

英语注释读物

聖經的故事

外語教學與研究出版社

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The Story of the Bible

圣经的故事

(节选本)

Written by  
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吴国瑞 选注

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## 聖經的故事

吳國瑞選注

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Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt.

## 前 言

《圣经》是基督教的一部经典。有人也许会认为它是一本宣扬宗教迷信的书，不值一读。确实，《圣经》中是有不少带有宗教迷信色彩的神话和传说，但由于基督教（包括天主教、东正教和新教三大派别）在世界上的广泛传播，它对西方各国的文学艺术和语言都曾产生过极大的影响，是一部极为重要的世界文学遗产。

根据《圣经·新约全书》中的故事：公元一世纪初，犹太人耶稣创立了基督教。在他被犹太教当局拘送罗马总督彼拉多钉死在十字架后，他的十二个门徒便离开巴勒斯坦四出传道。公元四世纪时，当时统治着地中海周围地区的罗马帝国的君主君士坦丁把基督教定为国教，从此基督教便向欧洲各地传播。基督教的教义和思想也逐渐成为西方文化和思想的基石。至今人们还用基督教文明（Christian Civilization）一词来指西方文明。《圣经》在四世纪时还未形成我们现在所看到的《新旧约全书》，但已初步定型成书。它的原文是用希伯来文书写的，英译本出现在十七世纪，由当时英王詹姆士一世下令组织学者根据原文译为英文，这就是著名的钦译《圣经》（King James Version of 1611 或称 The Authorized Version of The Holy Bible）。这一译本文字古雅优美，几百年来，凡是讲英语的国家无不使用这个本子。在英美等国的文学艺术史上，有许多伟大的诗人、文学家、艺术家等采用《圣经》中的故事和传说为题材创造出诗歌、戏剧、小说、音乐和绘画，而更多的故事传说和片言只语则进入了英国的日常语言，成为广泛使用的典故和谚语。

因为《圣经》如此深入到欧美各国的语言中去，伟大的革命导师马克思、恩格斯、列宁和斯大林的著作中，也不时引用一些《圣经》上的典故或谚语，赋予它们以新的涵义。例如列宁在《国家与革命》的第二章中，就引用了“为了—碗红豆汤而出卖了自己的长子权”这一《圣经》中的典故（见本书三十八页）来批评机会主义者为了吃到资本家的一点残羹剩饭，而不惜出卖无产阶级的根本利益。因此，对学习英语的读者来说，了解一下《圣经》的内容是很有必要的。因为它不但能帮助我们英语的理解更深入一些，也能使我们对西方的文化和思想意识有进一步的认识。

本书是根据美国作家亨德列克·范隆所写的《圣经的故事》节选而成的。范隆写这本书时剔除了《圣经》中神话迷信的部分，只采用了较为可信的史实。它的文字简洁流畅，很值得学习。在选编时，我们又删除了一些不太重要的章节。在第二十五章中，我们增引了两段“登山宝训”（Sermon of the Mount）的原文，使读者可以更清楚地看到耶稣基督所宣扬的“爱”，实质上是一种超阶级的爱。最后，我们从《圣经·新约全书》中选了十几个耶稣在讲道时所讲的寓言故事作为附录 I，为了阅读方便，附上现代英语译文作为对照，为附录 II。这些寓言大都是《圣经》典故的来源，对读者是有用的。此外，我们为少数重要的专门名称，人名地名，作了一些注释。

由于编者的水平有限，希望读者提出批评指正。

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## Chapter I

# A LITERARY INHERITANCE

The pyramids were a thousand years old. Babylon<sup>1</sup> had become the centre of a vast empire.

The valley of the Nile<sup>2</sup> and that of the broad Euphrates<sup>3</sup> 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 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.

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 Tigris<sup>1</sup> 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.

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 Babylonia<sup>2</sup> and Assyria<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>1</sup>. 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<sup>1</sup> of Memphis<sup>2</sup> 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 Sinai<sup>1</sup> and that they lived for a while in Egypt.

From that moment on, however, Egyptian and Assyrian texts begin to throw some light upon the events which are enumerated in the Old Testament<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>, and was then turned into part of one of the minor provinces of the great Roman state.

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 Canaan<sup>1</sup> 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 Babylon<sup>2</sup>. 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 Constantinople<sup>1</sup>, 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 Hebrew<sup>2</sup>. But Hebrew was no longer a spoken language when Jesus was born. Aramaic<sup>3</sup> (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

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 Testament<sup>1</sup>, its history is quite simple. During the first two or three centuries after the death of Christ, the followers of the humble carpenter of Nazareth<sup>2</sup> 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.

Then followed several centuries of discussion and dispute. Many famous Synods<sup>1</sup> were held in Rome and in Carthage<sup>2</sup> (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.