

外教社 英语专业文学方向课程系列

圣经文学导论

丁言仁 编

Dreams of the Humble:

Reading the Bible as Literature

 上海外语教育出版社
外教社 SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS
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前言

这

本书的编写是在很多老同事老朋友的鼓励、支持和帮助之下才完成的。我自己其实对《圣经》了解极少，《圣经》与我的专业也没有关系。上个世纪八十年代，我的母亲郭秀梅先生编写圣经文学的教材，我当时帮助她打下手，工作之余做一些资料查找、电脑输入、文字处理的事，对《圣经》仅仅了解一些皮毛的皮毛。现在这本书里的内容，很多都是几年前开始编写以后才钻进去学了一点。编写的过程其实就是一个学习的过程。

在这个学习过程中学到的最重要的一点就是自己知之甚少，也就是 to know that I don't know。《圣经》对于欧洲乃至整个西方文明的形成和发展起了重要作用，是西方文化不可分割的一个部分。正因为这样，这本书尽管页数不少，但只可能是对西方文化有兴趣的大学英语专业学生在学习时用的的一本入门书，只可能作个初步的介绍，要真正了解《圣经》的内容以及它在西方文化中的影响，还需要经过长期的学习。由于这是一本入门书，篇幅受到很大的限制，因此只能在《圣经》里节选一些文学性较强的章节，简要地介绍它们的社会、历史背景，重点是帮助读者理解它们，而对于它们的文学价值、风格和对以后文学作品的影响，至多仅仅是略有提及。有兴趣的读者应该做进一步的研究。《圣经》语言中包含了大量的格言、成语、典故，在西方社会人们日常生活中广泛应用，妇孺皆知、耳熟能详，了解它们对于英语专业的学生来说十分重要，但同样由于篇幅的原因，这本书只能做到略有提及。总之，这本书不可避免地会有很大的局限性，希望读者阅读时加以注意。

学习的另一个体会是，在中国这样一个社会主义初级阶段的国家，改革进取，解放思想，每一步成绩的取得都极为不易，都要与“左”的思想束缚经过反复的争斗。《圣经》在“文革”中是“禁书”、“毒草”、“反动书籍”。改革开放以来，国内的

教会大量印刷出版了《圣经》，但是在高等院校的讲台上，很多人仍旧心有余悸，避而远之，以至于《圣经》文学课一直开不出来，直到近年来开设这门课的学校才逐步增加，教材也陆续出版。

历来《圣经》的批评者称之虚无缥缈，称之为剥削制度辩护，这无疑都是有见地的批评，然而，同样无可否认，《圣经》表达了被压迫被剥削的穷苦百姓的善良愿望和对未来的憧憬。这就是为什么这本书的中文书名原先叫做“卑微者的梦乡”。人们认可《圣经》在西方文化中的重要地位，但是却没有多少人去探究它为什么会有这样的重要地位。“剥削阶级的控制和宣传”是我们传统的解释，而且无疑确实是致使宗教长期存在的因素之一。然而，纵观历史，基督教有时快速发展，有时停滞不前，与统治阶级宣传的力度之间并没有必然的联系。马克思主义认为历史是人民创造的，这里的历史包括了宗教。

《圣经》里的故事、人物、哲理、传说、诗歌之所以至今仍旧具有强大的生命力，就是因为它们是人民群众创造的，在写进《圣经》以前就已经在中下层的古代希伯来/犹太人民中间广为流传，经过了无数代、无数人很多世纪的打磨和凝练，反映了这些老百姓对社会、对未来的一种朴素、善良的诉求和愿望。这同荷马史诗、《诗经》里的“风”以及其它民间故事、传说、诗歌的情况相类似，见诸文字之前经过了多年的口头传诵。在《圣经》（新约）成书的公元一、二世纪，基督教仍旧是古罗马帝国里一个包括奴隶在内的下层百姓的宗教，受到社会上层的排挤和迫害，它被统治阶级控制和利用以至成为“国教”，这是很多年以后的事。恩格斯在晚年还专门讨论过早期基督教和欧洲早期工人运动的相似性。抹杀《圣经》和基督教的人民性，这不仅违反了马克思主义，与事实不符，也无法解释《圣经》在西方文化中的地位。《圣经》反映的是“卑微者的梦乡”，而马克思和恩格斯在这无数的“卑微者”身上倾注了极大的同情。

《圣经》的内容博大浩瀚，而我仅仅是现学现卖。正因为如此，这本书里很多都是我个人的观点，不代表任何其他人，错误和片面的地方欢迎大家批评指正。

丁言仁

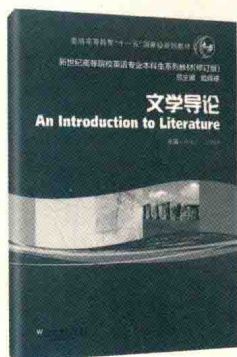
2015年，南京大学

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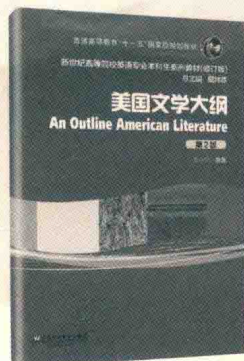
This book would not have been possible without the help and support of several colleagues and friends of many years' standing. Professor Liu Haiping, whose office is next door to mine at Nanjing University, always urged and encouraged me to launch into this project, even years before I started to consider this idea. He also found me commentaries and biblical materials once the work was underway. Philip Wickeri, a Hong Kong-based professor of theology and former colleague from the Amity Foundation, read and commented on a large part of the manuscript and answered many of my questions. His advice has not only prevented me from saying things grossly wrong but also greatly improved the quality of the work. Adding a unit on early Christianity, for instance, was largely his suggestion. Finally, I am most grateful to Barbara Penney, a former colleague from both the Amity Foundation and Nanjing University who spent many months and weeks carefully editing the manuscript — for two rounds! — and correcting my English and misunderstanding of Bible passages, including consulting biblical scholars on my behalf. She should be more appropriately regarded as a co-author although I know she may not agree to some of my interpretations, which can indeed be idiosyncratic and mistaken. To all these dear friends, I owe my deepest gratitude.

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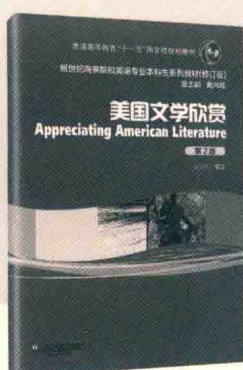
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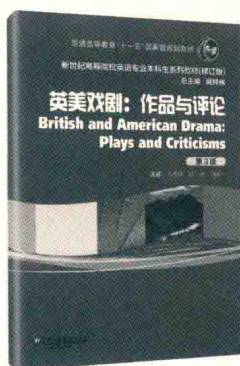
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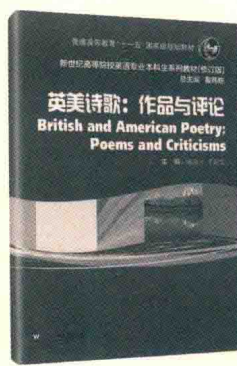
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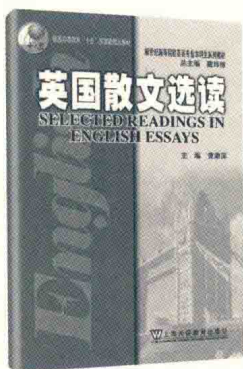
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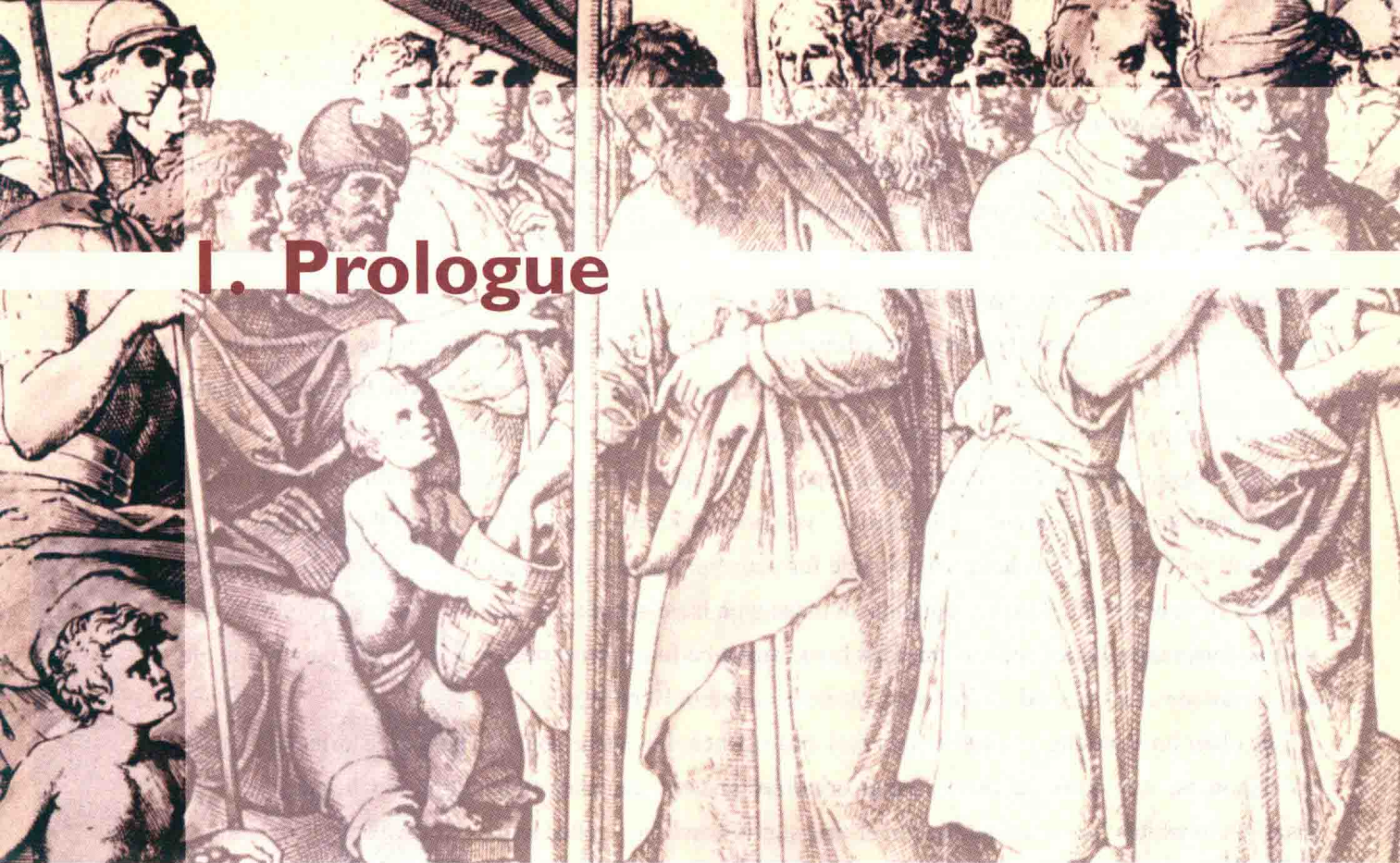
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I. Prologue

How the story started

Imagine that you live more than two or even three millennia ago, in an area about one-fifteenth the size of Taiwan, between the Euphrates^[1] River and the Nile^[2] River. This area connects Asia, Africa and Europe. The land is fertile, and the weather is mild.

Living as a Hebrew^[3] at the time, you wander in search of fertile pastures. Like other shepherds, you lead an extremely poor life. You wear ragged clothes, go barefooted, and your stomach is often half-empty. You tend your herds for long hours each day, and actually the sheep are not yours. You have no house and no property of your own. You are fed and sheltered by the master who owns the sheep. You are a young slave like the others who share a straw hut with you. None of you has had any schooling. Most of you come from families who have been slaves for many generations; some grew up in the tribe, but others were bought from other slave owners.

Your master is not necessarily well off either. He has to pay a percentage of the flocks and herds to an overlord as tribute.^[4] As a Hebrew, you are a member of a small people. Your people struggle to survive between two powerful, often warring neighbors, the empires of Egypt and Assyria-Babylonia.^[5] Often, all Hebrews are enslaved and forced to migrate into poor and barren land. When this happens,

[1] Euphrates (/juːˈfrentɪz/): 幼发拉底河

[2] Nile: 尼罗河

[3] Hebrew (/ˈhiːbrʊz/): (古代) 希伯来, 希伯来语, 希伯来人; a member of an ancient Semitic people

[4] tribute: 贡品

[5] Assyria-Babylonia (/əˈsɪrɪə ˌbæbəlɒniə/): 亚述-巴比伦

you are adrift together with others.

At nightfall, after a long day's hard work and a light supper, you get together with fellow slaves and sit in the moonlight, enjoying the breeze before going to sleep.

What would you talk about on an occasion like this?

About food and clothing? Maybe, but that does not necessarily interest you because there is never enough to eat or wear and the situation will not be different tomorrow. About the abuse inflicted on you or others during the day? Maybe, but again that does not necessarily interest you because you have seen too much and have experienced too much. Again, it won't be very different tomorrow.

What you and your fellow slaves really hope for is a time when you are treated with justice, a time when you will not have to suffer. Since all of you are powerless nobodies, you hope that a powerful hero will protect you. This hero will provide for you and others so that you will no longer go hungry, and this hero will uphold justice and punish those who have abused you and exploited you so that you will no longer live under oppression. This hero cannot be found on earth. He has to be supernatural. He can be no one else but God, or Yahweh^[1] as he is called in Hebrew.

The older ones among you tell stories they heard when they were young. These are stories of God, about how he is so powerful that no kings or nobles on earth can ever match him, how he causes disasters in which the honest and hardworking survive and the wicked and exploitive are reprimanded and punished. These are stories of divine retribution^[2] and of God punishing evil. In these stories, God shows his mercy for the poor but honest, and his dislike of those who have made their fortune unscrupulously. Many of these stories are didactic, telling you that you should work hard, be honest to others and guard yourself against selfish ideas. Some are etiological,^[3] telling you, for instance, why people get old and die. God is all knowing and God is the best protector that you and your fellows can imagine, whether you are listeners or storytellers. The deeper you suffer, the more you wish to see God take action in the world.

All these stories are extremely rich in detail and give you much to think about. You take them to be truth, as does everyone else around you. God will guide you out of misery, and you pray that the day of God will come soon. Such a belief enables you to see that even your poor life is still worthwhile, and it encourages you to show your sympathy and give a helping hand to your fellows. God is to most of you the only light in the darkness, the only hope in a hopeless world. As you lie in bed and think of the stories of God you have just heard, you fall into a sound sleep before the next day's hard labor begins.

The formation of the Bible

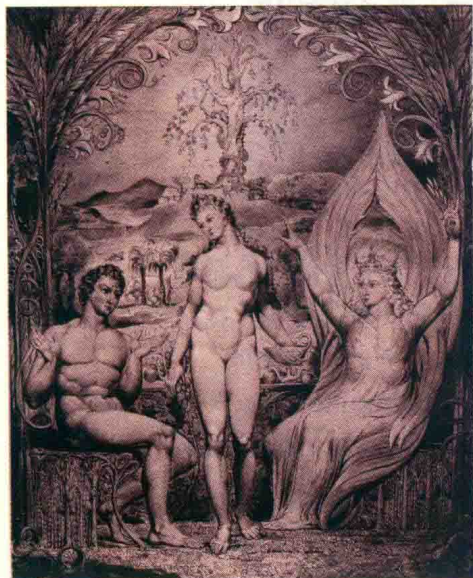


As time goes on, you and your fellows may be gathered in a place where you can listen to a designated storyteller who has collected many stories of God. The stories are related to history, law, poetry, drama, and moral teachings. By the time you hear these stories, they have already been told

[1] Yahweh (/ˈjɑːweɪ/): 耶和華, 也译作“亚卫”

[2] retribution: 报应; divine retribution: 神的报应

[3] etiological: explaining the cause or origin of something



and retold for many long centuries. Some of them are based on still older mythological stories, for instance, the story of how God created the heaven and earth and men and women. Many, however, like the one about Moses^[1] leading the Israelites^[2] out of Egypt, might have originally been based on historical events, but as there are no written records, each time the stories are retold, the storytellers leave some traces of their own creative powers.

Similar changes could have occurred when these stories were written down by scribes, who were slaves with a knowledge of writing so that they could take dictation and keep records for kings, nobles and temple officials; they often had higher social positions than other slaves because of their close association with the powerful. When later scribes hand-copied the worn-out old copies, they, too, might have introduced changes. These scribes are more appropriately called story collectors, compilers, revisers, editors, interpreters and redactors.^[3] They sometimes made changes so that the documents would fit their ideas of what stories about God should be like. Given two or more versions of the same story, they sometimes put them side by side if those versions were quite different, or, if the versions were roughly similar, they combined them into one story, ignoring the contradictions in detail.

The Bible is a product of many hands over a stretch of at least one millennium, and this does not include the previous one or two millennia when biblical stories existed only in oral form and were transmitted orally. No one could claim authorship and demand copyright, and no one did. Many people, even people with very different opinions, had a hand in shaping the biblical stories in response to many different needs and events. We might perhaps say that the Bible came into being to serve the needs of a particular people in a particular time and place. It was created by, for, and about this people and their religious beliefs, and yet it seems to have timeless and widespread appeal.

The Old Testament^[4] part of the Bible (also known as the Hebrew Bible) was written down, compiled, revised, edited and approved over a period that extended from over 1,000 years BCE^[5] to about 160 years BCE. Much of the writing was done during the period after 586 BCE, the year in which Jerusalem was conquered and 50,000 Hebrews were sent into exile. Scholars agree that the Old Testament took its final form, as we see it today, during this exilic and post-exilic period.

[1] Moses: 摩西（古代希伯来民族英雄）

[2] Israelite (/ˈɪzrəlaɪt/): （古代）以色列人

[3] redactor: 编写者

[4] Testament: 约书，圣约，（人与上帝间的）契约；Old Testament: 《旧约圣经》

[5] BCE: Before Common Era; CE: Common Era



The New Testament was written down between 50 and 150 CE. It contains stories about the life of Jesus^[1] and also many letters that early Christian leaders sent to various congregations.^[2] Under Roman rule at that time, people of Jewish heritage were not allowed to have their own government, but they had their churches where they gathered and worshipped. Despite Roman persecution, the church attracted more and more people, including many slaves, freedmen,^[3] freedwomen, and poor peasants. As early Christians recognized the need to give a reliable account of Jesus' life and teachings, they began to compile the Gospels^[4] and other books on the basis of oral tradition and the notes and instructions used during church services. Their efforts led to the formation of the New Testament.

Not only was the Bible written by many different people, it was also written in more than one language. The Old Testament was mostly written in Hebrew, while most of the New Testament was written in Greek, the *lingua franca*^[5] of the time due to the influence of the Greek invasion and occupation. The word "testament" means covenant or agreement, so the Old Testament is seen as the covenant between God and the Israelite people, and the New Testament is seen as that between God and the early Christians.

The Bible is, to be accurate, a book of books, an anthology of diverse works. Because it is a gigantic collection of stories, some stories repeat each other and even contradict each other; sometimes contradictions can even be found within a single story. Biblical writers were recording history, but not in the sense that we think of history. Their primary objective was not the detached recording of historical events but the rendering of an account of the past that explained the present and the future. The writers were telling stories. As a result, the Bible is not just history; it is literature, great literature created by a people over many centuries. To Christians all over the world, it contains the Word of

[1] Jesus: 译作“耶稣”

[2] congregation: 教堂的会众

[3] freedman: a slave released from servitude

[4] Gospel: (Greek) Good News, 福音

[5] *lingua franca*: common language

God and is therefore inspired and inspiring. To non-Christians, it contains teachings about moral and cultural traditions that people have been practicing and promoting for thousands of years. It is worthy of our respect as is any other cultural heritage of human civilization.

It is worth pointing out that people do not agree about which books make up the Bible. Such disagreement started even when people were still compiling the Bible and is carried over to this day. For Protestant^[1] Christians, the Bible contains the Old Testament, with 39 books, and the New Testament, with 27 books. The Jewish Bible or Hebrew Bible, for believers of Judaism,^[2] does not have the New Testament, and, unlike the Christian Old Testament, it has only 24 books because some books in the Old Testament have been combined. The Catholic^[3] Church has 46 books for the Old Testament, and the Eastern Orthodox^[4] Church has 51; both of them, for instance, have books of Maccabees,^[5] which record the Maccabean Revolt (167-160 BCE), in which the Jewish people rose against Greek rule, established their own kingdom and defeated the occupying army in many battles. Besides these books, there are materials that are not included in any Bible but are just as old and authentic. They often attract scholarly interest.

“But there’s no God...”

“But there’s no God.” This is the immediate reaction of most Chinese students upon hearing the word “Bible.” If you flash back 2,000 or 3,000 years, however, you would find yourself in a different world. In that world, it never occurs to you or to anyone around you that there is no God. Rather, God and his teachings are part of your daily life and the daily life of many others: you grow up judging others and judging your own behavior according to God’s teachings, and you criticize wickedness on the ground that it violates God’s teachings. If an evil person has lost his fortune or a righteous person has recovered from her illness, you regard those events as expressions of God’s will. If the opposite happens, you regard it as part of God’s larger plan.

“Religion is the opium of the people.” Yes, but the word “opium” is used not in the sense of a narcotic, as the word is used today. Rather, it means a cure-all medicine or a painkiller, since this was how opiates were used in Europe and elsewhere for many centuries up to the time of Karl Marx. For the Israelites living in captivity or in exile and for the early Christians living under Roman persecution, the belief in God indeed served as the most potent form of pain relief available. It gave them a short break from oppression and exploitation as they were experiencing hunger, cold, horror and slaughter. It was “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions,” as Karl Marx put it in his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*. These words actually explain what he meant by “the opium of the people.” Following this line of thought, we may say that those who exploited and oppressed the Israelites and other religious believers were “heartless” and

[1] Protestant: 新教, 基督教

[2] Judaism: 犹太教

[3] Catholic: 天主教

[4] Eastern Orthodox: 东正教

[5] Maccabees (/ˈmækəbiːz/): “马克比”或“玛加伯”(天主教、东正教旧约圣经中的书名); adj., Maccabean (/ˈmækəˈbiːən/)

“soulless,” and it would be both logically and morally wrong not to criticize those who were “heartless” and “soulless” but to criticize the oppressed slaves and peasants for using a painkiller in the midst of their dire circumstances.

Because of its close association with the lives of working men and women, religion has played important, positive roles in history. As religion led people to marvel at how God makes things happen on earth, it encouraged them to make close observations of the world around them. That in turn led to the development of medicine, natural science, literacy, literature and the arts. As the light and hope for the poor and enslaved, religion promoted reconciliation among them and taught them to care for each other. At times, it also encouraged people to unite in their efforts to fight against oppression, as happened in many peasant revolts in the world’s history. During times of foreign invasion and occupation, religion was not always able to teach people to organize armed resistance, but neither did it ever teach them to collaborate with the enemy. Religion was often a sanctuary where people held on to their hope. As you will read, the history recorded in the Old Testament testifies to this role assumed by religion.

Thousands of years have passed since biblical times, but among the millions of faithful today, we still see many who suffer from poverty, injustice, unfairness, disaster, disease, or insecurity, and the belief in God still gives them an important spiritual shelter. They are often the weak and disadvantaged among us, and for them, religion remains the place where they find hope. Therefore, were Marx alive today, he would probably say that the correct attitude is to show respect to believers, serve them and help them solve the difficulties they encounter.

During China’s “cultural revolution” (1966-1976), the ultra-leftists treated religious believers as enemies: if religion was opium, then its believers were drug addicts. The fact that they treated religious believers as enemies only showed that they themselves were the enemies of the people and that they belonged to the part of the world Marx regards as “heartless” and “soulless.” Forty years have passed since the end of the “cultural revolution,” but tradition dies hard. Decades of “ultra-leftism” in China have resulted in feelings of superiority and elitism on the part of some officials. They look down upon people with religious beliefs and never fail to “educate” them in the doctrine that “there is no God.” In their minds, they are the enlightened and privileged while the masses of people, whether religious or not, are dirty, ignorant, backward and under-educated. Marxism is their cover rather than conviction in so far as they ignore the Marxist view of the people as the maker of history.

Ours is a people’s government, and “the people” includes people with religious beliefs as well as people without religious beliefs. We should serve all people, believers and non-believers, and they all deserve our respect and understanding. If you personally have no religious belief, it is still necessary to work with all people, regardless of their religious beliefs. In fact, Karl Marx and his true followers have devoted themselves to serving all people and removing the “condition” that turns people to what he calls “illusory happiness.” In this sense, any prejudice against people with religious beliefs is a sign of prejudice against the people and, therefore, a sign of departure from Marxism.

In fact, one reason we study the Bible today is to gain an understanding of the feelings, dreams and longings of the millions who read this book and draw inspiration from it. Unless we have such

understanding, we will not be able to commit ourselves to serving their interests, let alone to serving them well. Those entertaining ultra-leftist ideas may be concerned that the reading of the Bible helps “disseminate Western bourgeois thoughts.” These words reveal that they see themselves as an “incorruptible” elite while they see us teachers and students as ignorant and easily swayed by bad ideas. They have isolated themselves from the masses of people when they show contempt for what others treasure.

About the version of the Bible this collection uses

The Bible passages in this collection are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible,^[1] an English translation released in 1989.

If you have reached a relatively high level in your study of English literature and want to study literary works written before the end of the 20th century, you might also want to consult the Authorized King James Version (KJV) of the Bible,^[2] which was completed in 1611 and has since then had a tremendous impact on English-speaking culture and everyday lives. Although it is 400 years old, it is still in use on many occasions. There are also Christians in the English-speaking world, known as “King James Only,” who hold that every word in the KJV is holy and should not be changed; they oppose the use of any contemporary translations.

For those of us who are new to Western culture or biblical studies in today’s China, however, it may be easiest to begin with the NRSV, a version that has several advantages over earlier versions. First, the new translation is more accurate. Over a period from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, archeologists discovered on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea in Israel biblical manuscripts and other documents dated from about 400 BCE to 300 CE. Scholars studied these documents, or Dead Sea Scrolls^[3] as they are called, and discovered some inaccuracies and mistranslations in the existing translations of the Bible. The NRSV is able to incorporate these advances in scholarship. It is closer to the version people used two thousand years ago.

Second, the NRSV is easy to read because its language is modern. It no longer uses the archaic second-person pronouns like “thee” and “thou.” Furthermore, the language is gender-neutral, and this is an important feature of contemporary English. For instance, “when I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (1 Cor 13.11^[4]) has become “when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.” This is, however, rather controversial. Many, like the “King James Only,” are opposed to it when the NRSV departs from a literal translation of the text in favor of gender neutrality.

Besides the NRSV, there are in fact several other contemporary English translations of the Bible, all coming out in the latter part of the last century. In comparison, the NRSV is easy to read but remains

[1] the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible: 新修订标准版《圣经》

[2] the Authorized King James Version of the Bible: 英王钦定本《圣经》

[3] Dead Sea Scrolls: 死海古卷

[4] 1 Cor 13.11 (/ˈfɜːst kəˈrɪnθiənz/): “1 Cor” means “the first Corinthians” or 《新约圣经·哥林多前书》; “13” means “chapter 13”; “11” means “verse 11.”

close in tone to the KJV. This, of course, is a matter of opinion. Even today, Bible translation is perhaps as dispute-ridden as Bible compilation 2,000 years ago.

The production of Chinese translations of the Bible, too, involves disputes. Even the term “the Lord” has different translations.^[1] This collection will not get into these controversies, but when referring to the Chinese translation, it uses the Union Version,^[2] published in 1919 by China’s Protestant churches, since it is still the most extensively used version in China.

We may not like such lack of agreement, but in fact we should also cherish this situation today because, historically, the translation of the Bible into various contemporary languages often involved severe social, religious conflict.

Early Christians in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD were often ostracized^[3] and persecuted, and their leaders often had to go into hiding. Not long afterwards, however, the ruling elites began to take over the church and make it highly institutionalized and rigidly hierarchical. By medieval times in Europe, the Roman Catholic Church stood side by side with the nobility in exploiting vassals (peasants) and suppressing their revolts. To reinforce the existing social and religious hierarchy, the church deliberately made the Bible inaccessible to the common people. The Bible itself was available only in Latin and worship services in the churches were conducted only in Latin even though most believers across Europe did not speak or understand this language. An 11th-century pope went so far as to say:

Holy Scripture^[4] should be a secret in certain places, lest,^[5] if it were plainly apparent to all men, perchance^[6] it would be little esteemed and be subject to disrespect; or it might be falsely understood by those of mediocre learning, and lead to error. (“Bible: History” 716)

You may perhaps see here an analogy to the continued use of classical Chinese in feudal China, even though it was a “language” no one spoke.

Any effort to translate the Bible into the language of local people — English, German or any other language — was prohibited in medieval Europe, and translators were tried and killed. Eventually, however, translation of the Bible into vernacular languages helped break the grip of the Roman Catholic Church on Western society. In fact, vernacular translations became an important part of the Protestant Reformation.^[7] At about the same time Martin Luther^[8] advocated the idea of “justification by faith” (everyone with faith is equal before God), he published his own German translation of the Bible. When Henry VIII^[9] broke with the Pope and established the Church of England, he too published a new translation of the Bible, this one in English.

[1] In different Chinese translations of the Bible, “the Lord” is referred to as 天主, 天父, 上帝, 神, or 上主, depending on one’s tradition and theological understanding.

[2] Union Version: 《和合本圣经》, 在国内最为通用, 由于其翻译的年代较早 (1919年全书出版), 很多人名地名不同于现代的译法。本书将注出部分《和合本》的译法, 以便读者查寻。

[3] ostracized: not liked

[4] Holy Scripture: 《圣经》

[5] lest: for fear that

[6] perchance: maybe

[7] the Protestant Reformation: 新教改革运动

[8] Martin Luther: 马丁·路德

[9] Henry VIII: 亨利八世

The King James Version of the Bible was the fruit of the continued efforts of generations of English scholars, including those who laid down their lives for their defiance against Rome. The KJV used the everyday language of educated English people in the late 16th century so that everyone could understand God's words as found in the Holy Scripture. The idea was that there should be nothing mysterious about the church. The English Bible was indeed a tool of the rising bourgeoisie; it was quoted in support of their cause. To mobilize the masses, as Karl Marx remarked, "Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions and allusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution" (*Eighteenth Brumaire* 17).

Today, the dust of the revolution has long settled, but people still appreciate the beauty, power, simplicity, and expressiveness of the language used in the King James Version of the Bible. It remains a popular translation in the United States, especially among conservative Christians.



About this collection

The purpose of this collection of biblical stories is to help university English majors in China "dip into" the wealth of literature in the Bible. It is hard to imagine that students of English and Western culture can achieve much success without some knowledge of the Bible as literature.

This book is by no means a comprehensive introduction to the Bible as literature. In fact, no one should expect a slim volume like this to do justice to one of the greatest books human civilization has ever produced. The only purpose of this book is, to use a cliché, to initiate the uninitiated, including the "initiator" himself.