

INTRODUCTION

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Hints to Bible Study

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Bible study will never cease to be vital to those who desire to reach spiritual heights of attainment and accomplishment. We awaken on a spiritual staircase that we seem to have climbed. This is the stairway the race has climbed and we inherit the fruits of their labor. There are yet stairs above us reaching into infinity. We are the surer of our present position and the better quipped for the journey ahead, if the essential steps below us are firmly imbedded in our consciousness. History has a fashion of repeating itself and in the light shed by past attainment, our decisions are the wiser and truer.

The spiritual discoveries of a nation devoted to finding God, which are contained in the Old Testament, are what make its study so valuable. This nation called itself the "Chosen People," because it chose to be chosen. Our debt to them is incalculable. They have given us an ideal of God that is both spiritual and practical, "A God who demands righteousness from his children and will accept nothing less from them," yet one who is interested in our every need and supplies it from his own bounty.

There were three great schools of antiquity, each bequeathing its gems to us, and these are foundation stones in our modern civilization. The Hebrew school gave us spirituality and righteousness, the Grecian school gave us reason and beauty, the Romans gave us law and virility. On this foundation Christianity stands and places her gifts, attainment and service.

The Bible is not one book, but, like the United States of America, "many in one." These books cover a period of about sixteen hundred years. They are the history, literature, religious tenets, ceremonies and experiences of a nation which felt that its commission was to present God to the nations, and to testify to His goodness and holiness. The Old Testament is the record of the nation's search for, and experience in, this search for God. The New Testament is the detailed account of the finding of Him and the experiences resulting from the knowledge of the divine nature.

There are two moments in a diver's life, Browning tells us; one when he plunges for the pearl, the other when he rises with the treasure in his hand. The Old Testament is the history of the plunge, the New Testament is the history of the rise with the treasure, God. We each represent those two phases in ourselves, for what has been discovered and achieved by the race must be rediscovered by each member of the race individually.

The Bible is the record of the quest of mankind for God. We find it from Genesis to Revelation to be our own history, for each of us repeats the race experience in his

own. Can time be better spent than in conning the texts of the Bible and gleaning their meaning?

Civilized man unquestionably considers this Book his greatest treasure. The spiritual life is the real, and the Bible has inspired all that is best and truest in our modern life. Perception of an idea must be in the mind of the race before that idea can be demonstrated. It was revealed to a seer of the Hebrew race that "God created man in his own image"; later a member of this race said, "The Father and I are one," and demonstrated this great truth in the Resurrection. Man is not material nor in a material body. He is a citizen of the Spiritual Kingdom, and his body is spiritual when he knows the truth about it. Dominion over the earth is his divine birthright.

The message of the Bible is the Gospel, or Good Spell it casts over us as we come to understand it. It dispels and exorcises the evil spell of materiality and its consequent train of sorrow, disaster and death. We find that we are allied to Infinity, and so enter by the door into the life abundant. Here we live in Reality. We have left the world conceived by human imaginings and see in Spirit and in Truth. We are in eternity and only the eternal things matter. We have perspective here and our scale of values is completely changed. Love, life, truth, spiritual efficiency, are the things from which we work.

Surely no book ever had a more sublime opening sentence than this Book of books possesses. The invariable end of everything is in its beginning. "In the beginning God," and this can have but one climax, God's representation in mankind. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." God in the beginning, God's graciousness in mankind the fitting completion.

A few words in regard to the growth and compilation of these books into one may be helpful here. There are two distinct narratives of spiritual evolution in the Bible. These two are commenced in the first two chapters of Genesis and are interwoven throughout the historic portion of the Old Testament. One is the priestly or religious account, the other the primitive or national account. The former is the more formal, as befits the foundation of the church, the latter is full of human and picturesque interest. The Priestly commences in the first chapter of Genesis and is continued through Chronicles. The Primitive account commences in the second chapter of Genesis, is continued throughout the book, and naturally merges into the book of Kings. It is the history of the nation as the Chosen People. Chronicles is the account of the merging of the nation into the church, and belongs to a later date. The same incident is sometimes told more than once and for a different purpose, as the national and churchly elements would see from slightly different standpoints.

The reader should always have sympathy in reading the Bible, for he is tracing the evolution of consciousness in the race. Always remember that we have the fuller light, because these people gathered "here a little and there a little, precept upon precept, line upon line." This rich inheritance has been bequeathed to us. Just as the childhood

stories of our great men interest us, because we can trace the unfoldment from childhood to manhood, our interest in the Bible is sustained from the beginning of race insight to spiritual demonstration. Whether we study for the historic account, for the human interest, or, greatest of all, for the spiritual experiences and discoveries found therein, it will retain its place and hold us its debtors.

The Bible goes back to remote antiquity when literature was at its highest development. We find here allegory, lyric, drama, history, essays, sonnets, treatises, rhapsodies. Every form of literature, both prose and poetry, are here. Satire and humor are not found wanting and a wealth of human incident unrivaled in literature. All, however, are spiritualized because this nation from first to last was interested in things of the Spirit. God to them was not something to speculate about, He was something to experience. He was a Shepherd who watched over his flock, loved and cared for them and was interested in their welfare and progress.

God is always reaching down to man. Man is always striving up to God and the Bible is the Book of the Meeting. This book grows in value to us as we grow in the knowledge of spiritual things; it interprets our own spiritual experiences, and enables us to see the goal of mankind, the Resurrection of the human race, above material limitation and darkness. It is the inspiration alike for individual needs, national needs, and international aspirations. It inspires the artist, the literateur, the musician, the merchant and the housewife. It comforts the sorrowing, and heals the sick in mind and body. It reveals our relation to God, and inspires our association with our fellow man to reach a closer affiliation. It is therefore not only the book of the meeting of God and man; it is the book of the meeting of man and man, for we never meet our fellow man until we meet him in Spirit.