

**BIBLICAL HISTORY: A LECTURE
DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE
TERM OF THE UNION THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER
19, 1889, PP. 6-45**

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BIBLICAL HISTORY

*A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE
TERM OF THE UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 19, 1889*

WITH AN APPENDIX

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BIBLICAL HISTORY.

times. He does not expect to please those who find nothing desirable outside the beaten tracks. Novelties are to them heresies. He aims rather, to stimulate those who believe that the Holy Spirit will guide into all truth, and are willing and eager to find new truth as well as old in the Word of God. That Word liveth and abideth forever. Its treasures of wisdom were not exhausted by our fathers. It has precious fruits for us also.

BIBLICAL HISTORY.

BIBLICAL HISTORY is the History contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is necessary to distinguish it from the History of Israel on the one hand, and from the recent theological discipline called "Contemporary History of the Old and New Testaments" on the other. I do not undervalue either of these two important branches of History when I urge that Biblical History is a separate branch. I rather aim to put these three branches of history, that deal more or less with the same themes, in their true relations.

The Contemporary History of the Old Testament aims to study the history of the nations that influenced Israel. It studies the monuments of Babylon, Egypt, Phœnicia, Assyria, and the lesser nations that encompassed Israel or were entwined with him in his development. It studies the history of Persia, Greece, and Rome,—the ancient masters of the world that held Israel in subjection.

These cast a flood of light upon the history recorded in the Bible and give us invaluable information with regard to the external influences working upon Israel and co-operating with the internal influences to produce his historical training. Great attention has been paid to this method of study in recent times, and it has in many

minds overwhelmed and absorbed the study of Biblical History itself.

Biblical History moves on its way in the narratives of the Bible, touching the great nations of the Old World at various points in its advancement, giving and receiving influences of various kinds, but pervaded with a sense of an overpowering force that has determined not only the History of Israel, but of all nations of the world. Israel has been a football of the nations, trodden under foot and tossed hither and thither by those mightier than he, but he has been a ball of light and fire that no violence could quench; for a divine blessing was in him for all mankind. God cast Israel into the fiery furnace that his dross might be consumed and the pure gold shine in its glorious lustre. The nations were his hammers, to beat him into the holy image God had designed for him from the beginning.

The earlier Isaiah warns the proud Assyrian :

"Wherefore it shall come to pass, that, when Adonay hath performed his whole work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem,

"I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria and the glory of his high looks,"

"Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Or, shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?"

(Isaiah x. 12, 15).

And the later Isaiah encourages Israel :

"And now, thus saith Jahveh,

Thy creator, O Jacob, and thy former, O Israel,

Fear not, for I have redeemed thee.

I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine ;

When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee ;

And in the rivers, they shall not o'erflow thee :

When thou walkest in the fire, thou shalt not be burned,

Neither shall the flame consume thee.

For I, Jahveh, am thy God,

The Holy One of Israel is thy Saviour" (Isaiah xliii. 1-3).

The Hebrew Prophets see that Jahveh, the God of Israel, shaped all the migrations of the nations, all the movements of mankind, all the revolutions of history, for the training of His own well-beloved people.

"When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance
 When he separated the children of men,
 He set the bounds of the peoples,
 According to the number of the children of Israel;
 For Jahveh's portion is his people.
 Jacob is the lot of his inheritance" (Deut. xxxii. 8-9).

And yet Israel was not for himself alone. The Biblical historians do not encourage any neglect of the other nations of the world. They represent that all are to share in the blessings of Abraham; they see them all ultimately before the judgment-seat of God; they look forward to their ultimate incorporation in the kingdom under the Messianic King. The prophet rebukes Israel for supposing that he alone was the people of God, and that all the other nations were neglected by the God of all the earth.

"Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me,
 O children of Israel, saith Jahveh,
 Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt,
 And the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?"
 (Amos ix. 7).

God watched over the other nations of the world, guided their history, and will bring them also to salvation and judgment. No one can altogether understand Biblical History until he has placed it in the light of its Contemporary History, and yet he would make a vast mistake who would suppose that this Contemporary History is the key to Biblical History. The Biblical History is the centre of this circumference of nations. It is the Sun in the midst of the world in whose rising

all mankind are to rejoice (Is. lx.). It is the light streaming forth from Biblical History that illuminates the Contemporary History. Contemporary History reflects the rays of that light. The study of the one ought not to conflict with the study of the other.

It is also necessary to distinguish Biblical History from the History of Israel. The history of Israel is a part of the history of the world. It is a section of the discipline of Universal History. It should be studied with a purely scientific interest. It uses Biblical History as one of its sources; it uses Contemporary History as another; it arranges all its material in a scientific manner, in accordance with the principles of historic development. It is on the one side more extensive than Biblical History. It fills up the numerous blanks that are left therein from other sources of information.

The period between the Old and New Testaments is of no importance to Biblical History; but it is of vast importance to the History of Israel. The historian will lay much more stress upon it than upon many earlier periods where the Biblical writers dwell at length. On the other hand the History of Israel is less extensive than Biblical History. It does not enter into the province of the supernatural, that most characteristic feature of Biblical History. It stumbles at theophanies, miracles, and prophecies. It finds it difficult to adjust these supernatural features to the principles of scientific study. The purely personal relations of Jahveh to his people are matters into which the scientific historian does not venture.

The scientific study of the History of Israel is of vast importance. No one can understand altogether the History of Israel, unless Israel's true place and importance in universal history have been determined. Each one of