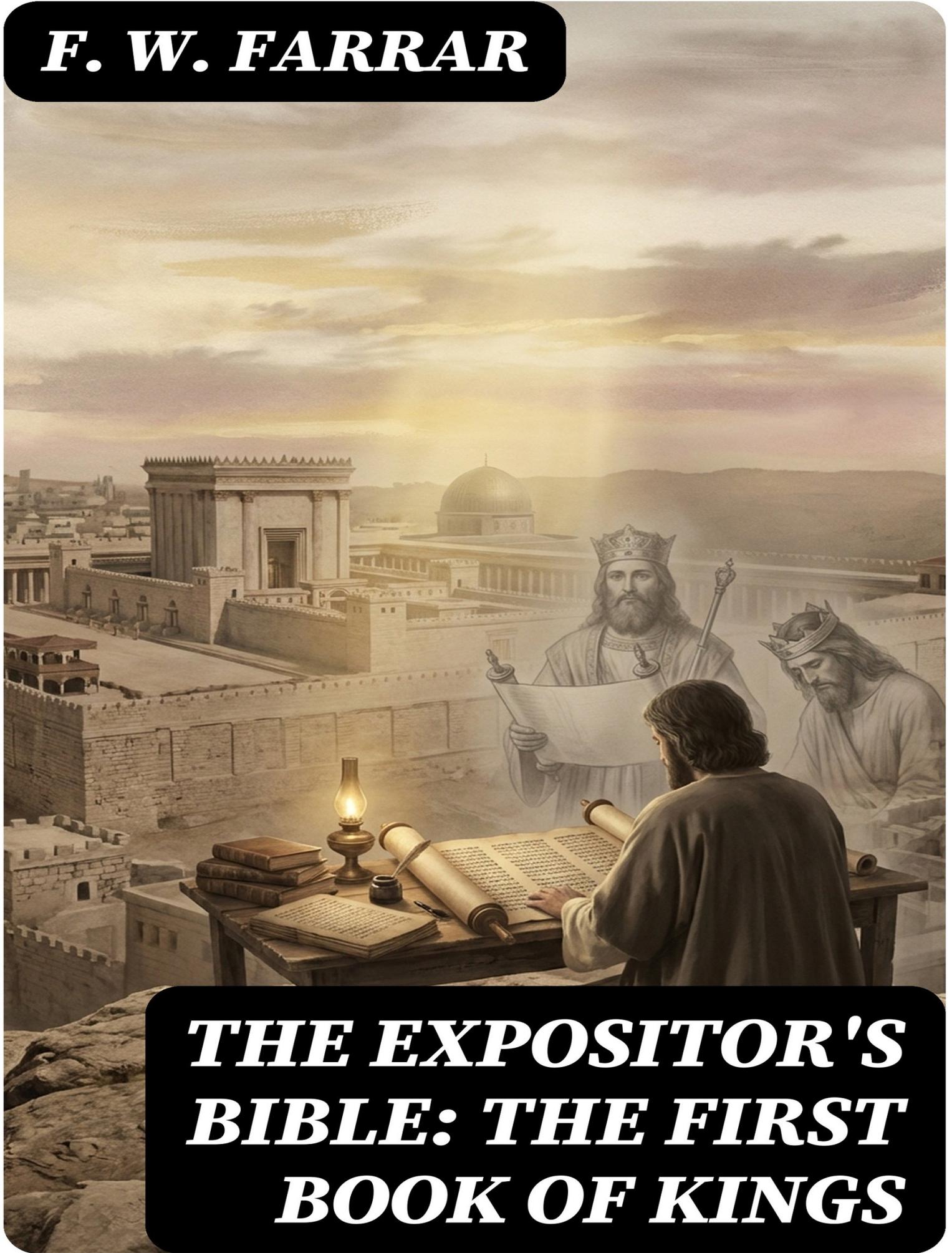
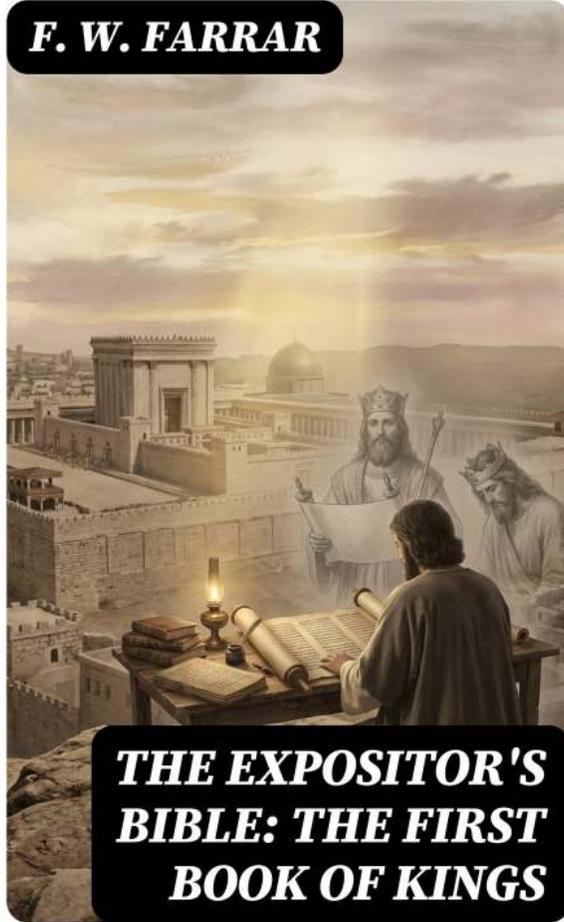


***F. W. FARRAR***



***THE EXPOSITOR'S  
BIBLE: THE FIRST  
BOOK OF KINGS***

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# **The Expositor's Bible: The First Book of Kings**

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Peter Boyd*

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# Introduction

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Between throne and altar, this volume traces how the promises and perils of kingship expose the heart of faith while prophetic conscience exposes the heart of power, setting royal ambition, public worship, and communal memory in a continual test of allegiance that asks whether a nation's greatness is measured by the splendor it builds, the treaties it seals, or the fidelity it keeps, and whether leaders secure their people by multiplying defenses or by returning to first principles, so that every triumph carries a question and every crisis becomes a summons to remember who rules, who serves, and why.

F. W. Farrar's *The Expositor's Bible: The First Book of Kings* belongs to the long-running *Expositor's Bible* series, a popular English-language project of biblical exposition from the late nineteenth century, and it takes as its subject the canonical history recorded in 1 Kings, set amid the palaces, sanctuaries, and borderlands of ancient Israel and its neighbors. As a work of commentary, it stands between scholarship and pastoral application, guiding non-specialists through a difficult scriptural book while offering preachers and students a reliable framework for teaching. Its pages keep close to the biblical text, clarifying context, sequence, and meaning without obscuring reverent devotion.

It opens at a moment of transition, when the mantle of rule passes and the new court must define legitimacy, wisdom, and worship before watching eyes at home and

abroad. Farrar attends to the tensions of statecraft and sanctity: the building of sacred space, the ordering of justice, the management of wealth and labor, and the counsel that kings accept or refuse. As the narrative stretches across generations, he follows how policy becomes habit and habit becomes destiny, while prophetic figures emerge to test prevailing loyalties. The book invites readers to observe, not to rush, letting complexities accumulate before judgments are drawn.

Farrar writes with a steady, lucid voice that alternates close exegesis with reflective, sermonic meditation, offering historical notes where needed and moral evaluation only after he has stated what the text says. His sentences are brisk yet generous, gathering parallels from elsewhere in Scripture to illuminate difficult turns, and his tone remains pastoral even when he confronts contested questions of chronology, authorship, or custom. The result is neither dry philology nor vague homily, but an exposition that respects literary form and theological weight. Readers encounter a companionable guide who explains, cautions, and occasionally exhorts, always aiming to deepen understanding rather than display ingenuity.

Among the themes he patiently unfolds are the burdens and limits of political authority, the centrality of worship for communal identity, the danger of syncretism, and the vocation of truth-tellers who stand outside the palace yet shape the nation's conscience. Personal virtue and public policy are intertwined; misaligned loves spread from private chambers into markets, tribunals, and borders. He also dwells on memory as a theological safeguard, showing how

promises handed down can restrain panic and correct pride. Through such emphases, the commentary interprets power not merely as capacity to act but as responsibility before God, neighbors, and posterity.

For contemporary readers, the book remains instructive wherever institutions are tested by competing loyalties and leaders must choose between expedience and integrity. It speaks to debates about national identity, public religion, and the stewardship of wealth, as well as to the quiet crises of vocation, family, and prayer that shape the character of decision-makers. Pastors will find clear pathways from text to sermon without reduction; students will encounter a model of attentive, fair-minded interpretation; general readers will gain a map for navigating complex narratives. In each case, Farrar's measured counsel invites discernment, patience, and hope rather than outrage or despair.

Ultimately, this commentary offers a disciplined way of reading that keeps together history and theology, story and instruction, without forcing certainty where the text itself invites reverent restraint. By placing the glitter of courts next to the burdens of conscience, it teaches readers to weigh outcomes by deeper measures than success, urging a long view shaped by promise and accountability. Written in the late nineteenth century yet attentive to perennial questions, it opens a conversation across centuries between Scripture, church, and public life. Those who enter that conversation will find not easy answers but sturdy guidance for thoughtful faithfulness.

# Synopsis

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F. W. Farrar's *The Expositor's Bible: The First Book of Kings* is a late nineteenth-century volume in the Expositor's Bible series that offers an accessible commentary on 1 Kings. Farrar blends historical background, literary observation, and practical reflection to guide readers through the book's narrative arc. He situates the text within Israel's monarchy, noting how Kings evaluates rulers by their fidelity to the worship of Israel's God. Throughout, he balances attention to political realities, social consequences, and theological claims, aiming to illuminate how the book's editors shaped the story to convey religious meaning while still respecting the plain movement of the narrative.

Farrar begins with the transition from David to Solomon, treating the charged atmosphere of royal succession and the interplay of court advisors, priestly figures, and prophetic oversight. He underscores how 1 Kings frames legitimacy not only in terms of lineage but also covenant responsibility. Without dwelling on minutiae, he sketches the stakes around continuity of the house of David and the consolidation of authority. His analysis traces how the narrative tests claims to power, marking the difference between expedient statecraft and principled leadership, and preparing the reader for the larger biblical pattern by which kingship is weighed against religious loyalty.

Turning to Solomon's reign, Farrar interprets the famous petition for wisdom as emblematic of an ideal ruler's

posture: discernment in justice, not mere technical skill. He explores the administrative and international dimensions of the kingdom's zenith—alliances, trade, and strategic cooperation—while keeping the theological center in view. The account of the king's judgments becomes a lens for distinguishing prudence from moral depth. Farrar is careful to show how prosperity contributes to stability and cultural achievement but also introduces pressures that test integrity, setting up the narrative's later concerns about compromise in worship and the burdens imposed on the people.

Farrar devotes sustained attention to the building and dedication of the temple, treating its architecture and ritual as symbols of national vocation and divine presence. He tracks the literary rhythm of construction, prayer, and blessing, highlighting how centralized worship binds public life to covenant ideals. Yet he also notes the text's cautions: grandeur can conceal spiritual drift, and institutions can harden into formality. The commentary follows how Solomon's policies—labor demands, diplomacy through marriages, and expanded court culture—create both coherence and strain. The result is a nuanced portrait of splendour poised between devotion and incipient fracture.

With Solomon's death, Farrar traces the rupture of the united kingdom, analyzing the political missteps that precipitate division and the rival claims that follow. He emphasizes how 1 Kings assesses the new order by religious criteria, particularly the establishment of alternative sanctuaries in the north. Prophetic voices challenge expedient solutions that secure borders at the cost of

fidelity. Farrar shows how the narrative contrasts outward success with spiritual erosion, and how the evaluation of each ruler hinges on worship and justice. The commentary clarifies why seemingly local cultic decisions carry national consequences across generations.

In treating the northern dynasty founded by Omri and the reign of Ahab, Farrar explores the entanglement of power, policy, and imported religious practices. He presents Elijah as the decisive counterpoint: a prophet whose confrontations expose the stakes of allegiance. Episodes of drought, public contest, and personal crisis reveal a pattern—divine initiative meeting human fear, courage, and renewal. Farrar draws out the narrative's ethical texture, including care for the vulnerable and the testing of authority. He reads the theophany and the prophet's recommissioning as pivotal for understanding how divine purpose proceeds through fragile yet faithful agents.

Farrar closes the volume with the wars against Aram, the courtroom drama of competing oracles, and the chilling episode of judicial abuse that follows a royal desire for property. He highlights the single uncompromising voice that resists a consensual prophecy shaped by politics, showing how truth and accountability stand at the book's moral center. The ending looks toward subsequent crises without exhausting them, allowing the commentary to underscore enduring themes: kingship under law, the primacy of true worship, and the prophetic conscience. Farrar's work remains resonant as a clear, integrated reading that connects Scripture's history with questions of leadership and public ethics.

# Historical Context

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The Expositor's Bible was a widely read late-Victorian commentary series launched in 1887 under the editorship of W. Robertson Nicoll and published by Hodder & Stoughton. Its volumes, written by leading British scholars and preachers, aimed to make contemporary biblical scholarship accessible to clergy and educated lay readers. F. W. Farrar, an Anglican churchman and noted author, contributed The First Book of Kings. Appearing in an era of expanding literacy, robust periodical culture, and energetic religious debate in Britain, the series bridged pulpit and study, blending exposition, historical background, and practical application rather than presenting technical, philological monographs for specialists only.

The scriptural narrative treated in First Kings spans the 10th to 9th centuries BCE in the ancient Levant, moving from the consolidation of monarchy under Solomon to the emergence of rival kingdoms in Israel and Judah. It highlights the building of the Jerusalem Temple, international diplomacy with Phoenicia and Egypt, internal strains that culminate in political fracture, and the rise of charismatic prophetic figures who confront royal power. This setting involves city-states and empires—Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt—whose interactions with Israel and Judah shaped trade, religion, and warfare. Victorian readers sought historical anchors for these events as they assessed the Old Testament's moral and political themes.

Nineteenth-century biblical studies were transformed by historical criticism, especially the German “Graf-Wellhausen” school, which emphasized sources, redaction, and historical context. Scholars argued that Kings exhibits a Deuteronomic editorial outlook, evaluating rulers by their fidelity to covenantal worship. In Britain, controversies such as *Essays and Reviews* (1860) and debates sparked by Bishop J. W. Colenso’s writings intensified discussion about inspiration and historical reliability. Farrar, associated with the Broad Church tradition, wrote for readers open to critical insights yet committed to the Church’s teaching. His exposition reflects a Victorian attempt to integrate historical method with pastoral aims without abandoning doctrinal and ethical concerns.

Archaeology and Assyriology furnished external points of reference for Kings. The identification of Shishak with the Egyptian pharaoh Shoshenq I, whose Karnak relief records a campaign into the Levant, intersected with the biblical account of incursions after Solomon’s reign. The 1868 discovery of the Mesha Stele (Moabite Stone) referencing the Omride dynasty corroborated the geopolitical milieu described in 1 Kings. Mid- to late-century decipherments of cuneiform and Egyptian texts, and syntheses like Eberhard Schrader’s work on inscriptions and the Old Testament, encouraged commentators to correlate the narrative with Near Eastern records, cautiously balancing archaeological data with textual analysis.

Victorian Britain’s strategic and cultural interest in the Near East intensified engagement with the biblical world. The Palestine Exploration Fund (founded 1865) sponsored

surveys and excavations, including Charles Warren's work in Jerusalem and the Survey of Western Palestine by Conder and Kitchener (1870s). Travel literature, maps, and reports shaped public imagination about ancient sites named in Kings. Such materials filtered into commentaries that sought to illuminate geography, routes, and material culture. Popular publishers and religious periodicals amplified these findings, enabling writers like Farrar to draw on current research to contextualize narratives while addressing parish clergy and informed lay readers.

Within the Church of England, the legacy of the Oxford Movement, persistent Evangelical influence, and Broad Church mediations framed how Scripture was taught and preached. The Revised Version of the Bible (New Testament 1881; Old Testament 1885) provided updated translations that many commentators employed alongside the Authorized Version. Parallel series—the Speaker's Commentary, the Pulpit Commentary, and the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges—signaled demand for resources uniting scholarship and homiletics. Farrar's contribution to *The Expositor's Bible* stood in this milieu, offering literary analysis, ethical reflection, and historical notes designed for sermon preparation and adult education amid shifting theological currents.

Frederic William Farrar (1831–1903) was a prominent educator, preacher, and writer, serving at Harrow and Marlborough before holding senior posts at Westminster and, later, Canterbury. His popular works on the life of Jesus and Paul, and his public engagement with questions of judgment and mercy, made him a recognizable voice in

Victorian religious life. Known for lucid, rhetorical prose and moral emphasis, he addressed biblical history with pastoral intent. In treating Kings, such a profile favored attention to character, responsibility, and prophetic critique of power—features that resonated with Anglican preaching and with readers navigating faith in a scientifically and historically self-conscious age.

The Expositor's Bible: The First Book of Kings reflects a moment when English-speaking Christians sought coherence between faith, history, and emerging knowledge. Farrar's volume channels contemporary interest in archaeology, engages critical scholarship judiciously, and retains a devotional, ethically oriented approach. It neither retreats from historical inquiry nor yields the pulpit's concern for conscience and community. The result mirrors late-Victorian confidence in learning as an ally of belief and critiques the misuse of power through the lens of prophetic tradition. In doing so, it situates ancient royal narratives within debates that preoccupied its era's churches, universities, and reading public.

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# BOOK I.

## INTRODUCTION.

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"Ich bin überzeugt, dass die Bibel immer schöner wird, je mehr man sie versteht, d.h. je mehr man einsieht und anschaut, dass jedes Wort, das wir allgemein auffassen und in Besondern auf uns anwenden, nach gewissen Umständen, nach Zeit- und Orts-verhältnissen einen, eigenen, besondern, unmittelbar individuellen Bezug gehabt hat."—GOETHE.

"Es bleibt dabei, das beste Lesen der Bibel, dieses Göttlichen Buchs, ist *menschlich*. Ich nehme dies Wort im weitesten Umfang und in der andringendsten Bedeutung. Menschlich muss man die Bibel lesen: denn sie ist ein Buch durch Menschen für Menschen geschrieben; menschlich ist die Sprache, menschlich die äussern Hilfsmittel, mit denen sie geschrieben und aufbehalten ist.... Es darf also sicher geglaubt werden: je humaner (im besten Sinn des Worts) man das Wort Gottes liest, desto näher kommt man dem Zweck seines Urhebers, welcher Menschen zu seinem Bilde schuf ... und für uns menschlich handelt."—HERDER.

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# CHAPTER I.

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## THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

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"God shows all things in the slow history of their ripening."—GEORGE ELIOT.

God has given us many Bibles. The book which we call the Bible consists of a series of books, and its name represents the Greek plural τὰ Βίβλια[1]. It is not so much a book, as the extant fragments of a literature, which grew up during many centuries. Supreme as is the importance of this "Book of God," it was never meant to be the sole teacher of mankind. We mistake its purpose, we misapply its revelation, when we use it to exclude the other sources of religious knowledge. It is supremely profitable for our instruction, but, so far from being designed to absorb our exclusive attention, its work is to stimulate the eagerness with which, by its aid, we are able to learn from all other sources the will of God towards men.

God speaks to us in many voices. In the Bible He revealed Himself to all mankind by His messages to the individual souls of some of His servants. But those messages, whether uttered or consigned to writing, were but one method of enabling us to hold communion with Him. They were not even an *indispensable* method. Thousands of the saints of God lived the spiritual life in close communion with their Father in heaven in ages which possessed no

accepted though specific archaeological identifications remain debated.

**47** Members of the Israelite tribe of Gad; in biblical narrative they are depicted as a martial band who joined David at the cave of Adullam (traditionally dated to the early Israelite monarchy, roughly 11th century BCE).

**48** A refuge mentioned in the Hebrew Bible where David and his followers hid from King Saul (see 1 Samuel); it is located in the hill country of Judah and is a traditional locus of David's early band.

**49** An older English spelling of Bedouin, referring to nomadic Arab pastoral peoples of desert regions (e.g., Sinai, Negeb and northern Arabia), noted for tribal, mobile pastoral lifestyles and desert knowledge.

**50** A person who took a vow of consecration in ancient Israel (described in Numbers) that typically included abstaining from wine, avoiding ritual impurity by contact with corpses, and not cutting the hair for the vow's duration.

**51** Originally citizens of the ancient city Laodicea, the term is used in Christian writings to describe people who are indifferent or 'lukewarm' in religious commitment; here it refers to neutrals who tolerate wrongdoing rather than oppose it.

**52** A Hebrew word meaning 'high place', referring to an elevated outdoor shrine or altar used for worship in ancient Israel and neighboring cultures; such sites were often local and sometimes criticized in biblical texts.

**53** A Hebrew term for a grain or meal offering, and by later usage also the afternoon/evening offering or prayer in

Temple and synagogue practice; here it denotes the evening oblation time.

**54** A Latin phrase meaning 'law of retaliation', denoting the legal principle of proportionate retribution (e.g., 'an eye for an eye') found in ancient legal codes including passages of the Hebrew Bible.

**55** A tragic dramatic poem by John Milton, first published in 1671, which retells the biblical story of Samson in the form and tone of a Greek-style tragedy.

**56** A stream mentioned in 1 Kings 17 where Elijah was said to have been sheltered and fed; its precise historical location is uncertain but it is traditionally placed east of the Jordan in the region where Elijah fled.

**57** A Hebrew word (mal'akh) meaning 'messenger' and commonly translated 'angel'; in this passage it refers to a divine or ministering figure who brings food to Elijah.

**58** A desert shrub mentioned as shading Elijah (often identified with *Retama raetam* or related broom-like bushes of Sinai and the Negev); the exact botanical identification is not certain.

**59** A biblical designation for the sacred mountain where God appears to prophets; in the Elijah narrative it refers to Mount Horeb (often identified with Sinai), the traditional site of earlier revelations to Moses.

**60** Groups or communities of prophetic disciples in ancient Israel who trained and acted together as seers or religious instructors; their precise organization and practices are debated by scholars but they appear frequently in the Hebrew Bible.

**61** Also called the Mesha Stele, a ninth-century BCE basalt monument found at Dibon with a Phoenician/Moabite inscription by King Mesha that records Moabite history and events paralleling the Hebrew Bible; it is now housed in the Louvre.

**62** A rabbinic Hebrew term meaning 'daughter of a voice,' used for a heavenly or supernatural voice regarded as an omen or divine utterance in Jewish and Near Eastern tradition.

**63** A laticlave is a broad vertical stripe on a Roman-style robe indicating rank; Tyrian purple was a costly purple dye produced at and named for the Phoenician city of Tyre, traditionally associated with royalty and high status.

**64** A seraglio refers to the women's apartments or harem of a ruler or wealthy polygamous household; European writers often used the term to denote a royal or princely harem or secluded female quarter.

**65** Asherahs were cultic objects or symbols connected with the Canaanite goddess Asherah, often represented by wooden poles or trees and prohibited in Yahwistic reforms; their precise form and usage varied across time and region.

**66** A Latin maxim attributed to St. Augustine (4th-5th century), meaning roughly 'the meaning of Scripture is Scripture itself,' i.e., that unclear passages should be interpreted in the light of other scriptural texts.

**67** An ancient source cited within the Hebrew Bible (e.g., in the books of Samuel and Joshua); it is not extant and is generally understood to have been a collection of songs or historical poems used by later biblical writers.

**68** A Hebrew phrase literally rendered 'Beyond the river' (מִדְּהַנָּהָר), used in the biblical text from the Persian or eastern standpoint as a fixed geographical expression referring to lands on the other side of a major river.

**69** A Masoretic Hebrew term (often written Qere) meaning the marginal or “read” text; it marks an alternative pronunciation or reading supplied by the scribal tradition in contrast to the consonantal text (Ktiv).

**70** An ancient city identified with Palmyra in modern Syria, historically a caravan oasis and fortress on trade routes; some later sources (e.g., Josephus) ascribe its construction to Solomon, but such attributions are debated by scholars.

**71** A legendary people from classical (Greek) tradition, said in ancient authors to quarrel with griffins over guarded gold; they are part of mythological geography in sources such as Herodotus rather than historically attested peoples.

**72** An adjective for monumental sculptures made of gold (chryse-) and ivory (-elephantine), famously used for major ancient Greek cult statues (e.g., Phidias' Athena); it denotes the materials and technique rather than a specific work.

**73** Abbreviation for the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible produced in stages from about the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE and frequently cited in later Biblical scholarship and textual comparisons.

**74** A place-name meaning “House of God” in the Hebrew Bible, an ancient town and sanctuary where Jacob is said to have had visions and later became a focal point of alternative worship (e.g., Jeroboam's calf cult).