

**THE OLD TESTAMENT  
AMONG THE  
SEMITIC RELIGIONS**

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The Old Testament among the Semitic religions by George Ricker Berry

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**GEORGE RICKER BERRY**

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AMONG THE  
SEMITIC RELIGIONS**



**The Old Testament**  
among  
**The Semitic Religions**





To  
the memory of  
E. L. B.

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Published March, 1920



## Preface

WITHIN recent years much has been written concerning the relation of the Hebrews to the surrounding nations, especially Babylonia and Assyria. While many phases of this relation have been discussed with great fulness, the most fundamental question has received a relatively inadequate consideration. This general question is, What features of the religious teachings, or theology, of the Old Testament are to be considered common to the Hebrews and some other nation or nations, and what features are distinctive. Various elements in this question have been discussed, but it has been approached usually from the other side, with the consideration, *e. g.*, of the features which Babylonia has contributed to the Old Testament. It is this general question which the present writer proposes for consideration.

The nations to be embraced in this discussion evidently should include all the Semitic nations,

so far as material is available; for the association of the Hebrews was largely with Semitic nations. Further, it is a question not alone of national environment but of national inheritance. Some reference will also be made to the religion of Egypt. It is held by some that the Egyptians were a Semitic people. The present writer does not accept this view, but recognizes that the Egyptians were frequently subject to Semitic influences—religious as well as other—from an early period. The Egyptian sojourn of the Hebrews, however, and the intercourse between the two nations during the subsequent history, indicate that there was opportunity for influence by one nation upon the other. Nevertheless, the general study which the writer has given to the matter has convinced him that any such influence was comparatively slight. Hence, it does not seem important to make any extended comparison with the Egyptian religion, but preferable to limit such comparison to a few points of special importance. No reference is made to possible influence upon the Old Testament teaching by the Persian religion, the religion of Zarathushtra. If there was such influence, as

seems probable, it included only a few points and embraced simply details, so that it may here be disregarded. Practically, then, the comparison is between the Old Testament and the other Semitic religions.

So far as a common-Semitic element appears from this study, or even an element common to the Hebrews and one or more of the other Semitic nations, it may, aside from the possibility of independent development, be explained in two principal ways. One is by influence of one nation upon another, either by definite borrowing or in a less specific way; the other is by inheritance from common ancestors. Some reference will inevitably be made to these possibilities in the course of the discussion, but the general matter will be considered more directly at its conclusion.

It is recognized, of course, that any results reached in this study must be provisional and held with all due reserve. That is a necessary result from the fragmentary nature of the material. The new evidence that is constantly being made available, especially in the Babylonian field, will inevitably modify many features as they now ap-