the middle of the thirteenth century B.C or near the beginning of the Iron Age....’ The Israelite monarchy was not even thought of, yet some religious documents

were in existence from the hand of Moses. Miller & Miller (1967: 177) consider the 'Sinai script of 1500 B.C discovered by Petrie and the Phoenician alphabetic writing of 1200 B.C.' and exclaim: 'The Pentateuch could have existed in written form earlier than we for a long time thought.' The Torah, not considered from the perspective of the JEDP sources, may be an old product.

#### **4.3. Torah writing incidents.**

There were instances where the very content of the Torah indicates that writing was done usually by Moses for different reasons. Some scholars ascribe such instances to later redaction work; however, it seems improbable to believe that the work of Deuteronomists or Priests could deliberately add such instances if they were not part of the real history or what actually transpired.

Soggin (1989:93) argues about the authorship of the Pentateuch emphasizing that Moses could not be its author. Nonetheless, he says: 'In the Pentateuch itself very few passages are attributed to Moses: Exod 17.4; 24.4; 34.27; Num33.2; Deut 31.9, 24.' Immediately after mentioning these texts, the author switches to the argument that Moses did speak and ignores what is clearly written in the texts above that Moses actually wrote down some words of religious value. Fair enough, Moses wrote before his death and some passages of the Torah seem to have been informed by the existence of the monarchy which Moses never experienced. There are some passages which Moses could have written before his death.

Niditch (1996: 95) mentions a text in Daniel 9: 11, which indicates that something was written in the Torah of Moses. Furthermore, the book of I Kings 2: 3 gives an account of David entreating his son, Solomon, to '...keep God's laws, commandments, ordinances, and testimonies as it is written in the Torah of Moses....' The author continues to quote Joshua 1: 8 which says: 'This book of the Torah shall not depart out of your mouth....' The book of the Torah which may have been in existence by the time of Joshua may not have been the Torah as we have it today.

**4.3.1. Authorship of the book of Genesis.** Generally, the book of Genesis is about beginnings. This book is studied by believers, believing and unbelieving scholars if any be and evolutionists. All who study the book are concerned with the history of beginnings.

Dillard (1994: 39) postulates: 'In a strict sense, the Torah is anonymous.' Truly Moses could not have written every word in the Torah or book of Genesis as the composer or compiler. The book of Genesis covers a very long period of time for anyone to be regarded as the sole author of the book.

The book of Genesis reports about creation and the flood stories which clearly show that they are made of different sources which complement each other. Thus, there are various theories about such sources. Childs (1979:113) presents some scholars who identify the sources used in the book of Genesis as the J and E sources determined on the basis of the choice of the name God used as Yahweh (J) and Elohim (E) respectively. Dillard (1994: 41) indicates that the J source has been generally regarded as the earliest source and the E source came about soon after the J source.

Furthermore, much more energy has been expended on further analysis of what we do not have at hand. Seemingly, some scholars have taken pains to come up with theories or approaches. According to Dillard (1994: 43) the documentary approach purports that there were four distinct and parallel sources developing or open ended. However, the author argues that the fragmentary approach opposes the assertion of the documentary theory. There is also the complementary approach which recognises that there was an author or redactor who used one document as the basis of whatever account and used the other document or source to complement the other one.

Apparently, the authorship debate on the book of Genesis does not concern itself with the J and E sources only, but some scholars actually ascribe the same passages of Genesis to the Priestly source, according to Childs (1979: 148)

Whatever hypothesis, theory or approach that one understands, the bottom line is that the book says nothing about who its author may be from internal evidence. What is of interest in the book itself in this academic work is whether there are any incidents in the book which have to do with anyone writing anything being anywhere and using any writing materials.

**4.3.1.1. Writing incidents in the book of Genesis.** From the book of Genesis there are clear cut references made to the effect that writing was carried out even before the emergence of Moses. According to Alter (2004: 35), Genesis 5:1 refers to a book or record about the descendants of Adam. In Hebrew, the term for book is called *sofer* which the author regards as ‘anything written down.’ The author argues against the assumption that such a record could have only been circulating among priests of the second temple. The writer wonders as to how the priests could have easily written about the age of ‘antediluvians’ and the account of Enoch which as the author says: ‘...could scarcely have been a late invention.’ This book of the generations of Adam clearly reports about the lifespan of different antediluvians which would almost be a non-starter to recall in the time of the second temple. The format of the book is not an issue, but it serves as a record.

Wiseman (1958: 39) explains about Egyptian literature and posits: ‘But a most striking example comes from a recently published papyrus now in the Brooklyn Museum and illustrates Joseph’s early life...The broken text bears on one side a prison register of about a hundred years before Joseph’s time....’ Literacy developed even during the historical events in the book of Genesis. The Israelites could have been exposed to writing with the passing of time prior to the birth of Moses.

**4.3.2. Authorship of the book of Exodus.** The book of Exodus is particularly about the departure of Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. It begins with the birth of Moses and conditions that led to his calling by God and it is a book that is full of miraculous accounts before and during the sojourn out of Egypt.

For ordinary believers this book says a lot about Moses and him writing some historical accounts. Thus, it could mean that he is the author of the book. Generally, some Bible students concentrate on the third person presentation style as clear evidence that Moses did not write the book at all. The third person issue attests to redaction work over a period of time. Nevertheless, the book itself contains some incidents where Moses is reported to have written something.

As far as the source analysis of the book is concerned, some scholars find a number of sources and interestingly newer and uncommon sources emerge. Dillard (1994: 58) posits: 'According to traditional critical scholarship, the book of Exodus continues the three main sources that characterize the first four books of the Pentateuch, namely, J, E, and P.' The author further says: 'For one thing, it is very difficult to separate J and E.' The writer ascribes cultic passages in the book to the P source. Childs (1979: 165) presents the so called 'nomadic' or N source manifest in the first fifteen chapters of the book of Exodus as the idea of Fohrer. Eissfeldt (1974: 194-195) explains a source which he calls L as the oldest source, because it presents the 'primitive' lifestyle as it was as opposed to J & E which seem to present old accounts in the light of later experiences or developments. Generally, there is no clear evidence that a number of sources were used to write the book, but the book itself tells about Moses writing some passages and not literally anything.

Of utmost interest in the book of Exodus is not that Moses wrote it, but that clearly some records in the book have to do with writing and the exilic period had not been foretold or even considered. Interestingly, some records are religious in nature.

**4.3.3. Writing and reading in the book of Exodus.** The main character of the Torah is Moses even though his birth and background is actually outlined only in the book of Exodus. Some scholars find difficulty to insist that there was none literate during the time of the sojourn from Egypt to Canaan, because it clearly appears that Moses was able to read and write. Wiseman (1958: 48) attests: 'Moses, who was trained in all the wisdom of Egypt and received a court education, would have learned how to write both hieroglyphs



...and the flowing hieratic script, the business hand of Egypt....' The author further says that Moses, while in Egypt prior to his exile, fellowshiped with 'high officials, noblemen, priests, military leaders and a varied society where he would not be the only man of foreign blood at court.' According to the author, the other men or persons involved came from the east and Libya and these persons may have introduced in Egypt alphabetic writing existent in the Sinai region which was better than the hieroglyphic and cuneiform. There is hardly a single author who can boldly propound that Moses was illiterate, however those who are compelled to accept that Moses was literate by historical facts emphasise that the great majority of Israelites during the lifetime of Moses were illiterate and oral tradition was the main practice of passing information from generation to generation. The point is not how many in the population of Israel could read and write, but that somebody could at least write for purposes of recording.

**4.3.3.1. *The war against the Amalekites.*** The incident that is recorded in Exodus 17: 8-16 is highly commented about by various biblical commentators and theologians because particularly on verse 14 it is stated that Moses was instructed to write down the war incident and recite it in the ears of Joshua as a memorial. The war was between the Israelites and Amalekites and Joshua was leading in battle while Hur and Aaron helped Moses keep his arms raised up, for in that case the Israelite army would prevail against the Amalekites. The writing would be a memorial that God would wipe out the Amalekites on earth.

Alter (2004: 14) in commenting on Exodus 17: 14, declares: 'It must be said that literacy is an early phenomenon in ancient Israel, though it is difficult to determine how far it might have extended, beyond a learned elite.' Keil & Delitzch (1975: 81) compound the matter even more when they claim that the war incident was to be written in 'the book appointed for a record of the wonderful works of God ....' Here there is an indication that there was a written source of amazing works of God that may have been used by compilers in arranging the Torah as it is. Horn (1979: 1190) simplifies the matter by indicating that: 'Moses, however, did not use clay tablets, but scrolls, called "books"'

which were of papyrus.’ If Moses used scrolls, probably he also used ink to write on the scrolls, so civilisation pertaining to the art of writing had advanced significantly.

**4.3.3.2. *The writing of the Decalogue.*** According to the history of the writing of the Ten Commandments, the first stone tablets of the Decalogue were broken by Moses when he actually saw that the Israelites had made an idol for themselves. The second set of stone tablets was made and the Ten Commandments were written down on them as they were in the first tablets. There are scholars who capitalise on the fact that the first tablets were broken by Moses in his state of shock. So some authors believe that Moses wrote on the other tablets as God had written on the first tablets, but they do not explain how he actually did the writing whether he used ink or his fingers for inscription to write the commandments on another set of stone tablets. Keil & Delitzsch (1975: 160) also concede that the Ten Commandments were actually written by God on the tablets. It is interesting that apparently scholars do not argue about the written Decalogue as to whether it was readable to Moses and Levites or not. Howley (1979:193) indicates that the expression of the commandments was done 'tersely and in such a way that they could easily be inscribed on a small tablet.' ` Certainly, it would be pointless for God to write or inscribe something that none could read. The main reason for the silence of most scholars about the understandability of the Ten Commandments written by God is that the writing of the Decalogue is an incident that cannot be argued about, because it is clear. In fact the writing of the Decalogue is a testimony that there was religious writing even prior to the entry into the Promised Land.

**4.3.3.3. *Public reading.*** There is an impression that oral tradition did not give room for writing and public reading. However, in Exodus 24: 7 it is recorded that Moses read from the book of the covenant in the hearing of the people. In Exodus 24: 4, it is stated that Moses did actually write all the words of the LORD which he read to the people according to verse 7. Keil & Delitzsch (1975: 156) indicate that the writing of God's words was meant for '...preserving them in an official record.' Keck (1994: 880) expands about the book of the law as 'a literary deposit of the commands given by God to Moses....' ` Even when oral tradition and memorizing were existent, Moses did read in public from an official record and not that he recited as it would please the proponents of

oral tradition to the exclusion of the practice of religious writing and reading. The idea that Israelites did not have a book religion is here proved wrong. The only point that could be made is that not everyone had scrolls with religious material written on, but such were kept in the tabernacle or the ark and often publicly read for the Israelites.

Generally, the book of Exodus portrays Israelites as a nation on a journey and the leadership as one that often had to write and read some documents of significance. Before reaching Canaan, there was the use of writing and reading in the Israelite nation.

**4.3.4. Authorship of the book of Numbers.** The book is generally said to have some records of Israelite census at a certain stage. However, Dillard (1994: 83) indicates that among the Jews the book is called: 'In the wilderness` especially considering the journey from Sinai to Paran and finally to the plains of Moab. Pfeiffer and Harrison (1962: 111) say that the title 'In the wilderness` as opposed to Numbers '...is quite descriptive of the total contents.'

The book of Numbers covers different kinds of material including poems. The book, according to Childs (1979:192-193) was produced from the J, E and P sources. The author continues to indicate that there has been no agreement on the breakdown of the sources of the book. On the same score, Dillard (1994: 84) declares: 'After all this is said, we must remember that we cannot be precise or certain about our reconstruction of the composition of Pentateuch books. It is fruitless to speculate about it more carefully in the manner of most source criticism.` Difficult as it may be to work out the contributions of J and E sources, there is a general consensus that the P source contributed largely and the D source contributed little (Dillard 1994: 85).

Of great interest in the book of Numbers is the fact that there is an account which Dillard admits that it contains Moses` act of writing which is of great significance in this study.

**4.3.5. Writing in the book of Numbers.** There are different texts in the book of numbers that present writing as a common phenomenon in a way that is hard or impossible to question.

**4.3.5.1. Priestly literacy.** Numbers 5: 23 clearly says that the priest shall write curses in a book and wash the book or writing with bitter water and let the suspected woman to drink the water. Pfeiffer and Harrison (1962: 119) state: 'This incidental acknowledgement of the use of pen, or brush, and ink fits well for a people who had lived for generations in Egypt, where the scribe's brush had been in constant use since early in the third millennium B.C.' This text is found in an explanation of a ceremony of determining whether the suspicion of a jealous man on his wife is correct or not. The other details about such a ceremony are not of great importance, but the point is that priests had to write as part of their duty. Thus, the text of interest exposes researchers who ignore the fact that priests were actually literate to read and keep written accounts from the hand of God or Moses himself. Van der Toorn (2007: 85) posits: 'The lack of references to priestly scribes in the time of the monarchy is not to be construed as an indication of non-literacy on the part of the priests. The priests needed writing skills to do their work.' The fact that priests had to write as stated by the text is generally not disputed at all, but rather ignored.

The over-emphasis of the notion that the Israelite religion was not a 'book religion' prior to the exile carries no water, because it suggests that there was a general or widespread illiteracy and that oral tradition was the only practice to pass messages and religious regulations to younger generations and none had to read or write anything religious. This text found in the book of Numbers dispels such notions charged with grave ignorance.

**4.3.5.2. One of the Torah sources.** In Numbers 21: 14, there is a phrase 'the book of the wars of Jehovah' which clearly indicates that initially the Torah was composed of different books or scrolls arranged in a topical manner serving a memorial purpose. Scholars regard the so called JEDP sources as the main sources of the Torah, yet there's a source here about the wars of Jehovah which we may not know as to who actually wrote

it. This particular source emphasises that the Torah may have been arranged in its present form quite later. The most important fact about this source is that it is not an inference like the JEDP are, because the Bible clearly mentions it.

**4.3.5.3. *Moses commanded to write.*** In the book of Numbers 33: 2, it is stated that Moses wrote about the stages of the journey of Israelites from Egypt as commanded by God to do so. Keil & Delitzsch (1975: 241-242) maintain that Moses wrote as a memorial of the grace and the faithfulness with which the LORD led His people safely in the desert land and in the waste howling wilderness....' The authors here do not argue against the fact that Moses wrote this particular record, but confirm what the text says by indicating that the writing was done for memorial purposes. Moses was instructed by God several times to write some events or commandments. Moses may have not written everything in one book or scroll, but whatever he wrote in different scrolls comprises a considerable part of the Pentateuch. The idea that there was no religious literature prior to the exile is proved wrong by the Bible in the book of Numbers.

**4.3.6. Authorship of the book of Deuteronomy.** The name of the book, Deuteronomy means second law. In this book there are Moses' speeches and repetitions of things that are written in earlier books. It is not clear as to who wrote it and when? The sources like JEDP are surprisingly not entertained by some scholars.

Even though there are different genres in the book, there is some consensus that the authors of the book negotiated and agreed on the content and decided what and how to write it. Dozeman (1998:272) says: 'Obviously the authors of the finished book have drawn material from different sources over an extended period of time.' It is not clear as to when exactly could the authors have done the act of writing the material, because in the book itself there is material that is quite old and some material seem to be post-exilic.

There is a general feeling that the discovery of the law book in the temple during the reign of Josiah could have influenced the writing of the book. Some students of the book surmise that the discovered book of the law was actually the book of Deuteronomy while others perceive it to be the law part of the book of Deuteronomy. Childs (1979: 205)

posits: 'No consensus has emerged on the exact nature of the influence which arose from the reform....'

There is consensus that the books, Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings which constitutes the Former prophets were actually grouped with the book of Deuteronomy and such books are believed to have been a product of Deuteronomists who castigated anything done in the northern kingdom of Israel and justified anything done in the southern kingdom of Judah.

The dating of the book of Deuteronomy is fluid, because the contents of the book begin earlier than Josiah's reign and stretch to the post-exilic period. Thus, Dozeman (1998: 278) states: 'Much depends, then, on which part of Deuteronomy is being discussed when the question of time of composition is under consideration.' The impression being made here is that the book of Deuteronomy was being open for additions for a long time since Dozeman (1998: 279) says: 'Neither the law code of chapters 12-26, nor the book as a whole was composed as a stroke and at one time.'

Not only is the date unclear, but the authors' occupations or titles. Dozeman (1998: 281) posits: 'It seems certain that the authors of Deuteronomy were not traditional priests, even though they recognized the value and authority of services that Israel's priests performed.' All in all, the authors' identity, date of authorship and the processes followed to compose and compile the book are not agreed upon. However, of concern in the book are incidents where the book itself talks about some writing activities of any nature.

**4.3.7. Writing in the book of Deuteronomy.** There is a lot of controversy about the book of Deuteronomy, because it clearly repeats some events recorded in earlier books and its original authors are viewed as Deuteronomists who wrote it according to their interpretations or views.

Dever (2001: 203) finds problems with a belief that the Torah could have been written around the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, because there is no other proof of literature except the

Bible. The author goes on to indicate that some proof is available to substantiate the assertion that some literature existed or was written during the Iron Age. However, on page 204, the author refutes Deuteronomy 6: 6-9 which claims that an instruction was given to the effect that certain laws should be written on door-posts. The reason for negating the text is that he believes that the text itself is post-exilic. The author further refers to other texts that say something about writing in the Torah as ‘anachronism.’ The author here claims that it may not be true that God ever commanded Moses to write anything or that there was anyone (including Moses) able to write and read during the time of Moses.

**4.3.7.1. Divorce certificate.** Deuteronomy 24: 1, 3, talks about a divorce certificate which would be given to a wife by her husband when he does not want her anymore. The assumption that during the times of the events of the Torah, people could not read and write is here challenged, because it is hard to imagine the existence of any certificate that is without anything written on it. Niditch (1996: 89) declares: ‘The writing of a certificate of divorce ...is another example of use of the technology of writing for legal purposes.’ There are no explanations about how an illiterate man shall find a divorce certificate for his unwanted wife. This idea of a divorce certificate clearly shows that literacy was not a serious problem during the time of the Torah.

**4.3.7.2. Moses writing.** In Deuteronomy 31: 22, Moses is said to have written a song and taught the Israelites how to sing it. There is no argument that Moses completed writing the book of the law and instructed the Levites to put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD which they would usually carry when moving from one place to the other. It is not very clear as to what the contents of the book were.

#### **4.4. Post-Mosaic writing incidents.**

There are texts in post-Mosaic contexts that confirm that some religious writing occurred, while other texts indicate that some persons were literate. The argument that renders anything to do with writing or reading in the Torah as anachronism will either be rejected or confirmed by immediate post-Mosaic history.

**4.4.1. Authorship of the book of Joshua.** The authorship of the book is a matter of belief or scientific study. Some Bible readers, based on unclear reasons, believe that the book was written by Joshua while some scholars do not find reasons to support such a view. Dillard (1994: 108) out rightly states: 'As with all of the historical books of the Old Testament, the author of Joshua remains anonymous.' Of course Joshua could not have written about his death and the author does not sound like Joshua writing as the first person narrating to any interested readers.

The book of Joshua does not sound like a product of Deuteronomists, because at that stage, Israelites were one nation and there had been no king. However, some scholars like Eissfeldt (1974: 251) who find the J, E and P sources to have been used in composing the book. Furthermore, on page 253, the author presents another source called L alongside J and E. On page 255, the author claims to have found traces of Deuteronomic editing in the book. In fact, the author claims that the L, E and J sources were edited by Deuteronomists. On the same score, some scholars perceive the book of Joshua as part of the Hexateuch when added to the Pentateuch and thus all source analysis as done in the Pentateuch applies to the book of Joshua.

Certainly, Joshua never wrote the whole book, but the incidents of writing in the book help emphasise that whatever redaction action was done whenever it was done, there was something concrete earlier.

**4.4.2. Writing or reading incidents in the book of Joshua.** In the very first chapter of the book of Joshua which accounts about God addressing Joshua in order to prepare him for leading His nation into the Promised land. In verse 8, God is said to have talked about the book of the law which should not 'depart' from Joshua's mouth and Joshua was to use it for his meditation at night or during the day. God is portrayed here as one who confirmed that there was a book of the law in existence by the time of Joshua's



leadership. Clearly this particular book of the law may not have been the Pentateuch as we have it, but it was probably written in a different form than we have it today.

**4.4.2.1. Joshua did write and read.** In Joshua 8: 32, Joshua is said to have written a copy of the law of Moses on the stone on mount Ebal in the presence of a congregation of Israelites which had gathered for a sacrifice ceremony. Joshua, a man who rubbed shoulders with Moses could write. In verse 34, it is said that Joshua read all the words of the law as they were written in the book of the law. By the time of Joshua's leadership there was a book or scroll used for reference purposes in applying the commandments of God. Thus, religious literature was in existence.

Furthermore, in Joshua 24: 26, it is clearly stated that Joshua wrote some words in the book of the law and established a memorial for such words. The Torah seems to have been open ended since Joshua added some words in it. The Israelite religion was a book religion under the leadership of Moses and Joshua.

**4.4.2.2. Writing was common.** In Joshua 18: 9, men who had been sent to describe the land used a book or scroll to write down the description of the land and they brought the description to Joshua so that he may use it to apportion the various parts of the land to different tribes of Israel. This kind of writing used by these men was not meant for religious purposes, but administrative purposes. So writing was common since it could also be used for national administration. This particular text succeeds records of religious writing and introduces administrative use of writing as a practice that was earlier on used for religious purposes. This text, implicit as it may be, simply proves wrong the scholars who want to believe that writing was firstly used in royal circles before it could be used in religious realms. As far as it concerns the Israelites, writing was used in royal realms after it had been used in religious circles, thus by that time writing was common and not only restricted to royal palaces.

**4.4.3. Authorship of the book of Judges.** The book contains separate accounts of Judges that are defined by some scholars as minor and major depending on how much is written or remembered about them. The most outstanding phrase, 'when there was no king in

Israel` simply indicates that Deuteronomic involvement in the writing of the book may not be ruled out, because the writer or redactor knows something about kingship in Israel. Dillard (1994: 120) hastens to state: 'As with all of the Old Testament historical books, the author of Judges remains anonymous.' However, Childs (1979: 256) compounds the authorship problem of the book by observing that various writers contributed in coming up with the whole book.

There is a belief that the various accounts about different judges or heroes circulated orally since the judges emerged from different tribes. The various sources as determined in the Pentateuch and the so called Hexateuch are figured out by some scholars even though according to Eissfeldt (1974: 260) some accounts on minor judges are too short to actually discover anything regarding the various sources that may have been used. On page 263, the author indicates that the P source never contributed on anything that occurred after the distribution of land. Further, on page 264, the author says the L, J and E continued when the P ceased. Furthermore, the L source is said to have preceded the J and E.

There is general consensus that the book of Judges went through some Deuteronomic redaction. However, Childs (1979: 257-258) indicates that Noth`s attempt to to date the Deuteronomic redaction to the post-exilic period was never supported by other scholars. There is also what is called a 'pre-deuteronomic` book of Judges according to Eissfeldt (1974: 266) which is not dated at all , but probably it could have been during the time of the united monarchy.

Certainly, the book of Judges could not have been written prior to the period of the monarchy period, but it reports about incidents that could not disappear in the oral phase of the sagas of Judges. Despite the so called anachronism, we have grounds to believe that whatever could be remembered and written down as content of the book withstood the test of time and was ever vivid in collective memory until it was written by any person.

**4.4.4. Writing incident in the book of Judges.** It seems, by the time of Judges, writing was not so much a luxury. In Judges 8: 14, Gideon is said to have come across a young man of Succoth whom he questioned and this young lad could write down the names of '77 officials of his city' according to Horn (1979: 1190). It is not clear as to how young this man was, but apparently the practice of learning how to read and write had begun even before there was a king in Israel. It may have been that during the time of Moses very few could read and write, but prior to the monarchic era literacy had grown remarkably among the Israelites.

#### **4.5. Monarchic writing incidents.**

There is ample evidence that the art of writing was in existence by the monarchic period. This is made manifest by the use of writing on various objects. Mazar (1990: 514) states: 'The Hebrew inscriptions known from the period of the Monarchy include monumental, official texts; ostraca; short notations on pottery vessels; dedications; prayers; and even literary texts.' The list of inscriptions presented by Mazar covers religious matters. The author does not incline himself to royal developments.

Blenkinsopp (1995: 32) enunciates about writing during the period of the monarchy and posits: 'Since this increase in trade involved a great deal of scribal activity...the greatest concentration of inscribed material dates to this time ostraca from Arad, Hurvat Uza, Tell Qasile, Mesad Hashavyahu, and Jerusalem; the Siloam inscription; seals, seal impressions (bullae), and about a thousand stamped jar handles.' By the time of the monarchy writing was diversified as a sign of it being common. Niditch (1996: 90) presents another dimension of writing as a result of being aware that some biblical texts have to do with the writing of documents for various reasons. The author further points out that some letters were written and sent to certain recipients as a means of communication and such letters were popular during the monarchic period. The writing of letters simply means that literacy was quite widespread or literate persons could be found without a struggle. By the monarchic era literacy in Israel was not only for the elite, but a necessity of life.

#### **4.6. Authorship of monarchic historical books**

The historical books concerned with the history of the monarchic period are 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Isaiah 1-39, and Jeremiah.

**4.6.1. Authorship of the books of 1 & 2 Samuel.** These books were not meant to be divided, but there had to be a division so that each division may be written on one scroll and the other one on another. The first book of Samuel is purely not about events under any monarch in Israel, but partially about Samuel who according to some scholars was the last judge to reign in Israel. Samuel was responsible for a number of duties so to say, because there is no single title that tells the whole truth about his activities. Nevertheless, Samuel was not a king at all. Dillard (1994: 136) postulates: 'Like all other biblical historians, the author of the book of Samuel remains anonymous.' The author further presents the confusion that exists about the book thus: 'Since Samuel is part of the Deuteronomic history, most scholars view the final stages of its composition as the work of editors-authors during the period of the Exile; however, it is all but impossible to recover the compositional history of the book, and it may well have been produced in essentially its present form at a much earlier date.'

Despite the realization that source criticism is hard to figure out in the book of Samuel Dillard (1994:137) in agreement with Childs (1979: 268) indicate that the authors of the book could have been pro-monarchical or anti-monarchical in nature. Seemingly, the pro-monarchical authors wrote an earlier source while the anti-monarchical authors wrote the latter part of the book.

The scope of the book falls within the period or content which Deuteronomists present according to their subjective way. Eissfeldt (1974: 280) indicates that Deuteronomists did not do much work on the books of Samuel as much as they did on the books of Joshua and Judges. There is a feeling that the authors of the book were either pre-Deuteronomic or post-Deuteronomic due to the minute extent of their redaction on the books.

Eissfeldt (1974: 279) despite all the difficulties noted by other scholars, still finds sources that he identifies as E, J and L in the book. According to the author J and E are closely related and L seems to be separate and independent.

**4.6.2. Authorship of 1 & 2 Kings.** The books of Kings begin with final stages of David's reign and stretches to the era of the divided monarchy and ends with the exile whereby Jehoiachin is released and honoured in Babylon. The scope of the books of Kings simply indicates that the authorship issues are complex especially when it comes to the date of authorship. Since the content of the books include the period of the divided monarchy, the theory of the contribution of the Deuteronomists in writing the books gains prominence. Nevertheless, the analysis of the material by different scholars raises quite a lot of arguments.

Childs (1979: 285) leans on the hypothesis that a Deuteronomic author compiled the books from various sources that he had at hand. Furthermore, according to Childs (1979: 286) Noth is said to have ascribed the authorship of the books of Kings to one writer who actually wrote during the exilic period '...in order to demonstrate how Israel's continual disobedience to the laws of God finally caused the nation to be destroyed through divine judgement.' However, the author does mention Fohrer's concept of two phases of one redaction work done around the time of Josiah and another during the exile to Babylon.

Dillard (1994: 153) says: 'Attempts to trace the putative sources of the Pentateuch through the historical books have now been abandoned.' However, Eissfeldt (1974: 297) elaborates about the so called pre-deuteronomic books of Kings which indicate various sources that may be identified as L, J and E. The author further regards the J and E sources to be part of the first narratives of the books of Kings, especially prior to the divided monarchy. Finally, Eissfeldt (1974:300) asserts that there are additions to the books of Kings made later on, irrespective of whether one or two Deuteronomists wrote the books. Thus, this concept accommodates the pre-deuteronomic redaction or compilation of the book.

Of great interest in the books of Kings is the fact that either compilers or writers actually mentioned sources which informed their writing whenever they did write and such sources are undoubtedly pre-exilic, because some of them bear the names of pre-exilic characters and. Annals may have been written by scribes in palaces for record keeping.

**4.6.3. Authorship of 1 and 2 Chronicles.** The content matter of the books of Kings and Chronicles is roughly the same. However, the critical aspects that have to do with its authorship do vary with the books of Kings.

In comparison, Dillard (1994: 173) perceives the author of the book of Kings to have lived during the exilic period or earlier in the post-exilic era while the author of Chronicles lived later than the writer of the book of Kings. Seemingly, the book of Chronicles was written clearly after the exile.

Eissfeldt (1974: 531) acknowledges like other scholars that the writer of the book used several mentioned sources, but claims: '...the Chronicler... has also largely used the books of Gen.-Kings as sources.' There are other sources that the Chronicler used like the books of the kings of Israel and Judah, The book of the kings of Israel and others. Some of these sources have their own writers clearly indicated while others do not. Childs (1979: 645) indicates that some of the sources used are different versions of similar histories or accounts. Whatever comments that are made about the sources used, Childs (1979: 646) declares: 'It is probably fair to say that the historical critical problem of the Chronicler's use of sources has not been solved and may never be completely.' However, speculations are highly limited by the fact that the author acknowledged sources used.

Of significance in the Chronicler's work is the fact that some sources used probably date to the pre-exilic period and that he/she was not the composer, but compiler and commentator to a certain extent.

**4.6.4. Authorship of the book of Jeremiah.** What sets apart the book of Jeremiah from the rest of the prophetic books is that the prophet, Jeremiah, had a personal scribe by the name of Baruch. This fact limits speculations about the authorship of the book. However, scholars break down the book into three main sections while others find other additional sections or forms. Dillard (1994: 290) reports about Mowinckel who discovered three types of material in the book as the 'prophetic oracles,' biographical accounts and 'prosaic sermons.' Childs (1979: 342) who quotes the same Mowinckel presents oracles as 'poems' and prose material as 'Deuteronomistic redaction.' Eissfeldt (1974: 361) identifies the so called book of consolation as part of the material in the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah served as a prophet for about four decades and when the period of the exile to Babylon actually began, he was there, although he was later taken to Egypt and never returned. The fate of Baruch is not very clear even though some scholars according to Dillard (1994: 290) ascribe many texts to Jeremiah or his scribe Baruch. However, Childs (1979: 343) emphasises on the prose material as the work of a Deuteronomistic school, but recognises that some scholars claim that Jeremiah produced the prose material as much as he produced the poetry contained in the book. The autobiographical material according to Childs (1979: 344) may be credited to Baruch who knows much better about the prophet. Some students of the book of Jeremiah sought the original scroll which was burned by king Jehoiakim even though it is reported that another scroll was written with the same words and other additional words. The scroll may not be found to compare with the latter one and distinguish additions and inaccuracies of the latter scroll.

All in all, the book of Jeremiah contains material that was written prior to the exilic period and the practice of writing religious material is clearly presented.

**4.6.5. Authorship of Isaiah 1-39.** There is a general consensus that the contents of Isaiah 1-39 are a unity and therefore have to do with Isaiah, son of Amoz. According to Dillard (1994: 275) Isaiah served from the final year of King Uzziah's reign through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah until the reign of Manasseh. Dillard (1994: 275)

indicates that the death of Sennacherib (681 BCE) is reported by Isaiah, thus Isaiah served for a period of about 49 years.

According to Kaiser (1975: 221) the prophet may have had a scribal school, thus indicating that he was not illiterate. The book of Isaiah has to do with some apocalyptic or future events. Isaiah never lived to experience the Babylonian exile.

First Isaiah (1-39) is not composed of one genre and one message. A small size of the contents is ascribed to Isaiah himself by different scholars. Childs (1979: 318) refers to Duhn who ascribes Isaiah 7:2-6; 8: 1-18 and 28: 1-30 to prophet Isaiah. Dillard (1994: 271) ascribes between 20 and 40 percent of Isaiah 1-39 to the prophet himself. Like any other biblical book, the rest of the material could be ascribed to the work of editors in the post-exilic era.

How much Isaiah wrote of what we read in the book named after him is not of great importance, but it is fascinating that prophet Isaiah wrote something which was used by later writers to compile the whole book.

#### **4.7. The writing incident of King Saul's time.**

The very first king of Israel, Saul, reigned at a time when wars were very common and another part of his reign he spent pursuing David, thus there was not much of religious or royal writing and reading. However, in I Samuel 10: 25 it is recorded that Samuel wrote down the kind of kingdom the Israelites would have with Saul being their king or with a leadership of kings. Samuel is deemed by some scholars to have been a judge, while others understand him to have been a priest since he could offer sacrifices and perform the anointment of kings and other scholars have an impression that he was a prophet. None of the scholar's perception of Samuel is wrong. Thus, Samuel was a leader who had a spiritual role and a public administrative role to play. The writing that Samuel did serves both religious and public or civil purposes. The bottom line is that record keeping was practiced in the sanctuary for religious and civil purposes during the time of Saul.



#### 4.8. The writing incident of King David's era.

During the reign of David wars were still common and apparently the services of priests and Levites do not seem to appear except the events that took place during David's reign. However, the most common sin of David of lustfully using Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, is recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and verse 14 reports that David actually wrote a letter to Joab, commander of the army, to place Uriah in the area where the war was fierce so that he could be killed. This letter was delivered to Joab by Uriah himself. The moral issues of this account are not of interest, but the fact that David wrote a letter is of interest. It seems reading the letter was not a problem. It is clear that writing and reading was not a problem during the time of the reign of David.

The assumption that kings needed a scribe to write everything for them is here questioned. The letter that David wrote was just too personal for him to have a scribe write it when he could. However, there is a possibility that scribes may have written everything for their king. Beginning with David it is clear that kings may have needed scribes just to help them with writing many more things or documents so that the king's duty is not all about writing.

#### 4.9. The writing incidents of the Solomonic era.

Solomon, son of David, succeeded his father who reigned until he was old. During the reign of David, the monarchy could have been developed to a certain extent from which Solomon continued to improve it. Blenkinsopp (1995: 78) elaborates on the complex system of royal dynamics during the reigns of David and Solomon. Seeing such impressive arrangements of Solomon, the author declares: 'Measures such as these would, if historically plausible, have required the services of a considerable corps of educated and literate civil servants and would therefore signify important progress toward a society capable of generating a literacy and intellectual tradition.' By the time of Solomon, a scribe was not really a literate person among the few, but simply a person whose job was more about writing.

Davies (1998: 78) refers to I Kings 4: 1-6 which points out that Elihoreph and Ahiah were scribes during the reign of Solomon. Furthermore, Jehoshaphat is said to have been a 'recorder.' In his service as king, Solomon had certain priests in his inner circle. When the monarchy came into being, it seems religious operations ceased, yet they did not disappear at all. The royal and priestly services did co-exist especially prior to the divided monarchy. The magnificent temple in Jerusalem was built by Solomon so that the priestly services could be in a fixed place and not in a tent. The implicit conclusion that prior to the exile in Babylon, especially during the monarchic era, there was religious inactivity is fallacious. The use of writing by priests began prior to the appointment of kings, so that kings used writing which had been in use before the inception of the monarchy in the sanctuary of Israel.

**4.9.1. The book of Proverbs.** The authorship of the book is of great significance and therefore should be considered to uphold the fact that there were scribal or writing activities. The introduction of the book ascribes its authorship to King Solomon, son of David. However, scholars like Dillard (1994: 236) figure out the possibility of a number of writers being responsible for arranging the proverbs as they are. According to the author there are sections in the book that are clearly ascribed to other persons like Agur, King Lemuel and Hezekia or his men. According to Eissfeldt (1974: 476) there is a daring inclination that none of the wisdom sayings in the book may actually be linked directly to Solomon. This inclination sustains itself by the fact that Solomon is only recognised at the beginning of the book as the king that developed the use of poems or wisdom sayings in his court. Thus, Solomon may be only the founder of the school of poetry or wisdom. Childs (1979: 549) indicates that this kind of school was exclusively for the elite in Solomon's regime.

With regards to the date of the writing of wisdom sayings, Childs (1979: 548) indicates that the beginning time could have been pre-exilic, but there is a possibility that the work of writing wisdom sayings extended to the post-exilic period. The date of the Proverbs is

not clear at all, but there is an idea that Hezekiah's men may have done some redaction work on the book.

Despite the lack of clarity about the writing and date of the book itself, it is important to recognise that some material of the book existed prior to the exile.

The book of Proverbs is generally ascribed to King Solomon due to textual evidence and in it there are statements which are religious in nature. Truly, there are many proverbs which have almost nothing to do with God. If the book of Proverbs was written by somebody a long time after Solomon's death, especially after the exile, then the question would be how possible was it to remember all these proverbs without any written reference?

There is an impression that Solomon had relations with other nations which influenced these sayings and some scholars want to discard this book of Proverbs as a religious literature. The bottom line is that some proverbs were written down in an organised manner according to the standards of the time.

**4.9.2. The book of Ecclesiastes.** The authorship debate of the book of Ecclesiastes should be considered to emphasise the practice of writing and record keeping even on religious matters. There is an inference that in his early years, Solomon, wrote the book of Proverbs and later on in his elderly age he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes which is ascribed to him according to textual evidence. The book is not friendly to scholars because it discourages much study for it wearies the human body. The author introduces himself as teacher or preacher who is a king and son of David. The assembler or Qohelet is viewed as pseudonym while others feel that a repentant Solomon wrote it.

According to Childs (1979: 582) : 'There is an almost universal consensus, shared by extremely conservative scholars, that Solomon was not the author of the book.' Dillard (1994: 248) supports the view that the book was written late in the history of Israel, because '... the vocabulary and syntax of Ecclesiastes is compared to late Hebrew and

Aramaic....` Furthermore, the author (1994:249) questions as to why would Solomon use a pseudonym, Qohelet, and not come out clearly as Solomon. Childs (1979: 582) claims that the book may be dated 300-200 B.C.E. because of evidence found in the Qumran scrolls and linguistic analysis.

There is no agreement whether the book is a product of one author or not, but there is an inclination to the idea that some redaction was done on the book especially on the prologue and the epilogue. Generally, there is no belief in the book from a scholarly perspective, but it attests to the work that Solomon did to enhance the use of wisdom literature in his courts or schools. The book has some religious passages which attest to the fact that prior to the exile religious literature existed in an acceptable form of the time and situation.

**4.9.3. The book of Song of Songs.** Generally the book is handled from an allegorical point of view by a number of Bible readers and scholars. This approach has not been left unchallenged. Childs (1979: 574) classifies the book intelligently thus: 'The book, along with the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, is ascribed to Solomon as the source of Israel's wisdom literature. As Moses is the source of the law, and David of the Psalms, so is Solomon the father of sapiential writing. ` The author also indicates the ascription of the book to Solomon and does not preclude the contribution of other persons besides Solomon in composing and writing the book. Looking at the language of the book of Song of Songs, some scholars like Eissfeldt (1974: 490) date the book to the Persian period, because seemingly some Aramaic words are used in the book. However, Dillard (1994: 264) disputes the late dating of the book by concurring with Pope who claims that 'Aramaic is as old as Hebrew.` The author further indicates that some sections of the book may be dated to the Solomonic era, because the author's interest in vegetation and animal life is reminiscent of Solomon's interest in nature's lessons. Like Moses who did write some accounts in the Torah, Solomon did contribute, but not in the sense of being responsible for every word found in the book. Childs (1979: 578) postulates: '...there is a clear sign of editorial activity in the passage 8.6-7.'

In fact, the King James Version calls this book, Song of Solomon, and from textual evidence the book is probably ascribed to Solomon. Solomon may not be the author of the book, but its composition may have begun during Solomon's reign. How this book is read and applied, it is not necessary to delve into such arguments except to glory in the fact that king Solomon contributed in the composition of the book. During Solomon's time literacy was not much of a problem in Israel.

#### **4.10. Writing incidents of the Divided Monarchy.**

The time of the divided monarchy presents a lot of evidence to attest that religious or private writing did take place. Nevertheless, there are some scholars who propound the idea that literacy was not widespread even at that time. Crenshaw (1998: 36) talks about the work of Jeremiah and Baruch and posits: 'More than a century earlier the prophet Isaiah acknowledged that some people were illiterate, for when handed a scroll they would respond, "I do not know how to read" ...others, however, had acquired a knowledge of both reading and writing.' Not everyone could read, but scrolls were written by those who could read and write.

It is fascinating to realize that some scholars of our days do acknowledge that biblical literature did not only emerge after the exile, but prior to the exile. Schniedewind (2004: 64) declares: 'The Bible as we know it began to take shape in Jerusalem in the eighth century B.C.E., in the days of Isaiah, the prophet, and Hezekiah, the king of Judah.' The writer continues to justify the eventuality of the Bible beginning to be organised during the period, because social, economic and political situations had changed and became more conducive. The main reason that enabled religious literature to prosper was the rise of the Assyrian empire which exiled the northern kingdom of Israel. The author further posits: 'The exile of northern Israel also gave rise to the prophetic works of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah of Jerusalem, to priestly liturgies and to ritual texts, as well as to a pre-Deuteronomian historical work.' Not many scholars argue that literacy had not increased, but the substance that was written is despised by the use of redaction, compilation and composition.

Blenkinsopp (1995: 29) claims: ‘...nothing written has survived from that time with the exception of the Gezar calendar...and a few names and letters of the alphabet scratched on ostraca, bowls and arrowheads.’ There are numerous incidents of writing in the Bible done during the time of the divided monarchy. Scrolls or books of the time did not survive, but they indeed existed.

**4.10.1. The Siloam tunnel inscription.** This particular inscription may not have been meant for religious purposes, but it indicates that literacy had increased. Nielsen (1954: 54-55) says: ‘...on the use of writing in pre-exilic Israel by enquiring whether archaeology has anything to say in confirmation or refutation of our thesis.’ The author further explains that there are materials which are dated to the pre-exilic period and he singles out the ostraca from Samaria which could have had to do with an Israelite ‘household’ during the time of Jeroboam II. The writer goes on to mention the Siloam inscription of Hezekiah’s time.

Schniedewind (2004: 73) explains further about the tunnel inscription thus: ‘Although not a royal inscription, the wall on which it appears was carefully prepared and its letters are elegantly carved into the hard limestone. Here outside the royal palace and the temple, writing is being used by engineers, craftsmen, and labourers to memorialise their accomplishments.’ The Siloam tunnel inscription implies that writing was not only used in the temple and palace, but seemingly some could read to fathom the inscription.

**4.10.2. The Josianic discovery.** In 2 Kings 22 and 23 the discovery of the book of the law by Hilkiah, the high priest, is presented as the pivotal event that precipitated Josianic reforms. This book of the law discovered in the temple is clear evidence that religious literature existed prior to the Babylonian exile in book or scroll form.

The Time-Life Books editors (1975: 14) claim: ‘In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Josiah ... when the temple of Jerusalem was being refurbished, the priests found parchment scrolls containing the law of Moses. Many of the laws were familiar to the priests, but the book was not.’ Pfeiffer and Harrison (1963: 362-363) refer to this book of the law as the Torah, ‘the five books of Moses.’ However, Howley (1979: 470) considers a number of

theories about the book, but also says: 'Only a limited document is here in question as it was read publicly... in a relatively short time....' The authors further claim: 'Clearly it carried conviction in a way an entirely new composition would not ....' The Time-Life Books editors further assert that the discovery of the book was in 622 B.C.E. Some believers claim that the Deuteronomists had just prepared the book and placed it somewhere in the temple, yet the context of the discovery shows that the book would not have been found, if the king had not ordered that some money be taken from the temple to pay for the renovation of the temple. The king knew nothing about the book just as much as the high priest had no idea. Thus, the book or scroll had been written much earlier than the time of Josiah's birth. It is an assumption that the book was the work of Deuteronomists.

Schniedewind (2004: 91) simply says that in the light of the discovery of the book of the law, there seems to have been widespread literacy during the late monarchic period. Josiah, the king, himself did read the words of the book in the hearing of elders of Judah in Jerusalem that he had called. If the priests only used oral tradition to train the upcoming priests, probably such a piece of literature could have not been found in the temple. So far, the existence of pre-exilic religious literature is not an issue at all in the light of this discovery.

**4.10.3. Letters.** It was common to write letters during the period of the divided monarchy. Niditch (1996: 51) postulates: '... the finding of letters by archaeologists, the oldest dating to the early or middle seventh century ... is evidence of growing literacy of some kind....' The author explains that some letters were written on potsherds while others were written on papyrus. The author continues to say: 'A collection of twenty-one letters on ostraca from Arad in the northern Negev; all except for one have been dated to the period immediately preceding the area's conquest by Babylonian and Edomite armies in 597 B.C.E.' The practice of writing letters implies that the recipient can read or can easily find somebody to read for them. During the divided monarchy; generally, people could read and write.

In 2 Kings 5: 5-7, the king of Syria whose captain of armies was Naaman who was suffering from leprosy wrote a letter to the king of Israel (his counterpart) to heal Naaman, his servant. The king of Israel did read the letter and reacted by renting/ tearing his clothes and Elisha heard about it and intervened. Finally, the help needed was indeed given to Naaman. Apparently the ability to write had in a way begun to replace the use of royal messengers for passing words from one master to another. So reading was like hearing the very words of the one who wrote the letter.

In 2 Kings 10: 2, 6, Jehu is said to have written letters to the effect that the sons of Ahab be all executed. Letters had become weightier than the word of mouth and they made the use of seals even more popular or necessary. Jehu wrote to the elders and rulers who were tasked to kill the sons of Ahab. How could the practice of writing become so important, yet the writing of spiritual literature be out of consideration. Writing was important as much as computers are in every sphere of life in our days.

The most interesting letter in Bible history was written by Sennacherib to king Hezekiah to threaten him and to declare war against Israel. Hezekiah did open the letter before the LORD in prayer after having read it and God did hearken to the prayer of Hezekiah and conquered the Assyrians on behalf of the Israelites. These letters were cross-border means of communication which would by no means precede local literacy.

**4.10.4. Documents.** During the post-Solomonic era records or documents would by all means be kept in a better way. Niditch (1996: 61) elaborates on ‘documents’ in the form of ‘ostraca’ found in Samaria dated 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E which are categorized as ‘dockets, recording of deliveries of wine and oil.’ The author goes on to speculate that these records had to do with the taxation system or an account of palace provision. On page 89, the author enunciates about legal documents which were required to bear a signature of authority or ownership. She says: ‘The signing and sealing of a deed of purchase at Jer.32: 10, 12, 14 provide an example.’ Record keeping had improved a lot as a result of the use of writing. Writing was not only a phenomenon of post-exilic times.



#### **4.11. Sources used by compilers**

The argument that biblical literature only began to exist after the Babylonian exile has been questioned and rejected by some scholars, because the writing of religious literature after the Babylonian exile was not based only on compositions of the time, but older sources were copied or some redaction work was done. The sources used must be explored in order to substantiate a clearly ignored fact that some religious written material did exist prior to the exile and what took place after the exile was just a continuation of what had been interrupted by the exile which affected the leaders and resourceful persons of Jerusalem.

Schniedewind (2004: 7) discusses the issue of who actually wrote the Bible and states: 'The individual is submerged into the group. On the whole, Israel's literature is not merely the expression of an individual, it is also a collective tradition.' Thus, the whole notion of an individual composing a book or an account at a later stage is questionable. Copying and recording was basically done freely without any fear. The study of the authorship of biblical books should not be done with a view of criticizing a single author who may have had his personal reasons for writing such a piece of literature, but we should be mindful of other persons involved at different times.

Alter (2004: x-xi) in arguing against the Persian authorship of earlier parts of the Old Testament, mentions the fact that the Hebrew language used in the Torah and later sources shows signs of evolution or changing. Furthermore, the author emphatically says: 'There is very little in the Hebrew of the Torah that could have been written in this later era.' On page xi, the author refers to some nihilist who claims that the Torah was written during the reign of Josiah around the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the author negates such an idea thus: 'This contention, however, flatly ignores the philological evidence that Deuteronomy was responding to, and revising a long-standing written legal tradition, and that the editors of the so-called Deuteronomistic History... were manifestly incorporating much older texts often strikingly different from their own writing both in style and in outlook.'

The Old Testament itself does refer to some sources which were in existence much earlier. Nielsen (1954: 39) refers to written sources that are mentioned in the Old Testament itself such as the 'Book of Songs, Book of the Upright, Book of the wars of YHWH and Judahite annals.' Blenkinsopp (1985: 31) claims that what had all the time circulated orally was written around the ninth century B.C.E. Among other things: 'Old collections of ballads and songs were also passed on and augmented, including the book of Yashir... the book of Yahweh's wars...and other compositions of ballad writers ...and rhapsodists.' Nielsen and Blenkinsopp indicate that there were sources which were used and acknowledged by Second Temple compilers. Harrison (2004: 201) says: 'The ultimate aim of the textual critic is to recover the text of scripture as nearly as possible in its original form. However, this laudable objective cannot always be realised, for none of the original drafts of the Old Testament compositions has survived, and the copies that exist have of course been subjected both to the frailty of human nature and the ravages of the centuries.' The author further admits that much of the authorship of biblical books is about redactions of later material and not the very original text. The fact is that there were older materials in disintegrated forms. In some historical books of the Bible, often some sources are mentioned by name in admitting that the latter piece of literature draws from an earlier one and it is not as detailed as the earlier one. There is a lot of historical data which has been lost since we do not have access to the sources that are actually referred to. Whether some data is lost or not, it was used to prepare an edited book or document.

**4.11.1. Book of Shemaiah.** In Chronicles 12: 15, the book of Shemaiah is mentioned as a source in which much was written about Rehoboam, king of Judah. It appears that Shemaiah was a prophet during the reign of Rehoboam and had given word of counsel to the king according to the revelations or inspiration of God. Odelain & Segueineau (1991: 343) claim that in this source '...the history of Rehoboam is recorded.' This expression is in harmony with the Biblical text which mentions the book of Shemaiah. Horn (1979: 1022) elaborates about Shemaiah as the 'chronicler of Rehoboam.' Certainly, Shemaiah and Rehoboam did talk with one another, but they may have either had a close or distant relationship. The relationship issue is not so much significant.

It is important to realize that this particular source is actually recognized as one that had much information about Rehoboam and since it is mentioned, it is likely to have been used by the compilers of the book of Chronicles thus magnifying the fact that some religious literature existed in different forms.

**4.11.2. Book of Nathan.** Nathan is one of the prophets who were active even during the reign of David. Seemingly prophets had quite some writing to do, but they themselves may have used scribes who wrote to their dictates like Jeremiah. In 2 Chronicles 9: 29, the book of Nathan is mentioned alongside some other sources which had a detailed history of Solomon, king of Israel. The compilers of 2 Chronicles indicate that the source has the history of Solomon from the beginning to the end of his reign. Normally, when an author or compiler uses a source, he or she does not necessarily copy it or use all the information and reference to the sources proves that he or she is not the composer of such information. Nathan was active prior to the exile in Babylon and he actually did write at length about Solomon.

Elwell (1988b: 1526) intimates: ‘Nathan was an important chronicler (1Chr 29: 29, 2 Chr 9: 29). With David he played a vital part in developing the musical aspects of temple worship (2 Chr 29: 25).’ Nathan must have been a very resourceful person especially when it came to matters that should be written as history or litany.

According to Browning (1996: 264) Nathan was a ‘palace historian.’ In the history that Nathan wrote, there are some aspects that are of religious value, thus the notion that religious writing was only exercised during the Persian period is unfounded and is a fallacy. In stead of having the books of Kings and Chronicles as we have them, the pre-exilic readers had different sources in which to find religious material including the book of Nathan.

**4.11.3. Book of Wars.** In Exodus 17: 14, Moses was instructed by God to write in a book for memorial purposes about the war encounter between the Israelites and Amalekites in which God fought for his nation. As per inference, the book of wars could have been written by Moses initially. However, in Numbers 21: 14 there is a clear mention of the book of wars.

Chavel (1973: 245) claims that the book in which words were to be written for a memorial purpose is actually 'the book of the wars of the Eternal, which contained the history of the wars which God fought for those that fear Him, and it is possible that the history began from the time of Abraham.' The author further says the proper interpretation of the source is actually the 'Book of the law.' There may be arguments about this particular source with regards to when it began and what it embraced, but that's not the focus of the research. The point is that when later authors referred to it they had no doubt that it was a pre-exilic source.

Elwell (1988b: 2132) argues: 'The book was used as a source, but is no longer extant. It probably contained a record of Israel's conquest in Transjordan and may be identical to 'the book of the Upright [Jasher] ...' Other arguments about the book of wars source may not be helpful, but the fact is that during the Persian period or earlier, Bible authors or compilers did not really compose the events that occurred prior to the exile, but they compiled from various sources including the book of wars.

**4.11.4. Book of the Covenant.** In 2 Kings 23: 21, the phrase, 'book of this covenant' appears in the context of Josiah's reforms. This source is often mentioned as the book of the law. Elwell (1998a: 374) indicates that a certain scholar regards the source to have contained what is written in Exodus 20-23 excluding the narrative sections, but including the Ten Commandments. Elwell (1998a: 374) further indicates that the 'contents' of the book of the covenant are not clearly known. The point of interest in this study is to emphasise that religious writing and probably reading occurred prior to the exile in Babylon. This particular source, despite all other arguments was indeed in existence as it was discovered during the reign of Josiah. This source may have been used or not, but it was one of those sources that could be used or read for reformation purposes.

**4.11.5. Visions of Iddo.** In 2 Chronicles 9: 29; 12: 15, the source called visions of Iddo is mentioned with other sources used to draw some information from contemporaries of David, Solomon and Rehoboam. Iddo was a prophet who was also a seer because he was

shown visions. In particular, according to 2 Chronicles 13: 22, Iddo wrote in detail about activities of Abijah, son of Rehoboam, as king of Judah.

Iddo seems to have lived longer or written more about events that occurred before his prophetic ministry. Elwell (1998a: 1014) enunciates about Iddo thus: ‘Prophet and seer who chronicles the events of Solomon’s reign in a book of visions concerning Jeroboam, Nebat’s son..., recorded Rehoboam’s acts in the genealogies ... and wrote a story of Abijah’s life....’ Iddo was one of the pre-exilic authors of religious literature, because he was also a seer of visions and thus God’s word, counsel or warning was a greater part of his writing and overall ministry. Iddo, the writer of several sources, contributed in making the Israelite religion to become a religion of books and not only a book (Bible) religion.

**4.11.6. The prophecy of Ahijah.** Ahijah was a prophet from Shiloh who prophesied to Jeroboam that the kingdom of Israel would be torn into two kingdoms and Jeroboam would lead tribes according to the will of God. Among other source, the prophecy of Ahijah is counted. Elwell (1998a: 43) intimates: ‘The prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite was evidently a written source for Solomon’s biography.’ Ahijah witnessed the acts of Solomon and was aided by divine inspiration to actually understand the strengths and weaknesses of his regime. As a result, his writing about Solomon may have been found to be comprehensive for use in compiling the history of Israel. This prophet, Ahijah, who lived during Solomon’s reign, wrote at that time and the compilers of biblical history used his work to organise part of the monarchic history of Israel. It is believed that the prophets only had to speak on behalf of God and never had to write. This belief is against the historical fact which attests that prophets did write their prophecies like Ahijah did. Ahijah’s written prophecies are clearly part of the spiritual literature in existence prior to the exile in Babylon.

**4.11.7. Book of Jasher.** This source seems to have emerged during the pre-monarchic era and it developed even during the monarchic period. Jasher does not seem to be a name, but it means upright or just. This is a book whose author is not clearly known just like the

book of Malachi. The other mention of the source is in 2 Samuel 1: 18 which indicates that instructions of using a bow properly are laid down. This is considered by some authors either as a hymn book or a poetry book. However, Browning (1996: 195) combines the two genres of the book thus: 'A Book of Jasher is quoted in Josh 10: 13 and 2 Samuel 1: 18 and apparently consisted of songs and poems.' For Wigoder (1986: 499) the source is : 'A lost book of poetry, excerpts of which are preserved in Joshua's command to the sun and the moon not to set ...and David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan....'

The point is not whether the book still exists or not, but that it was one of the sources used by compilers of the Old Testament to organise it as it is or into one book of books. Without any doubts, the source dates back to the early pre-exilic period, thus some writing on revelations of God occurred prior to the exile.

**4.11.8. Book of Jehu.** This Jehu was a prophet during the reign of Jehoshaphat and his ministry also extended to the northern kingdom of Israel. He rebuked the kings of Israel and Judah and above all, according to Odelain & Saguineau (1991: 193) he wrote 'a history of king Jehoshaphat....' The Bible says that he wrote the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat from the first to the last. The compilers of the books of Chronicles recognise the work of Jehu as one of the most detailed source about Jehoshaphat which they likely used in compiling the history of Israel. The history of Israel as found in the books of Chronicles, Kings and Samuel was quite researched and pre-exilic sources were used. The history of Israel in the listed books was not simply composed during the Persian period without any reference or research whatsoever. Ancient or older sources, especially prophets' written works, were used including Jehu's work.

**4.11.9. Annals and Records.** The books of Chronicles are not drawn and produced from memory as proponents of extreme oral tradition propound. These books are quite acceptable according to the standards of our days because they indicate references. Niditch (1996: 91) in the light of the exercise observed in the biblical books of Chronicles of referring to the annals at the end of each story or account posits: 'In works presenting themselves as historiographic chronicles, the reader is offered an impression

that the written text is an epitome of a fuller record that can be consulted, proof, as in some of the references to letters, of the veracity of the report, conveying an impression of reliability.’ The compilers or writers of books of Chronicles do not claim to remember everything because of the so called oral tradition. However, the date of the annals often mentioned is not made clear. However, Blenkinsopp (1995: 30) refers to Hezekiah’s ‘recorder’ or what is called ‘*mazkir*’ and further asserts that such a person ‘...may have been charged with the task of putting together the royal annals, of the kind which the biblical historian often refers the reader...’ If indeed, the annals were kept during the time of the monarchy, then much writing was done in royal realms while other prophets did their own writing of prophecies and the circumstances under which they lived. Thus, there was more of pre-exilic information to draw from when the compiler sat down to link the royal records and the prophetic writings.

Japhet (1993: 5-6) outlines a number of factors about the authorship of the books of Chronicles and posits: ‘...Chronicles was viewed as composed of “sources” (considered to number between two & four) i.e. complete and continuous documents, each with its own author. The Chronicler was viewed more as a compiler or a redactor than an author.’ The material that was rearranged after the exile never emerged from simple memory, but sources were used to include the accounts or books in an orderly arrangement of Old Testament scrolls out of which our current Old Testament Bibles were produced. The Old Testament writings after the exile were credible and fair because older sources were used to the exclusion of hearsays.

#### **4.12. Summary**

The biblical record presents accounts that portray some pre-exilic characters as individuals who write and read. The scholarly criticism of the Pentateuch and the probable sources used to compile it clearly demonstrate that different ancient pieces of literature were used. Throughout the record of the Pentateuch, there are incidents where writing was used by divine instruction or in the priestly service.

It is evident that during the Israelite pre-monarchic period the practice of writing was used though not to a very large extent. Furthermore, during the monarchic period the practice of writing continued under the kings: Saul, David, and Solomon who contributed in composing Wisdom literature. Letters were written by kings to other kings or persons. Thus, at this stage literacy was not a very huge challenge.

Writers of historical books regarding the monarchic history of Israel used detailed sources that were clearly pre-exilic. The religious literature of the pre-exilic time was not in one book called Bible or something else, but these different sources were authentic as scripture and during the exilic or post-exilic period such sources were put into one conventional source with references.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1. Literacy

The art of writing is very ancient though it had some developmental stages especially in the ancient Near East. If Israelites lived in a remote island which was hard to reach for other nationalities, the argument of underdeveloped Hebrew literacy would indeed carry much water. It so happened that Israelites came into contact with many nations in positive and negative situations, thus the development of Hebrew literacy was enhanced. It was during the Bronze Age (3300-1200 BCE) that alongside other alphabets, the Hebrew alphabet was developed.

Moses, one of the main figures in Israelite history, was raised in the Egyptian royal realms and as a result could have benefited most in as far as learning how to read and write was concerned. By the way, Joseph was exposed to writing in Egypt before his family joined him. While Joseph was alive the Israelites were not really slaves, since they became slaves when one Pharaoh who knew not Joseph came into power. Furthermore, when Moses fled from Egypt after his scandal of murdering a person, his exile in Midian put him at an advantageous disposition to learn more about writing.

Quite many seals, bullae and inscriptions testify that literacy is an old phenomenon. Some inscriptions which were done in particular contexts of Israelite history, have been discovered and serve as evidence that the art of writing prior to the exile in Babylon was common though not necessarily everyone could read and write.

Writing materials used throughout the Israelite history vary to prove that they also did write before they were exposed to advanced writing materials. Literally, almost anything inanimate that had some surface was used to write on like wood, slate, ivory, pottery, papyrus, leather, stone and more.

Therefore, literacy may not be used as a factor that precipitated the presumed notion that there was totally no religious literature in Israel prior to the exile in Babylon.

## **5.2. Scribes**

The study of who scribes were and what they did can be a very misleading area of study, because it heavily depends on your own perception of what scribes were, yet throughout history they served different purposes in different places. Among the misleading perceptions of scribes is the idea that they were mainly persons who could read and write. Strange enough, many scholars do not want to know or question as to how and where they may have learnt to read and write, but they want to emphasise that they were the elite perhaps in the sense of wealth or status or position in their nation.

The title, scribe, is very ancient in nature and it was used in different contexts. The word *sofer* is used by some scholars to try to get much closer to the meaning of the title and it simply means somebody who writes. Some scholars do not regard the title, *sofer*, with the necessary esteem. It was not really a prestigious thing to be a scribe. Those who highly rate the position want to believe that they were the custodians of writing or anything written and somehow nobody could write without their permission. This perception is utterly wrong.

Some scribes served in the temple while others served in palaces. Some scribes were what we today call a personal assistant. The question of how they were esteemed and probably how much they earned for a living is immaterial, because every employer should value productive and skilled employees whether their skills are rare or common.

In particular, Israelites experienced the development of writing partially with scribes serving mostly in the sanctuary area or the temple, because the royal system was preceded by a theocratic system generally based in the sanctuary area. These scribes contributed in composing and writing a lot of Israelite religious pre-exilic literature. The fact that the scrolls, especially the Qumran scrolls, could be found somewhere outside the temple or royal palaces implies that anyone anywhere could write or copy even religious material.

It is a fact that scribes who worked on religious material actually changed some things as they continued copying the literature which was already in existence and such are accused by Jeremiah of corrupting the word of God.

### **5.3. Pre-exilic writing in the Bible**

The Biblical text testifies to the fact that the practice of writing religious material prior to their entry into Canaan was existent. God wrote the Decalogue on stone tablets and Moses wrote some commandments as per God's instruction. Even prior to the monarchy, written sources of religious value did exist.

The JEDP sources which are propounded upon by many scholars clearly indicate that the Torah was written before the time of the monarchy and ancient sources or traditions did exist.

The Old Testament books containing pre-exilic history do indicate that religious material was written down while there were vivid memories about some historical events. During the monarchic period a lot of writing was done and about this fact there is no doubt whatsoever. From the royal realms there emerged some religious material way before the time of the exile. A number of letters were written during the monarchy and thus literacy was neither a problem nor a factor for us to confidently or presumptuously discredit the work done to produce some religious material during the monarchic period.

During the time of the divided monarchy a lot of writing was done still. Jeremiah and Baruch and other prophets did speak and write the message of God in different contexts. Some inscriptions were done e.g. the Siloam tunnel inscription.

The Josianic discovery of the book of the law in the temple which was an older document found in the pre-exilic era is clear evidence that some religious material did exist.

Compilers of biblical historical books such as I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, and others have a spread of references that there were sources used to compile the books as we have them today. A lot of these sources were pre-exilic in nature since some of their authors were pre-exilic characters or persons.

The Bible itself tells us that there were pre-exilic sources of religious value.

#### **5.4. Final conclusion**

Finally, after these considerations, I boldly concur with Davies (1992) who maintains an idea opposed to that of scholars like Thompson (2000: 268) claiming that literary traditions only began in the Persian period and were perfected in the Hellenistic period. The issue here is the substance of the idea not the age of the idea. Davies (1992: 94) posits: ‘...it need not follow that all the content of this literature arose only at this time. A certain amount of material in the form of pieces of written or of oral literature...must have survived in Palestine.’ The author, on page 99, further explains that the exile to Babylon did not really affect every Jew (not all Jews were taken to Babylon), so some remained probably with some ‘surviving literature of monarchic period’ in Palestine. Yersly (1933: 48) indicates that Ezra wrote new religious literature ‘from such copies as could be found....’ Clearly there was pre-exilic religious literature which was used in organising the conventional Old Testament books concerned with pre-exilic history.

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