

# VENTURING INTO THE BIBLE



By Siu May Kuo



NANJING UNIVERSITY PRESS

# 《聖經》淺析

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南 京 大 學 出 版 社

1989 · 南京

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## PREFACE

Professor Siu May Kuo (郭秀梅) showed me some specimens of her book on the appreciation of the Bible and asked me to write a few words about it. I read and enjoyed the specimens. I wished such a book had been available in the 1920s, when I made my first attempt to read the Bible. The Bible is not one book, but rather a library of books ever put between covers. Of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, what to read first and what next? And the most important of all, how to read it profitably? Confronted with such questions, I did not know what to do. There was no guidance. As a matter of fact, it was not until I came across a copy of Professor R. G. Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible* that I could study the book properly.

I think Professor Kuo's book is of the same type as Professor Moulton's *Literary Study of the Bible*. But as Professor Kuo has kept constantly in view the needs of our present-day students of English, her book will be much more useful in this country. Among the many translations or editions of the Bible, Professor Kuo recommends the Authorized Version of 1611, and she gives reasons for the choice. Further, there are background materials and explanatory notes at the end of each section as well as interesting discussions of the dominant features of biblical literature with comparative illustrations from our own language. Evidently, a lot of work has been done to facilitate our understanding and enjoyment of the best of the Bible. With Professor Kuo as a guide, our students of English will be able to travel in a new and boundless realm of myths and parables and poetry, and begin to be enchanted by visions of the good and great or missions of the righteous. And I am sure they will be grateful.

Fan Cunzhong  
(范存忠)

February 1987

## Foreword

What prompts me to write this book on the Bible as literature for Chinese students is my growing awareness of the crying need for such a book on the part of Chinese learning English. During my thirty odd years of teaching at Nanjing University, I have often been approached with questions concerning the Bible—about the source of a quotation, the origin of an allusion, or the implication of an idiomatic expression. Indeed, one cannot turn a few pages of any essay or novel in English without encountering some Bible-related reference. Some of them, like “the apple of one’s eye” and “a thorn in the flesh”, appear so frequently even in our limited scope of reading that they have become part and parcel of our vocabulary. Some others, like “wolf in sheep’s clothing” and “new wine in old bottles”, have even found their way into the Chinese language.

However, it gradually dawns on me that the trouble lies not so much in what we know we do not know, as in what we do not know we do not know. A person just learning to skate usually does not fall as hard as one having just mastered the rudimentary skills of skating. Expressions like “the elder brother”, “the second mile”, “a still small voice”, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness”, and “writing on the wall” which may look simple and innocent enough to us, may prove to be pitfalls for students without any biblical background.

Professor Northrop Frye, the contemporary Canadian authority on the subject of the Bible as literature, says in his book *The Great Code*, that the English Bible bears a continuously fertilizing influence on English literature; “thus a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a great deal of what is going on in what he reads.” Without any acquaintance with the Bible, how can one really understand the works of Hardy or Hawthorne? how can one fully appreciate the cadence of Galsworthy or George Eliot? And if one starts to read Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* which begins with “Call me Ishmel”, would not one feel bewildered? Could one easily make head or tail of this first sentence of Francis Bacon’s “On Truth”: “‘what is truth?’ said jesting Pilate and would not wait for an answer”? A book about biblical stories may help one know what to expect when one sees this headline in a magazine: “A David Waiting to Bring Down a Goliath”; but could one have any inkling of why another headline reads: “Suffer the



Children” and not “The Children Suffer”? No, it is not a misprint.

In a larger sense, it may be hard for us Chinese to realize the full impact of the Bible on Western culture and society as a whole. Every aspect of culture, indeed every facet of life in the West bears some marks from the Bible. Not to believe in Christianity is one thing, but to know the Bible which has been translated into more than a thousand languages and which remains to be the best of best sellers in many languages, including English, is entirely another matter. I feel it is not too much to say that the English Bible is a must to students of English. It is for my co-students of English that I write this book. It is to them that I dedicate it. I will be greatly gratified if some of them will find it of any use.

The Bible is such that no one book can claim or attempt to solve all the problems and questions raised about its study from whatever angle, much less the present one. What I strive to do here is actually very little more than what the late Professor Zhen Jia, former Dean of the Department of Foreign Languages of Nanjing University, once asked me to do: to furnish a list of the most essential sections from the Bible to initiate the uninitiated. This book aims simply at removing some of the biggest obstacles Chinese students of English are liable to encounter, providing the necessary background material to facilitate their approach to the Bible, and helping them to appreciate and to enjoy the Bible as literature.

To these ends, the book is so arranged that:

- (1) It contains a lot of passages from the Bible, since the Bible is its own best introduction, and since it is not very easy to gain access to Bibles in English.
- (2) All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized Version, as it is generally regarded as the best from the point of view of literature and everyday usage.
- (3) Paragraphing has been up-dated to the best of our knowledge, question marks have been added, and some other punctuation marks provided and changed, mostly according to Ernest S. Bates *The Bible Designed To Be Read As Living Literature*.
- (4) We try to present the literary analysis and interpretation of the selected passages by recognized authorities on this subject as well as our own views as Chinese.
- (5) We have given most passages lists of notes in Chinese and/or English, the idioms (i) and proverbs (p) being often juxtaposed with their closest Chinese equivalents.

In the process of writing, I have gotten help from many quarters. Friends

from overseas, on learning of my interest, started to send me books from Canada, from the United States, from England, from Scotland, from Australia, and from Japan. Books also came from Hong Kong. I am very much indebted to their senders, and to their authors. Without these I would not have any straw to make bricks with.

To the late Prof. Fan Cunzhong, I am very grateful indeed for writing the Preface while I was still struggling with the first manuscript, and for being generous with his encouragement and advice when I began to give talks on the Bible years ago.

I am very grateful to Mrs. Marie Jeanne Coleman, Associate General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation in the 1940s and 1950s and our friend of forty years' standing, and also Professor Mo Ru-xi of the Nanjing Theological Seminary, for going over the manuscript and giving very valuable suggestions, the former spending days and nights too on it out of her short stay in Nanjing, the latter being especially good at finding and repairing the "leaks" in it. I feel more than thankful towards Mr. Charles Wilson, former Amity teacher, who though swamped by many, many other demands, managed to type out most of the first manuscript and also did a lot in toning and shaping it as he would with his own writing. To Miss Peng Cui-An, post-graduate student of the seminary here, I am very thankful too for typing and sorting out my usually very disorganized material.

Last but not least, I appreciate very much the help and support given me by my husband, K. H. Ting and our son Stephen Yenren Ting. As always, K. H. dares me to attempt the seemingly unattainable, checks my lopsided propensities, and fills up my oversights. Yen-ren, failing in teaching his old mother the new tricks of using a word processor, undertakes to do much brass tacks on it, despite his duties at the university and the calls of Amity Foundation; but he stubbornly refuses to be mentioned as a co-author.

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# THE BIBLE AS A WHOLE

## What the Bible Is Not

To explain what the Bible is, is easier done through contrast with what the Bible is not, than said in a definition. So, as the starting point, we shall take off from what the Bible is not.

First of all, *contrary to its appearance, contrary to common belief, the Bible is not one book.* It is rather a group, or collection of 66 books, which differ widely in register and style, in content and subject matter, in approach and point of view.

Then, unlike most books, the Bible was not written by one person, or even by a number of people working in co-operation. Many, many were the people who took part in its making, men and women who knew nothing of the endeavors, or the existence, of one another: most of them remain unknown to posterity. Some sections and passages existed as oral traditions long before they got written down, having been fashioned and polished by numerous people of many generations. Some books, and a few poems, were attributed to authors who, by the simple logic of time sequence, could not possibly have been there to do the writing. Thus, we may say that the Bible was, at least partially if not mostly, written anonymously.

Besides, the Bible was not written within one single period of time. Knowledgeable scholars have more or less agreed that the earliest parts of the Old Testament got written over a thousand years B. C., while the parts in it written latest were probably done around 15 B.C. On the other hand, all sections in the New Testament were very likely written within the duration of the 100 years from 50 to 150 A. D. This divergence in dates may partially account for the heterogeneity of the Bible.

Furthermore, the Bible was not originally written in one language. The O. T. was written in Hebrew, the ancient language of the ancestors of present-day Israelis, while the N.T. was originally in Greek, with parts in Aramaic, the language of the Hebrews of N.T. days.

Lastly, the books in the Bible are not systematically classified, nor are they chronologically arranged. In order to give the reader a clearer view and to facilitate reading, an attempt has been made in the introduction to rearrange the books and to furnish some background material.

# What the Bible Is

What, then, is the Bible? To Christians, the Bible contains the Word of God. It is an inspired as well as an inspiring book, providing men and women with materials through which God reveals himself. But to the ordinary reader, it is a collection, or, rather, an anthology of books written by many writers during a very long period of time. Roughly these 66 books can be divided into some main classes according to contents and types:

## THE OLD TESTAMENT

### Part I Law and History

The Book of Genesis[ <i>ˈdʒenisis</i> ]	创世纪
The Book of Exodus [ <i>ˈeksədəs</i> ]	出埃及记
The Book of Leviticus [ <i>ləˈvitikəs</i> ]	利未记
The Book of Numbers	民数记
The Book of Deuteronomy [ <i>dju:təˈrɒnəmi</i> ]	申命记
The Book of Joshua [ <i>ˈdʒɔʃuə</i> ]	约书亚记
The Book of Judges	士师记
The First Book of Samuel [ <i>ˈsæmjʊəl</i> ]	撒母耳记上
The Second Book of Samuel	撒母耳记下
The First Book of Kings	列王纪上
The Second Book of Kings	列王纪下
The First Book of Chronicles	历代志上
The Second Book of Chronicles	历代志下
The Book of Ezra [ <i>ˈezrə</i> ]	以斯拉记
The Book of Nehemiah [ <i>nihiˈmaɪə</i> ]	尼希米记

### Part II Prophecies

The Book of Amos [ <i>ˈeɪməs</i> ]	阿摩司书
The Book of Hosea [ <i>houˈziə</i> ]	何西阿书
The Book of Micah [ <i>ˈmaɪkə</i> ]	弥迦书
The Book of Isaiah [ <i>aiˈzaɪə</i> ]	以赛亚书
The Book of Zephaniah [ <i>ˈzefəˈnaɪə</i> ]	西番雅书
The Book of Nahum [ <i>ˈneɪhəm</i> ]	那鸿书
The Book of Habakkuk [ <i>ˈhæbəkək</i> ]	哈巴谷书
The Book of Jeremiah [ <i>dʒeriˈmaɪə</i> ]	耶利米书
Lamentations [ <i>læmenˈteɪfənz</i> ]	耶利米哀歌
The Book of Ezekiel [ <i>iˈzi:kjuəl</i> ]	以西结书
The Book of the Unknown Prophet	第二以赛亚书

(part from Isaiah)

The Book of Obadiah [oubə'daia]

The Book of Haggai ['hægai]

The Book of Zechariah [zekə'raia]

The Book of Joel ['dʒouəl]

The Book of Malachi ['mæləkai]

Part III Poetry, Drama, Tales, and Moral Teachings

The Book of Psalms [sɑ:mz]

(an anthology of sacred poetry)

The Book of Proverbs

(an anthology of gnostic poetry)

The Book of Job [dʒoub]

(a philosophical drama)

Ecclesiastes [i'kli:zi'æstis]

The Song of Songs

Ruth: (a tale)

Jonah: ['dʒounə] (a tale)

Daniel: ['dænjəl] (a tale)

Esther: ['estə] (a tale)

俄巴底亚书

哈该书

撒迦利亚书

约耳书

玛拉基书

诗篇

箴言

约伯记

传道书

雅歌

路得记

约拿书

但以理书

以斯帖记

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Gospel According to Mark

The Gospel According to Matthew

The Gospel According to Luke

The Gospel According to John

The Acts of the Apostles

The Letters of Paul:

The First Letter to the Thessalonians [θesə'lounjənz]

The Second Letter to the Thessalonians

The First Letter to the Corinthians [kə'rinθiənz]

The Second Letter to the Corinthians

A Letter to the Galatians [gə'leɪʃənz]

A Letter to the Romans

A Letter to the Colossians [kə'lɔʃənz]

A Letter to Philemon [fi'li:mən]

A Letter to the Ephesians [i'fi:ʒənz]

A Letter to the Philippians [fili'piənz]

Other Letters:

马可福音

马太福音

路加福音

约翰福音

使徒行传

帖撒罗尼迦前书

帖撒罗尼迦后书

哥林多前书

哥林多后书

加拉太书

罗马人书

歌罗西书

腓利门书

以弗所书

腓立比书



A Letter to the Hebrews	希伯来书
The First Letter to Timothy	提摩太前书
The Second Letter to Timothy	提摩太后书
A Letter to Titus	提多书
The First Letter of Peter	彼得前书
The Second Letter of Peter	彼得后书
A Letter of James	雅各书
The First Letter of John	约翰一书
The Second Letter of John	约翰二书
The Third Letter of John	约翰三书
A Letter of Jude [dʒu:d]	犹大书
Revelation	启示录

The Bible, containing the above books, is the Holy Scripture of the Protestant Christians, just as the Koran is to Moslems. However, this is only half the truth; in fact, the Old Testament (without the New Testament) plus some other writings, is the Bible to believers of Judaism; and the Roman Catholic Church has a Bible containing some other books besides the ones given above. So the Bible has to do with more than one religion.

Even a very cursory view of the above list impresses one deeply with the diversity of subject matter and literary form. What, then, binds all these books together? What gives the Bible its oneness? No matter how far-flung the titles may look, how far-fetched the themes may sound, they all build around one center of gravity—the Hebrew nation. The Bible was written by the Hebrews, meant for the Hebrews, about the Hebrews—about the people, and about their religious beliefs.

## The Hebrews

The Hebrew nation in those days occupied an area corresponding roughly to present day Palestine. In size (a total area of no more than 11,200 square miles), it was approximately one-fifteenth of that of our Taiwan. Located on the land-bridge connecting the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and wedged between the two powerful rival empires of Egypt and Assyria-Babylonia, it was but a grain between the upper and nether millstones. Thus, when war broke out, as it often happened in the neighborhood, the situation of the Hebrew nation under crossfires was as precarious as a pagoda standing in the paths of onrushing floods. No wonder out of the long period depicted in the Bible, only for 98 years did the Hebrew nation exist as a united kingdom and for 336 more years did it prolong its entity as a divided kingdom, rent by internal strife and partially occupied by invaders. To these we may add about a hundred years of Maccabean revolt with some semblance of independence and religious freedom. Aside from these, the Hebrews lived

under foreign domination, as shown in the list of dates given in the ensuing section.

## OUTLINE OF HEBREW HISTORY

with approximated dates and comparison to Chinese history

### Hebrew History

### Chinese History

3000-2000 B.C.

entry of Hebrews as nomads or semi-nomads  
into Palestine from Arabia or Egypt

legendary

2100-1600 B.C.

period of patriarchs, beginning with Abraham

Xia dynasty

1600 B.C.

16-11th. century B.C.

Jacob's twelve sons driven into Egypt by famine

Shang dynasty

1200 B.C.

exodus of twelve tribes led by Moses back to Palestine

1200-1020 B.C.

11-8th. century B.C.

period of theocracy under Judges

Western Zhou dynasty

1020 B.C.

establishment of monarchy under King Saul

1000-960 B.C.

reign of King David

960-922 B.C.

reign of King Solomon

922 B.C.

beginning of the Divided Kingdom:

Northern Kingdom of Israel of ten tribes with  
Samaria as capital, Southern Kingdom of  
Judah of two tribes with Jerusalem as capital

722 B.C.

770-256 B.C.

Northern Kingdom conquered by Assyrians,  
Samaria destroyed, many people taken into  
captivity

Eastern Zhou dynasty

770-476 B.C.

Spring and Autumn period

600 B.C.

rise in power of Babylonia

586 B.C.

southern Kingdom conquered by Babylonia,  
Jerusalem destroyed, many people carried off  
in exile

536 B.C.

Persia conquering Babylonia, being more lenient to Judah, and permitting its people to return

520-515 B.C.

reconstruction of the temple

445 B.C.

beginning of rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem

300 B.C.

translation of Hebrew scriptures

167 B.C.

outlawing of Hebrew religion

166 B.C.

beginning of Maccabean revolt

142 B.C.

Hebrews regaining religious freedom

67-63 B.C.

rent by civil war and under continual intervention successively by Syrians, Egyptians and Romans, Palestine made into part of the Roman province of Syria

4 or 6 A.D.

birth of Jesus Christ

16-26 A.D.

Pontius Pilate made Roman procurator of Judah

30 A.D.

crucifixion of Jesus Christ

66-73 A.D.

open revolt against Rome

73 A.D.

fall of Jerusalem and destruction of its temple

475-221 B.C.

period of Warring States

221-207 B.C.

Qin dynasty

206 B.C.-24 A.D.

Western Han dynasty

25-220 A.D.

Eastern Han dynasty

## Literary Greatness of the Bible

Small and weak as the Hebrew nation was, great and powerful is this book, or rather, this anthology of books written by, for, and about them. Numbered among the greatest literary works of the world, its influence is felt in a lot of the best writings, and its stories and

allusions are on the lips of many people the world over. Where do its greatness and universality lie?

In a word, we may say, they lie in the very nature of the writing. The Bible is a record and a witness of the invincibility and insurmountability of a people, oppressed time and again, but never cowed or subdued. In captivity or in exile, they never gave up hope. Defeated and suppressed, they kept on struggling. When they could not have a government, they developed a church, which served as their rallying center. Hence, the chief note of Hebrew literature is that of rejoicing as shown in these two lines of a psalm:

"Weeping may tarry for the night,  
But joy cometh in the morning." (Ps. 30:5)

Hebrew literature is the outgrowth of tragic experiences, but the expression of hopeful emotions. When a Hebrew prophet saw the morning break, he said:

"The sun of righteousness shall rise,  
With healing in its wings." (Malachi 4:2)

Often in a Biblical passage one hears the cry of despair at the opening, but the hail of hope and joy at the end. Here is a typical passage from Isaiah, wherein hopefulness is sounded in the promise of vindication, in the ending of abandonment and desolation, and in a new life out of old defeat:

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,  
until her vindication shines forth like the dawn  
and her victory like a burning torch.  
"No longer shall you be called 'forsaken'  
or your land 'desolate'." (Isaiah 62:1, 4)

Throughout their long years of affliction, they believed that righteousness would prevail, that wickedness would be overcome, and that suppression or tyranny, however formidable it looks, however long in duration, could never come to stay. This was their conviction. This is Biblical faith that history develops in the direction of better prospect and more social justice for all people, irrespective of colour and race, despite twists and turns. People may disagree with the Hebrews on many different religious questions, but these very people can always see eye to eye with them on the validity of this fundamental optimism. With this fundamental optimism as the core, how can their literature fail in universal appeal?

The appealing power of a writing comes from the appealing abilities of the writers. The Bible was not written by professional writers, in the present sense of the word, any way, not written by people in armchairs or ivory towers, but by people keeping flesh-and-blood ties with their fellow-countrymen and fellow-countrywomen, always in the