Written Communication Employed during Early Judaism as a Pastoral Society

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Abstract

The information provided in this study demonstrates the central role written religious text played in the restoration of Israel as a nation, after the Babylonian captivity. Israel could be regarded as an organisation after the return of Israel under King Cyrus (600 BCE. - 530 BCE) and the later re-settling of Israel as a nation. Klopper's Theory of Optimisation of Human Communication (TOHC) has been used as a theoretical framework for this study. Firstly, in order for a community to survive they need to employ the various forms of communication. Secondly, for survival they need to be competitive against other groups. The second theory that was used was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In order for higher needs to be obtained, lower needs must first be achieved in a sequential order. The aim of this study was to document the different types of Old Testament writing that was used during early Judaism as a predominantly pastoral society. Communication was the process that linked sporadic parts of the living world to each other. The Jews became highly competitive by making inroads into re-establishing maximization of the use of communication. Written communication thus played a major role in early Judaism as numerous aspects inter alia, their sacred teachings, were documented for posterity.

Keywords: Written communication, Early Judaism, Pastoral society and Sacred writings.

Introduction and Background

The information provided in this study which is purely a desktop study, attempts to show the central role written religious text played in the restoration of Israel as a nation after the Babylonian captivity. Reddy (2004:80) states, "the Babylonian captivity, which entailed the forced movement of the Jewish aristocracy to Babylon and the dispersion of large numbers of Jews throughout the territory of King Nebuchadnezzar, can be equated to the Jews being a movement". Israel could be regarded as an organisation after the return of Israel under King Cyrus (600 BCE -530 BCE), and the later re-settling of Israel.

When the opportunity arose for the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem, captivity had destroyed their overall morality to a large extent. Though thousands went back to Jerusalem, many did not want to go back home due to various individual factors experienced which prevented them from returning to Jerusalem. Many Jews had already established themselves in Babylon and saw no reason to uproot and leave a place which had become their home. Many chose not to go back to a city that was lying in ruins. Why would they choose to leave Babylon where they had established homes, to return to Jerusalem where everything they once had was destroyed? There was also fear of being attacked by their enemies along their 1126 km journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. Brown and Cullen (2006) state that religious behaviour is associated with scores on a measure of Maslow's Hierarchy. Thus for example, when the Jews in Babylon felt threatened, their need for safety came into effect. The innate need of Jewish people in exile to feel as if they belonged in a special, chosen social group, required fulfilment of their need to be accepted; if not, they would be prone to depression and loneliness. Meeting this need required effective communication.

The Aim and Objective

The aim of this study is to document the different types of Old Testament writing that was used during early Judaism as a predominantly pastoral society; whilst the objective of the study is to identify the different types of Old Testament Writings used during early Judaism as a rural society.

The oral basis of early Judaic narratives

Oral traditions and oral communications were in great use before writing systems were invented and used. During the time of oral communication, people employed rhymes, repetition alliteration, and figurative speech as mnemonics. According to Jewish tradition, the Oral Torah was passed down orally in a continuous chain from generation to generation (Telushkin, 2001; Danby, 2012), until its contents were finally committed to writing after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, when Jewish civilization faced a foreign menace.

Theoretical Framework

Klopper's Theory of Optimisation of Human Communication (TOHC) is used as a theoretical framework for this study. Klopper (2002:277) states, "Humans optimise a variety of forms of communications within a culture, and between cultures, to ensure immediate direct personal survival and to maintain their culture as a long-term indirect survival strategy." For a community to survive they need to employ the various forms of communication. Secondly, to survive they need to be competitive against other groups. The second theory that will be used is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In order for higher needs to be obtained, individuals have to achieve their lower needs first. Human behaviours are motivated by five basic human needs which are as follows: survival, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation. Humans have to achieve their lower levels of need before they can move on to the level above; and once each level is achieved then the next level which is above that, can be achieved and so forth. When the Jewish people wanted to rebuild their nation, their survival was of uttermost importance and the basics were priority.

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
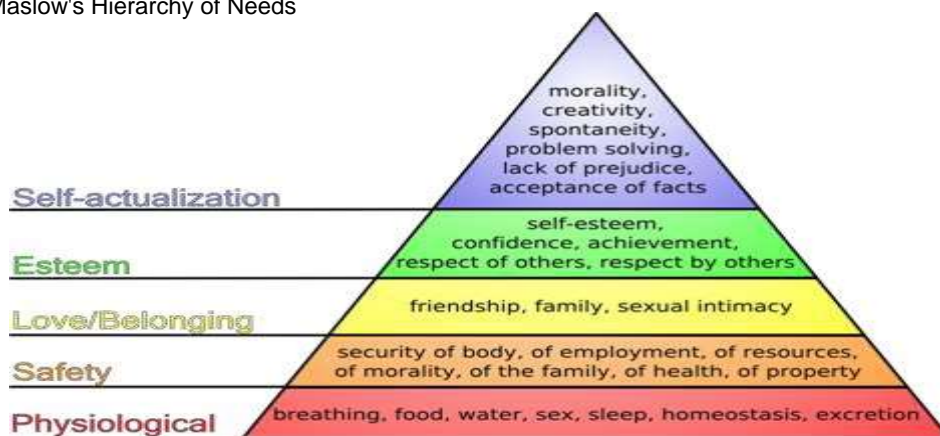
Adapted from Bountless.com (nd., np)

The study focuses on how various challenges were hindering the Jewish people as they were re-establishing the Jewish nation, thus how they strove to achieve the higher levels of Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs when they needed the basics first. At the same time the author shows how they overcame their various challenges and were thereby able to achieve their higher needs, and thus finally reach the higher levels of Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs.

The documenting of religious belief

In order for the Jews to write beliefs systems, they created narratives. Scholars are divided when it comes to the issue of the Law of Moses even though it is ascribed to him. In 2 Chronicles 34:14 it is written that the priest Hikkiah found the Book of the Law that had been given to Moses by God. The question many asked, if Moses had written the Law, then how would he be in a position to document his own death as documented in Deuteronomy 34:5 – 8 and the verses that follow? (Deuteronomy 34:9 – 12).

The Law of Moses or the Pentateuch is the first five books of the Jewish Bible and the Old testament. Great emphasis has been placed on the Law of Moses/Pentateuch by the Jewish people. It documents creation, the values, beliefs and laws according to which they should live as required by God. Deuteronomy 31:11 states, "when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing". In the temple the Kings read the Pentateuch (2 Kings 23:2). The Samaritans broke away from Judaism because they accepted only the Law of Moses as their holy scriptures. In the New Testament era, Jesus refers to the Pentateuch in Luke 10:26, Matthew 12:5 and John 8:5, 17. Whatever the reasons for actions, communications were critical in early Judaism but there were conditions required:

> Only face-to-face communications would guarantee the reliable transmission of the words and opinions of one person to another, whereas mediated messages would always be suspected of misrepresentation or even forgery. Face-to-face communication could easily be conducted with one's immediate neighbors and fellow villagers or townspeople. In the case of more distant communication partners, a larger effort would have to be made to reach them. In such cases, communication would be intrinsically linked to mobility, either one's own or that of one's messengers. Only the most mobile members of a particular social group, and those who had the greatest access to mobile intermediaries, would be able to establish and maintain contacts over longer distances. One may assume that those who sat at the nodal points of the local, country-wide, or international communication system would be the most powerful members of their respective social circles. (Heszer, 2010)

God revealed himself through words, deeds of prophets and through His own presence. The prophets and the law thus came to indicate the everlasting presence of God's divine communication. A prophet is an individual who speaks or interprets a message from God. Loubser (2002:34) maintains that the books of the prophets must have been written and adopted as authoritative works before 164 BC. From the time they were first uttered, the words of the prophets were considered to have authority. Loubser (2002) further states that earlier prophetic writings were completed during the years 600-560 BC. The later prophetic writings were composed between 750 and 400 BC. There were 48 prophets and seven prophetesses in Judaism, according to Rashi (Scherman, 2010). The words of the prophets were well-maintained, first orally and then in writing. This oral and written communication was the basis of change and it was the inspiration for the liberation of the Jews from bondage in Babylon.

Ezra's collection of documents

The name Ezra means help. In Hebrew it is written עזרא (Ezra is spelled with an aleph), who was a priest. Young (1960:401) states, "In the LXX it (Ezra) bears the designation *Esdras deuteron*, and the Vulgate calls it the first book of Ezra (*liber primus Esdrae*)." In Jewish tradition, Ezra was the author of the Books of Chronicles (Hirsch & Broydé, nd.) and is also known as Malachi (Fensham, 1983). Ezra was well versed in the Law (Ezra 7:6b). Bible Study Tools (2017, n.p.) states, "with the arrival of Ezra there was a revival of the study of the Law, and with that the necessity for the interpretation of it in language which the people could understand". He taught the decrees and laws to Israel (Ezra 7:10). Traditions ascribe the book to Ezra. The book of Ezra can be divided in two parts. Part one focusses on the return of the people of God under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 1 - 6). Part 2 focuses on the return of the people of God under Ezra (Ezra 7 – 10).

Scribes were important embers of the community. Schaff (1996:212) describes a "scribe" as follows: "in Old Testament times, was a person that was employed in correspondence and keeping accounts. Sheva, the scribe of King David, is mentioned in 2 Samuel. 20:25. His duty was to record proclamations, etc. In the New Testament times the scribe was a copyist of the law, and one who prided himself on his knowledge of it and of the traditions of the elders (Matthew 2:4; Mark 1:22)."

In the year 537 BC the Jewish exile in Babylon was over. Babylon was conquered by Persia. King Cyrus then issued a decree which granted the Jews permission to return to their homeland (Jerusalem) and to rebuild their temple which was destroyed.

Ezra 1:1-4 states:

> In the first of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: "This is what the Cyrus king of Persia says: "'The Lord, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.

Cyrus returned to Zerubbabel the golden vessels that belonged to the temple in Jerusalem, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken (Ezra 1:5-11). It was estimated that around 50 000 people returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. These individuals left Sheshbazzar's leadership (Ezra 3:2) and were under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 3:2). As 70 years had passed since the Jews were taken into captivity, it is more than possible that many would have died since they were taken captive. During the reign of King Cyrus those that were there, were most likely all exiles.

Many Jews did not want to go to a demolished city. They chose not to return to Jerusalem and decided to remain in Babylon. They were not interested in the tedious task of rebuilding the city. They were also fearful of being attacked while on their way back to Jerusalem, which was a long way off. Over the seventy-year period it was possible that they were well established. Many then made Babylon their home and wondered what the benefit would be to go to a destroyed country. They were also unsure if they would experience a safe journey. By 516 BCE the temple was rebuilt. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem about 80 years after Zerubbabel. It was in the 7th year of King Artaxerxes of Persia that he issued a decree allowing Ezra to return to Jerusalem and to carry out the necessary work required, for which finance would be provided (Ezra 7:1, 7, 13) (Reddy, 2004). In his letter to Ezra (Ezra 7:13-26), any Israelite could return to Jerusalem, any finances if required would be provided by the royal treasury. Furthermore, any individual involved in the temple building was not to be taxed and finally, Ezra was to appoint individual magistrates and judges to administer justice throughout the land. One concern which Ezra had during this time was that many of the leaders, officials and others, married foreign women (Ezra 9:1-2). All those that had married foreign woman were instructed by Ezra to separate themselves from the people (Ezra 10:10-12). It was a time to get back to basics rather than strive for loftier ideals and wishes (Bossman, 1979).

Baxter (1965:199) states the following:

> Jewish tradition, via the Talmud, has made Ezra one of the most celebrated personages in all the history of his people. Five great works are attributed to him: (1) The founding of the so-called "Great Synagogue", or synod of learned Jewish scholars…; (2) the settlement of the sacred "canon", or recognised list of authoritative Hebrew Scriptures, and its threefold arrangement into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings; (3) the change-over from the writing of the Hebrew Scriptures in the old Hebrew script to the new, with its square Assyrian characters; (4) the compilation of the

Chronicles, along with the book which now bears his own name, and the Book of Nehemiah; (5) the institution of local synagogues.

Ezra is dated around 458 BCE because he preceded Nehemiah, and he went to Jerusalem in the 7th year of Artaxerxes (Young, 1960). Young (1960:407) states that the purpose of this book was to lay "emphasis upon the establishment of the people as the kingdom of priests and a holy nation which is to walk in the light of the Law". The last Jewish prophet is believed to have been Malachi, and with his death the authentic period of Nevuah or "prophecy" ended (Steinsaltz, 1976).

Nehemiah established the Jewish state

Nehemiah is the dominant figure of the Book of Nehemiah named after him. This work describes his efforts in rebuilding Jerusalem during the Second Temple period. He was the governor of Persian Judea under the Persian king Artaxerxes I (Gesenius,1846). In Hebrew נְחֶמְיָה (Nehemya), means "Yahweh comforts". Young (1960:409) states, "in the LXX the name (Nehemiah) appears as *Neemias*, and in the Vulgate as *Liber Nehemiae* or *Liber secundus Esdrae*". Nehemiah was a layman as compared to Ezra. Young (1960:409) states, "yet his (Nehemiah's) work served to complement that of Ezra, and the two were used of God in the establishing of the post-exilic Jewish nation".

Nehemiah received permission to return to Jerusalem and also given the necessary building material (Neh., 2:1-8) which the people would need to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. Unlike Ezra, Nehemiah made use of the king's armed escort (Ezra, 8:21-23 and Neh., 1:9). The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was a real challenge for the people. Sections of the wall were allocated to people to build. The building of the wall became the responsibility of everyone (Neh., 3:1-16); once again a back to basic needs for community defence.

By the King of Persia granting the Jews permission, no one could attack them openly. However, their enemies prepared surprise attacks and mocked them. Since the Jews knew the power of prayer, they spent much time in prayer which was also a basic requirement. They even strengthened their defences materially (Williamson, 1987) and Nehemiah armed his workers for battle also because they were aware of their enemies' strategies. One could state with confidence that Nehemiah was an excellent strategic leader who realised the value of human needs. While he had a group of people on watch, he also had a group of people to build. Individuals that worked in the city but lived in the country did not return to their homes at night (Neh., 2:22-23). "From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me" (Neh., 4:16-18).

The financial problems among the wealthy and poor was another challenge which Nehemiah had to deal with, amongst the array of other challenges which he was currently encountering. When the poor people could not pay their taxes they borrowed money from the rich in order for them to pay their taxes. However, when they could not repay their loan, they lost their property and their children were taken and sold as slaves. When the situation became unbearable to those who were poor, they approached Nehemiah for help (Coggins, 1976). The rich continued this trade because they knew that the state would buy back the children sold as slaves. However, Nehemiah ordered that all property and children be retuned and all interest outstanding against anyone should be written off (Neh., 5:9-13).

Near to the completion of the walls, the Jews' enemies tried to kill them. However, when they were unable to destroy them they tried to discredit Nehemiah. Despite the many challenges which were faced by Nehemiah and the Jews, the walls were filled in and completed by them (Neh., 6:15). On the lowest level of Maslow's needs is one basic need which is vital for survival, namely physiological, which is water, air, food and sleep. The level above this is about safety and security. These two levels were of great concern to the Jews when returning to Jerusalem, as they lived in fear until they were able to complete building of the walls. It was only after the walls were built that they felt secure from any instant attack.

Secondly, the relevance of Klopper's TOHC, when cultures want to ensure their survival is that they need to be competitive against other groups.

It is believed that 90 years earlier the altar was completed (Neh., 8:1-8). Ezra and the Levites read and explained the law to the people after they were requested to do so. The people had come to a place of realisation that they had wandered away from God and a time of joy became a time of weeping and mourning (Neh., 8:9-12). Even the following day the leaders returned to hear more about the law of God (Neh., 8:13). This is an example of interpersonal and small group communication that is important to have.

A new covenant was made by the people in which they promised to be faithful to God. A written oath was taken and signed by the leaders on their behalf, which is an example of written communication being used by the leaders of these Jewish people. This document made rules about mixed marriages (Neh., 9:30; Exodus, 34:15-16), the Sabbath day (Neh., 9:31), the sabbatical year (Exodus, 23:10-11; Exodus, 20:8-10), temple tax (Neh., 9:32; Exodus, 30:11-16), maintenance of the temple and its rituals (Neh., 9:33-34), offering of the first fruits and first-born (Neh., 35-36; Numbers, 18:13-18) and tithes (Neh.,9:37-38; Numbers, 18:21-28). Written communication became common and was done to document their values and beliefs. This was for knowledge of what was permissible and what was not permissible (Barton, 2001).

Nehemiah returned to Persia and after 12 years upon returning to Jerusalem, he discovered many things that displeased him. He had discovered that the religion of the Jews had deteriorated drastically and that they were not observing their faith as required. The high priest Eliashib had allowed a high priest family member to marry the daughter of Sanballat

(Neh., 13:28). This high priest allowed Tobiah to live in a temple room (Neh., 13:28). The disappointing aspect for Nehemiah was that Sanballat and Tobiah were old enemies of the Jews and the high priest would be aware of such information. However, after Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he rectified whatever issues needed to be addressed (Coggins, 1976).

Nehemiah was disappointed that the people did not keep the covenant which they promised to keep with God. Since the people were not paying their tithes, the Levites had to work in the fields (Neh., 13:10-14). Nehemiah stopped the people from conducting business on the Sabbath day. Nehemiah also stopped people from marrying foreign women (Neh., 13:23-29). Though Nehemiah encountered many challenges he was able to achieve what he set out to achieve. He, together with the people, was able to build the walls of Jerusalem.

Thus the prophets and the words they uttered indicated the perpetual presence of God's divine communication. The prophets were declared as the messengers of God and they were understood as the intermediaries for communication with the Creator.

Canonization of Old Testament /Hebrew Bible

The religious documents of the Jews, known as the Torah, have since the end of the Babylonian captivity, played a central role in how members of the Jewish culture see themselves and how they identify with being Jewish, wherever they may live on earth (Ulrich, 2002). Loubser (2002) indicates that it was a lengthy process to canonise the Old Testament, predating as well as postdating the period of the Babylonian captivity.

In the first phase of this process, many different oral traditions were formed which had a normative value for the life and faith of Israel (Blenkinsopp, 2002). These traditions were based on the experience of divine revelation. In the next phase these traditions were combined and edited to form individual authoritative books. During the third phase groups of texts were received as canonical at different stages (Davies, 2002).

The emergence of different versions of the Jewish canon reveals how important written documents were to establish a group identity in the various pastoral communities in Israel. In the early phases of development of the Jewish national identity the different regional canons

of the Old Testament that came into existence, indicate that there were a number of regional Jewish identities, but not yet an overarching national identity. A national Jewish identity was only established during the reign of King Solomon around 1015-975 B.C. The Jews separated their scriptures into three sections, the Law or Pentateuch, Prophets, and the Writings.

Whaling (1994: 270) states, "Judaism is the religion of the Jews, central to which is the belief in one God, the transcendent creator of the world who delivered the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt, revealed his law (Torah) to them and chose to be a light to all humankind." It is important that Judaism is understood because Christianity is rooted in the Judaic tradition. As is the case in traditional cultures, it is difficult to differentiate between religious, historical, cultural and literary discourses in Judaic writings.

What is clear however is that the introduction of writing subsumed an earlier oral tradition, that individual collections of such documents were kept at separate locations prior to the Babylonian captivity, and that they were collected and edited into a coherent set of scriptures subsequent to the Babylonian captivity. Essentially, the canonisation of the Law and the Prophets demonstrates how written communication subsumes oral communication in order to cope with the greater cultural complexity of pastoral existence (Davies, 2002).

Samaritan Canon

The Samaritan Canon came into existence between 500 and 300 BCE when the Samaritans broke away from Judaism and accepted only the Law of Moses as the authoritative scriptures. In 1616 CE in Damascus, there was and old copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch found. It is a popular copy of the original text and contains some 6000 variants. With different languages coming into prominence the Old Testament canon was translated into different languages (Beckwith, 1986).

The Hebrew Bible was translated into other languages because the Jews began to speak different languages. The ruling language of the day had an influence on the Jews and a new translation had to be done to ensure that Jews know the word of God. The Hebrew canon was translated into Greek, because by the 3rd century BC it became the ruling language of the day. It was referred to as the Septuagint. Other translations appeared as Christianity began to spread through different areas. Among them were Latin, Coptic, Gothic and Ethiopian, to mention a few.

The Targums

After the Persian Empire became the ruling empire, Aramaic became the language of the day or commonly spoken language in Palestine. The outcome was such that the need for an Aramaic translation became eminent. The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic is known as the Targum. It is believed that some books did not have any official Targum, like renditions. They are Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles (Bible Study Tools, 2017). It is believed that certain sections in Ezra and Daniel were written in Aramaic (Bible Study Tools, 2017). Aramaic had in a good part replaced Hebrew in Palestine before the Christian era (The Aramaic Bible, The Targums, 1987).

Other translations of the Old Testament

There were other translations of the Old Testament. These were completed so that people could read and understand the Scriptures. They were the Peshitta and other Syriac translations. Then according to Bodmer (1987) came the translations of Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus. Then the Old Latin (Vertus Latina) and ultimately, the Vulgate.

Bodmer (1987:178) reviews the above statement as follows: "At an early date, Christian scholars translated the Gospels into Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian." The Bible is the beginning of Slavonic literature, and the translation of the New Testament by the West Gothic Bishop, Ulfilas, is the oldest Germanic document extant. Even to this day the

Christian impulse to translate it remains unabated in parts of Europe. Our Bible Societies have similarly carried out pioneer work in the study of African and Polynesian dialects.

At the beginning of the history of Judaism, the patriarch Abraham and his clan lived as nomadic herdsmen, with no indication given that anyone had the ability to write or was literate in any sense. The first reported instance of writing in the Judaic tradition is the account of God writing the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). By the time of Christ, writing had become so commonplace that He, as a carpenter, is reported to have written a message on the ground twice (John, 8:6b; John, 8:8), which indicates some people at least, could read and write.

What can be concluded from the above is that nomadic groups first had to settle down into pastoral communities before writing systems emerged to cope with the greater complexity of pastoral existence. Also, that such written documents form the core around which an initial regional religious-cultural identity is established, and subsequently extended to a national identity in the case of what we consider to be highly successful cultures.

Conclusion

In this study the author investigated the development of belief systems in pastoral societies in line with Klopper's theory (TOHC). The information presented in this study confirms the validity of Klopper's theory (TOHC) regarding the development of belief systems in pastoral societies, as evidenced in how both Kings David and Solomon used written texts to establish a Jewish national identity before the Babylonian captivity. Furthermore, how the Medo-Persian King Cyrus used such documents to re-establish the Jewish national identity after the Babylonian captivity. The Jews' documented texts inform us of their religious beliefs. Therein is evidence of the projection of their use of writing communication. In looking at the second area of Klopper's theory (TOHC), while building the walls Nehemiah and the builders had a "Shovel in one hand and the sword in the other".

The above Klopper's theory (TOHC) of the Jews projecting their competitiveness against attack from hostile neighbouring nations during the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. All this communication was very closely related to − and played an important role in all areas of human life. Communication was a necessity since humans are social beings and cannot exist if starved of communicating with one another. One may speak about "a 'continuum' relating to orality and literacy, but there is a vast, complex region between the two extremes where most cultures exist, including those that produced biblical texts" (Hearon, 2016).

With regards to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the Jewish people made survival their main concern as a group of people, before focusing on their immediate and longer term higher needs as a group, occupying land that was coveted by many nations neighbouring them. They focused on re-establishing their key city of Jerusalem and this naturally gained their utmost attention, due to its religious significance and importance.

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