

# INTRODUCTION

## *The Theme of the Course*

The Bible has so many facets that it is well to work on one at a time, taking only side glances at other aspects until a clear concept of one is gained. Many of us are accustomed to reading, for depth of meaning, various short passages related in thought to other short passages. Thus it may be of value to attain a continuity of context. The purpose of this course is to offer such a large view based on a simple theme: the rise and fall of a material (historical) kingdom and the rise of a moral and spiritual kingdom (which extends beyond the New Testament in and through and to us, today).

*If you will look at the profile chart of the course (page 33), you will observe that it is set up on a horizontal line across a page, a line that is at first dotted and then solid and then split into two parts, etc. This is a crude graphic representation of the rise and fall of the ancient historical kingdom of Israel.*

*If you will look at the assignment sheets, you will observe that they are arranged according to the periods in the rise and fall of the material kingdom — and the continuance of Biblical writing in two periods when there was NO material kingdom (the Persian and Greek periods). But more of this, as you get there.*

## *The Rise and Fall of a Material (Historical) Kingdom*

What is needed for a kingdom or state? Among other things, people, law and government, land (territory), and sovereignty are essential.

• **People:** With Israel, the people were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who became Israel at Peniel). The period of the patriarchs gives us the founding family, as it were, the ancestors of the people who mainly comprised ancient Israel. Other elements were added to this original group, but the descent from Abraham was something of which the Jews of Jesus' time were very proud (see John 8:33, 39) and about which Paul had things to say (Gal. 3:16, 29). We start the course with the patriarchs, the first Bible people.

• **Law and government:** These are vital to a kingdom or state. For the Bible people, the exodus period provided the fundamental law (the Decalogue) and the beginnings of government (judgeships). Some legal materials in Exodus (20:23 to 23:33) come from an agricultural type of living and reflect the law of northwest Mesopotamia. Laws in Deuteronomy enlarge upon those in that early Covenant Code and repeat the Decalogue (Deuteronomy 5). Laws in Leviticus and some parts of Exodus are considered later priestly additions. However, the traditions of the Sinai Covenant persist through the Biblical periods with such strength that *all* law was attributed to Moses.

If you can grasp the tremendous significance of law and government in the Old Testament, you will understand the language, labors, and significance of the prophets in very crucial times in Israelite history, the great contribution of Jesus' interpretation of the law (Matthew 5-7 and elsewhere), and Paul's emphasis on and interpretation of law.

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## NOTES

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*Recent Old Testament scholarship represented in the bibliography (page 32) by Bernhard Anderson and John Bright has found the ancient pattern of Hittite international suzerainty treaties to be of vital importance; throwing light on the form of the Sinai Covenant and on elements in many, many passages of the Old Testament like the Shechem Covenant (Joshua 8:30-35 and Joshua 24), the lawsuit theme ("controversy" in King James English) of prophets (Hosea 4:1-4; Micah 6:1-5), etc., etc. The Sinai Covenant, so basic to Israel, has long been recognized as not a partnership of equals; the Hittite treaty form indicated a relationship between suzerain and vassal which to the scholar gives depth and meaning to that in Exodus 20, when Yahweh, merciful and loving, having in Egypt reached out to a mixed group of slaves or "nobodies," bound them to Himself as vassals with stipulations which they must obey (the Decalogue), thus dignifying them with a kind of citizenship and with individual responsibility to Him.*

- **Land:** Territory is necessary to a kingdom or state. The land in the Bible is that promised to Abraham when God called him to leave his family at Haran and go to a new land (Genesis 12:1-4). It was inhabited by Amorites and by Canaanites. The patriarchs lived in it as nomadic shepherds. It was later "conquered" and settled by the descendants of the exodus group, who assimilated others into their group, particularly at Shechem, when they instituted a Tribal League — this occurred during the IIIrd period, that of the conquest and settlement period (of the judges). This land was very small, roughly 150 miles from south to north and 75 from west to east; geography and terrain had a good deal to do with history. Palestine lay between two great power-areas, Egypt and Mesopotamia, which controlled or influenced the territory between them for centuries. Palestine is, of course, named for the Philistines, a sea people who were not indigenous to that area.

*If you look into geography, your study will be greatly enriched, your understanding, too. The Bible itself reveals brief glimpses of it now and then, as in Judges 5:21, when the river Kishon overflowed its banks and mired the iron chariots of the Canaanites, whom the Israelites were thus able to rout in battle. (God Himself was on their side and moved "the stars in their courses" to fight against Sisera!)*

- **Sovereignty:** The ability of a state to govern itself without outside interference is political sovereignty. On the profile chart (page 33) this is represented by a solid line. When a broken line appears, Israel either has not yet attained all essentials for statehood (including political sovereignty) or has lost some of them.

### ***The Rise of a Moral and Spiritual Kingdom***

- Long before the time of Saul and David, when an actual monarchy was established, the Bible people were laying the foundations for a moral and spiritual kingdom, which we believe has been most clearly understood through the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy in Christian Science.
- Since the Bible people were the only ancient (and modern) people to write their history in terms of their relationship to God, it is plain that even their accounts of the material (historical) kingdom are permeated with their concepts of God.
- Although we realize that GOD does not change, we should also realize that people's ideas about God *do* change. In the Bible, Jacob's concepts changed, for example. And although there is no steady and consistent rise in the concept of God, even at the outset, with Abraham there are really tremendous glimpses of God as principle, guidance, supply, all-power, presence, etc., etc. The great Bible figures are the ones with the GREAT concepts of God. Your most valuable enterprise in this course will be to discover with the

Bible people the nature of God and of man's relationship to Him — which, they learned, included his right relationship to his fellow man.

*If you will look into "righteousness" (which fills the Old Testament), you may be impressed by the high standards set for these ancient people throughout the Old Testament — not always understood or adhered to, certainly, but somehow always PRESENT. One of the highest statements, Leviticus 19:18, came rather late, perhaps at the time of the Exile, when the lessons of the prophets had been finally assimilated.*

*If you compare the ancient Mesopotamian and Canaanite myths of creation (and flood — Mesopotamia), you will find (in the Hebrew versions) elements of morality (and beyond) which are not present in the original. Genesis 2-11 contains composite materials, probably not taking first written form until the tenth century B.C. (some say later) in the J or YAHWIST (Jehovah) tradition, and edited by a priestly writer probably in the sixth century B.C. (The composition of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) is a specialized study — see special outside reading list and materials for the fifth assignment).*

As for a *spiritual* kingdom, this term in this course is meant to include several things: the glimpses throughout the Old Testament of the (spiritual) nature of God; the many contacts with God, as by patriarchs, Moses, individual judges, kings, prophets (through speaking "face to face" or through "angel" or "dream," insight or vision); the understanding of man's relationship to God; the growing sense of Jerusalem or Zion as not only the city of David but God's kingdom; the glimpses of Messiah (as in Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah). As you well know, you cannot read the Old Testament without the light which Christian Science throws upon scenes and characters and incidents.

*Although God may seem to be quite man-like for a long time in the Old Testament, it is well to bear in mind a couple of elements in the religion of the ancient Middle East: on the one hand, ancient Mesopotamians often had a quite close sense of a "personal god" who looked out for them (he was capricious, and if things went wrong either one was unwittingly at fault, oneself, or that was the unaccountable nature of things); on the other hand, Middle Eastern deities were often nature gods, storm gods, above all fertility gods, Baals, worshiped through idols and fertility rites, gods connected with nature and subject via priest and ritual to control by worship ceremonies. Yahweh was emphatically NOT a nature deity: thus he had more of the qualities of man; but HE was that Power which controlled the universe and could not BE controlled — never! Much of ancient Hebrew law forbids practices prevalent in Baal worship (Canaanite worship). Hebrew religion was really pure compared to that of its surroundings.*

*To conceive God as "like" a human being was not to MAKE him a human being. It was to prevent His being like the gods of the neighboring peoples. It could be said, however, that God was so real to the Bible people that He could almost be seen (Genesis 18) and argued with (Genesis 18, Exodus 32, Numbers 14:11-24). Yet seeing Him was forbidden, as He was holy (Exodus 33, Judges 6:22). If you were to study the "holy," you would find it to range from superstition to spirituality (I Samuel 4:3-8, Isaiah 6) as related to God and to require a high ethic of man (Leviticus 19, for example).*

Although the function of priests and sacrificial or festival worship ceremonies is an area of religion somewhat unfamiliar to us, the Old Testament is filled with these features.

It is helpful to remember that when the prophets inveighed against altars and sacrifices they had no intention of doing away with them entirely: their purpose was to make clear that when *unaccompanied* by morality and sincerity such worship was hypocritical and valueless. Abraham was given a substitute for Isaac (a ram to sacrifice), for God was satisfied with the love and fidelity Abraham had shown (Genesis 22). Sacrifices went on at the temple in Jerusalem right through from its building by Solomon, rebuilding by the returned exiles, and embellishment and extension by Herod the Great, until the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A.D. and Jews and Christians alike dispersed from that area. As a matter of fact, much of the historical tradition and the law was taught at the local shrines and later at Jerusalem in the temple area, rehearsed at festival observances, and thus transmitted in the very life of the people.

*If one were interested in studying the priests and development of worship in the Old Testament, this might be helpful; outside reading would provide useful information.*

### *A Word about the Writing of the Bible*

Textual study and form criticism provide two of many approaches to Bible study. Scholarship today is very active in these areas, stimulated most recently by the discovery, translation, and study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Behind the earliest scrolls, we must understand, lay even earlier scrolls, and, behind them, traditions passed down orally for years and years — even centuries, perhaps. The Song of Deborah in Judges 5, for example, is considered to have come down as *song* from about 1100 B.C. Incorporated into the Deuteronomist's history (presumably written soon after the exile of 586 to 538 B.C.), it illustrates the idea that Biblical writers drew upon the materials they had at hand — from their *memories*, from *records*, (court chronicles, for example), and from *worship*.

In this course you will find some reference to three great histories in the Old Testament. An understanding of the points of view of Biblical writers is helpful. We come to realize that the Bible was not meant to be a scientific record or even an historical record; it is rather the literature of faith, of various understandings of God from the ups and downs in the life of the only people who thought of themselves as "chosen" of God for His purpose of bringing light to the world.

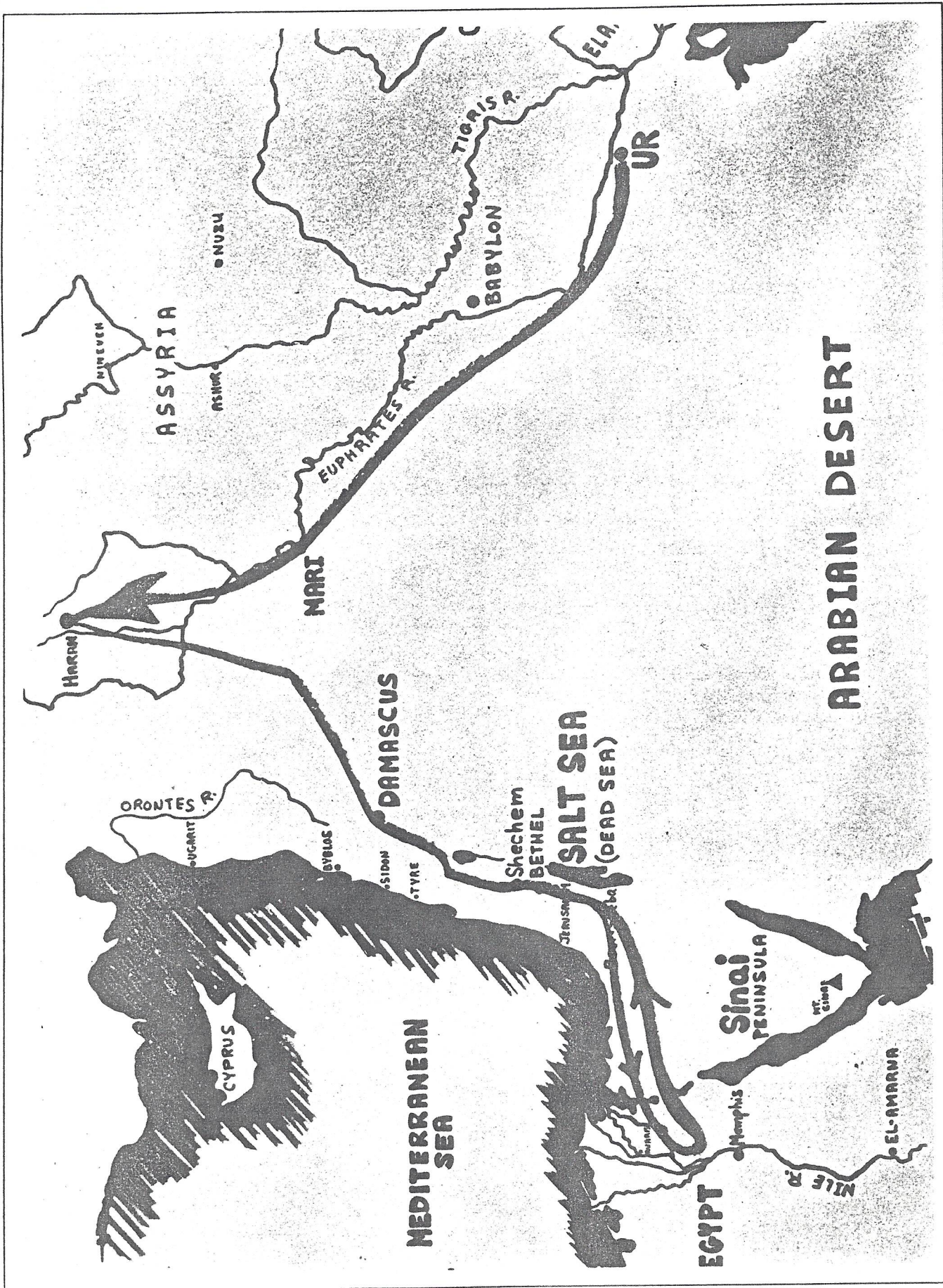
### *A Note on the Bible as Literature*

This, too, is an entire study in itself, of course. Yet a word about two or three characteristics of Biblical literature may actually help to throw light on and make more enjoyable your reading.

The Hebrew people had a genius for word-pictures. By law they were forbidden to draw pictures or carve or shape images. However, nothing prevented their realizing with great WORD POWER (and economy) unparalleled NARRATIVE SCENES — three men at Abraham's tent, a burning bush, a woman bringing her little son a new coat every year. Equally, in their POETRY, they imaged forth in words great ideas, qualities, concepts: a plumbline, a vineyard unexpectedly bringing forth wild grapes in spite of everything, the wind of God reviving a valley of dry bones (a defunct nation).

The Hebrew people spoke, sang, wrote with RHYTHM. Some scholars call their tendency to repeat what they are saying over and over (in different patterns) PARALLELISM. As you read, you will be aware of how much of what they say is said over again in other words, in further words, in contrasting words, in cumulative word power. (There are technical terms for these patterns. Unless someone wished to make a special study of it, it is sufficient simply to be aware of this un-even, flowing, un-measured but very palpable rhythm — as in well-known passages like Isaiah 40, for example.)

Indeed it is in the word-pictures and rhythms of the Bible people transmitted in the English of Shakespeare's time (through the King James version) that the Kingdom of God shines vividly before us and sings in our hearts and memories.



*Route of Abraham's Migration*