

Literature in the Old Testament (IV)

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The Maccabaeab Period

During the period of the struggle between Jason, who is the blood of the high priesthood and supported by the orthodox Jews and Menelaus who gets the High priest position and backed by Antiochus, situation becomes more serious. Though Jason was illegally appointed, he was at least a member of the high-priestly family, but Menelaus was not. The orthodox Jews would have nothing to do with him. Tumults broke out in Jerusalem and position of Menelaus become precarious. The king had to protect him by sending a Syrian official to take vigorous measures against the orthodox Jews. The city walls were razed and Syrian garrison was placed in the strongly fortified Adra, the old city of David. "A little later the observance of the Sabbath and of circumcision was forbidden, the temple services and sacrifices were stopped, the sacred books were destroyed. On the 15th of Kisle there was planted to the horror of the Jews, an altar of Zeus on the sacred altar of burnt-offering, everywhere in the country altars and images were erected."¹ These cruel measures had the effect to deny the Jewish faith. Among the greater number who resisted, many were put to death. In the little

town of Modia, Mattathias a priest and his sons led the revolt. The religious fervour and the valour of Mattathias's followers enabled them to achieve some remarkable successes, but these untrained bands, poorly armed could not expect to tie up successfully for any length of time with Syrian forces. It was at this critical time, in the year 166-5 B. C. that *The Book of Daniel* was written to encourage the loyal Jews in their enemies.

The content of *The Book of Daniel* consists of the prophecies of the transition of the world history after the downfall of Israel. The world history means the rise and fall of the four world empires, Babyloniand, Media, Peria, and Greek. These four empires are revealed by the dream of Nebuzzar, the image of gold, silver, brass and iron or in Daniel's vision of four beasts. *The Book of Daniel* possesses the two parts:

- 1) Daniel's life...historical element 1-6
- 2) Daniel's vision...prophetic element 7-12

The first part tells us about Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Anedmego who kept the ritual laws concerning food and drinks even though they were taken by Nebuchadrezzar and became fairer, and wiser and more honored than others, or about the Nebuchadrezzar's dream of colossal statue with head of gold, chest

1) Bewer: LOT, page 411

and arms of silver, abdomen of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron and potsherds mixed that this image had been shattered by a stone which smote the feet and became a great mountain which the king could not understand, but Daniel. Also about Daniel and his three friends who refused to worship the golden image of Nebuchadrezzar were thrown into the fiery furnace but saved by the angeles. Also this part tells us about Daniel who fearlessly performed his daily prayers and was thrown into the lion's denm, but saved by the angeles. God so wonderfully helped those who were faithful to him, even the leathen kings were astounded and compelled to blees the God of these men and let Nebuchadrezzar had said "Now I Nebuchadrezzar, praise and extol and honor the king of Heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase", (4:37)

The second part shows the expansion of the four empires by means of vision of Daniel.

"Of the four great beast that Daniel dreamed, coming out of the sea the lion with eagle's wings represented the Babylonian, the bear the Median, the leopard with four bird wings on its back the Persian, and the terrible, strong beast with iron teeth and ten horns the Helenic kingdoms, The ten horns represented the ren kings of Syria from Alexander the great to Dametruiis. The other born which came up as the prophet looked the little one before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots was Antiochus Epiphances. The three horns were his immediate predecessors, Seleucus IV, Heliodorus and Demetrious and with An-

tiochus IV the end is reached." (10)

The most elaborated and detailed vision as given in Chapter 10, in which the history of the Greek kingdoms and especially of the time of Antiochus IV is given. The author gives interesting and reliable details of the conflicts of Seleucids with the Ptolemies, of their wars and their marriages, until he finally comes to the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes. One of the admirable features of *The Book of Daniel* is the author's firm belief in the sovereignty of God. This faith becomes prophetic as he shows the hand of Jehovah in past, present and future events of history. The style of this book is greatly enhanced by the dramatic manner in which the author presents his narratives and visions. Every story has a definite theme which is well developed and carefully carried on to a dramatic climax.

About the same time with the appearance of *The Book of Daniel* (165 B.C.), the second Zechariah (9-11; 13:7-9) was added to the original book of Zechariah. 13:7-9 was perhaps accidentally misplaced. It forms actually the conclusion of 11:4-17 and should be read at the end of the 11th chapter.² The first part has three prophetic poems (9:1-10; 9:11-10:2; 10:3-11:3) and the second, a description of the symbolical action in poetic oracles (11:4-17; 13:7-9). After the victories of the Maccabees, the hopes of future glory returned among the Jews, the author of the book now sees all Syria,

2) Bewer: LOT, page 413

Phoenicia, and Philistia subjected and part of the Jewish domain. Jehovah has occupied all these lands already (9:1f). In the second poem, he shows the Messianic hope, Jehovah will defend His own city against all attacks, but he predicts that an ideal king who is Jehovah's agent will come. He is not only the brilliant warrior, but also a prince of peace. He will come back from the battle on his battle-horse, but showing his lowliness before Jehovah (9:11-10:2). The third poem is the prediction of the returning of the exiles, and Israelites and Judaeans will fight against the Greeks together. The second part of the book is the fourth poem in which Jehovah's sheep have become war horses. It is the repetition of the victory of the battle, and the return of the exiles from Egypt and Syria is predicted. In his conclusion (13:7-9) after the story of 11:17, the foolish shepherd and his flock will be smitten leaving only one-third purged by fire and redeemed.³

The Book of Ester is one of the five Megilloth or scrolls in the Old Testament appointed for reading in the synagogues at certain feasts and fasts. That is, in the spring, on the 14th and 15th of Adar, the last month of the Hebrew year, the Jews celebrated in their community and throughout the world the festival by giving presents and banqueting. The name of this festival was Purim.

In the three years of his reign, 482 B. C.

Xerxes, king of Persia, dismisses his queen Vashiti. After an interval of four years he selected Ester also called Hadassah, to be queen instead of Vashiti. Ester had been brought up by her uncle Mordecai, who has some position in the palace at Shushan. At that time, through Ester, Mordecai reveals to the king that two of king's chamberlains planned to kill him and prevented the affair before hand. He received no reward but, on the other hand, he rouses the wrath of Haman, the chief minister, and in 473 B. C. Haman obtained a royal decree for the destruction of Mordecai and all of his race throughout the kingdom, for the Jewish opposition to the Persian law.

Haman appeared to the king saying..... "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the province of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of ever other people, and they do not keep the king's law, so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed..." (3:8-9) Haman prepared a gallow for Mordecai; but by the device of Ester and Mordecai, and timely recollection on the part of the king of Mordecai still unrewarded loyalty, Haman coming into obtain the king's permission to hang Mordecai fails of his purpose, and is hung on his own gallows. Mordecai is promoted to his office. The king accepted the petition which Ester and Mordecai turned in and the king retract the decree.....to destroy, to, slay, and to annihilate all Jews,

3) Pfeiffer: LOT, page 608

young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.....and gave another decree. The king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, with their children and woman and to plunder their goods, upon one day through out all the province of king Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. (8:11)

As the result of this, 500 were killed only in the city of Shushan and seventy-five thousand were killed in the whole area. Now Jews were able to win the victory completely here. They, however, called these days Purim, after the term Pur. This is the origin of Purim.

The Book of Ester means to give the reason why Purim, a non-Jewish festival is celebrated by the Jews, and it exalts the occasion of it into an outstanding event in Jewish history and the other purpose which we should keep in mind is to show how the God who reign the universe gave the protection to the chosen people. This is the important character of this book. You would not find even a single word of God or Jehovah in this book as well as in *Song of Songs*. So the spirit of revenge and hatred which appeared in this book that one feel more likely to characterize this book as a godless, but its author would probably against it.

“When Mordecai redfured to fall down

before Haman, we are not told that it was for religious reasons. When Ester fasted three days before her perilous undertaking, prayer is not mentioned, although fasting and prayer inevitably go together in such cases. When the people celebrated their deliverance, they rejoiced and feasted, but did not thank God. This purely secular character of the story finds its explanation not probably in the author’s lack of religious or opposition to it, but in the non-religious character of the festival of Purim whose origin it describes and for whose intruduction and celebration among all Jews everywhere it was written”.⁴

The time when this story took place was Persian period when Israel lost her national independence and had been oppreseed by the power of gentiles. Now the God has changed his direct relation together with the downfall of Israel and became ‘Thou art a God who hidest thyself’ (Isaiah 45:15). The world of *The Book of Ester* is the one where this hidden God dominates. It seems that the God’s will is not revealed in a vision, but it appeared invisibly as a salvation for the chosen people through the hand of a weak woman Ester.

The final editing of Psalms was done around 150 B.C. though the individual Psalms in the book come out out of all periods of Israel’s history, some of them are as old as David or older. *The Book of Psalms* is composed from five parts: 1-41, 42-72, 73-89,

4) Bewer: LOT, p. 306

90-106 and 107-150, each section closes with docologym, the doxology of Psalm, 150 conclude the book.⁵ The sources of the book upon which the book was compiled are including: a collection of David, a collection of the sons of Korah, a collection of Asaph, a collection of Pilgims or ascents and the hallelujah collection. The nature of the Psalms are verious as well as their style, however, the book can be classified as follow:⁶

The Hymn in Hebrew Worship

- General Hymns of Praise: 117, 150
- Hymns of Pilgrimage 84, 122
- Hymns of Zion 48, 87, 46, 76
- Hymns of Great individuals 103, 111, 145
- Hymn Songs and Prayers for the Hebrew New Year*
- A Preparatory Night Hyum 134
- Hymns of the Enthronement of the Lord 47, 68, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99
- New Songs for the Newly Enthroned King 33, 149
- New Year Songs and Prayers for the Reigning Mornarch 2, 21, 72, 101, 110, 132
- Hymns of National Thanksgiving 65, 67, 118, 124
- Hymns to the Lord as Judge and Prayers for the Turn of Fortunes 53, 14, 82, 85, 123, 125, 126, 129

Hymns of the Revelation of God

- Hymns of the Revelation of God in Nature 8, 19:1-6, 29, 104, 147, 148
- Hymns of the Revelation of God in History 78, 105, 106, 114
- Hymns of the Revelation of God in the Law 19:7-14, 119

Psalmn Liturgiee

- Liturgies of Entrance 15, 24, 100
- Liturgies of Praise and Thanksgiving 113, 115, 135, 136
- Prophetic Liturgies 50, 75, 81, 95
- Liturgy of Supplication 121

National and Congregational Laments

9-10, 12, 36, 44, 58, 60, 74, 77, 79, 80, 83, 90, 94:1-15, 108, 137

Psalms Concerning the King

18, 20, 45, 61, 63, 89, 144:1-11

Songs of Personal Thanksgiving

23, 30, 32, 34, 40:1-11, 66, 92, 107, 116, 138, 139, 146

Prayers of the Falsely Accused

- 1) Prayers of the Falsely accused seeking Vindivation 7, 11, 25, 26, 27:7-14, 31:1-8, 42-43, 52, 54, 55:1-18b, 22, 55:18c-21, 23, 56, 64, 70, 94:16-23, 20, 140, 141, 142
- 2) Prayers of the Falsely accused Spending a Night in the Sanctuary 3, 4, 5, 17, 27:1-6, 57, 59, 143

Prayers of the sick and the Penitent

- 1) Prayers of the Falsely accused and ill 13, 22, 28, 31:9-24, 35 38, 41, 69, 71, 86, 102, 109
- 2) Prayers of the Sick 6, 39, 62, 88
- 3) Prayers of Pentence 51, 130

Songs of Trust and of Wisdom

Songs of Trust 16, 91, 131
 Songs Tinged with the temper of Hebrew Wisdom 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133, 144:12-15:1

It is impossible in this paper to discuss on each Psalm, but we can find one of the richest source for spiritual insight and wisdom of all kinds. God is pictured in all through the book as majestic and the creator of all things including man.

The reign of Uziah had been long and prosperous, so the Chroniclers called its a period of great prosperity. Isaiah was called on to rebuke the sins of the prosperous in Judah and Jerusalem. At that time, the great empire was Assyrianm whose approach to Judah was from the North, and Egypt to

5) Leslie, Psamels: pages 11 }

6) Leslie, Psamels: pages 12

the South. During King Ahaz's reign, Judah's policy was to the aid of Assyrian; in Hezekiah's time, that of Egypt. Isaiah's policy was that Judah should avoid all entangling alliances and put her trust in God. The author of Isa, 24-27 was unknown. The theme of this book is the picture of the great catastrophe of God's judgement on the world along with the psalms of praises for His righteous acts. This section belongs to a period centuries later than the time of Isaiah and a number of songs were added later. The author predicts a great catastrophe in the near future; all classes irrespective of callin or social position, will suffer. Like Jeremiah said about Babylonians "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her" (J. 51:64) Isaiah foretells the destruction of the earth, saying, (24:20) "The earth shall reel to and from like a drunkened, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression there of shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and the not rise again". But though the future seems so hopeless, there is hope beyond, for Jehovah will come and punish the power of the Kings on the earth.

"The assumption of the coming catastrophes are already visible in the general fading and weariness of the world; all lose their vital power and joy of living".⁷

Some indeed are full of good cheer because of which makes them rejoice and sing; Glory to the righteous. but our prophet feels

other way;

"From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the righteous one.

But I say, I pine away,

For the treacherous deal tracherously."

The treacherous deal very treacherously."

Then the terrible conclusion begins, which will lead the great judgement;

"He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit; and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is rent asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man, is always like a hut;

Its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. (Isa. 24:18-20)

The imprionment of the kings on the earth was the first act of the judgement of the kingdom of God in Zion invisibly glory. Even the sun and the moon look pale before the glory of God and as the days gone by, the people will see the glory of God on Mount Horeb. There is no mention of Messaiah. But Jehovah invited all the people to the great banquet when Jehovah gave a coronation feast on Mount Zion, the Jehovah's will wipe away tears from all of faces; and the reproach of his people shall be taken away from all of the earth's (25:6-8) for death itself will be destroyed and eternal felicity will rules in all hearts.

This is one of the most beautiful passages in the O. T. and music appeals to the heart of the mankind, the large-hearted catholicity and human tenderness of the song is single it out. The author does not speak of the

7) Bewer: LOT, page 309

resurrection of the dead, but of the immortality of the living. The final Judgement of mankind and of the heavenly host is still to come, but His people are called by called by Jehovah to kill themselves for a little moment until the indignation is overpart, for,

Behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their inquiry

And the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her, and will no more cover her slain.

In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword

Will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. (26:21-27:1)

These seem to be the constellation of Serpens, Draco and Hydra. That three world-power we symbolized is possible, seeing how often the apocalypists worked current historical events into their eschatological scheme, but these three must depend on the views taken of the date of writing. But ultimately the trumpet shall be sounded for the ingathering of Israel (27:13) and in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem." That is all will come from Syria and Egypt to worship Jehovah on the holy mountain at Jerusalem. This was one of the Jewish hope of the future. One of the things which we must keep in mind is that there is a passage of great significance in which the hope of the

resurrection is revealed. He gave the people the hope. It is not the resurrection of all that is hoped for here, but only the resurrection of Jehovah's death. This is apparently the designation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and at last this hope had come.

"The large-hearted catholicity of the apocalyptic of Isaiah 24-27 had filled is with grateful admiration. Fortunately, he was not the only one of these universal spirit among the Jews that understood the full importance of Monotheism. One was even greater than he. Sometimes during the Greek period, he wrote the story of Jonah, which beongs to the final and highest that the O.T. writers have produced and which reveals the prophetic spirit in the puerst and truest way."⁸

The last two chapters of *The Book of Zacharian* except 13:7-9 were probably written by another later prophet, whom we may call Third or Trio Zechariah, for the style and diction of the latter part of the book are strikingly different from the first half. After Simon had been murdered by his son-in-law Ptolemy, the war between John Hyccanus and Antiochus VII Sidetes had started. There were accounts of war and impending doom.

Jerusalem is beseiged, the nations of the world have risen against the holy city, but there is also the confidence that in the end, Israel will triumph with the help of Jehovah of hosts.

"Through this struggle it will come about that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem be not magnified above Judah."⁹

8) Bewer: LOT, page 403

9) Bewer: LOT, page 439

But the war had apparently come so quickly to them, that the Jerusalem was faced to the hopeless situation. It was about this desperate time when the prophet Zechariah published this revealing visions, in which he prophesied the revelation of the world of Jehovah. He predicted that the struggle of Judah against the whole nations in the world would carry half of the population in Jerusalem into exile but finally Jehovah would stand on Mount Olivet and would enter Jerusalem with his holy angels and kingdom of God on earth would begin.

The victory of Jehovah and his sovereignty of the whole world, accomplishment of the prophecies, were contained. Jehovah should be recognized as the one God. Like in 14:4-8, the mountain will cleave in the middle and the water will flow to westward and to eastward from Jerusalem and Jerusalem will be like described in 10-21, the center of the pilgrims who are coming up from the various parts of the world. In the end the nations must come to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah as King of All the Earth. (14:9-16) We must remember the desperate conditions under which these chapters were written; the promises of the new Jerusalem which they held out was the only ray of hope in the darkness of despair.

Conclusion

Now finally we came to the end of the period which the Old Testament was written. There are so many kinds of literature; histories, laws, poems, folk-songs prophetic, in which sometimes we found the strong

religious inspiration, sometimes we found ourselves in the religious tranquillity and sometimes we could not help feeling monotonous.

Reading *Song of Ester*, we could not help wondering why these were inserted in the religious book. There was not even a single word of God or Jehovah and sounded very unbiblical. But when we read through the Old Testament, regardless these characteristics of each story, we feel the spontaneous unity and order existing there. We must agree with the author of Hebrews who said:

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:39-40)

We must see the deeper thing without emphasizing the superficial strangeness, and see the great spirit revealed all through the books of the Old Testament, longing for the secret of the Almighty, the unceasing belief in the Majestic being and the praise to the everlasting God. This is the heritage which was prepared all through these ancient ages ...and it is for us.

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