

THE BIBLE
IN ITS MAKING



MILDRED DUFF
AND
NOEL HOPE

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- **The Most Wonderful Book in the World**

One great universal law runs through the realm of nature. Our Saviour gave it in a sentence: 'First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.' It is with the desire to show that the same law rules in another of God's creations — The Bible — that this little volume has been prepared. The Bible has as literally 'grown' as has an oak tree; and probably there is no more likeness between the Bible as we know it to-day and its earliest beginning, than we find between the mighty tree, and the acorn from which it sprang. The subject is so vast that we have not attempted anything beyond the briefest outline. Our purpose has been merely to give some idea of the origin of the Bible books, up to the measure of our present light upon the subject, and also to show the purpose for which they were written. But if our readers, by seeing something of the wonder and glory of the Holy Scriptures, are able to catch a glimpse of the Creator's mind behind the whole, our work will not have been in vain. (Foreword, by Mildred Duff)

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THE BIBLE IN ITS MAKING

The most Wonderful Book in the World

BY

MILDRED DUFF AND NOEL HOPE

COMPANION VOLUME TO

'Where Moses went to School,'

'When Moses learnt to Rule,'

'Esther the Queen,'

'Daniel the Prophet,' and

'Hezekiah the King.'

ILLUSTRATED BY NOEL HOPE

With Sketches of the Original Monuments and Stone Pictures

MARSHALL BROTHERS, LTD.,
PUBLISHERS,
LONDON, EDINBURGH & NEW YORK

1912

Uniform with this Volume

PRICE ONE SHILLING

Where Moses went to School

Where Moses learnt to Rule

Esther the Queen

Daniel the Prophet

Hezekiah the King

All fully Illustrated

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THE BIBLE IN ITS MAKING

CHAPTER I

A LIVING BOOK



here is only one Book that never grows old.

For thousands of years men have been writing books. Most books are forgotten soon after they are written; a few of the best and wisest are remembered for a time.

But all at last grow old; new discoveries are made; new ideas arise; the old books are out of date; their usefulness is at an end. Students are the only people who still care to read them.

The nations to which the authors of these first books belonged have passed away, the languages in which they were written are 'dead'—that is, they have ceased to be used in daily life in any part of the world.

Broken bits and torn fragments of some of the early books may be seen in the glass cases of museums. Learned men pore over the fragments, and try to piece them together, to find out their meaning once again; but no one else cares much whether they mean anything or not. For the books are dead. They cannot touch the heart of any human being; they have nothing to do with the busy world of living men and women any more.

Now, our Bible was first written in these ancient languages: is it, therefore, to be classed among the 'dead' books of the world?

No, indeed. The fact alone that the Word of God can be read to-day in 412 living languages proves clearly that it is no dead book; and when we remember that last year 5,000,000 new copies of the Bible were sent into the busy working world for men and women by one Society alone, we see how truly 'alive' it must be.

Nations may pass, languages die, the whole world may change, yet the Bible will live on. Why is this?

Because in the Bible alone, of all the books seen on this earth, there is found a message for every man, woman, or child who has ever lived or will live while the world lasts:

It is the Message of God's Salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

The message is for all; for the cleverest white man, the most ignorant savage; for the black man of Africa, the yellow man of China, the tawny little man who lives among the icefields of the Arctic Circle.

It does not matter who the person is, nor where he lives; a living force exists in the Bible that will help every human being who acts upon its words to become one of God's true sons and soldiers. No human wisdom can explain this.

The Bible tells us about Christ. Before Christ came all teaching led up to Him. He is the only safe Guide for our daily life. Through His death alone we have hope for the future. From the first page to the last the Bible speaks of Christ. This is the secret of its wondrous power.

'These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me.' (Luke xxiv. 44.)

Although we speak of the Bible as one Book, because it tells one world-wide story, yet this one Book is made up of many books—of a whole library of books in fact.



BROKEN BITS OF CLAY BOOKS IN THE
CUNEIFORM LANGUAGE, BELONGING TO THE
TIME WHEN MOSES WROTE THE FIRST WORDS
OF GENESIS

*BROKEN BITS OF CLAY BOOKS IN THE CUNEIFORM LANGUAGE, BELONGING
TO THE TIME WHEN MOSES WROTE THE FIRST WORDS OF GENESIS*

Go into a library, look at the well-stocked shelves. Here is a volume of history, here a book of beautiful poetry, here a life of a great and noble warrior. This book was written only last year, this one appeared many years before you were born.

Just so is it with the books of the Bible.

For more than a thousand years God was calling the best and wisest men of the Jewish nation to write for His Book. Some of the authors were rich and learned; many were humble and poor.

Kings wrote for it; a shepherd-boy; a captive lad who had been carried away as a slave into a strange land; a great leader; a humble fruit-gatherer; a hated tax-collector; a tent-maker; many poor fishermen. God found work for them all.

There are sixty-six books in the Bible, written by at least forty different authors. Books on history; collections of sacred songs; lives of good men and women; stirring appeals to the sinful. God chose the men best fitted to write each part. He called them to His work; He spoke to their hearts; He put His Spirit into their minds.

In these days those who read God's Word often forget what old, old writings the first books in the Bible are, and how everything has changed since they were written.

Seeing the words so clearly printed on fine white paper, readers do not stop to think that they have come down to us from the days when the greatest nations in the world wrote their best books on lumps of clay, or on rough, brittle paper made from brown reeds.

So these Bible readers grow impatient, and because they cannot understand everything all at once, some are even foolish enough to give up reading the Old Testament altogether.

But the things that are hard to understand are only hard because we are still so ignorant. Whenever any new discovery about the ancient times has been made it has always shown us how exactly true the Bible is.

Some years ago, just at the time when the doubts and carpings were at their worst, when those people who did not trust God even declared that many of the cities and kings mentioned in the Old Testament had never existed at all, a wonderful thing happened. God allowed the old cities themselves to be brought to light once more.

Deep under the earth they were found, with their beautiful palaces, libraries full of books, and long picture-galleries, lined from end to end with stone and marble slabs, on which were cut portraits of the very kings whose existence the people were beginning to doubt! This is how it happened.

'The Bible does not describe things as they really were,' said some people. 'In Old Testament times, for instance, the nations were very rough and ignorant; as for Moses—who is supposed to

have written the first books of the Bible—it is most doubtful whether he ever learned to read and write at all.'

'But Moses was brought up in Egypt, and the Egyptians were very learned; the Bible says so,' answered others.

'The man who wrote those words in the Bible may have made a mistake. It is true that the ruins of old Egyptian temples and palaces are covered with strange figures and signs; but who can say now whether they mean anything or not?'

Those who trusted in God's Word could not answer these questions; but just at this time God allowed the first great discovery to be made; for the moment had at last come when all thoughtful men and women needed to be able to settle these questions for themselves.

In the year 1799 a French officer who was in Egypt with Napoleon's army discovered the Rosetta Stone.

You may see this stone in the British Museum. It is a great block of black marble. On the smooth side, cut deeply in the stone, are a number of lines of ancient writing. Many stones covered with ancient writing had been found before, but this one is different from all the rest.

The lines at the top of the stone are in the strange old Egyptian picture-writing, which learned men have agreed to call 'Hieroglyphic'; that is, 'writing in pictures.' This was a very special kind of writing in ancient Egypt, and generally kept for important occasions. The lines in the middle give the same words, but in the ordinary handwriting used for correspondence in ancient Egypt; and last of all is found a translation of the Egyptian words written in ancient Greek.

This old kind of Greek is not spoken in daily life by any people to-day, but many learned men can read and write it with ease; so that, you see, by the help of the Greek translation, the Rosetta Stone became a key for discovering the meaning of both kinds of ancient Egyptian letters. Thus, by the help of the Rosetta Stone, and after years of patient labour, the long-dead language could be read once more.

Egypt—the land into which Joseph was sold, where the Israelites became a nation, and Moses was born and educated! How great a joy to read the words carved on temple walls, or in palace

halls; and to find with each word read how exactly the Egypt of ancient days is described in the Bible!

The dress the people wore, the food they ate, the way they spoke to their kings, the description of their funerals, the very name of their famous river, and the words they used to describe the plants, insects, and cattle of Egypt—all these are found in the Bible and are proofs of the care with which Moses wrote of the land of his birth.

But other nations besides the Egyptians are mentioned in the Bible; and about them also grave doubts arose. Almost all the Old Testament prophets cried out against the wickedness of Assyria and Babylon, and foretold the awful punishment which God would bring upon them for their pride and cruelty, unless they repented.

They did not repent; destruction came upon them; their very names were forgotten, and their cities as utterly lost to the world as though they had never existed.

'Nineveh, Babylon? There *were* such cities once, perhaps; but as for the kings of whom the Bible speaks—Sennacherib, who came up against Jerusalem, and was driven back through the prayers of God's servants, Isaiah and King Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 19); Nebuchadnezzar, who carried Daniel away into Babylon; Ahasuerus, who reigned "*from India even unto Ethiopia*" (Esther)—well, if they ever lived at all, they were certainly not the kind of kings spoken of in the Old Testament. But it all happened so long ago that we cannot expect to understand much about it now.'



*EGYPTIAN SCRIBES AT WORK. (A) CASES FOR HOLDING WRITING MATERIALS.
NOTICE SPARE PEN PLACED BEHIND THE CLERK'S EAR*

So the questioners settled the matter in their own minds; but God had the answer to their questions all ready for them.

He put into the hearts of some brave men the idea of going out to the desolate plains, '*empty and void, and waste*' (Nahum ii. 10), the plains that had once been the rich empires of Assyria and Babylon, and there to search patiently for some trace of the splendid cities of old.

Very wonderful is the story of how these searchers found them.

Nineveh had been lying buried under huge mounds of rubbish for more than two thousand years. Now, just at the time when her testimony was needed, the ruined halls of her majestic palaces were once more brought to the light of day.

What had been the names of these grim kings of old, whose stern-faced figures were sculptured on the walls? Could any among them be the fierce Assyrian kings mentioned in the Bible?

If only the strange wedge-shaped letters that covered every vacant space on the stone slabs could be read, what a message from the past they would reveal.

Once again clever men set to work and persevered until the strange letters were deciphered, and the palace-walls gave up their secrets. Here was King Sennacherib; here Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings xv. 29); here Esarhaddon (2 Kings xix. 37). Oh, how wonderful to look at the old-time portraits which had been drawn from the men themselves!

'Well, although the Egyptians and Assyrians prove to have been great nations in the time of Moses, they had no communication with each other except in war time; they spoke different languages, wrote in altogether different styles, and had very different ideas about everything. Nations kept to themselves in those days. What the Bible says of their intercourse must be wrong.'

This all the clever people were quite sure about, but once again God showed them their mistake.

Twenty-five years ago an Egyptian peasant woman was walking among the ruins of an ancient Egyptian city—a city built before the time of Moses. Bright yellow sand had drifted over the broken columns and painted pavements of what had once been the palace of a great king. But the peasant woman did not care for that. Was there anything hidden in the sand that she could sell? This was all her thought.

Suddenly her foot struck against something hard in the sand. She looked down. Could it be a stone?

No, it was not a stone, but a queer oblong lump, or tablet of clay, hardened into a brick, and covered with strange marks that looked like writing. She wondered at it, for with all her findings in the ruins she had never come upon anything like this before.

She showed the tablet to her friends, and they dug down deep in the sand, and found whole sackfuls of baked clay tablets. But when the dealer in curiosities saw the lumps of baked clay he shook his head, and would give very little money for them.

After a while some of the bricks were taken to Paris and London.

'These tablets could *not* have been found in Egypt,' decided the learned professors; 'they are either imitations, or they were found somewhere else. These are clay letters, and must have been written in Assyria or Babylonia. No Egyptian could have understood a word of them.'

Yet the tablets had been found in Egypt, and had been read by the king of Egypt's scribes, for the peasant woman, had all unknowingly discovered what remained of the Foreign Office belonging to the old Egyptian nation, and thus we see that the Egyptians of Moses' time could read and write foreign languages as easily as we can to-day read and write French or German!

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET OF ITS GREATNESS



od always chooses the right kind of people to do His work. Not only so, He always gives to those whom He chooses just the sort of life which will best prepare them for the work He will one day call them to do.

That is why God put it into the heart of Pharaoh's daughter to bring up Moses as her own son in the Egyptian palace.

The most important part of Moses' training was that his heart should be right with God, and therefore he was allowed to remain with his Hebrew parents during his early years. There he learned to love and serve the one true God. Without that knowledge no education can make a man or woman fit to be a blessing to the world.

But after this God gave him another training. The man who should be called to write the first words of God's Book would need a very special education. Most likely some of the Children of Israel could read and write, for we know there were plenty of books and good schools in Moses' time, but they certainly did not make such good scholars as the Egyptians.

'And the child grew and she (his mother) brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son.' (Exodus ii. 10.)

In those few words the Bible shows us the Egyptian side of Moses' education.

And a very thorough education it must have been, for the Egyptians were the most highly cultured people in the world in those days, and we know that *'Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.'* (Acts vii. 22.)

The Egypt of Moses' time was very different from the Egypt of to-day. Among all the great nations it held the first place; for the people of Egypt were more clever, and rich; their gardens more beautiful, their cornfields and orchards more fruitful than those of the dwellers in any other land.

Again, of all the peoples in the world the Egyptians were looked upon at that time as the most religious. From one end to another the land was full of temples, many of them so huge in size, and so magnificent with carvings and paintings, that even their poor ruins—the great columns shattered or fallen, the enormous walls tottering and broken—are still the wonder of the world.

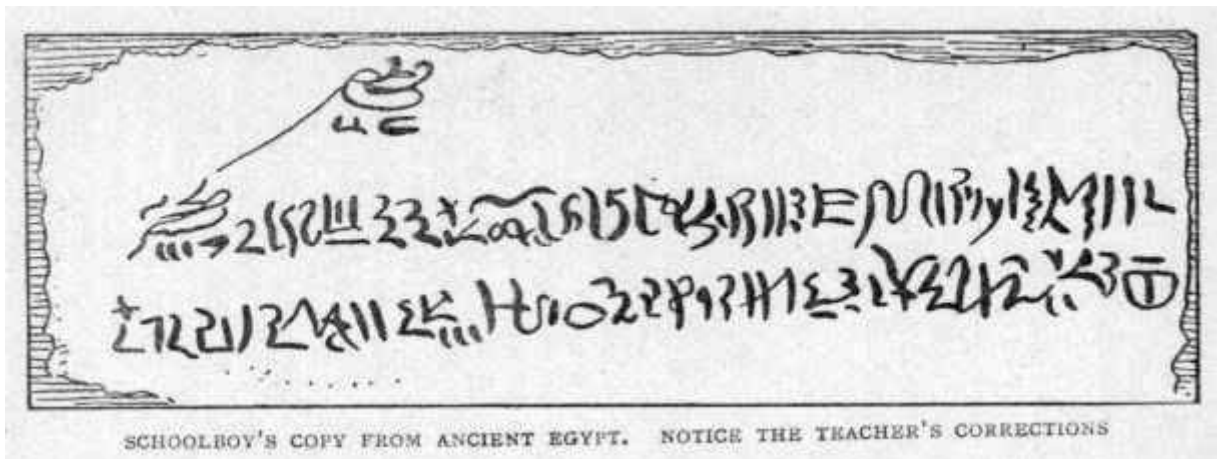
Every great city had its schools and colleges. Clever men devoted their whole lives to teaching in these colleges and to writing learned books, just as they do in the cities of Europe and America to-day. These men were called 'scribes,' that is, 'writers.' Moses, a boy brought up in the royal palace, would have the best and most learned scribes for his teachers.

A fragment of an old Egyptian book describing the duties of a lad in the scribes' school has been found. It tells how the schoolmaster wakes the boys very early in the morning. 'The books are already in the hands of thy companions,' he cries; 'put on thy garments, call for thy sandals.'

If the lad does not make haste he is severely punished; if he is not attentive in school the master speaks to him very seriously indeed. 'Let thy mouth read the book in thy hand, and take advice from those who know more than thou dost!'

He has to write many copies, and as he gets he learns to compose business letters to his master; before he is fourteen he is most likely a clerk in a government office, and must continue his studies at the same time.

The letters and copies of a schoolboy who lived three thousand years ago have been discovered. How many bad marks did his teacher give him, do you think, when he had to correct that carelessly written capital?



*SCHOOLBOY'S COPY FROM ANCIENT EGYPT. NOTICE THE TEACHER'S
CORRECTIONS*

So great a respect had the Egyptians for writing that they used to say, 'The great god Thoth invented letters; no human being could have given anything so wonderful and useful to the world.'

Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, drawing, an Egyptian lad was supposed to study all these, and as we have seen, those lads who were trained for work in the Foreign Office had to learn other languages as well; they had also to read and write 'cuneiform'—the name given to the strange wedge-shaped letters of Assyria and Babylonia.

All the letters from the people of Canaan to the Egyptian king and his Foreign Office were written in cuneiform.

Chinese is supposed to be the most difficult language to learn in our day; but the ancient cuneiform was certainly quite as complicated as Chinese. The cuneiform had no real alphabet, only 'signs.' There were five hundred simple signs, and nearly as many compound signs, so that the student had to begin with a thousand different signs to memorize. Yes, boys had their troubles even in those days.

Now, as Moses grew older and learned more, he must often have felt very thoughtful and sad. So many books, so many ideas, so many stories of cruel gods and evil spirits—where was the truth to be found? No one seemed to remember the One True God, the God of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Very likely a Babylonian book written in cuneiform, and pretending to describe the Creation of the world, and the story of the Ark and the great Flood found its way into Egypt. Many copies of this book existed in Moses' day; part of a later copy was found a short time ago in the ruins of the library of a great Assyrian king, and is now to be seen in the British Museum. A strange book it is. The words were not written, remember, but pricked down on a large flat tablet of clay.

If Moses read such a book as this, it must have troubled and puzzled him very much. For it is a heathen book, in which the beautiful clear story of the Creation of the world is all darkened and

spoilt. The Babylonian who wrote the book, and the Assyrians who copied it, were all descended from Noah, and therefore some dim remembrance of God's dealings with the world still lingered in their hearts; but as the time passed they had grown farther from the truth. That is why the oldest copies of these books are always the best; the heathen had not had time to separate themselves so completely from God.

'In the old, old days,' they said, 'there were not so many gods as there are now'; and some of the most learned heathen even believed that in the beginning there was but one God. 'Afterwards many others sprang up,' they declared.

'In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth.' (Genesis i. 1.) Oh, how far the nations had wandered already from the greatest, deepest truth which the world can know! How sad to think that horrible nightmare stories of evil spirits and cruel gods should have come between men's souls and the loving Father and Creator of all!

Yes; it was time, indeed, that the first words of the Bible should be written, and that a stream of pure truth should begin to flow through the world.

But Moses had much to do for God before he could write one word of his part of the Bible.

We know how his life of learning and splendour came to a sudden end; he fled from Egypt, and became a shepherd in the land of Midian; and there in Midian God called him to the great work of leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt towards the Promised Land.

Terrible troubles had come upon God's people in the land of Goshen.^[1] For the most selfish and cruel Pharaoh who ever reigned over Egypt had determined to treat the people who had come to live in Egypt, at the invitation of a former Pharaoh, just as though they were captives taken in battle.

Many of the old ruins in Egypt are covered with writings describing his cruelties. He killed all who rebelled against him, and condemned whole nations to wear out their lives by working for him in the gold mines, or granite quarries, or by making endless stores of bricks; he cared for no man's life if only he could be called the richest king in the world.

'*And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses,*' (Exodus i. 11) that is, store-cities. In Egypt many store-cities were needed because corn was more plentiful there than in any other country.

'Pithom—where was Pithom?' So people were asking a few years ago, and because there was no answer to that question they began to doubt. Had there ever been such a city?

But in the year 1884 the earth gave up another of its secrets—the ruins of Pithom were found, buried deep in the dust; and the remains of great store-houses built of rough bricks, mixed with chopped straw (Exodus v.) and stamped with the name of the cruel Pharaoh (Ramesis the Second) were laid bare once more.^[2]

What a pity some readers had not waited a little longer before doubting the truth of the Bible!

'*And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words.*' (Exodus xxxiv. 27.) So it was at last that God called Moses to begin the great work of writing the Bible, just as He had called him to lead the people out of Egypt; just as by His Spirit He calls men and women to do His work to-day.

How did Moses write the first words of the Bible? What kind of letters and what language did he use?

These are great questions. We know at least that he could have his choice between two or three different kinds of letters and materials.

Perhaps he wrote the first words of the Bible on rolls of papyrus paper with a soft reed pen, in the manner of the Egyptian scribes.

Hundreds of these rolls have been found in Egypt: poems, histories, novels, hymns to the Egyptian gods; and some of these writings are at least as old as the time of Moses. The Egyptian climate is so fine and dry, and the Egyptians stored the rolls so carefully in the tombs of their kings, that the fragile papyrus—that is, reed-paper—has not rotted away, as would have been the case in any other country.

Certainly in after years the Jews used the same shaped books as the Egyptians. Indeed, the Jews' Bible—that is, the Old Testament—was still called '*a roll of a book*' in the days of Jeremiah. (Jeremiah xxxvi. 2.)

Or perhaps Moses wrote on tablets of clay like those used by the great empires of Babylon and Assyria, and by the people of Canaan. Clay was cheap enough; all one had to do was to mould moist clay into a smooth tablet, and then to prick words on it with a metal pen. The prophet Jeremiah mentions this kind of book also. (Jeremiah xvii. 1.)

Most likely, however, Moses wrote on parchment made from the skins of sheep and goats. The Children of Israel kept large flocks, and could supply him with as many skins as he wanted.

And in what language did he write?

Perhaps even the very first words were written in Hebrew; we know that in later times the prophets and historians of the Jews wrote in Hebrew.

But we must remember that languages alter as years pass on. The Hebrew of Moses' time could only have been an ancient kind of Hebrew, very different from the Hebrew of to-day. Does this surprise you? Why, you and I could hardly read one word of the English written in England even a thousand years ago!

About the middle of the last century a German missionary found a large carved stone in that part of Palestine which used to be called Moab. This wonderful stone, which is black and shaped something like a tombstone, is covered with writing. It is called 'The Moabite Stone,' and was set up by Mesha, king of Moab. (2 Kings iii. 4.) The writing on it is neither Egyptian nor cuneiform, but a very ancient kind of Hebrew.



FIRST WORDS OF KING MESHA'S WRITING ON THE MOABITE STONE. MOSES MOST LIKELY USED LETTERS LIKE THESE

Of course, this does not take us back actually to the days of Moses, but still it is so old that Moses may well have used the same kind of writing.

We have seen that most nations in those old times had their books, and we know that each nation had always one book that it valued more than the rest. This was the book that told the people about their religion, and the gods in whom they believed.

In most of these books some grains of truth were found. All the nations of the world are but one great family, you know, and even the most ignorant people were not without some knowledge.

The heathen nations of Moses' time therefore remembered dimly some of God's dealings with the world; they were so blinded by their heathen worship, that no atom of fresh light could reach them, and little by little they drifted further into the darkness.

But, though tiny fragments of truth are to be found in their books, not one word is to be traced in any book of the most precious truth of all until God revealed it to His servant Moses.

This makes our Bible so wonderful and different from all other books: it is a revelation—that is, something which comes to us from God and which we could never have known without His help.

From first to last the Bible is written to teach us about Christ. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament Christ is referred to as the coming Saviour, or Messiah, which you know, is the Hebrew word for Christ.

Christ is to bruise the serpent's head. (Genesis iii. 15.) In Him all the nations of the earth are to be blessed. (Genesis xxii. 18.) He is the Star that shall come out of Jacob. (Numbers xxiv. 17.) When the Lamb of the Passover was killed, and the people taught they could only escape from death through the sprinkled blood, this was a type or picture of Salvation through the Blood of Jesus.

When at last the Saviour came, the Jews rejected Him and would not accept Him as the Messiah. Then He said to them: '*Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me.*' (John v. 46.)

[1] The Egyptians spelt 'Goshen' 'Kosem.' An old writing says, 'The country is not cultivated, but left as a pasture for cattle because of the stranger.'

[2] Some of these bricks are in the British Museum.

CHAPTER III

MOSES AND HIS WRITINGS



e now begin to understand a little of the very beginning of God's Book—of the times in which it was written, the materials used by its first author, and the different kinds of writing from which he had to choose; but we must go a step farther.

How much did Moses know about the history of his forefathers, Abraham and Jacob, and of all the old nations and kings mentioned in Genesis, before God called him to the great work of writing his part of the Bible?

We believe that he knew a great deal about them all.

Most thoughtful young people like to read right through their Bibles, and perhaps you have been perplexed to find that many parts of the Old Testament are both puzzling and dry. Of what use, then, can these chapters be? you have perhaps asked yourself. Is it not all God's Book?

But you must not let this trouble you. Every passage, every verse has its special place and object. Not a line of God's Book could be taken away without serious loss to the whole.

'What, all those long lists of the queer names of people we never hear of again?' asks some one. 'Why, I dread those chapters. I once had to read Genesis x. aloud, and I shall never forget it!'

Those who feel like this will be surprised to know that many of the most learned men of our own days are giving much time and thought to the careful and patient study of this very list of names; and the more carefully they study it, the fuller and wider does the subject become.

'Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.' (Genesis x. 10.) The ruins of all these great cities and kingdoms have now been found. They were old before Moses was born; indeed, they were so old that their names were only to be found in ancient books; even the very language spoken by some of these nations had been forgotten by all save the learned scribes of Babylonia and Assyria.

And yet we find these names accurately given in Genesis; had they been missing from its pages, the Bible would give us no true idea of the beginnings of history. Remember this when next you are tempted to feel impatient at the awkward syllables.

Again, in Genesis xiv. we read the names of the kings who governed nine nations in the time of Abraham, and of how they fought together *'four kings with five'* (verse 9) three hundred years before Moses was born.

Until a very few years ago the Bible was the only Book that told us about these ancient kings and kingdoms.

And people said, 'The man who wrote that chapter did not really know anything; he just collected a pack of old stories that had been repeated over and over again with so many exaggerations and alterations that at last there was scarcely a word of truth left in them.'

Since this foolish conclusion was arrived at many new discoveries have been made, the broken fragments of old tablets have been pieced together and read, and the names of all the nine kings brought to light once more.

Certain it is that Moses, with the help of the writings which we now know must have existed in his time, would have but little difficulty in writing those parts of Genesis which tell us the history of some of the most ancient nations of the world. For when God gives a man some work to do, He always helps him to do it. To those who really trust Him, and have patience to work on, the help they need always comes, the difficult path is made smooth. This has been the experience of God's servants in all times.



PORTRAIT AND WRITING OF AMRAPHEL, KING OF SHINAR, IN ABRAHAM'S TIME

Many letters and books belonging to the reign of 'Amraphel^[1] king of Shinar' (Genesis xiv. 1) have lately been found. He was one of the wisest heathen kings who ever lived, and the writings of his times are very interesting, because they bring us quite back to the days of Abraham.

Amraphel kept written records describing the splendid temples he built, and a great embankment which he made to keep the river Tigris from flooding his people's cornfields; but the wisest thing he did was to collect and write out a long list of all the laws by which he governed the land of Shinar. Thus he worked in very much the same kind of way for Shinar that our own King Alfred did, thousands of years later, for England.

This list of laws was found in 1901. They are engraved on a great block of black marble, and are so numerous that they would fill pages of our Bible.

They are wise and just as far as they go. There is a great deal about buying and selling in them, and the lawful way of conducting different kinds of business; but they are wholly different from those wonderful Commandments which God gave to the Children of Israel three hundred years later.

For Shinar's laws were the heathen laws of a heathen king; in them there is no word of God; no word even of the heathen gods in which Amraphel believed.

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God ... and thy neighbour as thyself.' (Luke x. 27.) In these words Jesus Christ gives to us the true meaning of the Commandments which Moses wrote down in our Bible.

Again, until quite lately many people were certain that there could never have been a king like Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who came and blessed Abraham, and of whom we read in Genesis xiv. and also in Hebrews vii.

But among the letters found in the Foreign Office of the king of Egypt, is one from the king of Salem. Not from Melchizedek, but from another king of Salem, who describes himself in these words: *'I was set in my place neither by father nor mother, but by the Mighty King'*—meaning 'by God.' Read what is said about Melchizedek in Hebrews vii. These words show us that all the kings of Salem believed that they owed everything to God. This is why Abraham honoured Melchizedek so highly.

'Salem'—that is, peace. *'Jeru-salem'* means city of peace. So, as we see from these ancient letters, Jerusalem was called the city of peace even in the days of Abraham.

All these old records and many more Moses must surely have seen; the cities of Canaan were as full of books as were those of Egypt and Babylonia, for the name *'Kirjath-sepher'* (Joshua xv. 15) means 'City of Books.'

Thus, as year by year new discoveries are made, we realize more clearly the kind of preparation which Moses had for his great work, and the sources from which he gathered much of his information. Yet no single word of the Bible is copied from the heathen writings.

No; just as a man who decides to give his whole life to God to-day uses, in the Lord's service, the knowledge he gained before he was converted; so, after God called Moses to his great work, all

the learning and wide knowledge he had gathered during his life were dedicated to the service of God, and used by His Holy Spirit.

We do not know—we are nowhere told—whether Moses wrote every word of the 'Books of the Law.' The Jews believed that every letter, every tiniest dot was his. It may well have been so, as we have seen.

But, again, he may very likely have had helpers and editors; that is, people who arranged and copied his original writings.

But the Children of Israel always called the first five books of the Bible 'The Torah'; that is, 'The Law'; and they looked upon these as their most precious possession, something quite above and apart from every other writing—Jehovah's direct words and commandments to His people.

At last the life-work of Moses was done, and Joshua took his place, called by God to lead the people forward. But the new leader found himself at once in a very different position. When Moses brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt they were without a Bible.

But in Joshua's days the light had begun to shine, the river of the knowledge of God to flow, and God was able, therefore, to say to His servant Joshua:

'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shall make thy way prosperous, and then thou shall have good success.' (Joshua i. 8.)

We are not told who was called by God to write the Book of Joshua; we think that Joshua wrote at least a part of it himself, but we all know that it describes how the Israelites came at last into the Promised Land, and drove out the wicked idol-worshippers.

Buried deep in the earth the remains of many old Canaanite cities have been found.

Those of Lachish, the great Amorite city, are specially interesting. We know how the Children of Israel dreaded the Amorite cities. '*Great and walled up to Heaven*' (Deuteronomy i. 28), as the people said. Yet, in spite of their great strength, Joshua took them one by one, overthrew them, and afterwards built the Jewish towns upon their ruins. This was the custom of conquerors with all these ancient cities, as the excavators find to-day.

Now, in the remains of Lachish we can see its whole history. Three distinct cities have been found, one below the other.

Deepest down of all, full sixty feet underground, are the enormous walls of the Amorite city; great masses of rough brick forming huge walls at least twenty-eight feet wide. No wonder the Children of Israel, felt doubtful of victory!

Above the Amorite walls are the scattered fragments of rough mud-huts and cattle shelters. The Israelites had no time to build anything better until Canaan was conquered.

Above these again stand the ruined walls of a later Jewish city, Lachish, as it was in the days of Solomon and the Jewish kings.

A fair city it must have been, built of white stone, the capitals of some of the columns carved to resemble a ram's horn, perhaps to remind the people of the horns of the altar in the Tabernacle. But the walls of the Jewish Lachish have none of the massive strength of the ancient Amorite city.

Had we space we might pause over many of the other ancient Canaanitish cities, for the subject is of absorbing interest, but perhaps we may return to it in a later volume. Joshua, like all God's true servants past and present, made full use of the precious Book, and, *'There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers.'* (Joshua viii. 35.)

Before he died he spoke to the people very sorrowfully about their sins. Many of them, in spite of God's commandments and His favour and love, had begun to serve the false gods of Canaan. The people repented at the old leader's earnest words, and they cried, *'The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey.'* (Joshua xxiv. 24.) Joshua made them promise to be steadfast. *'And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God.'* (Verse 26.) From this we see that Joshua wrote a part, at least, of the Book that is called by his name.

People have often thought it strange that the Children of Israel should again and again break God's clear command, *'Thou shall have no other gods before Me.'* (Exodus xx. 3.) How could they have been so foolish as to care for false gods when the living God had done so much for them?

It is the old story. A man who has once given way to drunkenness is not safe unless he puts strong drink out of his life for ever. If he even touches it he is liable to fall back again into its power. So it was with the Children of Israel. The worship of false gods had been the terrible sin of their wilderness wanderings, and now to serve the gods of Canaan became their strongest temptation.

The temples were so strange, so beautiful, the gods themselves so mysterious, and then all was so easy, so pleasant! No stern self-denial was needed; there were no difficult laws to keep; no holiness was asked for. Drinking, feasting, and all kinds of self-indulgence were part of the worship of Baal, and those who served Ashtaroth, the goddess of beauty, might spend their whole lives in wicked and degrading pleasures.



ANCIENT FIGURE OF ASHTAROTH, THE WICKED IDOL-GODDESS OF CANAAN

The backsliders of Israel found it only too easy to give up the struggle for right, and to sink down into the horrible wickedness of the heathen tribes around them.

Many people to-day are asking how a God of love and mercy could bid the Israelites utterly to destroy the cities of Canaan, and to kill their inhabitants, but the more we discover of these ancient tribes, the more hopelessly depraved do we find them to have been. For centuries God had been waiting in patience; the warning He had given to them through Sodom's swift

destruction had been unheeded; now at last the cup of their iniquity was full (Genesis xv. 16) and the Israelites were to be His means of ridding the world of this plague spot.

In the Book of Judges we see how each time His people disobeyed His command and copied the sins they were called to sweep away, God punished them by letting their merciless neighbours rule over them, till they loathed the bondage and turned once more to the living God.

Had Israel absorbed the vices of these nations instead of destroying them, try to think what the world would have lost! The one channel through which God was giving His Book to man would have become so choked and polluted with vice that in its turn it also would have become a source of infection and not of health.

[1] This king's name is also spelt Hammurabi.

CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORY BOOKS



hus little by little the Book of God grew, and the people He had chosen to be its guardians took their place among the nations.

A small place it was from one point of view! A narrow strip of land, but unique in its position as one of the highways of the world, on which a few tribes were banded together. All around great empires watched them with eager eyes; the powerful kings of Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia, the learned Greeks, and, in later times, the warlike Romans.

How small and unimportant the Israelites appeared to the world then! Yet we know that in reality they were greater than any people the world had ever seen. God's words have been fulfilled; through the Children of Israel all the nations of the world are blessed.

The old empires have crumbled into dust; the great conquerors of ancient days are forgotten; few people to-day remember the names of the wise men of Greece and Rome, but our lives and thoughts are daily influenced by the thoughts, words, and deeds of the Jews of old. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah—their very names are nearer and dearer to us than those of the heroes of our own land.

When Queen Victoria was asked the secret of England's greatness, she held up a Bible. Their Sacred Book was all that the Jews possessed. Their whole greatness was wrapped up in it. As the heathen truly said, they were 'The People of the Book.'

And now let us glance at the history books of the Bible. The first and second Books of Samuel have been put together from several other records. Most likely Samuel himself did part of the work. In Shiloh, where he was educated, the old documents were kept, and Samuel, the gifted lad, who so early gave his heart to God, was in every way fitted to write the story of the Lord's chosen people during his own life-time.

The Bible mentions several other histories that were written in these days besides those which we know. '*Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer.*' (These last have disappeared.) (1 Chronicles xxix. 29.)

Stores of books were being gathered. When, for instance, Saul was chosen king, Samuel '*wrote in a book and laid it up before the Lord.*' (1 Samuel x. 25.) These books were most likely written on a rough kind of parchment, made from the skins of goats, sewn together, and rolled up into thick rolls.

The Books of Samuel are very precious to us, for in them we read nearly all we know of the history of David the shepherd-king. Some of David's own writings are found in these books, but for most of them we have to turn to the Book of the Psalms, which was the manual of the Temple choir, and became the national collection of sacred poems. These Psalms were composed by different authors, and at different times, chiefly for use in the Temple, but the collection was founded by David, and he contributed many of its most beautiful hymns.

David's boyhood was spent among the rugged hills and valleys of Bethlehem. As we read his Psalms we feel that the writer has passed long hours alone with God, and the beautiful things which God has made.

Let us watch him for a moment. It is evening, and the young lad is alone on the hills, keeping his father's sheep. The sun is sinking, and all the earth is bathed in golden light. Even the sullen surface of the Dead Sea reflects the glory, and the hills of Moab glow as though on fire.

'God is the Creator of all this beauty,' thinks David. 'Yes, bright as is that golden sky, His glory is *above the heavens.*' (Psalm viii. 1.)

Now the sun has quite gone; night's dark curtain draws across the world, the rosy glow fades from the hills. One by one the great white stars shine out, and presently the moon rises. The young lad raises his face, and gazes upward. '*When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained*' (Psalm viii. 3) he murmurs; 'how great is this mighty God, how far beyond all the thoughts and ways of men! *What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?*' (Verse 4.)

But God loves us even though we are lower than the angels. He has crowned us with glory and honour. He has given all His beautiful world, and all the wonderful things He has made, into our hands. '*O Lord (verse 4) our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth.*' (Verse 9.)

In Psalm xxix. David gives a word picture of a thunderstorm. He describes the furious blast, the crashing thunder, the vivid lightning. Many times as a young lad he had watched the black storm-clouds gather over the hills and valleys of Bethlehem. He had no fear of the tempest. God's voice was in the wind; God's voice divided the lightning-flashes; God's voice shook the wilderness. Yes, God would make His people strong, even as the storm was strong.

And when the storm had passed, and the sun shone out once more over the quiet hills, how clearly the words rose in David's mind, '*The Lord will bless His people with peace!*' (Verse 11.)

Solomon, David's son, was the wisest king of ancient times. He wrote many books, but only small fragments of them are found in the Bible; a few Psalms, Solomon's Song, and a collection Proverbs.



*SENNACHERIB, KING OF ASSYRIA. FROM THE ASSYRIAN PICTURE OF THE
TAKING OF LACHISH. (2 Kings xviii.)*

For much of Solomon's wisdom was of the earthly sort. He stood first among all the learned men of his day. He would now be called a 'scientific' man. But all science which is limited to mere human wisdom grows quickly out of date. The cleverest men of to-day will be thought very ignorant in a few years.

Whereas David's writings live. His love for God, and his faith in God, made him able to write those words of trust and hope and praise which are as sweet and fresh to-day as when they were written, and which go right home to our hearts.

How many cold hearts have not David's psalms warmed into life, how many wounded spirits have they not comforted! There is not a grief or anxiety in our lives to-day that could not be met and softened by the words of the Jewish writer of long ago. Yes, the work done for God and inspired by His Spirit never grows old.

And now, as we open the books of the kings, the great empires of the days of old, of Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Persia, seem to start into vivid life once more.

How strong they were—how terrible! What defence had the little kingdom of Judah against such overwhelming power, such mighty armies, such merciless rulers?

She had the best defence of all—God's holy promises chronicled in His Book. While her people loved and served their God they would be safe.

But, alas! they soon forgot to read and obey His Book, and neither loved nor served Him any more. Then came sorrow and trouble exactly as Moses had foretold. Cities were sacked, and many hundreds of people led away into slavery; yet, until the days of Hezekiah, no one tried to understand the reason for all this.

King Hezekiah understood and trembled; he prayed earnestly that God would pardon the nation's sin, and when the Book of the Law was lying forgotten in the Temple he had it brought out and read before him. (2 Chronicles xxxiv. 14-18.)

Under his direction the Proverbs of Solomon were collected and copied (Proverbs xxv. i), and the Psalms of David sung in the Temple once again.

The wonderful story of the King of Assyria's campaign against Jerusalem, followed shortly after by the defence of the Holy City by God Himself in answer to Hezekiah's prayer, can be read at length in the story of 'Hezekiah the King.'[\[1\]](#)

Although Sennacherib of Assyria was one of the mightiest rulers the world has ever seen, he was utterly discomfited when he set his power against the will of God.

The Books of Kings and Chronicles give us, as it were, the history of a nation from God's point of view.

The writers' names are not even known. But in these Books we are shown clearly that God rules over the nations, and is working His purpose out through His chosen instruments, year by year. It is in vain for a man to strive against God, or for a nation to hope for prosperity while it forsakes the law of the Lord.

No other history has ever attempted to show us the deep truths and perfect order which lie behind apparent confusion in the story of a nation.

With the History Books of the Bible, the Books of the Prophets are closely interwoven. Throughout Kings and Chronicles we catch many glimpses of the prophets and of their noble efforts to keep alive God's words in the hearts of the people; but in the writings of the prophets themselves we may read the actual messages which God's messengers proclaimed in order to stir up their hearers in times of national distress or heart-backsliding.

God's indignation against hypocrites and oppressors is declared in words that cannot be passed over; but ever as the clouds of trouble gather more thickly over His people is the hope of a coming Saviour more clearly put before them.

For a real understanding of the Prophets' Books it is necessary to know something of the circumstances under which each man lived and wrote. Amos and Hosea, for instance, warned their people of the approach of Sargon of Assyria unless they repented and turned again to the law of the Lord.

As they did not repent the prophets' warning came true, and Sargon invaded and destroyed the Kingdom of Israel.

But Nahum brings comfort, for he tells the suffering Kingdoms of Judah and Israel that the Kings of Assyria shall so disappear that in the years to come the very place where they dwelt shall be forgotten, while Judah shall keep the Lord's feasts for ever. (Nahum i. 15.)

The Bible tells of many of God's acts which seem very wonderful to us. We call these acts 'miracles,' because we cannot explain them, nor how they happened.

Now the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the rest of the prophets are also miracles, for although these men wrote at widely different times, and hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, yet their books all speak of Him. The light of God's Spirit shone into their hearts so that they foresaw and foretold the coming of the Saviour King.

Terrible troubles would overwhelm the Jews; but, even though the wall of Jerusalem should be broken down, the city laid waste, and the inhabitants led away captive, God's words were sure. He would visit His people at last. He would redeem them from their sins.

The troubles came, the prophets' eyes streamed with tears, and their hearts were torn with grief as they saw their land wasted by the heathen. Yet they did not despair. The dark night of sorrow would wear away at last, God's people should be brought back, Jerusalem rebuilt; her King would come, the Sun of Righteousness arise, '*And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*' (Isaiah ix. 6.)

[1] A companion volume to this book.

CHAPTER V

THE SCATTERING OF THE PEOPLE



At last the full punishment for their many sins fell upon God's chosen people.

The words of warning written in the fifth book of Moses had told them plainly that if they turned aside and worshipped the wicked idol-gods of Canaan, the Lord would take their country from them and drive them out into strange lands.

Yet again and again they had yielded to temptation. And now the day of reckoning had come.

Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, sent his armies into the Holy Land. No nation at this time could resist Nebuchadnezzar; even the fierce Assyrians had to bow before him, for he was one of the most powerful kings the world has ever seen.

Yet even Nebuchadnezzar was but an instrument in the hands of God, as Daniel recognized when he said: *'Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of Heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.'* (Daniel ii. 37.)

This thought had been Daniel's comfort and stay, though he had been carried into the great heathen land far from Jerusalem, his beloved and holy city. But to those Jews who had no trust in God to uphold them, the sorrow was almost greater than they could bear.

For Nebuchadnezzar broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and led many thousands of her people away to be his slaves in Babylon.

'We have taken their treasure of gold and silver; we have laid their city wall in ruins; their Temple is bare and deserted; their gardens of lilies and spices are choked with weeds; their fields are unsown; their vineyards untended; the best men and women of the land are serving us in Babylon. Now, at last, there is an end of this proud Jewish nation, for all that they most valued is in our hands.'

So said the heathen Babylonians, mocking the poor captives. How little they dreamt that the Jews' most precious possession was with them still!

More valued than jewels or gold, sweeter than the milk and honey of their own land, was the Book of the Law—the Book which told them all they knew of God.

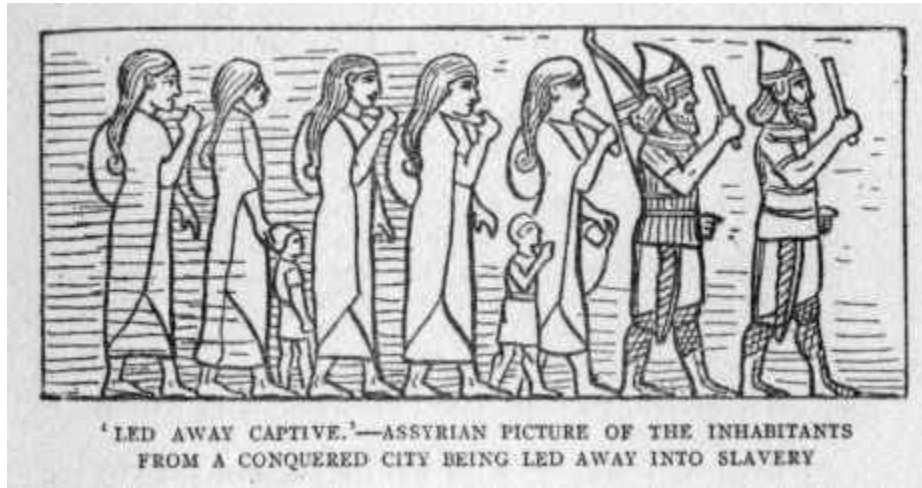
Indeed, not until the people were forced to live in a heathen city did they really learn to understand how great a treasure their nation possessed in the written words of God.

But in Babylon, with its huge heathen temples blazing with jewels and gold, its scores of cunning idol-priests, who deceived the people by pretending to tell fortunes and make charms, and its countless images, here, at last, God's chosen people began to see the greatness of the gift with which the Lord had blessed them, when He gave them the words which have now become the first books of our Bible.

Nebuchadnezzar might break down the wall of their city, he could not break down the spiritual wall which God Himself had built round His people. Scattered through many lands, forced to serve heathen masters as they were, the Book of God's Law was a living gift which bound the Jewish people together.

As we have seen, the Psalms were written by different writers, and one of the later Psalms, the 137th, gives us a vivid picture of those sad days: '*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*' (Verse 1.)

Babylon was famous for its great rivers; and the poor captives watched the flowing water, and the great wind-swept beds of reeds and giant rushes. '*We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.*' (Verse 2.)



'LED AWAY CAPTIVE.'—ASSYRIAN PICTURE OF THE INHABITANTS FROM A CONQUERED CITY BEING LED AWAY INTO SLAVERY

But their Babylonian masters had heard of the sweet psalms of the Lord's people. 'Sing to us,' they said; 'sing us a merry song. *Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*' (Verse 3.)

'Sing to these cruel heathen who have wasted our country, and carried us away into slavery! Sing one of the holy songs of Israel, the songs which King David wrote, that they may laugh and mock at us! *How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*' (Verse 4.)

No, they could not sing; their hearts were breaking with grief. Never, never could they forget the Holy City. Ruined, desolate as it lay, Jerusalem was still to them the place most loved in all the world.

And yet, even in far-off heathen Babylon the Lord called men to add to His Book.

The Book of Daniel has troubled many people greatly. It was not history at all, some critics said, but a mere collection of myths and legends. But year by year, as fresh discoveries are made, we see ever more clearly that it would have been better to trust the old Bible words after all.

'There never was a ruler over Babylon named Belshazzar' so these people said; 'the last Babylonian king was Nabonides.' A few years ago, however, Belshazzar's name was found on an old cuneiform tablet. Nabonides had been crowned king, but he seldom took any part in the affairs of the empire. All that he left to his eldest son, Belshazzar, who seems to have acted as king in his father's stead.

Almost daily further discoveries are being made, all proving the accuracy of Daniel's writings. What is probably the floor of the very dining-hall in which the hand-writing appeared has recently been uncovered.

Cyrus,^[1] of whom Ezra speaks in the first chapter of his book, was a very different king from Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar loved to pull down and destroy nations; but the great wish of Cyrus was to build up and restore. The cuneiform writings of the old Babylonian and Assyrian kings consist mostly of long lists of the nations they led away into slavery and the towns they burnt with fire; but the inscriptions made by Cyrus, the Persian king, speak of the people he sent back to their homes. 'All their people I collected, and restored their habitations.'^[2] And among these people, as the Bible tells us, were the Jews of Jerusalem.

Many and great were the difficulties before them; but led, during the reign of Artaxerxes, by Ezra and Nehemiah, they faced their troubles bravely, until at last the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt, and the city restored to something of its old beauty.

What a time of joy and triumph! Hardly could the Jews believe that they were in their own dear city once again. Psalm cxxvi. describes this wonderful day.

'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them.' (Verses 1, 2.)

'We have sinned against the Lord, we have been untrue to our promises; but never again will we neglect His Book, nor forget His Law.'

'And all the people gathered themselves together as one man...; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.' (Nehemiah viii. 1.)

A solemn day that was, as we read in the Book of Nehemiah, a day of real returning to the Lord. Picture them standing there, those men and women and little children of Jerusalem; their faces would be worn with toil and hardship.

On a raised platform of wood stood Ezra ready with the rolls of the Books of the Law, and beside him were the interpreters.

For the people had been so long in a strange land that scarcely any of them could speak Hebrew; that is, the old Hebrew language in which King David wrote. If the Law of God was to be impressed afresh on the nation's heart that day, the scribes, the writers and the teachers must translate it into the language of their heathen conquerors.

'So they read in the Book of the Law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.' (Nehemiah viii. 8.)

Since those days of Ezra, the Bible has been translated into nearly every known language. It is most interesting, therefore, to read in the Bible itself about what was most likely the very first translation of all—and this not a *written* translation, remember.

Now when the people heard the words of God's Book they were very sad; for now at last they understood how deeply they had sinned against Him.

They had been proud of their Bible, and had rightly felt it to be a great treasure; but now they saw that the words of the Bible must be shown forth in the lives of those who believe. To honour God's Book is not enough; we must obey it.

The Jewish people did not again learn to speak the old language of their nation. Yet all the copies of the Books of the Law, and the Books of the Prophets, the Psalms, and those writings which tell of the history of the Lord's people—that is, the whole of the Old Testament—were still written in the ancient tongue.

So it came to pass, after a while, that the Bible could only be read by the learned people; for the words in which the Law of God was given had become a 'dead language'—that is, a language that had ceased to be used in daily life at all.

Before the death of Ezra and Nehemiah, or else very soon after, the scribes of Jerusalem—that is, the writers and teachers—began to devote themselves almost entirely to the studying and copying of the Bible.

A young lad of those days who became a pupil in the School of the Scribes at Jerusalem would have to begin by learning the Old Testament almost by heart. To read an old Hebrew writing correctly was almost impossible, unless you had heard it read two or three times, and knew pretty well what was coming. For the ancient Hebrew alphabet consisted entirely of consonants; there were actually *no* vowels!

The little dots you see in the specimen of Hebrew given on this page are called 'vowel-points,' and are a guide to the sound of the word; but in the old, old days of which we are speaking, these dots had not been invented. The reader had nothing but consonants before him, and was obliged to guess the rest.

Just think of it! Suppose we followed this rule in English, and you came to the word, 'TP,' you would be puzzled indeed to know whether tap, tip, or top was meant!

But the Jewish scribes had wonderful memories. A teacher would read a long passage from the Psalms to his pupil, and very soon the lad would be able to repeat the whole correctly, the consonant words just refreshing his memory.



THE FIRST LINE OF THE BIBLE IN HEBREW

This would not always be as difficult as you might suppose. For instance, you can read this easily enough:

'TH LRD S M SHPHRD SHLL NT WNT.'

Indeed, to this day the Hebrew of the sacred Books in the Jewish Synagogues is all written without vowel-points.

At this time it was that the Jews became really the 'People of the Book,' and that a special society was formed to guard and copy the Bible.

How wonderfully this work was done! Never have the words of any other book been so lovingly cared for.

We have called the Bible the oldest Book in the world; we have seen that it tells about nations and people who were almost forgotten before the days of Abraham. It seems strange, therefore, that the most ancient copy of the Old Testament Scriptures, written in Hebrew and in the possession of the Jews to-day, carries us back only to the time of our Saxon kings.^[3]

This is because the Jews' custom is reverently to destroy every copy of the Books of the Old Testament—that is, of their Bible—as soon as it becomes worn with use, or blurred with the kisses of its readers.

'This is a living Book,' they say; 'it should look new. God's Word can never grow old.'

So, year by year, they make new copies directly the old are worn out, and this they have done for long ages. And so careful have they been in making the copies, that although all was written by hand, there has practically been no alteration in the words for more than two thousand years. God had indeed well chosen the guardians of His Book.

Let us try to picture to ourselves a young scribe of those old, old days, with his dark hair and big, serious eyes, and dressed in his white robe.

He has been very patient and industrious for many months past, working early and late; now, at last, he is to be allowed to copy one of the sacred books.

'My son,' his old teacher has said, 'take heed how thou doest thy work; drop not nor add one letter, lest thou become the destruction of the world.'

'Oh, may the Lord keep my attention fixed, may He hold my hand that it shake not!'

So, with a prayer on his lips, the young scribe begins his work.

And it is through such patient, careful work as his that the older part of our Bible has come down to us from the half-forgotten ages of the past.

[1] Cyrus became King of Persia 546 B.C., conquered Babylon 538, died 528 B.C.

[2] Cuneiform writing made by order of Cyrus.

[3] The Codex Babylonicus, the earliest known Jewish manuscript, dates from the year A.D. 916.

CHAPTER VI

THE ATTACK ON THE SCRIPTURES



ut troubled times came again to Jerusalem. The great empires of Babylon and Assyria had passed away for ever, exactly as the prophets of Israel had foretold; but new powers had arisen in the world, and the great nations fought together so constantly that all the smaller countries, and with them the Kingdom of Judah, changed hands very often.

At last Alexander the Great managed to make himself master of all the countries of the then-known world. Alexander was an even greater conqueror than Nebuchadnezzar had been. He did not treat the Jews unkindly; he neither interfered with their religion nor took treasure from their temple.

Yet while Alexander did God's people no outward injury, his influence and example led them astray.

For Alexander was a Greek, and the Greeks, although at this time the cleverest people in the whole world, were a heathen nation, and as such did many foolish and wicked things. Alexander himself offered sacrifice to Venus, Jupiter, and Bacchus (the pretended god of wine and strong drink[1]), and to many other gods of man's invention.

Never again would God's chosen people willingly worship false gods; their troubles had cured them once for all of that sin.

But although they knew the Greek religion to be untrue, they began greatly to admire the Greeks themselves, and to take their opinion about many things.

'Who can build like these Greeks?' they will have said. 'Who can carve such beautiful statues, or paint such beautiful pictures? Everyone knows that their poetry is the finest in the world, and that their books are the wisest and pleasantest to read; and then, how well they train their young people! The lads of Greece are the strongest wrestlers and the swiftest runners in the world!'

All this was quite true; but the Jews forgot that mere cleverness does not make a man or woman good, and that the fear of God is the beginning of all true wisdom. Many people forget this even to-day.

So the Jews began to give their children Greek names, and to send them to Greek schools, and, what was worse, they put Greek books into their hands instead of the Bible.

Slowly but surely this unholy 'leaven' entered the people's life, and influenced their thoughts. But, in spite of all, many Jewish men and women remained faithful to God; they kept His laws, and read in His Book daily, looking always for the coming Saviour, the Messiah, who would rule and redeem His people.

As the years passed the fashion for Greek ideas and ways grew stronger in Jerusalem, until at last even the High Priest himself[2] began to encourage the people to neglect the services and sacrifices of the Temple, that they might go to heathen sports and games.

The Greeks were very fond of foot-races and wrestling-matches, and they held large athletic meetings two or three times a year; but no one who believed in God should have gone near those meetings, for the Grecian games were always held in honour of some heathen god or goddess.



*FIG. 1.—COIN OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT, WITH PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF AND
FIGURE OF JUPITER, THE FALSE GOD HE WORSHIPPED*

*FIG. 2.—COIN OF ANTIOCHUS, THE WICKED KING. PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF,
AND FIGURE OF VENUS, ONE OF THE FALSE GODS HE TRIED TO FORCE THE
JEWS TO BELIEVE IN*

When Alexander died he left his vast empire to be divided among his generals, just as Napoleon did centuries later with his conquests. The descendant of one of these generals was named Antiochus, and he began to reign over Syria, which included the country of Judah, a hundred and seventy years before the birth of Christ. He was known as Antiochus IV, and was a selfish and cruel ruler.

Although indifferent to his own heathen religion, he set himself to destroy all other forms of faith. 'I am king; all my subjects shall think as I do,' he said. He was told that the Jews believed in only one God, but he cried with a scornful laugh, 'Yes, but I will soon alter that!'

Before this there had been trouble between Antiochus and the people of Jerusalem, and he thought to himself, 'I must break down their old ideas and force them to disobey the laws of Moses, as they call them; above all, I must utterly destroy their Book. The Book of their Law once gone, they will be easy enough to manage.'

So he sent one of his generals to Jerusalem, and bade him take an army of soldiers and 'speak peaceable words unto them; but all this was deceit.'^[3]

The orders of Antiochus were obeyed; the Jews suspected nothing, and the soldiers kept quiet until the Sabbath day.

But while the Jews were at prayer, and unable to defend themselves, the treacherous Greeks 'fell suddenly upon the city, and smote it very sore, and destroyed much people of Israel.' Then these wicked men built a strong castle on the hill of Zion, so overlooking the entrance to the Temple that no one could come in or go out without the knowledge and consent of the governor of the castle.

But this was only the beginning of sorrows. Soon the dreadful orders of the heathen king were cried through the streets of Jerusalem:

'It is the will of Antiochus the king that all the people throughout his whole empire shall worship the same gods as himself, and shall declare that his religion alone is true. Death to all those who disobey.'

The Jews looked at one another in utter dismay, for they knew well that Antiochus had power to keep his word.

'No more burnt offerings may be made to the God of the Jews in the Temple. I forbid the keeping of the Sabbath. The Jews' law declares the flesh of swine to be unclean. I command that on the altar of the Jewish God, in His Temple at Jerusalem, a sow be offered in honour of my god Jupiter. The Priests themselves shall be forced to eat of it.'

'As for the Books of their Law, destroy them utterly; let not a word remain in the whole land. Publish this order against the Book; and if, after my will has been declared, any man is found to have a copy in his possession, let him be put to death.'

Horrible as it seems, all these wicked commands were carried out. A sow was slaughtered on the altar, and an image of Jupiter set up in God's Holy Temple. More cruel than all, the Book of the Law was torn and trodden underfoot.

Throughout Jerusalem and all the cities of Palestine bands of soldiers went everywhere searching for copies of the Scriptures. Torn to fragments, burnt with fire, often, alas! drenched with the life-blood of those who loved them, now, indeed, the Books of the Bible were in terrible danger, for the most powerful king of the fierce heathen world was fighting directly against them!

'O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy Temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.... The blood of Thy servants have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them.' (Psalm lxxix.)

So the cry went up from those faithful hearts who still dared to serve the true God.

The altar—the Temple itself—was now defiled, made 'unclean'; the Book of the Law had been torn to fragments; but His people could still cry to the Lord, and He heard.

They did not obey the wicked heathen king; and the stories of their courage thrill our hearts as we read them, for they show us what those saints of old suffered rather than deny their God.

'They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy).' (Hebrews xi. 37, 38.)

It was of these times especially that the writer of Hebrews was thinking when he penned those words.

Seven young men, the sons of one woman, were with their mother brought before the king's officer—or, as some say, before the king himself—for refusing to break the laws of God.

They were cruelly beaten, but one of them cried:

'What wouldst thou ask of us? We are ready to die, rather than to transgress the laws of our fathers!'

The torturers thereupon seized the brave fellow, and so cruelly tormented him that he died, his mother and brothers being forced to look on.

But though their faces grew pale as death, and they quivered with anguish to see their loved one suffer, they gazed steadfastly at each other.

'The Lord looketh upon us, the Lord God hath comfort in us,' they said.

Then the second son was taken, and before he died he cried with a loud voice, looking his heathen judge full in the face:

'Thou, like a fury, takest us out of this present life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for His laws, unto life everlasting!'

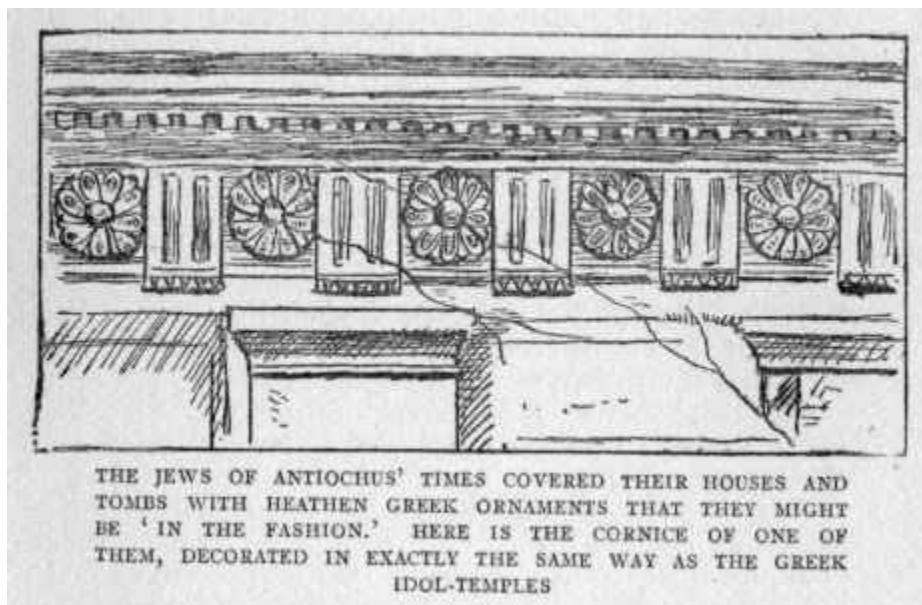
But when it came to the turn of the youngest son even the heathen judge was anxious to spare him, and he promised the lad honour and great riches if he would but turn from his faith.

But the youth stepped out before them all, his boyish face as brave as a man's and his boyish voice as steady.

'Whom wait ye for?' he asked. 'I will obey the Commandments of the Law that was given unto our fathers by Moses; but thou shalt not escape the hands of God.'

'We suffer for our sins, but our pain is short. See, I offer up my body and life for the Laws of my fathers, beseeching God to be merciful to my nation, and that thou at last mayest confess that He alone is God!'

Last of all, after her sons, the mother died as well.[\[4\]](#)



THE JEWS OF ANTIOCHUS' TIMES COVERED THEIR HOUSES AND TOMBS WITH HEATHEN GREEK ORNAMENTS THAT THEY MIGHT BE 'IN THE FASHION.' HERE IS THE CORNICE OF ONE OF THEM, DECORATED IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY AS THE GREEK IDOL-TEMPLES

But the saints of God did not die in vain; their victories over pain and death fired the hearts that had grown so cold, and awakened the careless into active life. Those who had forsaken the religion of their fathers returned by hundreds to God, confessing their sins, and pleading for pardon.

So the very fierceness of the trial proved a blessing, and the days of torture were followed by a revival of faith in God, and devotion to His service.

Now there was an old priest named Mattathias who, with his four sons, had never listened to the cunning temptations of the heathen Greeks. All his life he had served God with his whole heart, and had brought up his sons to follow in his steps. When Mattathias and his sons heard what was

being done at Jerusalem, they clothed themselves in sackcloth and wept, praying, and fasting continually, beseeching God to forgive His people, and to put away their sins.

In a little while the king's officers came to the heathen altar at Modin, the town where the old priest lived.

'Sacrifice to Jupiter, our master's god!' they said. 'Sacrifice, as all Jews shall be forced to do, or die!'

But the old man looked the Greek straight in the face. 'Though all the nations in the world obey the king, yet will I and my sons walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake His Law.'

As he spoke a backsliding Jew stepped up to the altar to sacrifice. The old priest's eyes flashed fire, and in an instant he had struck him down, and the Greek officer with him.

Quivering with indignation Mattathias then turned to the startled people: 'Whosoever loves God, let him follow me!'

And he turned and fled swiftly through the streets of the city.

Many followed him at once. Others joined him later in the strong camp he formed in the mountains, until at last he was at the head of an army.

Wonderful it is to read how, little by little, this army of God's people drove the heathen from the cities of Judah; how they overturned the heathen altars, and cast down the images of the false gods; and how, at last, they came to Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple, and purified the golden altar from the stains of heathen sacrifices.

Then, tenderly and reverently, they gathered together all that was left of the copies of their Scriptures, weeping as they saw the poor fragments, blackened with fire, stained with blood, and scrawled all over with the horrible figures of heathen gods.

As to-day we read in the clean white pages of our Bible, let us remember this scene and of the time when those torn and blood-stained fragments were all that remained to the world.

But, thank God, when all the pieces had been collected together, there was plenty of material from which to make fresh copies; and no sooner had peace been restored to the city than the scribes set to work, with eager, loving care.

The Book had become doubly precious now! Its written words were indeed sacred, for the blood of martyrs had fallen upon them, and men and women, and little children, too, had chosen to die by hundreds rather than to deny them.

[1] With all his cleverness, Alexander, while still quite young, drank himself to death.

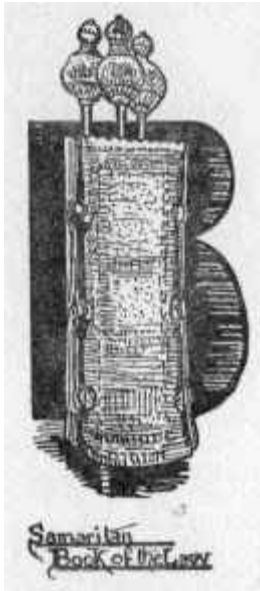
[2] In the days of Joshua, who bought the office of High Priest under the reign of Antiochus, so many priests took part in the games that the regularity of the Temple services suffered.

[3] From 'Maccabees,' an old Jewish history, which is sometimes bound up with our Bible.

[4] This is taken from 'Maccabees.'

CHAPTER VII

TWO FAMOUS VERSIONS OF THE SCRIPTURES



y the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea, on the coast of Egypt, lies Alexandria, a busy and prosperous city of to-day.

You remember the great conqueror, Alexander, and how nation after nation had been forced to submit to him, until all the then-known world owned him for its emperor? He built this city, and called it after his own name.

About a hundred years before the days of Antiochus (of whom we read in our last chapter) a company of Jews were living in Alexandria, then a rich and beautiful city, with its stately palaces and temples of white marble, its beautiful gardens, and groves of graceful palm-trees.

After the death of Alexander, the Greek kings of Egypt delighted to live in the new city, and in the old Greek books we can yet read of the splendid processions and festivals held in its streets year by year.

At this time Alexandria drew all the merchants of the world to her markets; and her harbour was constantly filled with ships laden with silver, amber, and copper; while caravans were arriving daily, bringing jewels and rich silks from China, India, and the cities of the far East.

The Jews of Alexandria were not treated as foreigners, but as good subjects and citizens, by the Greek rulers of Egypt, and therefore as the years passed they grew rich and honoured in their beautiful home. Their children, however, seldom if ever heard Hebrew spoken; for all the Jews of Alexandria, for convenience' sake, spoke Greek like their neighbours.

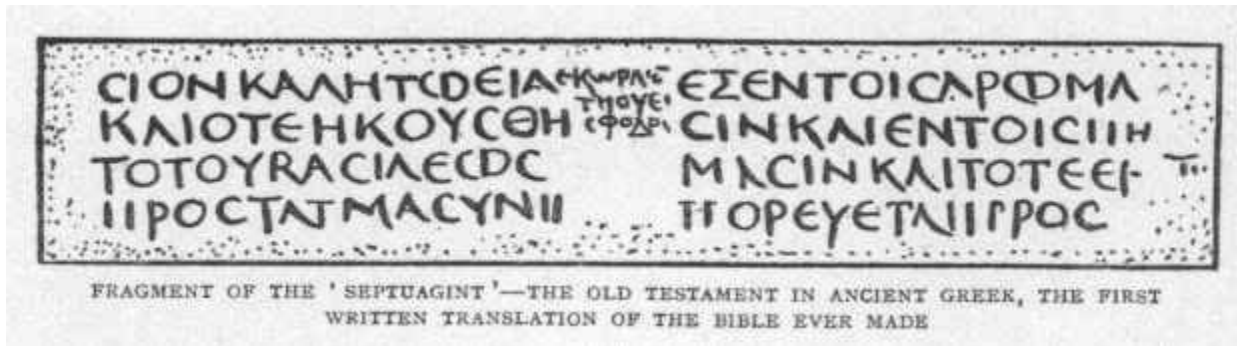
But, although these Jews lived in a heathen city where they read nothing but Greek books, and heard Greek spoken all day long, they did not forget their God. They longed as earnestly as ever to hear about Him, and to read in His Book; but what was to be done? Only a few of the elder Jews could read Hebrew, and their children could not understand one word of the language. Must the little ones, therefore, grow up in ignorance of the Word of God?

This was impossible. Here in the heathen city of Alexandria the Scriptures would be the only safeguard of Jewish boys and girls. 'If the language of our children is Greek, then the Bible must be translated into Greek, so that they all can understand it.' So said these Jewish parents.

This was a wonderful proof of the Bible's living power. The Jews had changed their language and their country. Thousands of the cleverest books ever written were within their reach—for Alexandria had at this time the largest library in the world—yet all this made no difference; without the written Word of God, they could not exist.

Some writers say that Ptolemy Philadelphus, the king of Egypt of that time, having heard the Jews speak of their Book, and wishing to have a copy of it to place in his great library, sent all the way to Jerusalem for seventy learned scribes who should translate the Book into Greek.

Now, however, it is believed that the Jews of Alexandria did the work entirely themselves, although their Greek Bible is still called the 'Septuagint'—that is, 'The Scriptures of the Seventy'—in memory of the old tradition.



*FRAGMENT OF THE 'SEPTUAGINT'—THE OLD TESTAMENT IN ANCIENT GREEK,
THE FIRST WRITTEN TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE EVER MADE*

Gradually, as the years passed, the Greek language spread to other nations, until at last it became, as we have seen, the leading language of the world. Even to-day, as you know, this old Greek tongue is taught in many of our schools and colleges, and those who can read it tell us that there is no language so beautiful; none with words so sweet to the ear, nor in which such deep thoughts can be expressed.

Thus we see how God used the learning of the heathen Greeks to make His Book known to the world!

For hundreds of years the Bible had been a Book for the people of Israel alone; but now, as the time drew near when the Son of God Himself should come to the world—that the world by Him might be saved—the Scriptures, which had since the days of Moses spoken of His coming, were sent out to the nations by God Himself in order to prepare the way.

The Jews of old divided all dwellers on the earth into two classes: the Jews—that is, themselves; the Gentiles—that is, all the other nations.

But now the wall of separation was to be broken down, and the words of the Prophet Isaiah were to be fulfilled, *'The Gentiles shall come to Thy light.'* (Isaiah Ix. 3.)

Now that God's Holy Word had been translated into Greek, the one language which every man of those days wished to learn, the message could ring through all the Gentile cities: 'A King, a Saviour, is coming; be ready to meet Him!'

So the Scriptures went forth, north, south, east, and west, and we think they reached to that far eastern city in which those three wise men lived who afterwards travelled to Bethlehem, seeking the Messiah, and saying, '*Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*' (Matthew ii. 2.)

The Bible had indeed taken a strong leap forward now!

For long centuries it had been like a tiny stream flowing through a dry land, and reaching only a few people. Now it had become as a river of truth, ever growing deeper and wider, guided by God in all its wanderings across the earth.

The Bible was now no longer locked up in a language which was already half-forgotten. With this Greek translation its world-wide work had begun!

But while the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was becoming an open door through which the people of many lands could draw nearer to God, a second witness to the truth of God's Book was hidden away in Samaria.

For the Samaritans had their own copies of the Books of the Law, and kept them closely shut up among their own people for hundreds of years.

It is impossible now to give the actual date when the Samaritans began to use a different copy of the Scriptures from the Jews. The Israelitish city of Samaria was captured by Sargon, king of Assyria, in 722 B.C.; but although he carried away the most important inhabitants captive, a great number of the poorer people remained on the land, and when Sargon filled the country with new and heathen settlers, so many marriages took place between the two races that the Children of Israel lost their old name and were known to the Jews of Judah as 'Samaritans.'

Yet the Samaritans still clung to the Jews' religion, and the separation did not probably become complete until Nehemiah expelled all those Jews from Jerusalem who had married heathen wives. (Nehemiah xiii. 23-30.)

Now Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that among these exiles was a man named Manasseh, a grandson of the high priest, and that, indignant at being cast out, he fled to Samaria. Here he determined to set up a separate worship of Jehovah, and, having obtained permission from the king of Persia to erect a Temple, he built a Holy Place on Mount Gerizim, which became the centre of a new form of religion.

It is thought that Manasseh had carried away a copy of the Books of the Law from Jerusalem, and by means of certain alterations in the words he made it appear that God had chosen Mount Gerizim in Samaria for the site of His House, instead of Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.

Now at this time all the Jews still wrote in the ancient style, forming their letters as we see them on the Moabite Stone; but not long afterwards they adopted the square letters of Hebrew writing such as are still in use to-day.

The Samaritans, however, in their hatred of everything Jewish, refused to follow their example. The Jews had cut them off, and they would take nothing from the Jews; they would keep to the old style of letters; they would not allow a single word of the Books of the Prophets or the Psalms or History Books to have a place among their sacred writings. The Jews accepted these Books as inspired; therefore the Samaritans rejected them.

Thus Jewish pride and Samaritan littleness raised a terrible barrier between the two nations, which grew more hopeless every year.



THE SAMARITAN BOOK OF THE LAW AT NABLOUS

Yet these hidden Samaritan documents, falsified as they had been, have had a work to do for God's Word within comparatively recent times.

For in the year 1616 A.D., just as some people were beginning to attack the Bible, and to declare that they could find no evidence that the Old Testament was so ancient after all, the world was suddenly startled to hear of a great discovery—an ancient copy of the Law had been found in Syria.

Other copies soon afterwards came to light: the world had rediscovered the Samaritan Bible!

At Nablous, in Samaria, known in Old Testament times as Shechem, a traveller was allowed to look at the oldest Samaritan copy of the altered books of the Law. Its queer letter signs are traced on parchment rolls, which are said to have been formed from the skins of rams offered in sacrifice. They are kept in a silver cylinder, covered with crimson satin, heavily embroidered with gold.

But out of this discovery a new difficulty arose. Some of the critics decided that this was the original copy written by Moses, and therefore more correct than the Jewish Scriptures. They would have done better to wait, and to have trusted the Bible a little more.

True, the discovery was of great importance, for these documents proved beyond all doubt that the Book of the Law dated back to a time when the ancient form of letters were still in use, and so they bore a strong witness to the great age of the first five Books of our Bible.

But learned scholars were soon able to prove that the oldest Samaritan copy was probably not older than the tenth or eleventh century of our era, and that the form of the letters was so ancient merely because the Samaritans refused to imitate the improved Jewish writing. A hundred years ago, for instance, books with long 's's' were printed in England; but the old form of letter was tiresome to read, and is now entirely out of date.

Now the Samaritans had not only refused to accept the new and improved form of letters—they had rejected as well all the fresh light and inspiration which God was continually giving to His people through the Holy prophets. According to the Samaritans, Moses was the only true prophet. Thus they cut themselves adrift from further light, and little by little the nations had dwindled away.

Yet because so many of the Samaritans in the time of Christ were faithful to the measure of light they had, and kept alive in their hearts the hope of a coming Messiah, God made for them a wonderful way of escape.

Every Bible reader knows and loves that beautiful scene by the well of Sychar, in Samaria, where the Saviour began by asking a woman for water to drink, and ended by explaining to her some of the deepest truths of God's Kingdom.

We understand now why the woman was so surprised that a Jew should condescend to speak to her, and why the Jews would have '*no dealings with the Samaritans.*' As we have seen, a great barrier divided her from all ordinary Jewish teachers—she had been taught to believe in an altered Bible.

Not merely a different translation, remember, for the Bible should be the same in every language, but a Book of the Law in which some of the words had been changed and the original meaning destroyed.

So the woman said to our Lord, '*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*' (John iv. 20.)

The Saviour had not said so, but she felt sure that He, as a Jew, would certainly contradict the old traditions of his countrymen.

But the Lord Jesus Christ had come to show the world that it was no longer a question of this mountain or that. Such matters had been but a shadow of the good things to come. '*God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*' (John iv. 24.)

With these words Jesus, the Messiah, for whom both Jews and Samaritans were waiting, threw down the barrier of ages, and united the two nations in a spiritual worship.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BIBLE IN THE DAYS OF JESUS CHRIST



lowly but surely, as time went on, God was adding to His Book, until about four hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ the Old Testament Scriptures, in their present shape, were completed.

Many questions have been asked as to how the canon of the Old Testament was formed—that is, how and when did the Jews first begin to understand that the Books of the Old Testament were inspired by God.

About the first five Books—the Books of the Law—there had never been any question. From the very earliest times those Books, so wonderfully given to the people, had been the strength and stay of the Children of Israel.

But many books had been written in the days of the old Jewish kings, and also after the return of the people from Babylon: some of these were very beautiful and helpful. How were the sacred Scriptures first divided from the other Jewish writings?

We do not know. Some have thought that Ezra the scribe, with the assistance of a council of elders, fixed the canon of Hebrew Scripture; others have supposed Nehemiah to have undertaken the work; but most likely it was a gradual process, directed by God Himself, who inspired His servants to carry out His will.

The Christian Bible is composed of two parts, the Old and the New Testament; but the Jews divided their Scriptures—our Old Testament—into three parts, and they certainly looked upon some books as far more sacred than others. The 'Torah'—that is, the Law—included, as we have seen, the first five books of the Bible. From the very earliest days the Torah was revered as containing the commandments and promises of God.

The second division consisted of the 'Prophets,' these being subdivided into the 'Former Prophets' (four volumes)—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings—and the 'Latter Prophets' (three volumes)—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel—and the Twelve Minor Prophets (which were included in one book).

Next in order of sanctity came the third division, the 'Writings,' and these again were subdivided into three groups: the poetical Books of the Psalms, Proverbs, and Job; the 'Rolls' or 'Readings' (seven volumes)—Solomon's Song, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, and one volume containing Ezra and Nehemiah; and, lastly, in a separate book, Chronicles. Thus the whole Scriptures were contained in twenty-four books.

Indeed, not until the Greek translation was made were the books grouped in the order in which we have them now, and at the same time their number was increased to thirty-nine by taking the writings of each of the prophets separately, and treating Ezra and Nehemiah as different books.

And now God, who has spoken in times past by many different ways and voices, spoke at last to the nations by His Son, *'by whom also He made the worlds.'* (Hebrews i. 2.)

Let us think for a little while of what was being done with the Scriptures in the days when the Lord Jesus learnt to read their words at His mother's knee; words which from first to last told of Himself.

We have seen that no people could possibly honour the actual letters of the Scripture more highly than did the Jews. The care they took to keep the words exactly as they had been handed down to them was infinite; and God, who knows all things, knew that a time would come when the pure

Hebrew words of the old Bible would be eagerly sought for, and treasured by all who truly honour His Book.

Therefore, although the eyes of the learned Jewish scribes were so blinded, that they did not recognize their King and Saviour when He came, yet God blessed all that was true in their work, and it is from the Hebrew copies which they made of the Books of the Old Testament, and not from the 'Septuagint,' or Greek translation, that the Old Testament of our Bible has come to us to-day.

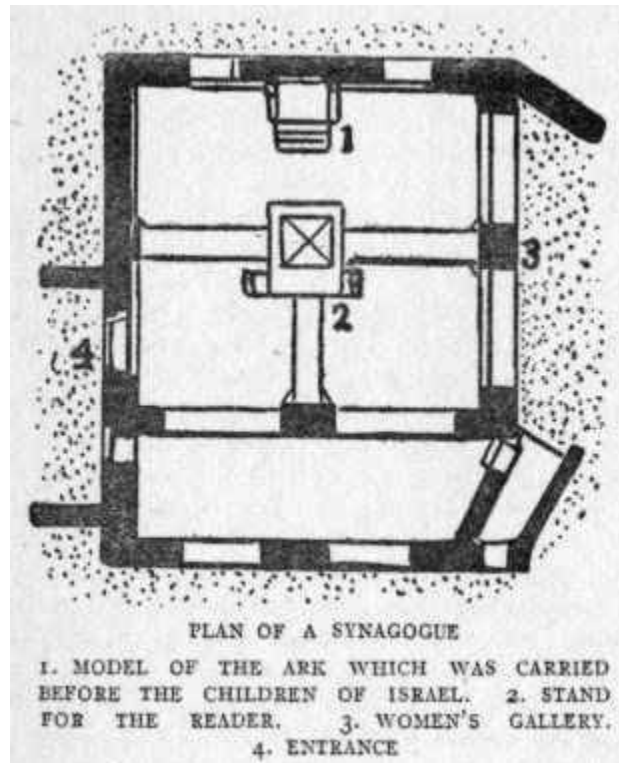
Yet, sad to say, while so careful to preserve the words of the Scriptures, the Scribes and Pharisees forgot its spirit, the very purpose for which the Bible had been given them.

A man might know by memory every letter of the Bible, but unless the Spirit of God were in his heart, helping him to act out in his life the words he repeats with his lips, all his knowledge of the Bible would only lie as a dead-weight upon his soul. '*The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*' (2 Corinthians iii. 6.) So wrote the Apostle Paul, who had, as we know, been educated by the Scribes and Pharisees, and when he wrote those words he was recalling his own experience.

Thus, as year by year the learned Jews thought more of the letters of their Bible, they saw less of its spirit; worse still, they began to add to the teaching of the Books of the Law.

Not that they ventured to put other words between those of the Bible, or to alter it as the Samaritans had done; but they invented long explanations of almost every verse, and declared that these explanations must be followed as absolutely as the words of the Bible itself.

For instance, a learned Jewish teacher wrote an explanation of Moses' command about obeying the Levites. (Deuteronomy xvii. 11.) Moses had said that the people were to do what the Levites told them respecting the Law of God, neither turning '*to the right hand, nor to the left.*' The Jewish teachers declared what Moses really meant was that if a teacher of the Law told you that your left hand was your right you must believe him!



PLAN OF A SYNAGOGUE

1. MODEL OF THE ARK WHICH WAS CARRIED BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. 2. STAND FOR THE READER. 3. WOMEN'S GALLERY. 4. ENTRANCE

In this way, while professing to explain God's Word, the scribes and teachers were confusing the simple people who wanted to obey this Holy Law.

The Saviour saw this, and He fearlessly rebuked the teachers of the Law, grieved beyond words that those to whom God had entrusted His Book should make *'the Word of God of none effect through your tradition.'* (Mark vii. 13.)

His own way of using the Scriptures was very different. From His mother He had first learned to repeat texts from the Old Testament, and with her He had gone to the Synagogue, Sabbath by Sabbath, to hear the Books of the Law and the Prophets read.

As He grew older He would have been sent to school and taught to read and recite the Scriptures, and long before He began Himself to teach the people He had so absorbed the spirit of the Old Testament that His very thoughts seem to have been given in Scripture words.

Perhaps you have wondered why the names of some of the prophets and heroes of the Old Testament are spelt so differently when mentioned in the New—'Elias' instead of 'Elijah,' 'Noe' instead of 'Noah,' and so on. This is because the writers of the New Testament quoted from the Greek translation of the Bible instead of from the Hebrew. Names change a little, you know, when translated into other languages. For instance, our name of Mary becomes 'Marie' in French, and 'Maria' in Italian, and yet it is all the while the same name.

Some people think that this, the Septuagint, or first Greek translation, was the special translation of the Bible which the Saviour used. Many of the quotations which He gave from the Old Testament appear to have been from this translation, although some seem taken directly from the Hebrew, and others again from an Aramaic version which has disappeared.

Christ Himself no doubt taught the people in the Aramaic tongue, which was a mixed language, and came into use after the Jews' return from Babylon. Aramaic is called 'Chaldee' in the Book of Daniel.

But while our Saviour constantly quoted from the Old Testament, He never used its words without definite purpose. The Sword of the Spirit in His hands was either turned against the Evil One, or brought directly to bear with overwhelming force on some mistaken teaching which had blinded the people to the true meaning of the Word of God.

The direct and yet simple way in which He reached the point, and once and for all swept away the difficulty, amazed and confounded the learned Jews.

An instance of this is found in His wonderful answer to the Sadducees, who disbelieved in the Resurrection. '*As touching the Resurrection of the dead,*' He said, '*have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?*' (Matthew xxii. 31, 32.) His hearers, of course, had heard these words quoted

from childhood, but not till the Saviour explained their full significance—'*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*'—did they realize that in the first recorded words spoken by God to Moses lay a proof of the Resurrection and of life after death.

Let us take a look at the first time in which Christ publicly read and explained the Scriptures. It is the Sabbath, and the synagogue of Nazareth is full of people, serious and attentive, for they have met together to hear the Word of God.

Now One stands up to read. The sacred Roll is in His hand; the Roll of the Book of the prophet Isaiah. Listen:—

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

'To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' (Luke iv. 18, 19.)

He closes the Book and sits down.

From the dim ages of the past those words had been read; in the long, long ages to come they will yet be read, until the World shall cease to exist, and time itself be known no more.

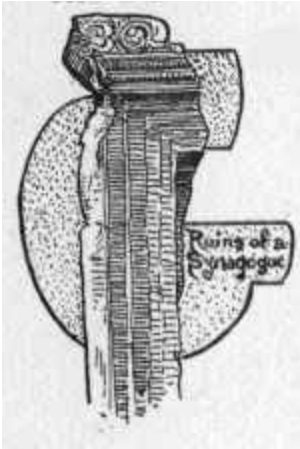
But never before and never again could there be so heart-searching or sacred a reading as this, when the Son of God read from His Father's Book in the simple village meeting in Galilee.

And yet His listeners did not understand the reading. Even after His explanation of the words they fell upon deaf ears and raised only anger and surprise. It was then that the first attempt was made to destroy Him. (Verse 29.)

To His own Apostles, enlightened as they were, the message of the Old Testament was sealed until after the Saviour's Resurrection, when He '*opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.*' (Luke xxiv. 45.) Then only did the wonderful truth dawn upon them that in coming to earth, in suffering, rising from the dead, and ascending to Heaven, their Master had not destroyed the Scriptures, but had fulfilled them. (Matthew v. 17.)

CHAPTER IX

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM



God had given to His people a Book foretelling the coming of the Christ—or Messiah, as the word is written in Hebrew—so that they might be prepared and ready for His appearance. Yet when He came they did not receive Him. They were looking for an earthly king, and the beautiful words spoken by the ancient prophets had no meaning to them.

When Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, the Jews were under the iron rule of the Roman Empire, of which they formed a part, for although the Jewish family of the Herods reigned over Judea, they only held their throne under the Roman Emperor. This the Jews could not endure. They longed to be a free and independent nation once again.

'When our Messiah comes He will be a great warrior,' they said. 'He will utterly destroy all our enemies. He will make Jerusalem the greatest and richest city in the whole earth; all other nations will bow down before us, acknowledging that the Jews alone are the chosen people of God.'

Thus they were expecting a Messiah who would begin his work by killing all the Roman soldiers in Palestine.

Had Jesus of Nazareth been willing to become their earthly king and to lead the nation against the Romans, the Jews would probably have followed Him to a man. (John vi. 15.) But He saw that, even from a human standpoint, the nation could not be helped in this way, and that the Jews would only rebel against the Romans to their destruction.

Instead of widening the breach between them and their conquerors, the Saviour sought to heal it. He called out the faith and gratitude of the Roman centurion, and His answer to the Jewish leaders, '*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*' (Mark xii. 17) showed them the right attitude in which to regard the Roman rule.

When, therefore, He was brought at last before Pilate, the Roman Government had no quarrel with Him. '*Thine own nation ... hath delivered Thee unto me,*' said Pilate who would have released his prisoner, had not the Jews prevented it.

'If thou let this Man go, thou art not Caesar's friend,' they cried, thus compelling Pilate, at the risk of being reported as a traitor to his Emperor, to crucify Jesus of Nazareth, and to free Barabbas.

But in choosing the rebel, Barabbas (Mark xv. 7) as their hero, the nation started on their downward road, as the story of the forty years which followed the Saviour's crucifixion clearly shows.

For the Jews were determined at all costs to throw off the Roman yoke, and the history of those years is one long list of terrible risings and massacres, while cities were ruined, villages wrapped in flames, and men, women and children perished with hunger.

Yet the keener the suffering, the more desperate the Jews became. Their whole souls were possessed with a wild and mad passion for revenge.

The Saviour had warned His hearers most earnestly against following false Christs. '*Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.*' (Matthew xxiv. 23.)

Yet no sooner did a daring rebel or murderer gather a band of robbers around him, and begin to kill and plunder, than multitudes of Jews cried, 'The Christ, or Messiah has come; now we shall have vengeance on our enemies!'

They were fighting against God now, and against the Book which He had given them. All peace-loving people who could possibly do so left the country.



*THE PRECIOUS GOLDEN CANDLESTICK, FROM THE TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM,
CARRIED BY THE ROMAN CONQUERORS THROUGH THE STREETS OF ROME—
FROM THE BROKEN ROMAN CARVING STILL TO BE SEEN IN ROME TO-DAY*

At last, in 66 A.D., all the Jews in Jerusalem rose in a body against their Roman governors. They surrounded the great tower of Antonia where the Roman soldiers were quartered, and cried out to the garrison within that their lives should be spared if they would lay down their weapons. The Roman soldiers hesitated, but the Jews promised most faithfully to keep their word.

The Romans believed them, and opened their gates; but no sooner were they in the power of the Jewish mob than they were fallen upon and murdered to the last man!

As they died the Roman soldiers, whom not even death could terrify, lifted up their hands to Heaven, as though calling upon God to witness that the Jews had broken their solemn oath.

The Roman Emperor could not overlook such rebellion and treachery, and he sent a great army against Jerusalem. The Jews shut the gates of their city, and so began the awful siege of Jerusalem.

'And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.' (Luke xxi. 20.)

Forty years before, Jesus Christ Himself had spoken these words, and now there began for Jerusalem days filled with horror and woe, *'such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time.'* (Mark xiii. 19.)

The story of these days has been written for us by a wise Jew named Josephus. He was a prisoner in the Roman camp during the siege of Jerusalem, and he watched with dismay the great battering-rams and war engines crashing through the walls of the Holy City. His ears rang with the cries of rage and despair which broke from the Jews within, as one by one their defences fell, and the end drew near!

Then food failed in the city; men fought like demons in the streets for a tiny loaf of barley-bread; so frantic were the people with hunger that mothers even snatched the bread from their own children's mouths!

'Look over the walls, O people of Jerusalem; the Roman soldiers are crucifying all the prisoners they have taken, and the line of crosses is as long as our city is wide!'

Hard, merciless as was the Roman general, even he grew sick with horror at last, and he sent his Jewish prisoner, Josephus, to the Jews, promising them their lives if they would give up the city. But a furious madness had possessed the people, and they refused to yield.

Josephus pleaded in vain. He was not a Christian, but he could see plainly enough that God was no longer with His people.

'Ah, my countrymen,' he cried, 'we did nothing without God in the past, but now you are fighting against Him. Had God judged you worthy of freedom, He would have punished the Romans as He did the Assyrians long ago. God is fled out of your holy place, and stands on the side of those against whom you fight!'[\[1\]](#)

It is strange and wonderful to read these words in the old history. Even a Jew who had no faith in Jesus Christ could see plainly that the ancient power and glory of his nation had gone.

At last the end came. The first wall fell, then the second and the third, until the Roman soldiers, now as mad as the Jews themselves, burst into the Holy City, hewing down the defenceless people at every step.

And so they came to the Temple—that beautiful Temple of white marble and gold, which still glittered like a hill of snow in the morning sunshine, or sparkled as though wrapped in flame when the sunbeams struck full on its golden roof.

Then redder flames than ever the sunshine made leapt above the golden roof; pillars fell, beams crumbled to ashes, while round the altar of sacrifice the people of Jerusalem lay heaped together, slain in such numbers in the Holy Place that their blood flowed down the broad marble steps in a heavy crimson stream.

And the golden candlestick and the Book of the Law were carried away in triumph into heathen Rome.

Alas for the Holy City, over which the Saviour of the world had stood and wept forty years before, knowing the suffering that lay before her!

'These Jews are dangerous. We must not allow them to rebuild their city, or to become a separate people again. As a nation they must cease to exist.'

So the Roman conquerors of Jerusalem agreed; and from that day onward the Jewish people have had no country of their own. They have, indeed, been '*led away captive into all nations*' (Luke xxi. 24) exactly as the Lord foretold.

There is scarcely a country in the world where Jews may not be found, but Jerusalem lies still in the hands of strangers, and is the property of the Turkish nation.

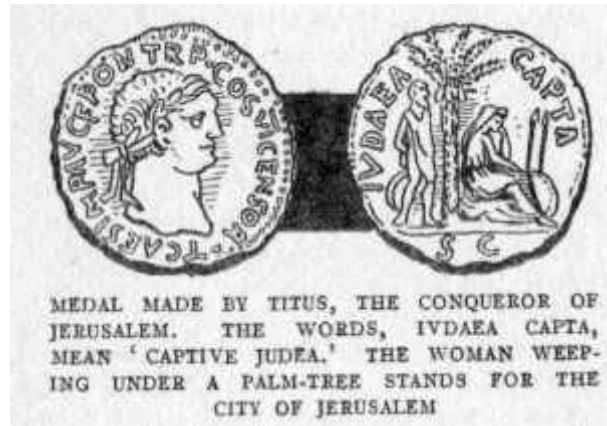
The Jews were now no longer a nation. They had become merely a body of people led by their Rabbis, or teachers of the Law; but they were still 'the people of the Book,' for even after frequent rebellions had so angered the Romans that they passed a law forbidding a Jew to enter the partially re-built city of Jerusalem under pain of death, they allowed the Jewish teachers to continue the synagogue services in other parts of Palestine, and to teach in their colleges.

The most famous Jewish college of these days was at Tiberius, on the shores of the 'Sea of Galilee,' over whose clear depths the Lord Jesus Christ had sailed so often, and beside whose shores He had done so many wonderful deeds of love and mercy.

A great and beautiful college it was, with broad terraced gardens, where the students paced to and fro, their whole hearts and souls absorbed in their work. The Temple copy of the Book of the Law was now in the palace of the heathen Emperor in Rome, but many less precious copies were left to them. So all day long they studied and copied the old Hebrew Bible.

As we have seen, the Jewish scribes had not been content with taking the Word of God just as it stood; they had begun, even in our Lord's day, to invent explanations of many parts of the old Books which quite altered their true meaning.

After the fall of Jerusalem the learned Jews, shut away in their colleges and striving to forget their sorrows, began to write down the Scripture explanations, and to add to them so greatly that it became more difficult to recall the comments on the Bible than it was to remember the Bible itself.



MEDAL MADE BY TITUS, THE CONQUEROR OF JERUSALEM. THE WORDS, IVDAEA CAPTA, MEAN 'CAPTIVE JUDEA.' THE WOMAN WEEPING UNDER A PALM-TREE STANDS FOR THE CITY OF JERUSALEM

These explanations, all collected together, are called 'The Talmud.' Now the learned Jews grew so fond of their Talmud, that they declared a man to be a blockhead if he knew only the Scriptures and not the Talmud explanation.

'The law of Moses is like salt, but the Talmud is balmy spice,' they would say.

Yet although they heeded so little the true meaning of God's Book, they guarded its *words* more and more carefully; and the rules for copying any portion of the holy Books were strict indeed.

'My son,' an old teacher would say to his pupil, 'before you copy a single word you must wash your body all over, and clothe yourself in full Jewish dress, preparing your mind with solemn

thoughts. The parchment you write upon must be made from the skins of "clean" animals only—that is clean according to the Law of Moses.

'The ink you write with must be of a pure black, made only from a mixture of soot, charcoal, and honey. Though you know the whole Book of the Law by heart, you must not write a single word from memory, but raise your eyes to your copy, and pronounce the word aloud before trusting it to your pen. Before writing any of the names of God you must wash your pen: before writing His most sacred Name you must wash your whole body. If, after your copy has itself been examined, three corrections have to be made, that copy must be destroyed.'

Not satisfied with all these directions, the master taught his scholar to count the *letters* of every Book.

One of the letters in Leviticus xi. is the *middle letter* of all the five Books of Moses, a word in chapter x. is the middle of all the words, and a verse in chapter viii. is the very centre of all the verses. The letter 'A'—that is the Hebrew letter which stands for 'A'—occurs 42,377 times; the letter 'B' 35,218, and so on.

Not only this, but every scribe was required to know from memory exactly how many letters of each kind there should be in his sheet before he began to write. Every sheet of parchment must contain an equal number of lines, and the breadth of each column had to be thirty letters wide.

There are eleven verses in the Book of the Law beginning and ending with 'N,' there are forty verses in which 'Lo' is read three times—and so on, and so on.

How tedious and meaningless such information appears! Of what value were all these details?

To spend all his days in learning such things as these could have no influence on a man's character, nor make him a power for good in the world. Not for this purpose had God revealed His will to man.

Some years ago in the coffin of an Egyptian mummy, a little jar of wheat was found. For thousands of years it had lain there, shut up in the dark, while out in the fields the corn which had been sown had grown up and been reaped every year, and men and women had been fed. But this jar of corn was useless, because it had been prevented from doing the work in the world for which it was created.

Just so was it with the Hebrew copies of God's Word. Locked up in a dead language, kept close, away from the world, they were like the jar of wheat which could not grow.

But meanwhile God's Book was growing in the wide fields beyond. While the Jews were keeping safe the *letters* of the Old Testament, the New Testament was beginning to do its mighty work in the great heathen cities of the world.

[1] Josephus: 'Wars,' Books v. and vi.

CHAPTER X

THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



urn to the list of books given in the beginning of your New Testament. You will see that first come the four Gospels, or glimpses of the Saviour's life given by four different writers. Then follows the Acts of the Apostles, and, lastly, after the twenty-one epistles, the volume ends with the Revelation.

Now this is not the order in which the books were written—they are only arranged like this for our convenience.

The first words of the New Testament were written, not as we should have supposed by one of the twelve apostles, or by some one who had loved and followed the Lord Jesus Christ when He was upon earth. They are written by a Pharisee who had been one of Christ's bitterest enemies.

Though Saul had, as far as we know, never seen the Saviour on earth, what he had heard of His work and teaching made him feel that in stamping out all the followers of the so-called Messiah, he would be doing God service. But we remember how the Saviour Himself appeared to Saul on his way to Damascus, and how his heart was changed, and his eyes were opened.

We can scarcely imagine the transformation which came over his mind. Together with all the other learned Jews he had considered Jesus of Nazareth to be an impostor, and to blaspheme the words of God's Holy Book when He applied them to Himself. Now Saul the Pharisee understood that he and his countrymen, not Jesus of Nazareth, were at fault. As he read the old prophecies he understood their true meaning, *'and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.'* (Acts ix. 9.)

Then the full tide of Jewish anger turned upon him. That he should join the followers of the despised Nazarene and forsake the sacred traditions of the Law made all the Jews scattered through the then-known world into his bitterest enemies.

Paul, as he was afterwards called, loved his countrymen with a passionate love. He would gladly have died for them,^[1] and that he should be unable to show them what was so clear to himself, was certainly the greatest sorrow and disappointment of his life. But though he was unable to help his countrymen, as a nation, God made him the most successful missionary-traveller the world has ever known, and to him was given the privilege of writing a large part of the New Testament.

Before we think about his writings, however, let us look at the condition of the great heathen cities of the world at the time when he lived.

In the year A.D. 54, that is, twenty years after our Saviour's death upon the cross, the Emperor Nero, who is still remembered as one of the worst men who ever lived, began to reign in Rome.

For many years the Roman Emperors had been masters of all the then-known nations, and for awhile they had ruled justly; but ever as the Roman Empire increased in power and riches, the Roman rulers grew more haughty and selfish, until at last they cared for nothing but their own

pleasures, and spent their days in drinking and feasting, wasting enormous sums in senseless extravagance, while thousands of their subjects starved.

A dreadful city Rome must have been in those days, though to look at she was beautiful indeed.

A city of marble palaces, of fair white statues and green gardens; of huge public baths and theatres. On one side stood an enormous building, with a round space in the centre, and tiers of seats rising one above another like a circus. This was an amphitheatre, where shows and performances were given.

There were no sham combats in a Roman circus; no mere pretence of being wounded. Men fought with men in stern reality; worse still, men were made to fight with wild beasts. Lions and tigers, and fierce bulls tore and gored men to death, while the audience leaned back in their comfortable seats, watching the horrible scenes intently.

Every rich man in Rome at the time of which we write owned hundreds of slaves, who were the absolute property of their owners.

A slave-girl who arranged her mistress's hair badly was burnt with a hot iron. If a slave-boy broke a costly vase his master might whip him to death, or have him thrown into a tank full of ravenous fish. There was no limit to the master's power.

Although millions of people had scarcely a rag to cover them, or a crust to eat, the rich people flung their gold away on useless trifles. Indeed, a kind of competition existed among them as to who could waste his money the most foolishly.

'Nightingales sing more sweetly than any other bird,' thought one of these. 'I have it. I'll order a dish of nightingales' tongues for my feast next week; that will be something rare and expensive indeed!'

All his friends were charmed with the new idea, and nightingales' tongues became quite the fashion.

But all the time, in this mighty city, so black with sin, so red with cruelty, the pure white light of the Gospel of Christ had begun to shine.

'Gospel' means good news. The story of Jesus was blessed news indeed, for the suffering, hopeless people. As yet all unnoticed by the rulers of the heathen world, the little band of Christians was ever increasing.



THESSALONICA : NOW CALLED SALONICA. IT WAS TO THE CHRISTIANS OF THIS TOWN THAT PAUL WROTE HIS FIRST EPISTLE

THESSALONICA: NOW CALLED SALONICA. IT WAS TO THE CHRISTIANS OF THIS TOWN THAT PAUL WROTE HIS FIRST EPISTLE

From Jerusalem the good news had spread to Rome and to numbers of other heathen cities. The Apostle Paul had preached and gained little groups of converts in Thessalonica and Philippi and other strongholds of evil, and in the year when Nero became Emperor of Rome, the first words of the New Testament were written.

It happened in this way: St. Paul was in Greece, carrying on the war for Christ in the very centre of the idol-worshippers. Most of the Roman ideas of the false gods had come from Greece. In Athens and Corinth the most beautiful buildings were heathen temples, and not a house in the whole land was without its images.

Paul had preached at Athens and Corinth, but in the very midst of his difficult work he heard that the little band of faithful followers he had left behind in the city of Thessalonica were in great trouble.

They had no books to help them except the Old Testament, written in Greek. Although they had tried hard to remember his words, many things still perplexed them. Besides, the Jews living in the city were their bitterest enemies, and had so stirred up the people against them, that they were in constant danger of losing their lives.

Would not their great leader tell them what they ought to believe, and how they ought to live?

Paul loved these Thessalonians, and longed to go to them. But he could not leave his work in Corinth. What then was he to do?

He could write a long letter to them, bidding them to '*Stand fast in the Lord.*' (1 Thessalonians iii. 8.) To remember that God had called them '*unto Holiness.*' (1 Thessalonians iv. 7.) Paul did not need to remind them to love one another, for that God Himself had taught them. (Verse 9.)

He told them, too, not to sorrow hopelessly for those who had died for Christ, for when Christ returns, as He surely will, those who have loved Him shall rise first to meet Him, and so be with Him for evermore. '*Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.*' (Verse 18.)

We can imagine how eagerly the Thessalonian converts listened to the letter. We see, too, that the first Christian document ever written contained the full Gospel message, and that the heathen had already *'turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.'* (1 Thessalonians i. 9, 10.)

A few months later the Thessalonians were once more in great perplexity.

'What are we to believe?' they had asked. 'Paul tells us plainly that Christ will return to the earth. How can we settle down to our ordinary work with such a wonderful hope before us?'

From the answer which the Apostle sent to their questions—which we call to-day the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians—we can see clearly how troubled they must have been.

In order to understand their position we must remember that the words and acts of the Lord Jesus Christ had not as yet been written down, and all that the Thessalonians knew about Him was from Paul's preaching and teaching. They could not turn to their Bibles as you can when you long to know just what the Saviour would have you do.

So Paul wrote to them again, explaining that they must wait in patience, quietly doing their daily work, and earning their own bread, as he and his companions had done whilst living in Thessalonica. (2 Thessalonians iii. 12.)

Most of St. Paul's Epistles—that is, his letters—were written in this way because of some special need or danger.

The converts in Corinth, Galatia, or Ephesus, were in difficulty, or in danger of losing their faith in Christ, and Paul, ever watchful, but unable to go to them at the moment, wrote the message of comfort and warning which God had put into His heart.

At last there came a time when Paul could visit his converts no more.

The Roman rulers were as yet not angry with the followers of Christ. They simply despised them, and thought the Jews very foolish to trouble about a pack of low, ignorant people. 'They are mostly slaves or such like whose opinions are worth nothing. Why do they not let them alone as we do?' said the proud Romans.

But at last so bitter had the Jews become against Paul, and so violent were their attacks on him, that the Roman Government was obliged to interfere. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea. Here he remained for many months, until, at last, finding he would get no justice from the Roman governor, he demanded to be taken to Rome itself to the Judgment Seat of the Emperor.

Two or three years before this he had written a most wonderful letter to the Roman Christians.

'To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints,' his letter was addressed. He told them how he prayed for them, and how he longed to see them *'Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.'* (Romans i. 10.)

His prayer was answered, but he came as a prisoner in the year of our Lord 61.

Yet Paul was not put in prison when he arrived in Rome. He was allowed to see his friends, and even to hire a lodging of his own, though day and night he had to be chained to a Roman soldier. The soldiers were changed when their watch expired, but never for one instant could the Apostle go free.

Many of these Roman soldiers were hard and proud, believing in nothing at all, not even in their own idol gods; but after a while, won by Paul's words and life, the soldiers learned to believe also, and became his converts.

For the first year of his imprisonment Paul wrote little, but he spoke and thought much; as the second year drew on he sent letters to many of those he so longed to see again which are as precious to us as they were to those old-time Christians.

Among these are the Epistles to the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and a touching little appeal to Philemon concerning a runaway slave who had become one of Paul's converts at Rome.

We are almost certain that the Apostle was released for a time so that he was enabled to revisit many of his converts, as he so earnestly desired to do.



*THE OLD ROMAN ROAD, DOWN WHICH ST. PAUL TRAVELLED INTO ROME, AS
IT APPEARS TO-DAY*

Then he was once more taken prisoner and brought again to Rome, where Nero's wickedness had become repulsive even to the Romans themselves, cruel and hardened though they were.

To Timothy, who was to him as a son, Paul the prisoner wrote a farewell letter, just when he was to be brought before Nero the second time.

'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.' (2 Timothy iv. 7.) So he wrote, and before he closed his letter he begged Timothy to make a special effort to come to him, and to bring with him *'the books, but especially the parchments.'* (Verse 13.)

These 'books' would most likely be the first copies of two or three of the books of the New Testament, just the very beginnings. Perhaps the life of Jesus Christ, written by Mark, and a letter or two of Peter's; fragile, reed-paper rolls, which would tear and crack unless they were handled with the greatest care. These would be written just like the ordinary books of the time, for as yet no one dreamt that they would one day be bound up with the 'parchments,' and so form the Christians' Bible. For by the 'parchments' Paul almost certainly meant the Old Testament written in Greek.

He needed these very 'specially.' He had time to think and study now; and the old, old Books of the Law and the Prophets spoke from the first page to the last of his beloved Master, Jesus Christ.

Did he live to receive the parchments? We do not know. How did he die? The Bible does not tell us. But about the date St. Paul wrote the last of his words that have come down to us, a fierce time of trial swept like a storm over the little Christian colony in Rome.

In his mad wickedness, the Emperor Nero set fire to his own city so that he might watch the blaze. Half Rome was burnt, and then he grew alarmed, for the people were furiously angry at losing their homes. So he looked round for some one on whom to throw the blame.

In an evil hour he thought of the Christians. 'The Christians plotted to destroy my city—death to them! Drag them from their houses, burn them, throw them to wild beasts!'

The order went forth, the excited people were only too ready to obey, and so the Lord's faithful followers were put to death by hundreds. Nero prided himself on inventing the most horrible tortures for them.

On one dreadful night he even caused a number of living men and women to be wrapped in cloths soaked in pitch, tied to the top of long poles, and then set on fire. This horrible deed was carried out in Nero's own beautiful gardens, which were thus all lighted up with the glare of the flames.

But nothing could shake the faith and courage of these saints and warriors.

'As it is written, *For Thy sake we are killed all the day long.*' (Romans viii. 36.) But they feared none of these things; they were faithful unto death, and the Lord has given them a crown of life. (Revelation ii. 10.)

[1] Romans ix. 3.

CHAPTER XI

HOW THE GOSPELS CAME TO BE WRITTEN



ut how did the story of the Saviour's life on earth come to be written?

We have seen that many years passed before any one thought of writing it down at all. The men and women who had really seen Him, who had listened to His voice, looked into His face, and who knew that He had conquered death and sin for evermore, could not sit down to write, for their hearts were all on fire to speak.

But as the years passed, the number of those who had seen Christ grew less, and the need of a written Gospel became ever greater. Precious words would be forgotten, precious facts passed over, unless they were collected together and put down in black and white. Some of those, therefore, who had seen and heard Christ began to write down all they remembered of His life.

They had no thought, as yet, of a New Testament being added to their Bible; the Old Testament Scriptures were still the 'Bible'[1] to them. These early Christians, as we remember, did not read the Bible in the original Hebrew, but in its Greek translation. They loved it and searched its pages eagerly, as they realized that all its words spoke of Christ!

But about the time that St. Paul was imprisoned at Rome we think that the Gospel according to St. Mark was written.

Most of you know that Mark was a young Jew who began his work for God by travelling with Paul and Barnabas (Acts xii. 25), but who left them when the work grew dangerous. (Acts xiii. 13.) Paul was so grieved at his failure, that for a while he refused to trust him again; but Barnabas, who believed in his repentance, gave him another trial. (Acts xv. 37-39.) That Mark proved himself even to Paul we find from the Apostle's last Epistle to Timothy, when he writes: *'Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.'* (2 Timothy iv. 11.)

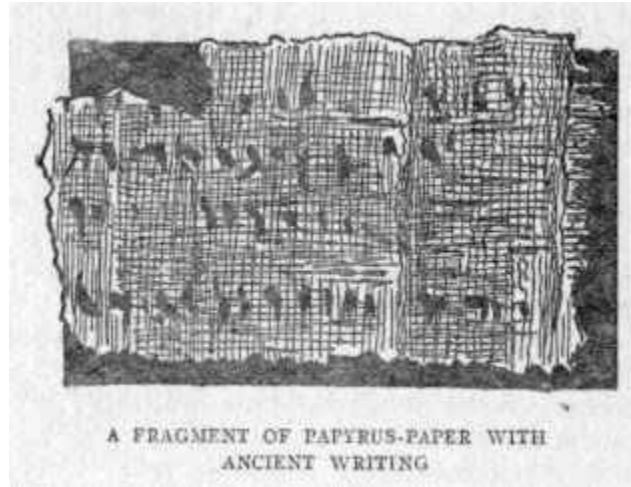
Before that time, however, Mark had lived and worked for many years with the Apostle Peter, who in his letter written from Babylon speaks of him as *'Marcus my son.'* (1 Peter v. 13.)

Now a Christian writer, named Papias, who lived about sixty years after this time, tells us that Mark wrote his Gospel story from what Peter had told him about Christ; so we think this Gospel writing is really the Apostle Peter's account of our Lord's life on earth.

Very likely, as Mark journeyed with the Apostle from place to place, and heard him tell and retell the wonderful story of His Master's life on earth, the thought came into the young man's mind, 'Why not write down what Peter says, so that his words shall not be forgotten?'

And so fresh and vivid are the words of Mark's Gospel, so full of little natural touches, that most people agree that old Papias must have been right. The very things St. Peter would have noticed are mentioned by Mark.

Matthew, the writer of the Gospel which comes the first in our New Testament, was a Levite; that is, he belonged to the tribe of Levi, and this tribe was specially chosen in the time of Moses to learn the Law and serve God in His Temple. Matthew, therefore, was very learned in the books of the Law, and in the writings of the old prophets. As you all know, the Lord Jesus chose Matthew to be one of His special companions; and as Matthew followed his Master day by day, he saw more and more clearly how all the old prophecies which he knew so well pointed to the coming of Christ.



A FRAGMENT OF PAPHYRUS-PAPER WITH ANCIENT WRITING

So, when the Holy Spirit called Matthew to write what he knew of the Lord's life on earth, those ancient prophecies, and the wonderful way in which they had come true, were still in his thoughts. This is why we find in the Gospel according to Matthew more quotations from the Old Testament than in the writings of any of the other evangelists.

'See, My Book has always spoken of the coming of My Son.' This is the wonderful message which God gave to the world through Matthew's knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Years passed, and those who had seen Christ in His earthly life had nearly all died, while Gentile Christians everywhere were asking eagerly for the written story of His life.

Twenty years after Matthew's Gospel was written, God called a Greek scholar, named Luke, to write what was to be a most important part of our Bible. The Jews of old hated and despised the Gentiles; we have seen how bitterly they persecuted Paul because he declared that God had sent him to preach to the heathen nations; think, therefore, how impossible it would have seemed to a Jew of this time, that a Gentile could, at God's bidding, write two Books which should become even more precious and sacred than the Books of the Law, which the Jews rightly prized as the greatest treasure of their nation!

Those who work in heathen lands to-day tell us that the Gospel of St. Luke is always the favourite book of the converts, and that if they can only afford to buy one Gospel they always ask for that of Luke. This is because the whole work is written from the Gentile point of view—it is the world's history of Christ.

St. Luke wrote his Gospel as an historian, and in dedicating his work to Theophilus^[2] in a kind of preface, he followed the Greek custom. '*Many,*' he says, '*have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us*' (Luke i. 1), but their records have disappeared, while that of Luke remains.

He was a physician, as we know (Colossians iv. 14), and besides being highly educated and gifted, he took infinite pains with his work. He collected all the information he could both from books and eye-witnesses—either from the Saviour's Mother herself, or from some of her relations—and to him we owe many of the most beautiful and touching facts of our Lord's life on earth.

Written last of all, we have the good news—that is, Gospel, told by St. John.

When the Saviour ascended into Heaven, John was still a young man, but he lived to be older than all the other Apostles. By the time that St. John wrote his Gospel, Jerusalem had been destroyed and her inhabitants slain or scattered. He was able, therefore, to mention details, and give the actual names of people and places, which, if told earlier, might have endangered the lives of those of whom he wrote.

Many instances of this will be found by those who read carefully. He alone mentions the name of the Apostle who struck off the ear of the High Priest's servant, and the story of the raising of Lazarus is given only by St. John as though it would have been dangerous to record it earlier.

So filled with love was the Apostle John that before he died his spirit became altogether one with Christ's spirit, and the sayings of Jesus, which he had only half understood whilst his Master had walked this earth, grew quite clear to him, so that he remembered them distinctly.

Therefore, that others might understand also, God's Spirit called John, when he was an old man, to write out those precious words of Jesus Christ's which were always echoing in his heart, and which the other writers had not known, or had forgotten. It is in John's Gospel that we learn most about the love of Christ.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—let us thank God for them all.

[1] The name 'Bible' is derived from the Greek word 'Byblus,' i.e. 'Papyrus,' the paper reed on which the New Testament was written.

[2] The name 'Theophilus' means 'God's friend.' Most people believe that he was a notable convert of those days, though unknown to history.

CHAPTER XII

SOME OTHER WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



et us now look at the rest of the books which make up the New Testament. In the days when Paul preached at Athens, the old capital of Greece, much of the ancient splendour and power of the Greek people had passed away, for the Romans had conquered their country, and they were no longer a free nation.

Yet, although the Greeks had been forced to yield to Rome, their conquerors knew that the Grecian scholars and artists were far better educated and more highly gifted than themselves, and Greek statues and writings had therefore become the fashion throughout the Roman Empire. Indeed, many of the Greek sculptors and authors are remembered and admired to this day. Homer, the greatest Greek poet, who lived about a thousand years B.C., is still world famous.

Homer's best-known poem[1] is about a terrible war which took place between the Greeks and the Trojans. Its words are noble, and its descriptions very clever, but although all must admire the beauty of the lines, the poem produces a dismal and depressing effect.

The picture it gives of the old heathen religion is terrible, for Homer described the 'gods' and 'goddesses' in whom he believed as being far more cruel and unjust than the worst men and women of his time. According to his ideas, Jupiter, Diana, Apollo, Mars, and the rest came down to earth and took part in the battle.

In vain did the great hero, Hector, fight his bravest; in vain did he sacrifice himself, and strive to make up for the wrong-doing of his brother; he failed utterly, for Homer tells us that he was hated by some of the 'gods' for no fault of his own, and so they doomed him to destruction, and guided the hand of the man who slew him. How little those clever Greeks had been able to discover of the mercy and justice of God!

But although the men of this great nation knew nothing of our wise and loving Heavenly Father, He knew and loved them every one, and as we have seen, He called a Greek Christian author to help Him in the wonderful work of writing the Bible.

In addition to the story of our Saviour's life this Greek author, St. Luke, also wrote a book about a war—a war that was to become world-wide—the war against sin and the Devil, and the name of this second book is the '*Acts of the Apostles*.'

In all this wonderful Bible of ours there is no Book more wonderful than the 'Book of the Acts.' Have you ever stopped to think what a terrible gap there would be in the history of God's dealings with the world had the 'Acts' never been written?

The Apostle Paul's life would be almost a blank. Stephen's victorious death would be all unknown to us. Above all, the story of our Saviour's ascension into Heaven, and the marvellous fulfilment of His promises in the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, would have been left untold.

The Book of the Acts stands alone.

There are four Gospels—written from four different points of view, but of the four writers, Luke, the Greek, was the only one who wrote a sequel and showed the results which our Saviour's Life, and Death, and Resurrection produced at once in the world.

The marvellous accuracy of St. Luke and his keen observation become every year more striking as fresh discoveries in the lands of which he wrote show how true he is in the tiniest detail; while his modesty is equally remarkable, for only by carefully noticing when he says 'we' and when 'they' can we discover when he shared St. Paul's dangers and trials.



*VERY ANCIENT FRAGMENT OF A PAPYRUS ROLL, WITH PORTIONS OF THREE
PSALMS WRITTEN IN GREEK*

'*Only Luke is with me*' (2 Timothy iv. 11) wrote the Apostle from his Roman prison. The beloved physician was faithful to his great leader to the last.

How did Luke write, and what did his two books look like when he had finished them? He wrote on papyrus—that is, on reed paper, using an ink like black paint, and a reed pen.

As far as we know no portions of the Bible-books of this date are left in the world, but in the beginning of the year 1911 a large number of very ancient fragments of Bible-books were

discovered in Upper Egypt, and with these was part of a translation of Luke's Book of the Acts—just shreds and tatters of fragile papyrus paper, the remains of what is up till now the oldest copy of the New Testament in the world.

Amongst the ancient manuscripts kept in the British Museum are old old copies of Homer's War poems, and here also are stored the precious fragments of the chronicles of that other great Greek writer—St. Luke.

Homer's book belongs to the forgotten past, for the heathen religion of Greece is to-day as though it had never been.

But the writings of St. Luke are as full of blessing and power as ever, and the war he wrote about grows more wonderful every day. For Christ, the Son of God, came down from Heaven not to fight *against* men as the false gods of the old Greeks were supposed to have done, but to fight and conquer *for* men, to lift up the fallen, and to win for the victors a crown of deathless glory.

The Apostle Peter, in contrast to St. Luke, was only a fisherman when the Lord bade him leave his boat and his nets to preach and teach the Gospel.

His ideas were very limited when Jesus Christ first came into his life, and he knew little or nothing of the various branches of knowledge which had become a second nature to the Greek scholar; but the fisherman was to receive his education in a very different fashion from Luke, for his teacher was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

How impossible it would have seemed to Peter, in the days when he washed his nets by the Lake of Galilee, that his writings should ever form a part of the Scriptures—God's Book, which he had learned from his childhood to love and reverence!

Yet with God all things are possible.

Not only did the Apostle Peter write a part of the Bible, but that short book known as the 'First Epistle of Peter,' is one of the most frequently mentioned by all the earliest Christian writers—those authors and teachers who had seen the Apostles, and had heard from their lips the story of the Saviour's life on earth. Thus it is that Peter's contribution to our Bible has become one of the strongest witnesses to the truth of the words written down in the Gospels. There is no possibility

of a mistake; the man who wrote this Epistle could have been none other than the Apostle Peter who had been with the Lord from the beginning of His public work.

And it is very beautiful to trace throughout Peter's writings the echoes of the great facts which he had seen, and which to the end of his days formed the background of all his thoughts.

Christ had given him his name 'Peter' or 'Cephas,' that is, a rock or stone, and so he wrote of his Master as the great Corner-stone of God's spiritual house, in which each one of Christ's people are living stones, (1 Peter ii. 5-7.)

The Saviour had once told Peter that he must forgive his brother although he was wronged by him on seventy-times seven occasions, and in Peter's Epistle we read, '*Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*' (1 Peter iv. 8.) 'Charity' should have been translated 'love.'

Then the Lord had warned Peter that Satan had desired to have him, and he—remembering that solemn fact in his own life—tried to put his readers on their guard against the great enemy, '*because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*' (1 Peter v. 8.)

Most touching of all are the words he wrote: '*For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God ... because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example.*' (1 Peter ii. 20, 21.) The man who had seen the Lord Jesus Christ suffer patiently could never forget.

'*Feed the flock of God which is among you.... And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory.*' (1 Peter v. 2, 4.) His Master's last command by the Lake of Galilee to feed His flock was so deeply impressed on Peter's mind that it coloured all his thoughts to the last day of his life. (John xxi.)

This Epistle of St. Peter was written, we believe, to comfort God's people under the heavy trial of Paul's second imprisonment. Cruelty and persecution were doing their worst, but God was above all. '*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you ... but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.*' (1 Peter iv. 12, 13.)

Two short, but very beautiful, epistles are believed to have been written by two of the Lord's brethren, St. James and St. Jude.

Eusebius, the first Christian historian—born 260 A.D., died 340—tells us that James was a Nazarite. This means that he had taken the old Jewish vow of special purity; he ate no meat, drank no wine, and wore nothing but white linen garments. This vow is often mentioned in the Old Testament. James had not believed that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of the world until after His Resurrection, when the Lord appeared to him. *'After that, He was seen of James.'* (1 Corinthians xv. 7.)

This set his doubts at rest for ever, and St. James too was called to write a part of God's Book.

Of St. Jude, author of the Epistle of that name, scarcely anything is known, but from Matthew xiii. 55 and Mark vi. 3 we learn that he was one of the Lord's brethren, and, like his brother, James, did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah until after the Resurrection. This Jude must not be confused with the Apostle Jude.

These writers of the New Testament as they took their reed pens in their hands, and spread out their rolls of whitey-brown papyrus-paper, were not like Moses. True, they knew that the Holy Spirit was bidding them write, but that their written words should ever be used by God to form a part of the Bible would have seemed impossible to them all.



PART OF AN ANCIENT COPTIC TOMBSTONE—IN BRITISH MUSEUM

The last and by far the latest writer of God's Book was St. John, the beloved disciple.

Long after most of the other Apostles were dead, he still lived on, speaking and writing of his Master, and to the Apostle John the Lord Jesus Christ entrusted the record of many of His most beautiful and comforting words, and of the deepest and most spiritual teaching in the whole Bible.

Three of the shortest and yet most beautiful Books of the Bible are the three epistles which bear John's name. They are supposed to have been written from Ephesus, in John's latter days, and every sentence in them seems to breathe forth the peace, love, and wisdom of a very old man who has lived close to Christ for many years. It may well be then that these calm and loving letters were the last of all the Bible words to be written.

Now the 'Revelation,' though placed at the end of our Bible, was not the last Book to be written.

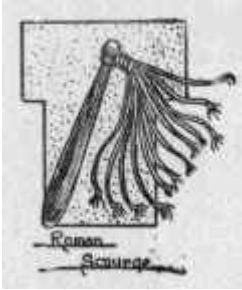
It was probably composed whilst Nero, the wicked Emperor, was torturing and burning the followers of Christ. St. John's heart must have been ready to break with distress, but the Holy Spirit comforted him, and lifted his thoughts right up to Heaven, showing him in a vision the end of all these things.

Among the fragments of the oldest Bibles in the world recently discovered, the Book of Revelation takes a prominent place. Some of these were probably written about the year 150 A.D. Let us remember when we look on the faded pages lying in the British Museum that when their discoloured lines were fresh and clean, men were still living who had seen the early martyrs die.

[1] The Iliad.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIRST BIBLE PICTURES



Those boys and girls who love their Bibles are fond of Bible pictures. Even tiny children delight to see a picture of Jesus Christ holding the little ones in His arms; and how sad children feel when they are shown a painting or engraving of the Saviour led away to die!

We have learnt much now of the Bible, and of how the Old and New Testaments were written, but who first thought of making pictures from the Bible?

We shall see.

A few miles from the city of Rome, deep, deep underground, are those wonderful networks of galleries and chambers called 'The Catacombs.'

'Catacomb' means 'scooped out.' Miles and miles of passages are there, some low and narrow, others wide and lofty; they cross and re-cross each other, like the streets of a town, and all are scooped out of the solid earth.

On either side of every gallery are almost endless rows of spaces hollowed out in the walls, one above another like the berths on board ship. For the most part they are open and empty, but a few are still closed. Above some of them words are faintly traced on stone slabs; a man or woman's name perhaps, oftener still the Latin words, '*In Pace*'—that is, 'In Peace.'

For all this great underground city is in reality one huge cemetery: the quiet resting-place where the first Christians of heathen Rome buried their dead, where the martyred bodies so cruelly tortured by Nero were laid at last. In pace, in peace.

How wonderful to read the names of those who loved Christ and suffered for His sake so long, long ago! Their very names speak to us of the courage and joy which, in spite of torture, Christ had brought into their lives.



TWO EMPTY TOMBS IN THE CATACOMBS, THE LOWER ONE SHOWING PART OF THE COVERING SLAB WITH A ROUGH CARVING OF THE MARTYRS' PALM OF VICTORY

'Rest,' 'Constancy,' 'God's will.' Many names have meanings like these. Sometimes a simple picture of a victor's crown or martyr's palm-branch is placed beside them; sometimes a few words are added. Latin is a dead language now, but in those days it was the everyday language of Rome, so most of these inscriptions are in Latin.

Some of them are sorrowful, for the mourners grieve to think that the loved one will open his eyes on earth no more; but in all the hope of eternal life is sure and certain. Our beloved mother, our little child, our dear brother is with Christ; the parting is only for a time. Yonder, in our beautiful Heavenly Home, we shall meet once more.

How different from the words carved over heathen tombs! We know what these were like, for not very far away is a heathen catacomb.

'*Valeria dormit in pace.*' Valeria sleeps in peace. So the Christian woman was laid to rest.

'I lift up my hands against God, who snatched me away.' We can still read these despairing, rebellious words on a heathen tomb.

'Spare your tears, dear husband and daughter, and believe that it is forbidden to weep for one who lives in God.' How beautiful to know that we shall one day meet the woman in Heaven of whom these words are written!

Now, about the time of Nero's cruel persecution, the Christians of Rome began to use the Catacombs for meetings and services. Their heathen tormentors had a horror of death, and therefore among the quiet dead the Christians were safe for a while.

So they met deep underground in the dim galleries, their little oil-lamps twinkling like stars, and there they listened to the Word of God, and prayed and sang together.

Many touching stories are told of these days; and of the meetings held underground in these Catacombs, where the living were surrounded by the bodies of the martyred dead.

Now, these first Christians loved the Bible with all their hearts, and just as you like to see hanging in your room the picture of the Good Shepherd with the little lamb, so they began to long for pictures from their Bible. Every heathen Roman had his house decorated with pictures and carvings from his pagan religion, but it was in the dim underground galleries that the first Bible pictures appeared.

Some of the subjects were taken from the Old Testament, some from the New. Only Bible pictures interested the first Christians.

Noah and the Ark was a very favourite subject. 'Noah was safe in the ark,' they said, 'although thousands perished. So will God keep safe all those who trust in Him.'

There are many pictures of Jonah and the whale, and one of the three children in the burning fiery furnace, for this had special messages for the martyrs as we can well understand.



*ONE OF THE FIRST PICTURES EVER MADE OF 'CHRIST, THE GOOD SHEPHERD.'
FOUND IN THE CATACOMBS, THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CEMETERY*

Another very touching picture is of the raising of Lazarus. The artist who carved this had once been a heathen; perhaps in former days he had made and sold idols, but now all his life and talents were consecrated to God.

And here carved in stone, is the Good Shepherd, Christ bearing the lost lamb on His shoulder, just as He does in the picture you love so well at home; Christ, the Good Shepherd of your life,

just as surely as He was the Saviour and Friend of these men and women who fell asleep so long ago!

Here is a picture of Jesus feeding the five thousand with the loaves and fishes; in this carving He is changing the water into wine; here, carved on a small panel, let into a tomb, is a Roman soldier crowning our Lord in mockery; and here is Pilate washing his hands in the vain hope that he could wash away his responsibility.

Now, there is one very wonderful thing about all these pictures: although so many martyrs lie buried here, nearly all the pictures and inscriptions are cheerful!

The heathen Roman writers tell a great deal about the dreadful sufferings of the Christians, but there is very little said about it on the tombs of the martyrs themselves. In peace; they are at peace: the torture, the shame is over for ever; the life of love and joy and victory is all before them.

How thoroughly these first Christians knew their Bible! How they loved to picture its scenes. Had all the writings of the New Testament been lost, we should have known the most important events of our Lord's life on earth from these faded paintings and worn carvings alone.

Love, joy, peace; the love of Christ from which nothing can separate us; the joy which even the fires of martyrdom cannot quench; the peace which the world does not give, and cannot take away. This is the message which these first Bible pictures bring to us all. For to the early martyrs the Bible was what God intends it should be to us—a living power, a Divine Voice, a constant source of strength and inspiration on the heavenward journey.

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