

written a book which will be both informative and helpful for the laity.

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### THE BIBLE

*The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts, Containing the Old and New Testaments Translated from the Peshitta, The Authorized Bible of the Church of the East.* By GEORGE M. LAMSA. Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1957. xix + 1243 pages. \$12.50.

This translation, in modified KJV phraseology, is hardly a significant monument in the history of Bible translations. The uninformed reader who cannot check the translation against the "original" Syriac might have been more impressed had the author omitted his Introduction. Despite a superficial flavor of learning, the Introduction contains numerous scholarly absurdities. The publishers' readers should have caught the author's error in affirming that the style of Shakespeare, who died in 1616, could not have been what it was without the beauty of the King James Version. The author credits the Assyrians, who invented neither the alphabet nor the cuneiform script, which was not alphabetic, with the invention of the alphabet. Among his many incredible assumptions is that Aramaic was the language of the Patriarchs, that the word "Hebrew" has an Aramaic etymology, that such names as Manasseh, Ephraim, Bar-Nun (sic!), and Miriam are of Aramaic origin, that the Gospels and Epistles were originally written in Aramaic, that Jesus and his disciples never heard Greek spoken, that the Qumran Commentary on Habakkuk (in Hebrew!) proves that "Aramaic has been in use from earliest times to the present day," and that "all the Peshitta texts in Aramaic agree."

The author avoids the commonly accepted term Syriac to designate the language of the Peshitta, intent on minimizing the differences

between Western and Eastern Aramaic. He ignores the fact that the Syriac text did not and could not have originated in Palestine, for it is different from the Palestinian Aramaic now much better known to us from the Qumran scrolls (although not from the Commentary on Habakkuk!). Contrary to Lamsa, the word "Peshitta" does not mean "the original," but rather the simple, common, popular version; it is parallel in meaning to "Vulgate" (Latin *vulgata*, common, public). At times Lamsa seems to presume that the translators of the English Bible used a Syriac text from which to translate (see the section "Words Resembling One Another"), and even to presume the chronological priority of the Syriac texts over the Hebrew O.T. text. His suggestion that in Isa. 14:12 the "Aramaic" *aiel*, to howl, is confused with the Hebrew *helel*, light, is too absurd to deserve comment.

The translation itself leaves much to be desired, despite the recommendations of such persons as Norman Vincent Peale and Daniel Poling, who hardly qualify as experts in Syriac. One outstanding biblical scholar who is at home in the field has found more than 60 incorrect renderings in three chapters, arbitrarily chosen. The reviewer has spot-checked the translation against the Urmia text of the Peshitta. It would appear that Lamsa, in using the KJV as his literary pattern, at times follows the KJV to the extent that he renders not the Syriac but the Hebrew. For instance, in Ps. 90:9 KJV reads: "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale *that is told.*" Lamsa reads: "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath; we spend our years in emptiness." By contrast, the Urmia edition of the Peshitta is to be translated: "For all our days are spent (*gmrw*) in thy wrath, and our years are spent (*gmrw*) as a whisper." Unlike the Peshitta, the Hebrew text uses two different verbs and the second is first person plural, as reflected in the KJV rendering. The reviewer has not checked

Codex Ambrosianus, but Lamsa argues the agreement of the Peshitta texts. Note also Amos 8:8, KJV "and every one mourn that dwelleth therein," Lamsa "and every one mourn who dwells in it," but the Urmia Peshitta "and all its inhabitants shall sit in mourning." In the same verse the Peshitta reads "its end," but Lamsa "the end." In Hos. 7:5 Lamsa reads: "The day they start to give counsel, the princes begin . . .," but the reviewer finds in the Urmia Peshitta "The day of our kings, the princes begin. . . ."

These examples are sufficient to indicate that the translation is not trustworthy as an indication of variants between the Hebrew text and any "original" text in Syriac. Of course Lamsa's translation does more often than not reflect such variants, but the reader cannot be sure in any particular instance that it does so. Above all the reader should be warned against the impression given by Lamsa that this translation, or even the Syriac texts on which it is based, necessarily gets him closer to the original form of the biblical text. Particularly in the light of recent manuscript discoveries, the Hebrew and Greek texts are our primary sources. Despite their value, the Syriac texts, Lamsa's "Aramaic" texts, are only secondary sources.

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*Biblical Research.* By The Chicago Society of Biblical Research. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1957. Vol. I, 47 pages. Vol. II, 44 pages. \$1.25 each.

The Society of Biblical Research, which was organized in 1891, has included, and still includes, some of America's most distinguished scholars. All of these papers are of excellent quality. Vol. I contains a paper by Reginald H. Fuller on "The Virgin Birth: Historical Fact or Kerygmatic Truth?," 7 pages, and an article by Ralph Marcus on

"The Qumran Scrolls and Early Judaism," 39 pages.

Fuller concludes that the time has now passed for arguments over whether the Virgin Birth occurred or could occur, and that its true meaning is to be seen in the *kerygma*. Like the doctrine of the pre-existence, the Virgin Birth should be regarded as an affirmation of the invasive character of the Christ-event, which took place within a particular history; and that it expresses the idea of the "eschatological marriage between Yahweh and his people," with Mary as the representation of her people.

Marcus finds that Jewish Gnosticism antedates the Christian era; the covenanters were Essenes; they were Gnosticizing Pharisees; their Gnosticism influenced Christian, Jewish and Pagan Gnosticism.

Vol. II contains papers by Charles F. Kraft on "Poetic Structure in the Qumran Thanksgiving Psalms"; Paul E. Davies on "Did Jesus Die as a Martyr-Prophet?"; Ernest W. Saunders on "Theophylact of Bulgaria as Writer and Biblical Interpreter."

Kraft thinks that the Qumran psalms, written not long after the latest OT psalms, give us firsthand insight into poetry of the period, throwing light on Hebrew poetry in general and on the poetic elements of the NT. He notes parallelism, but one which may be natural rather than conscious artistry.

Davies writes a penetrating study of the attitude of Jesus toward his mission and approaching death. He thinks that Jesus derived his designation of himself as Son of Man mainly from Ezekiel, with possibly some influence from Daniel; that the accepted view that true prophets inevitably became martyrs was important in his sense of approaching death; that the execution of John was decisive; and that his predictions of his death have an authentic sound.

Saunders finds that in his exegetical writings Theophylact, like other theologians of the Byzantine period, was verbose and rhetorical, based on compilations, but that his