

英语注释读物

The Story of the Bible

圣经故事

(节选本)

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吴国瑞 选注

外语教学与研究出版社

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外语教学与研究出版社出版

(北京外国语学院23号信箱)

北京外国语学院印刷厂排版

人民教育出版社印刷厂印刷

新华书店北京发行所发行

全国各地新华书店经售

787×1092毫米32开 $7\frac{3}{8}$ 印张 161千字, 印数34,001—64,000册

1980年7月 第1版 1983年11月 第3次印刷

书号: 9215.19

定价: 0.65元

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Chapter I

A LITERARY INHERITANCE

The pyramids were a thousand years old. Babylon had become the centre of a vast empire. *inkerman*

The valley of the Nile² and that of the broad Euphrates³ were filled with swarming masses of busy people, when a small tribe of desert wanderers, for reasons of their own, decided to leave their home along the sandy wastes of the Arabian desert, and began to travel northward in search of more fertile fields.

In time to come, these wanderers were to be known as the Jews.

Centuries later, they were to give us the most important of all our books, the Bible.

And yet, curious to say, we know nothing of the origin of those strange folk, who came from nowhere, who played the greatest role ever allotted to the race of man, and then departed from the historical stage to become exiles among the nations of the world.

What I shall therefore tell you in this chapter is somewhat vague in its general character and none too reliable as to detail.

But the archaeologists are busily digging in the soil of Palestine. They are learning more and more as time goes on.

goes by.

A few facts are at our disposal, and of these I shall try to give you a trustworthy account.

Through the western part of Asia run two broad rivers.

They take their origin among the high mountains of the north. They lose themselves in the waters of the Persian Gulf.波斯湾

Along the banks of those two muddy streams, life was very agreeable and quite lazy. Therefore the people who inhabited either the cold mountains of the north or the scorching desert of the south all tried to get a foothold in the valleys of the Tigris¹ and the Euphrates. Whenever they had a chance, they left their old homes and wandered into the fertile plain.

They fought each other and conquered each other, and founded one civilisation right on top of the ruins of another that had gone before. They built large cities like Babylon and Nineveh, and more than forty centuries ago they turned this part of the world into a veritable paradise, the inhabitants of which were envied by all other men. 天也 只 天也

But when you look at the map you will see many millions of busy little peasants tilling the fields of another powerful country. They live on the banks of the Nile and their country is called Egypt. They are separated from Babylonia² and Assyria³ by a narrow

strip of land. There are many things which they need and which they can obtain only in the distant countries of the fertile plain. There are many things which the Babylonians and the Assyrians need, and which are manufactured only in Egypt. The two nations therefore trade with one another, and the highroad of commerce runs through the narrow strip of land which we have just mentioned.

Nowadays we call that part of the world Syria. In olden days it was known by many names. It is composed of low mountains and broad valleys. It has few trees, and the soil is baked by the sun. But a number of small lakes and many little brooks add a touch of loveliness to the sombre monotony of the rocky hills.

From the earliest times on, this region of the ancient highroads has been inhabited by different tribes, who have moved hither from the Arabian desert. They all belong to the Semitic race. They all speak an identical language. They worship the same gods. Often they fight each other. Then they make treaties of peace with each other, and fight each other again. They steal each other's cities and each other's wives and each other's flocks, and generally behave as such wandering tribes will behave when there is no higher authority in the land than the violence of their own will and the strength of their own good sword.

In a vague way they recognise the authority of the

Kings of Egypt or the Kings of Babylonia or Assyria. When the tax-collectors of those mighty potentates come down the road with their armed retinue of men, the quarrelling herdsmen become very humble. With many profound bows, they acknowledge themselves the obedient servants of the Pharaoh of Memphis or the King of Akkad. But when His Excellency, the Governor, together with his soldiers, has gone, then the old life of tribal warfare continues as merrily as before.

Please do not take these struggles too seriously. They were the only outdoor sport these ancient people could enjoy, and the damage done was usually very slight. Besides, it kept the young men in good trim.

The Jews, who were to play such a great role in the history of the human race, began their career as one of the quarrelling, fighting, wandering, stealing little tribes who were trying to maintain themselves in the land of the High Roads. Unfortunately, we really know next to nothing of the beginning of their history. Many learned men have made many learned guesses. But a plausible guess does not fill an historic gap. And when we read that the Jews originally came from the land of Ur on the Persian Gulf, this may be true, but also it may be false. Rather than tell you many things which were not so, I tell you nothing at all, and only mention a very few facts, upon which all historians agree.

The earliest ancestors of the Jews probably lived in the desert of Arabia. We do not know in what century they left their old homesteads, that they might enter the fertile plain of western Asia. We know that they wandered for many centuries, trying to get hold of a bit of land which they could call their own, but the road which they followed has been lost. We also know that at one time or another, the Jews crossed the desert of Mount Sinai¹ and that they lived for a while in Egypt. 西奈山(埃及)

From that moment on, however, Egyptian and Assyrian texts begin to throw some light upon the events which are enumerated in the Old Testament. 事件 旧约全书

The rest of the story became a familiar tale — how the Jews left Egypt and, after an endless trek in the desert, were united into a strong tribe — how that tribe conquered a small part of the land of the High Roads, called Palestine, and there established a nation, and how that nation fought for its independence and survived several centuries until it was absorbed by the empire of the Macedonian King, Alexander, and was then turned into part of one of the minor provinces of the great Roman state. 传说 巴勒斯坦 亚历山大 罗马

But when I mention these historical occurrences, bear one thing in mind. This time, I am not writing a book of history. I am not going to tell you what (according to the best historical information) actually hap-

pened. I am going to try to show you how a certain people, called the Jews, thought that certain things had happened.

As you all know, there is a great deal of difference between the things that "are facts" and the things which we "believe to be facts." Every textbook of history of every land tells the story of the past as the people of that particular country believe it to be true, but when you cross the frontier and read the textbook of the nearest neighbour, you will therein find a very different account. Yet the children who read those chapters will believe them to be true until the end of their days.

What is true of the rest of the world is also true of the Jews. The Jews of thirty centuries ago and those of twenty centuries ago and those of today are ordinary human beings, just as you and I. They are no better (as they sometimes claim) and no worse (as their enemies often state) than anyone else. They possess certain virtues which are very uncommon, and they also have certain faults which are exceedingly common. But so much has been written about them, good, bad and indifferent, that it is very difficult to come to a correct estimate of their just place in history.

We experience the same difficulty when we try to learn the historical value of the chronicles which the Jews themselves kept and which tell us their adventures

among the men of Egypt and among the men of the land of Canaan¹ and among the men of the land of Babylonia.

New-comers are rarely popular. In most of the countries which the Jews visited during their endless years of peregrination, they were new-comers. The old and settled inhabitants of the valleys of the Nile and of the dales of Palestine and those who lived along the banks of the Euphrates did not receive them with open arms. On the contrary, they said, "We have hardly room for our own sons and daughters. Let those foreigners go elsewhere." Then there was trouble.

When the Jewish historians looked back upon those ancient days, they tried to place their own ancestors in the best possible light. Nowadays we do the same thing.

For many centuries, the Old Testament was the only history of old Asia which our grandfathers could decipher and understand. But a century ago, we began to learn how to read the hieroglyphics of Egypt, and fifty years ago we discovered the key to the mysterious nail-writing of Babylon². We now know that there was a very different side to the stories which were related by the old Jewish chronicle writers.

We see them commit the mistakes of all patriotic historians and we understand how they perverted the truth to increase the glory and the splendour of their own race.

If you had used the word "Bible" to a Jew of the first century of our era, he would not have known what you were talking about. The word is comparatively new. It was invented in the fourth century by John Chrysostom, the patriarch of Constantinople¹, who referred to the general collection of Holy Books of the Jews as the "Biblia" or the "Books."

This collection had been growing steadily for almost a thousand years. With a few exceptions, the chapters had all been written in Hebrew². But Hebrew was no longer a spoken language when Jesus was born. Aramaic³ (much simpler and widely known among the common people) had taken its place and several of the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament were written in that language. But please don't ask me "when the Bible was written," because I could not answer you.

Every little Jewish village and every little Jewish temple possessed certain accounts of its own which had been copied on the skins of animals or on bits of Egyptian papyrus by pious old men, who took an interest in such things. Sometimes small collections were made of different laws and of prophecies for handy use among those who visited the temple.

During the eighth century B.C., when the Jews had settled down to their life in Palestine, those compilations grew larger and larger. At some time or other between the third and the first century before our era, they

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were translated into the Greek language, and were brought to Europe. Since then they have been translated into every language of the world.

As for the New Testament¹, its history is quite simple. During the first two or three centuries after the death of Christ, the followers of the humble carpenter of Nazareth² were for ever in danger of trouble with the Roman authorities. The doctrines of love and charity were thought to be very dangerous to the safety of the Roman state, which had been founded upon the brute strength of the sword. The early Christians, therefore, could not go to a book store and say: "Please give me a 'Life of Christ' and an account of the acts of His Apostles." They got their information from secret little pamphlets which were passed from hand to hand. Thousands of such pamphlets were copied and re-copied, until people lost all track of the truth of their contents.

Meanwhile, the Church had been triumphant. The persecuted Christians became the rulers of the old Roman state. First of all they brought some order into the literary chaos caused by three centuries of persecution. The (head of the) Church called together a number of learned men. They read all the accounts which were popular, and discarded most of them. They decided to keep a few of the gospels and a few of the letters which had been written by the Apostles to the members of

distant congregations. All the other stories were discarded. 教會

Then followed several centuries of discussion and dispute. Many famous Synods¹ were held in Rome and in Carthage² (a new city built upon the ruins of the famous old seaport), and seven hundred years after the death of Christ the New Testament (as we know it) was definitely adopted by the Churches of the East and by those of the West. Since then there have been countless translations made from the original Greek, but no very important changes have occurred in the text. 教會 會議 羅馬 迦太基 教會

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Chapter II

CREATION

上帝造物，

Five thousand years ago a story which told of the creation of this world in seven days was common among all the people of western Asia. And this was the Jewish version of it.

They vaguely attributed the making of the land and of the sea and of the trees and the flowers and the birds and of man and woman to their different gods.

But it happened that the Jews were the first among all people to recognise the existence of One Single God. Afterwards, when we come to talk of the days of Moses¹, we shall tell you how this came about.

In the beginning, however, the particular Semitic tribe which later was to develop into the Jewish nation, worshipped several divinities, just as all their neighbours had done before them for countless ages.

The stories of the creation, however, which we find in the Old Testament, were written more than a thousand years after the death of Moses, when the idea of One God had been accepted by the Jews as an absolutely established fact, and when doubt of His Existence meant exile or death.

You will now understand how the poet who gave

unto the Hebrew people their final version of the beginning of all things, came to describe the gigantic labour of creation as the sudden expression of one single and all-mighty will, and as the work of their own tribal God, whom they called Jehovah¹, or the Ruler of the High Heavens. 耶和华(上帝)

And this is how the story was told to worshippers in the temple.

In the beginning, this earth floated through space in sombre silence and darkness. There was no land, but the endless waters of the deep ocean covered our vast empires. Then the Spirit of Jehovah came brooding over the sea, contemplating mighty things. And Jehovah said: "Let there be light," and the first rays of dawn appeared amidst the darkness. "This," Jehovah said, "I shall call the Day."

But soon the flickering light came to an end and all was as it had been before. "And this," Jehovah said, "shall be called the Night," Then he rested from his labours, and so ended the first of all days.

Then Jehovah said: "Let there be a Heaven, which shall spread its vast dome across the waters below, that there may be a place for the clouds and for the winds which blow across the sea." This was done. Once more there was an evening and a morning, and there was an end to the second day.

Then Jehovah said: "Let there be land amidst the

waters." At once the rugged mountains showed their dripping heads above the surface of the ocean, and soon they arose mightily towards the high Heavens and at their feet the plains and the valleys spread far and wide. Then Jehovah said: "Let the land be fertile with plants which bear seed, and with trees that bear flowers and fruit." And the earth was green with a soft carpet of grass, and the trees and the shrubs enjoyed the soft caress of the early dawn. And once more the morning was followed by eventide, and so the labour of the third day came to an end.

Then Jehovah said: "Let the Heavens be filled with stars that the seasons and the days and the years may be marked. And let the day be ruled by the sun, but the night shall be a time of rest, when only the silent moon shall show the belated wanderer across the desert the true road to shelter." This too was done, and so ended the fourth day.

Then Jehovah said: "Let the waters be full of fishes and the sky be full of birds." And he made the mighty whale and the tiny minnows and the ostrich and the sparrow, and he gave them the earth and the ocean as their dwelling place and told them to increase, that they and little minnows and little whales and ostriches and sparrows might enjoy the blessings of life. And that night, when the birds tucked their tired heads underneath their wings and when the fishes steered into the

darkness of the deep, there was an end to the fifth day.

Then Jehovah said: "It is not enough. Let the world also be full of creatures that creep and such as walk on legs." And he made the cows and the tigers and all the beasts we know unto this very day and many others that since have disappeared from this earth. And when this was done, Jehovah took some of the dust of the soil, and he moulded it into an image, resembling Himself, and he gave it life, and he called it man, and he placed it at the head of all creation. So ended the labour of the sixth day, and Jehovah was contented with what he had wrought and on the seventh day he rested from his work.

Then came the eighth day, and Man found himself amidst his new kingdom. His name was Adam¹, and he lived in a garden filled with lovely flowers, and with peaceful animals who came and brought their kittens and their puppies, that he might play with them and forget his loneliness. But even so, Man was not happy. For all other creatures had been given the companionship of their own kind, but Man was alone. Therefore, Jehovah took a rib from Adam's body and out of it created Eve². Then Adam and Eve wandered forth to explore their home, which was called Paradise.

At last they came to a mighty tree and there Jehovah spoke to them and said: "Listen, for this is very important. Of the fruit of all the trees in this garden you