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978-1-107-63985-0 - A Short History of the Hebrews to the Roman Period

R. L. Ottley

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A SHORT
HISTORY OF THE HEBREWS
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Quum iustitia et dilectio quae erat erga Deum cessisset in oblivionem et exstincta esset in Aegypto, necessario Deus, propter multam suam erga homines benevolentiam, semetipsum ostendebat per vocem, et eduxit de Aegypto populum in virtute, uti rursus fieret homo discipulus et sectator Dei.

IREN. IV. 16. 3.

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A SHORT
HISTORY OF THE HEBREWS
TO THE ROMAN PERIOD

BY

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WITH MAPS

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PREFACE.

THE present "Short History" is an attempt to furnish teachers or students of the Old Testament with a sketch of the actual course of Hebrew history, somewhat more consistent with the present state of our knowledge than the textbooks now in use. The book presupposes, and is intended to encourage, a careful and intelligent study of the text of the Bible. With a brief outline of the history in his hands, a thoughtful student is probably best left to himself. In regard to many points of detail, he must freely use his own judgment, and the broad lessons, moral and religious, of the history, may be trusted to impress themselves on his mind without the aid of a manual.

I have not thought it desirable to distract the reader's attention either by minute discussion of critical problems, or by special reference to points of Old Testament theology. For practical purposes, the study of Hebrew *religion* may be well kept distinct from that of Hebrew *history*. With regard to questions of historical criticism, there is one period of obvious difficulty, namely, that which is covered by Chapters II. and III. It has seemed best, in dealing with the patriarchal and nomadic stages in Israel's history, to follow the plan of Kittel¹, so far as to give an outline of the Hebrew tradition, with a few introductory remarks, touching upon the peculiar nature of the narrative, and a brief concluding summary of what may be called its historical substance. In spite of the industry and research which well-known writers have devoted to this period, the results of archaeology cannot be fairly said to have corroborated the actual incidents recorded in Genesis and Exodus; and it is

¹ In his *History of the Hebrews*.

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hard to say which is the greater mistake :—to maintain, in face of the analogy presented by the early history of other nations, that the vivid narratives of the Pentateuch are literally, and in all their details, true to fact ; or to assert that if they are not in the strict sense historical, they are therefore destitute of moral and spiritual value.

New discoveries may yet throw light on the substance of these narratives ; but in the mean time, it seems our wisest plan to accept the ancient tradition for what it is worth, and not to devote disproportionate space to elaborate speculation as to the precise course of primitive Hebrew history, or to minute descriptions of the atmosphere and circumstances in which the patriarchs may be supposed to have lived. Whatever archaeology may still have to teach us, it is well to recognize the fact that the patriarchal period is described to us in narratives which were compiled in their present form about a thousand years later than the events they describe, and of which therefore, as Prof. G. A. Smith truly observes, “it is simply impossible for us at this time of day to establish the accuracy¹.”

I have generally employed the divine name JEHOVAH in preference to JAHVEH or YAHWE, as that form occurs in the Revised Version (Isai. xii. 2), from which all biblical quotations are taken. A list of books is given which includes those most accessible to ordinary readers.

R. L. O.

June, 1901.

¹ *The Preaching of the Old Testament to the Age*, p. 37. See the same writer's weighty discussion of this topic in *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the O. T.* (Yale Lectures), Lect. III. Prof. G. A. Smith fairly sums up the state of the case in the following sentences : “ While archaeology has richly illustrated the main outlines of the Book of Genesis from Abraham to Joseph, it has not one whit of proof to offer for the personal existence or characters of the Patriarchs themselves.....This is the whole change archaeology has wrought : it has given us a background and an atmosphere for the stories of Genesis ; it is unable to recall or to certify their heroes.”

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CORRIGENDA.

P. 85 note, ² omitted.

Pp. 100 and 149, **for** *The Lord* **read** *The LORD*.

P. 166, l. 16, **for** 'were' **read** 'was.'

P. 179 note, **for** 'Ebion-Gezer' **read** 'Ezion-Geber.'

P. 262 (foot), **for** 164 **read** 165.