

THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

AN INTRODUCTION

by

IRVING FRANCIS WOOD

and

ELIHU GRANT

Bible Study Textbook Series

The Bible As Literature:

AN INTRODUCTION

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THE ABINGDON PRESS
NEW YORK CINCINNATI

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First Edition Printed August, 1914
Reprinted July, 1915; November, 1916

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PUBLISHERS' ANNOUNCEMENT

FOR some time past there has been a growing conviction of the need of a more complete and comprehensive study of the Bible in all the colleges. Quite recently the matter has received new emphasis and practical direction. A complete course of Bible study has been outlined by a joint committee representing the Eastern and Western sections of the Association of College Instructors in the Bible, the departments of colleges and universities and of teacher training of the Religious Education Association, the Student Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A., and Sunday School Council. The proposed curriculum is not merely a theoretical outline but has already been tested, in part, at some of the leading colleges of the country.

The complete course will include the following books: "Old Testament History," by Prof. Ismar J. Peritz, of Syracuse University; "New Testament History," by Dr. Harris Franklin Rall, President of Iliff School of Theology; "The Bible as Literature," by Prof. Irving F. Wood and Prof. Elihu Grant, of Smith College; "Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible," by Prof. Theodore G. Soares, University of Chicago; and "The History, Principles and Methods of Religious Education," by Prof. F. H. Swift, University of Minnesota.

The publishers take pleasure in announcing that the volumes on New Testament History and The Bible as Literature are now ready. Professor Peritz's volume on Old Testament History will be published in time for use during the second half of the college year 1914-1915, and the remaining volumes by Professors Soares and Swift in time for the opening of the 1915-1916 college year. These books have been prepared with a view to the requirements of the college course and the needs of the student. The

authors are acknowledged experts in their respective fields—scholars and teachers of wide repute. The publishers cordially commend this course to the attention of Bible students and teachers everywhere.

THE ABINGDON PRESS.

PREFACE

THIS book is designed to be an Introduction to the Literature of the Bible, and is primarily intended for use in college classes. This fixes at once certain limitations. It excludes the technical terms and the discussion of detailed points of criticism which properly appear in the many biblical introductions written for the use of those with more training. It is an introduction to the biblical literature rather than to biblical history or theology. It attempts to give such information as will make it possible for the student to enter upon our literary heritage in the Bible. That the Bible is literature is no longer a novel idea, as it was to many a short generation ago, but how to learn to appreciate its literary qualities is not always clear even to some of its most devoted readers. Our rightful emphasis on its religious value has obscured its literary character. Bible study in the college classroom will serve to place the Bible in its proper position as a body of literature. When we learn to appreciate the Bible as literature we are better able to discover its true religious value.

The object of college study of biblical literature is very simple. It is to enable the student to read the English Bible with intelligent appreciation. He must understand what the writer wished to say. This involves knowing something of the type of literature, the historical background, the author's point of view and purpose, and the division and literary structure of the books. Such information ought to be given to the student in as clear and compact a form as possible, in order that his time may chiefly be reserved for the reading of the Bible itself. The writers of this Introduction have tried to produce a book which would send students to the Bible. The topics and assignments appended to the chap-

ters are designed to gather up the results of the students' reading. They are usually more full than would be required by a class which covers the Bible in a single year, and furnish a variety from which the teacher may select. Most teachers will wish to make changes and additions to the list. They should usually be assigned in advance, and answers or discussions may be presented in oral or in written form. It is not intended that the student shall answer simply from the text, but that he shall look up the subjects further by reading in the Bible and in the books named at the end of the volume. Paraphrasing is suggested as a frequent exercise in the earlier lessons, because no task so challenges the student's comprehension of an author. How much of each of the biblical books should be read in the course will depend on the time at command, but at least enough should be read to give familiarity with its style and content. It is necessary to read with care nearly the whole of Job and of each of Paul's letters in order to get the points of view, but even in those writings there are certain parts of preeminent value. If this Introduction is used as a basis for study not of the whole Bible but of biblical masterpieces, then more time can be given to the separate books. Such masterpieces would include Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Second Isaiah, some of the stories from Genesis, Judges, Samuel, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Jonah, Daniel, The Synoptic Gospels, Acts, Galatians, Romans, First Corinthians, Hebrews, and James. This includes the greatest examples of the different kinds of literature and the pivotal books of the Hebrew and Christian religions.

This Introduction attempts to place before the student the main lines of biblical interpretation as accepted by the common consent of modern scholars.

It would manifestly be impossible to note all variations of opinion among even scholars of repute, but the writers have tried to keep to the main highways of the subject.

Since this is a study of the literature of the Bible, there is no need for the discussion of the doctrines of inspiration or revelation. No one can make such a plea for the Bible as the Bible itself makes, when read with sympathy and scholarly appreciation. It is a fact, not a theological theory, that the religious value of the Bible is immeasurably greater than that of any other literature in the world. Nor does the literary study of the Bible lead away from its religious value. On the contrary, it leads by the surest and safest path directly to this value.

The order of study in this book is, in the main, chronological. The first great group of literature to arise was the prophetic. It is convenient to begin the study with this, because (1) it furnishes the point of view from which the books from Genesis to Kings were written. The purpose of these latter books cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of the ideals of the prophets. (2) The prophetic books are, when once the historical background is understood, very simple and clear. (3) Their religious conceptions are the foundations on which our own religious ideals are built. (4) They furnish excellent introductions to problems of the composition and growth of books, which appear in more complicated form in the historical books.

While the writers have given each other criticism and suggestion, each is responsible for his own part. Mr. Wood has written the Old Testament portion and the treatment of the book of Revelation. Mr. Grant has written the New Testament portion, except the book of Revelation, and has loaned the use of his classroom notes for the introductory chapter. The book is the outcome of many years of Bible teaching in college. The hope is that it may be of real value to other teachers.

Smith College, 1914.

*The prophetic books
are the foundations
of the religious
conceptions.*

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PART I
THE OLD TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTION

THE Hebrews, who belonged to a race that was kindred with the Assyrians, the Syrians, and much of the Babylonian stock, were a small people coming comparatively late upon the scene of Asiatic history. They were related to the Arabs, and some think that their earliest home was in Arabia. By the time they came to anything like settled possession of Palestine they had mingled so freely with races and tribes and in the civilization of the times that they were a sturdy and persistent nation able to use the best that Egypt or Babylon could suggest, and, moreover, able to stamp the blend with the mark of a powerful personality.

Palestine was a place athwart the paths of the life of the ancient world. The roads between Egypt and the East went through this country. Part of Palestine where these roads lay was low and fertile and part was rough and mountainous, but none of it was far away from the caravan routes of commerce. Of course so long as the Hebrews were weak they had to accept the poorer part of the land, while the Philistines controlled the best and took toll of the business that went through the country. Later, as the Hebrews grew stronger, they spread more over the land, which in its whole extent was not as large as the State of Massachusetts. When from a precarious hold and a divided tribal existence the Hebrews, now called Israel, passed to political union they became a monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon. These three reigns illustrate very well the rise, climax, and decay of a petty kingdom. After the death of Solomon the kingdom split into two. The house of David continued to rule in the southern kingdom, which was called Judah, while a rival series of dynasties ruled in the northern kingdom of Israel. The northern kingdom was the richer

understand of its beauty, the literature not longer belongs to the book, but we seem to be its author.

but also the more turbulent and came to an end one hundred and thirty-five years earlier than the other.

- When did literary records begin to be written in Israel? We must observe certain cautions in approaching this question. / In the first place, we know that literary interest and its products are slow in appearing among a people. Literature must always wait upon life, and, so far as known, the literary result can only follow the living fact. When we read a narrative of an event, for instance, we should seek for principles that will guide us in determining the difference in time between the event and the description. This time may vary all the way from a few minutes to many centuries.
- 2 Second, we have to recognize the practice of writing, re-writing, and editing former records or other literary productions. Strange as it may seem, no generation of literary people is wholly satisfied with the literary work of its predecessors. Especially in such matters as historical narrative, legal codification, and statements of intellectual attitude every age insists on its own version or edition. This is not merely with the purpose of including new materials, but with the desire to make the former statements meet the needs of present conditions.

Without much doubt we have fragments of Hebrew literature that antedate David. They indicate a lost literature of whose extent we can only guess. We can be a little more certain concerning the nature of that very early literature from the examples which we possess. As with so many peoples, it seems to have been poetical and to have included ballads and proverbial matter. Besides this there may have been early mythical tales, quaint legends, and popular philosophy. All of this material may have existed in oral tradition a long time before the state of culture suggested a literary form of it.

Thus it is not a question as to when the knowledge of writing existed in the world, for we know that in Egypt and in Babylonia literary culture was possessed long before

history knows of any such people as the Hebrews. But our question is, When did the Hebrews rise to the consciousness and ability that made literary composition possible with them? Even then the bulk of the nation's life and activity would never reach literary expression. At first only a few possess the skill to write and only the most precious interests are recorded. Perhaps that is the reason why early literature is usually poetry. People did not in those days put the prose of their common talk into the sacred mystery of writing.

The few precious fragments of early literature of the Hebrews reveal their rough and warlike mind, their love of a good story, the pathos of their sorrow, and their instinctive fellowship with nature.

As time went on, their literature grew till the nation had a large body of writings. Much of it was religious. Those interested in the religious life of the nation felt its value. Gradually it acquired a peculiar sacredness. Men felt that through these books God spoke to them, and that the writings were different from common books. The final result was a canon, or collection of sacred books. It had no distinct title, but was called the Torah (or Law, from its first part) or the Sacred Writings. The full title expressed the three divisions of the collection: The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

The contents of the three divisions are:

- I. ¹⁵*The Law*: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
- II. *The Prophets*: A. The former prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings. B. The latter prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, "The Twelve" (the minor prophets).
- III. *The Writings*: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, "The Five Rolls" (Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles.

No single authority ever made a canon; councils could only register the belief which had already risen. The

Hebrew canon was long in the process of formation. The Law was regarded as sacred before 400 B. C., while at a council in Jamnia in Palestine, 90 A. D., the Rabbis were still discussing whether Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon should have a place in the canon.

The Hebrew order of the canon is, in many respects, much better than that which appears in the English Bible. The difference in order between Hebrew and English is due to the work of men two thousand years ago when a translation of the Hebrew Bible was made into Greek. This was for the sake of the large number of Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria, between the third and first centuries before Christ. The version is known as the Septuagint, usually abbreviated in writing to LXX, because of a tradition that seventy translators made it. The translators made various changes; they rearranged the books in what they considered a better order, introduced new matter into some of the books, and included certain books which had never been in the Hebrew canon. This rearranged and enlarged Greek Bible became the Bible of the early Christian Church, and was later translated into Latin as the Vulgate, or common version universally used in the Western Church. At the time of the Reformation, the Protestants excluded from their canon the LXX additions to the Hebrew text. These form the so-called Apocrypha, and contain certain books of great value, though they were never a part of the Hebrew canon. The LXX order of books was kept, and is the order of the English and other modern versions.

The successful study of any ancient collection of writings demands (1) the desire for truth and (2) the spirit of sympathy. The first is necessary to make any study scientific. The primary questions in the biblical field are: What are the facts? How did these books originate? Why were they written? What ideas did the writers intend to convey to their readers? We need here, as in all subjects of scholarship, as close an approach to the exact truth as