

**A PLEA FOR A MORE
THOROUGH STUDY
OF THE SEMITIC
LANGUAGES IN AMERICA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649271436

A Plea for a More Thorough Study of the Semitic Languages in America by Samuel Ives Curtiss

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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SAMUEL IVES CURTISS

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And Camps

A PLEA FOR A MORE THOROUGH STUDY
OF THE SEMITIC LANGUAGES
IN AMERICA.

BY

REV. SAMUEL IVES CURTISS, JR.,

AT HIS INAUGURATION AS NEW ENGLAND PROFESSOR OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE
IN CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

WITH



THE CHARGE,

BY REV. A. L. CHAPIN, D. D.,

President of Beloit College.

PUBLISHED BY VOTE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

CHICAGO:
JAMERSON & MOISE, PRINTERS.
1879.

Chicago Theological Seminary,

UNION PARK, CHICAGO, ILL.

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Letters of inquiry may be addressed to

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In behalf of the Board of Directors,

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It points to a particular book—the Bible. That book has an origin all its own,—a character all its own,—a history all its own,—an aim and a power all its own. To the face of the blatant blasphemy of our day, I affirm here to-night, that these Scriptures were given by inspiration of God, as no other writings ever produced in this world were given. And I am content to rest this affirmation on these facts just hinted at. 1. That the character of these writings, as respects the matters of truth they embody, the clearness and simplicity with which these truths are presented, and the adaptation of these truths to meet the deep needs of human souls universally, is such that they can be referred to no other source. 2. That the history of this book as respects the manner in which it was made up by the human agency of many diverse writers working on one plan through a period of nearly 2000 years, and as respects its preservation down through the ages, and its diffusion into all parts of the world is unique, unlike the history of any other book, and so in full accord with its divine origin. 3. That the aim of this book is to reveal truths which the human soul craves, but which the human soul can know only through a special divine revelation, truths which lay hold on the thoughts, on the hearts and on the consciences of men to determine motives, choices and action, so as to give cast to their whole being, and that its power to accomplish this aim has been evinced by the radical transformation of individual character and wide sweeping reformations of human society, which show that the book is fully charged with the wisdom and power of God for the salvation of a sinful world.

These I know are bare statements. The time admits of nothing more now. But these assertions express what I understand to be the views of the churches whose interests you are set here to serve.

As a book given to the world by inspiration of God, it is the infallible source of that which man is to believe concerning God and of the rules of duty which God requires of man. Hence *its authority is supreme* concerning those things which it especially teaches. Thus it lies at the very foundation of all religious faith and religious character.

Now the duty with which you are to be charged in this seminary is the interpretation of the teachings of this sacred book. Nay, more than that, you are to instruct others, scores, hundreds of young men, especially in the method and spirit with which they, as religious guides, are to unfold the treasures of truth in their direct application to the heart and life of thousands of common people. There is no chair of instruction in this institution superior in importance to that which you are to occupy—none from which will flow consequences more momentous and vital to the perpetuity and power of christianity in the world. I say then, magnify your office in both your apprehension and your performance of its duties accordingly.

More particularly, I may say, to meet this responsible trust, you will need to conduct your own study of this book in a spirit of *devout reverence*—reverence not of the book itself as a sacred thing—a sort of fetish—not that—but reverence for its contents, regarded as a living voice of God to living souls. Treat it so that your pupils

will catch the same spirit, and regard these truths ever with reverence as things that may not be trifled with.

You need for the fit discharge of this office *accurate scholarship* in the original languages in which the book was written. Truth from God is here presented in particular forms of human languages, which are convertible into others, into all languages only by thorough acquaintance with the general philosophy of language, and with the peculiar idioms of the Hebrew and the Greek. No unimportant part of your work will be to incite and to guide your pupils to attainments in such scholarship.

But further, let me say, this book more than any other, is *its own interpreter*. It needs to be studied as a whole. No man can fully understand either of these two Testaments, without the light of the other. Each several book, too, brings its own help to the unfolding of every other. So studied there comes out in distinct manifestation, a wonderful unity and consistency, which makes a perfect whole of many parts.

Human science, too, in all its departments, lends light for the interpretation of this book, which may not be scorned or rejected. Nature is but another book from the same divine hand, and the book of Nature and this written word do ever complement each other in bringing us to the knowledge of God and His truth. Let in the light from this source freely, fearlessly.

But most of all will you need in the unfolding of these treasures of truth, *the guidance of the same holy Spirit of God*, whose inspiration moved the minds of those who first penned those words. With the highest exercise of your own, reason then, with the nicest application of