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THE BIBLE

by

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## FOREWORD

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## The Bible

Bible means "book." But the Bible is not *a* book; it is *the* book. It is the most important of all books, of all times. Since its translation into Greek by Ptolemaeus, King of Egypt, about the year 250 before the common chronology, it has always represented *the first work of the literature of the world*. After it was translated into the languages of all nations, any people who began to read it entered the highest community of civilization. And even when they neglected it, the influence of the book did not cease, but its thoughts remained, even as the stars shine long after their extinction. The persons of whom the Bible tells are the best known in the memory of mankind. They have been the constant companions of all ages of men. Nothing has been so often represented artistically as the world of the Bible; and the places of its action are *the second* home of all mankind.

### The Power of the Bible

This power of the Bible over our hearts is a fact of wonder in the material struggle for existence. Only one book reaches the transcendental and that is the Bible. It tells you of invisible powers, the Creator of the world and His laws of love and justice, of consecration and of holiness; it teaches

you of the pure soul which God has breathed into you, and which has dominion of the body and is part of eternity. This book declares war against the whole visible world. What seems to us the truest reality does not argue against the power of that which you do not see. Religion declares that the world belongs neither to itself nor to man, but to an invisible Power, and that it is dependent on His *metaphysic reality*. *The Bible has been the charter of the constitution of the moral world, by which the power of God on earth is eternally established.*

#### Magna Charta of Man

But this book is also the *magna charta of men and mankind*. When you wish to persuade man that he is more than the product of cruel senseless chance, you read in the Bible his patent of nobility:

"Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory. Thou has made him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Psalm 8).

Here it is said that he is created in the image of God, that he like God can spread love and goodness and achieve immortality. "You shall be holy, for I myself am holy, your eternal God" (Lev. 19, 2).

In this book of Law, high duties are

ordered for him. How sublime and noble must man be to fill that destiny. Descended from the first man created by God each man will find in the Bible a common aim of redemption and happiness. It has opened the earth to civilization; it has opposed war and conflict; it has destined man to an everlasting life of joy and blessing.

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah xi, 9).

With this mission of the human world pessimism and materialism can no longer convince. The Bible forces us upwards from despair to the highest joy of liberty, and to labor for the propagation of the Godly culture on earth.

#### Revelation

The Bible is the *book of the revelation*.

It is the collection of the words of sage men, to whom has been given a supernatural and superhuman knowledge, to whom had come so secure an enlightenment of the secrets of the world, that they feel this knowledge to have been given by God and not by their own power. Then it demonstrated to all that the experience of history confirmed and fulfilled all that they had divined. Such men were called proph-

ets, Nevim. The spirit of God was poured out over them, often against their will, so that their knowledge burned like a fire within them, robbed them of their calm, and forced them to go out and teach what they had heard and seen. Their doctrines were not welcome to the hearers, often bringing them widespread enmity. Decades later the world confessed to these martyrs that they were right; that their word was true. Even in our days after four thousand years time can not shake its truth.

"The word of our God shall stand forever" (Isaiah, 40, 8).

Most of the prophets descend from *one* people, the *Jewish*. It is a miraculous fact that the world through an epoch of about 2,000 years has again and again produced men of prophetic inspiration and Godly enlightenment, different in character, style, age, and surroundings, all of whom consciously or unconsciously ratified the words of their predecessors and successors. The Bible bears its proof of truth in itself. The prophets were not able to lie. Whenever a Jewish prophet proclaimed that he did not derive his words from higher inspiration, that he had merely heard them from other prophets or teachers, he was tried and publicly executed as Nabi Haseker, a prophet of falsehood.

But the strictest assurance of the truth of the Bible is the Jewish people and its long history. It is the only eternal people, promised by the Bible. Though no people has met so much enmity, though none has been so steadily persecuted and driven, yet it is unweakened in numbers and strength. "You are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God" (Isaiah 43, 12). Therefore the Jewish people is called "Am Haseker," the people of the Bible.

Five elements are comprised in the Bible—history, law, prophecy, song, and wisdom. They are distributed over all the books of the Bible.

#### History

History comprises the creation, primitive times up to Abraham, the first ancestor of Israel, and then the story of the Jewish people till the restoration of the second Temple, and of the Jewish State under Ezra and Nehemiah. Only the prophet is able, with God's enlightenment, to avoid the false subjective judgment of men. Only they see the principles by which all actions become explicable. The books of history are: The first, fourth, and part of the second book of the Torah, Joshua, the Judges, Samuel and the Kings, Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the books of the Chronicles, a panorama of the whole Biblical time.

## The Law

All the books of Moses contain the Law or the Torah—in particular, the second, third and fifth; it teaches us our duties toward God and our fellow-creatures, toward Jew and non-Jew; it teaches the consecration of labor of the body and the soul, the purity of the family, the sanctification of joy, the fulfillment of promises, care of the feeble and the poor, and the manner of divine service. In concentric circles the Law has been manifested. First, the seven Noahide laws which are valid for all the peoples; then the law of circumcision manifested to Abraham; then the Decalogue; then the Sefer Hab'rith, the book of the covenant (Ex. 20, 22 and 23), to which Israel swore allegiance at Mt. Sinai. "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do and obey" (Ex. 24, 7). There follows the book of the Tabernacle—"the law of the priests"—and of sanctity. At last comes Mishne Torah, the recapitulation in which Moses before his death communicates the laws of especial importance to the Holy Land.

This book of Law, the Torah, is the fundament both of our religion and of the whole Bible. The prophet who transmitted it to us, is master of all the prophets. That he was inspired is a permanent fact of our

faith. For at Mount Sinai the six hundred thousand men standing about, were themselves in a higher state of prophecy; and they comprehended that God makes known His will to men, and that Moses was His mouthpiece. All the later prophets cleaved to the Torah. That which they wished and strove for was nothing more than the accomplishment of knowledge of the Law.

## The Prophets

They warn and accuse the people who are in danger of stifling in the surrounding fog of paganism and immorality. They threaten them with divine punishment, with loss of country and of independence; but they also bless and console them in times of misfortune, and inspire them with the hope that Israel is not lost; and that the law of God will some day be acknowledged and that a descendant of David will redeem the world as an anointed of God, the Messiah.

In the first book of the Torah we have the blessings of Jacob. In the fifth book Moses himself delivers three admonitions and blessings; after the division of the Kingdom, Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as the twelve minor prophets, offer consolation through all the ruin of Israel and Judah, the captivity, the stormy political develop-

ments under Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Persia and Alexander the Great. Throughout they have kept awake the hope in God and trust of his assistance. The prophets were *the conscience of their people*, incorruptible, austere, fearless even before kings and despots. But they were also the merciful physicians, who bound up their wounds, and who saved the better self of the people for the great future. Even in the exile of Babylonia, Israel was comforted and instructed by prophets—Ezekiel, and Daniel, who, in visions and images, foresaw the whole development of universal history.

### Song

But at all times the prophets also loved song, "*Shirah*," *holy poetry*. It might be a song of thanksgiving, or of lamentation, or prayer and supplication or a pure prophecy of the future.

In the Torah Moses and Israel sing the song of deliverance at the ruin of Pharaoh, and as his testament the great leader leaves the prophetic song (Haazinu), a retrospect of the whole activity of God in the fate of Israel. Deborah, the judge, in remembrance of her victory over Sisera, left us a wonderful song. Often the death of great heroes was celebrated in song.

To the fall of Jerusalem Jeremiah dedicates the elegies of the book *Echah*, in which the tears of mourning have changed into pearls of beauty. Solomon celebrates Israel's love for God as the love between bridegroom and bride, in the Song of Songs. Solomon has also poetically celebrated the consecration of the Temple with a single song of prayer (2 Kings, 3); and King Hezekiah his convalescence in a Michtom (Isaiah 38, 8). But the greatest and richest of all singers of Israel was King David. To him we owe the *book of Psalms*, the *prayer-book of mankind*, which expresses all the emotions of the religious soul in grief and in joy, in sin and in purity, in despair and in enthusiasm, in devotion and piety. Like the five books of the Torah, the five books of the psalter have become most popular. What the prophets have *taught* us, David has *sung* into our heart; therefore he is called the sweet singer of Israel.

### Wisdom

The last element of the Bible is Hachma, wisdom. Two books are especially dedicated to it, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which are ascribed to the sage King Solomon. In these books rules for life and contemplation of human faults are given in the form

of sentences and epigrams. To the division of Hachma the patient Job also belongs. In reality his is a book of religious philosophy, meditations on the difficult problems of life, especially the *question of suffering* which strikes a man without guilt. The opinion that all suffering is only a *punishment* for committed sins is declined as thoroughly false; while it is shown that it is in fact a medium of education in the hand of God, who by it brings men to a higher perfection and deeper knowledge of the world. The rule of God in nature and history comes to this: the only wisdom of man is piety and virtue. Here the book of Job agrees with the fundamental idea of "Kohleth," which proves the *senselessness and vanity of all earthly efforts* without religion.

#### The Canon

The Bible is only a limited excision of the rich literature of the Jewish people till the time of the Persian kings.

When Cyrus in 536 allowed the Jews to return, and when Ezra, a second Moses, took in hand the spiritual improvement of the newly settled people, he founded the famous Synhedrion of "the men of the great synod," which set as its first task the *collection and ordering of the Holy Writ*. The principle was to gather all that had value

for all time . . . But only the prophet is able to penetrate the future and to know what will still be important to later generations. In the great synod the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Ezra himself sat. One Talmudic opinion declared Ezra to be identical with Malachi. This union of wise men (Sopheterin—those who know the Holy Writ) and prophets took upon themselves the task of presenting the Biblical Writ in its final form. Numerous prophets had preached to Israel. Their texts had to be examined, investigated as to their eternal value, edited, and brought into permanent order and arrangement.

#### The Sidroth

From the first days of the Jewish people the fundament of our religion was the Torah of Moses. During the forty years' wandering in the desert various portions of the Law were set down in scrolls. (Gitin, 60.) These were kept besides the tables of the Decalogue in the holy ark of the tabernacle, and later of the temple. Each transcribed exemplar had to agree exactly in all details with the original, or become invalid. The punctuation and accentuation, the division of the verses and chapters have been handed down from generation to generation. The men of the great synagogue



divided the Torah into 53 Sidroth, portions, each of which is recited in the synagogue on one fixed Sabbath of the year, the last on Simhath Torah. They placed the Torah in the center of the divine service, in the life and thought of every week, and fastened it in the soul of the people, as eternal source of learning and of elevation, of piety and of religion.

**Neviim (Prophets) and Kethubim**  
(Hagiographa)

The two other parts of the Bible—Prophets and Hagiographa—received their final form from the men of the great synagogue. This is declared by the Talmud as follows: (Baba Bathra, 36): "The succession of the prophets' books is: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the book of the twelve prophets." Today Isaiah, as the older, has been put before Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The Talmud mentions him as the last of three, because, as the most consoling book, its proper place is at the conclusion. The third part—Kethubim—has, according to the same excerpt of the Talmud, the following order: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Chronicles. In our Bible Ruth is placed after the Psalms,

Proverbs, and Job, and joins with the song of Solomon, Lamentations, Koheleth and Esther to form the book of the "five scrolls." Originally Ruth, as the genealogical history of David, should have been placed just before the Psalms; further, the works of Solomon should have been coordinate; and Job as the elder work, should have preceded Solomon's works. But as the five scrolls had an especial importance for the three pilgrimage feasts, for Tisha B'Ab, and for Purim, the whole arrangement was changed into that of our modern Bibles.

As to the *authors* of the books, the Talmud speaks: "Who has written them: Moses wrote his book, the book of Balaam, and the book of Job. Joshua wrote his book and the last eight verses of the Torah (about the death of Moses). Samuel his book, the book of Judges, and Ruth. David wrote the Psalter in association with ten elders: Adam, Melkizedek, Abraham, Moses, Heman, Jeduthun, Asaf, and the three sons of Korah (who contributed single songs. According to another reading—Solomon and the three Korahs, to whom Asaf belonged). Jeremiah wrote his book, that of the Kings, and Lamentations. Hezekiah and his co-workers wrote down the book of Isaiah, Proverbs, Shir Hashirim,

and Koheleth. The men of the great synagogue wrote Ezekiel, the twelve minor prophets, Daniel and Esther. Ezra wrote his book and the genealogy of the Chronicles till his own day; and Nehemiah finished the book. His premature death prevented Isaiah from compiling his own work; and the writings of Solomon were compiled by the activity of the scribes of Hezekiah; Ezekiel and Daniel, because living in exile, did not wish to write down their prophecies there—therefore the last prophets, members of the Synhedrion, gathered their books, just as they comprised all the minor prophets into one book (Rashi). In the Torah the last verses are not written by Moses himself. About the authors of the book of Job also varying opinions have been offered—one that Moses wrote it (Talmud, Baba Bathra 74A).

*Thus about the year 500, the Bible was concluded.* Since that time it has not been altered. Though the learned men of other peoples attempted to prove that the books of the Bible had another origin and history than that which Jewish tradition teaches, still never has any manuscript of the books been found which shows another text or even single important variation. There is extraordinary agreement, even in the man-

ner of writing (Prof. Sellin). In the apocryphal book of Ben Sirah, whose Hebrew original was discovered in the Geniza at Cairo by Schechter, the author, about the year 200, celebrates the glory of the Bible and reckons up all its parts. The New Testament knows nothing but our Bible as transmitted to us. The old translations, the Targumim, in spite of this liberty of interpretation, have confirmed the exactness of our text and of our tradition.

The Bible is truth. Nothing of it can be altered or has been. So it will persist through the centuries. As God is ever the same, the book which tells of Him, is always the same. *The Bible is and remains the eternal book of the eternal God in the hand and care of the eternal people.*