

ספר הישר

OR THE

BOOK OF JASHER.

REFERRED TO IN

JOSHUA AND SECOND SAMUEL.

FAITHFULLY TRANSLATED
FROM THE ORIGINAL HEBREW INTO ENGLISH.

"Is not this written in the Book of Jasher?"—*Joshua, x. 13.*

"Behold it is written in the Book of Jasher."—*II. Samuel, i. 18.*

SALT LAKE CITY:
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE age in which we live has been, and continues to be, particularly distinguished by a laudable desire in the minds of men, to inquire into the various states of knowledge, and of the arts, as they existed in times anterior to the Christian era; animated with these noble and elevated views, a considerable number of individuals, greatly distinguished for their genius and learning, have in succession turned their attention to the East—to those celebrated countries, in which the arts of civilization and the lights of science first dawned upon, enlightened, and embellished human society. The magnificent and unequalled remains of the arts in Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Palestine, and Persia, have, from time to time, been visited and explored; and it has been amidst these fallen monuments of human grandeur, that the adventurous and enlightened traveler has found himself amply rewarded for his laborious and hazardous undertakings; for amidst these wrecks of human greatness, he has succeeded in gathering ample evidence, in confirmation of many of the most important truths recorded in sacred history.

Profane histories have, indeed, conveyed down to us some account of these kingdoms, and of the mighty monarchs who, during a long succession of ages, ruled over them; but the events which they relate are evidently so mixed up with exaggeration, and so adulterated with fable, that, however celebrated their authors might have been, and however fascinating may be the style of their composition, the religious and philosophic student turns from them with dissatisfaction, to the divinely authenticated annals of the Hebrews; because, it is from these alone that he can derive true information concerning the rise, the splendor, the decline, and the real causes of the ruin of those celebrated empires.

In the sacred history we are presented with the only authentic, and, of course, the only valuable information concerning the origin of the universe,—of men and all other animated creatures—of the gradual increase of the human race—of the flood in the year A. M. 1656, of which mighty event there are existing evidences to the present day; evidences, so universal and so ponderous, that all the ingenuity of the sceptical geologists will never be able to remove them in order to make room for their plausible hypotheses.

The ever memorable events and transactions recorded in Scripture are with many others of the most interesting nature, comprehended in the Book of Jasher; and they are all arrayed in that style of simple, unadorned majesty and precision, which so particularly distinguishes the genius of the Hebrew lan-

guage; and this, together with other numerous internal evidences, it is presumed will go far to convince the Hebrew scholar that the book is, with the exception of some doubtful parts, a venerable monument of antiquity; and that, notwithstanding some few additions may have been made to it in comparatively modern times, it still retains sufficient to prove it a copy of the book referred to in Joshua, ch. x., and 2 Samuel, ch. i. There are not more than seven or eight words in the whole book that by construction can be derived from the Chaldean language.

The printed Hebrew copy, in the hands of the translator, is without points. During his first perusal of it, some perplexities and doubts rose up in his mind respecting its authenticity; but the more closely he studied it, the more its irresistible evidence satisfied him, that it contained a treasure of information concerning those early times, upon which the histories of other nations are either silent, or cast not a single ray of real light; and he was more especially delighted to find that the evidence of the whole of its contents went to illustrate and confirm the great and inestimable truths which are recorded in divine history, down to a few years later than the death of Joshua, at which period the book closes.

In this extraordinary book the reader will meet with models of the most sublime virtue, devotion and magnanimity, that cannot fail to raise his admiration, and, at the same time, to excite a generous feeling of emulation to follow the glorious examples set before him.

With these preliminary observations, the translator now respectfully proceeds to lay before the readers a few remarks upon the contents of the book. The title סֵפֶר הַיָּשָׁר is literally, "the upright or correct record," but because the book was not known, it was therefore termed the "Book of Jasher;" this has caused some persons, who are ignorant of the Hebrew language, to suppose that Jasher was the name of a prophet, or of one of the Judges of Israel; an instance of which appears in a publication which came from the press about the middle of the last century, and which purported to have been a translation into English of the Hebrew manuscript of Jasher, found at Gazna in Persia; which translation *only* was said to have been thence brought by Alcuin. When the translator wrote to the Editor of the *London Courier*, in November last, he was not aware that the copy of Jasher, announced in the *Bristol Gazette* as an important discovery, had reference to that fictitious book, which, through the kindness of a friend, he had previously obtained a sight of, and was soon convinced that the whole book was the work of some skeptic in England, in imitation of the language of Scripture, as it was sent forth from the press without the name of printer, bookseller, editor, or publisher; and it is evident that those who were concerned in getting it up, in making Jasher the name of a Judge of Israel were ignorant of the very rudiments of the language from which they pretended to have translated it, as it is well known, even to a tyro in the Hebrew language, that the definite article, הַ is never prefixed to proper names.

The important transactions which are narrated with so remarkable a brevity in the Bible, are, in Jasher, more circumstantially detailed as in the instance of the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, a particular account is

given of the disagreement which preceded it, and of the pretext which Cain sought for the commission of the crime. It appears, also, that when the divine judgment condemned him to wander upon the earth, his wife accompanied him, not to the land of *Nod*, for no such place is mentioned; but, from this book it appears that the word *Nod*, in the Scripture, has been given for the participle of the verb נדר "to move or wander about." Jasher has it thus:

ויצא קין בעת ההיא מלפני יהוה מן המקום אשר היה שם • וילך נע
ונוד בארץ קדמת ערן הוא וכל אשר לו

"And at that time Cain went forth from the presence of the Lord, from the place where he was; and he went moving and wandering in the land at the east of Eden, he and all belonging to him."

In the passage respecting the birth of Cain and Abel, three daughters are also mentioned. According to Jasher, the art of writing appears to have been known and practised from the earliest periods; it is stated that Cainan was informed beforehand by God of the intended destruction of mankind by the flood, which he engraved upon tablets of stone, and preserved amongst his treasures.

This book contains a more detailed account of the awful circumstances attending the commencement of the flood, and of the conduct of Noah toward the terrified multitude who had assembled about the ark, when the fatal moment had arrived, and their doom was irrevocably fixed.

A particular delineation of the life and character of Enoch is given, showing, that by his wisdom he reigned over the sons of men, continually instructing them in truth, righteousness, and a knowledge of the Most High.

Jasher informs us, that in the days of Peleg, not only the families of the human race were separated and spread abroad, but that the earth itself was divided; and of both these facts, it may be presumed, there are sufficient existing evidences, even at this day. This book gives, also, a more detailed account of the genealogies of the descendants of Japheth, Shem, and Ham, and of the various parts of the earth which were colonized by them.

Connected with this period of the history is given an account of Nimrod; in which is strikingly depicted the arbitrary and violent character of his conduct and government. The contested point, as to whether Nimrod was the founder of the Assyrian Empire, is here decided. The cause of the dispute amongst commentators proceeded from the word אשור in Gen. chapter x. ver. 11, signifying either the name of a man, or the name of the land of Assyria. Jasher has it thus:

ויצא אשור בן שם הוא ובניו ובני ביתו &c. ויבנו שם ערים ארבעה

"And Asher, the son of Shem, went forth, he and his sons, and the children of his household, &c., and they there built four cities."

Jasher clearly elucidates a number of genealogical and chronological difficulties which occur in the Bible; an instance is here adduced of the genealogy of Seir, the Horite, upon which the Bible is silent.

The learned commentator, Aben Ezra, remarks, שעיר לא ידענו יחסו "Seir, his genealogy we do not know;" and the word דורו is supposed to

come from חור a noble, but Jasher gives us the descent of Seir, (which accounts for his being called the Horite,) in the following words:

וילך שעיר בן חור בן חוי בן כנען

“And Seir, the son of Hur, the son of Hivi, the son of Canaan, went,” &c.; hence he was called the Horite, from Hur, his father.

The character of Abraham, for piety, true dignity and hospitality, appears to stand unrivaled, but the most affecting and beautiful account in this book, is that of Abraham offering up his son Isaac. The mutual affection of the father and son, and their willing devotion and obedience to the commands of their Maker, are so exquisitely described, that the heart of him who can peruse the narrative without being deeply affected, must be callous indeed. The conduct of Sarah, as connected with this unexampled and glorious event, was altogether worthy of the wife of Abraham, and the mother of Isaac. At this time Sarah died at Kireath-arba. Her funeral is described as having been magnificent; and it is expressly mentioned, that it was attended by Shem, the son of Noah, Eber his son, king Abimelech, together with Anar, Ashcol and Mamre, and other great people of the land.

In the Bible Sarah is the only woman whose age is given at her death; but it may be interesting to the reader to know that Jasher generally states the ages of all the women who are particularly mentioned in the course of the history.

From this book we learn that Noah and Abraham were contemporaries. How beautiful the contemplation of the meeting of these two Patriarchs, the one being a monument of God's mercy, the other having the promise of the favor and grace of God, not only to himself, but to his seed after him. This fact might be proved from Scripture; but from the 32d verse in the 11th chapter of Genesis, most of the Christian commentators have erroneously dated the birth of Abraham 60 years later than it actually took place; as it is generally stated that he was born A. M. 2008, whereas the regular calculation in the Bible leads us to 60 years earlier, viz. 1948. The only cause of this error has been that Abraham's departure from Haran, at the age of 75, is recorded close to the description of the death of Terah, at the age of 205, in Gen. ch. xi. v. 32. Although this is the frequent manner of Scripture, to record events out of the regular order of succession (an instance of which we find in Isaac, whose death is recorded in Gen. xxxv. 29, when we know from the calculations given us in Scripture, that Isaac's death must have taken place when Joseph was about 29 years old; and the description given in Jasher, of Isaac's coming from Hebron to comfort Jacob upon the loss of Joseph, is beautiful,) it is of great importance, in its making a difference of 60 years in the chronology of the world.

This book gives a particular account of the instruction received by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, from Shem and Eber, through which they became so excellent in piety and wisdom, their tutors in learning having lived to so great an age; and Shem particularly, who, being acquainted with all that was known before the flood, could therefore strengthen his precepts of virtue, the true worship of God, and the necessary dependence upon Him alone, by recording the awful events which he had seen.

The history of Joseph has always been considered one of the most admirable and interesting on record. It is composed in a style of simple and artless eloquence, which touches every feeling heart. A judicious critic has observed, that he considers it a perfect composition. This history, in Jasher, enters more into detail concerning the affairs of Potiphar's wife, Zelichah; Joseph's magnificent procession through the cities of Egypt, on coming into power; the pomp with which he was attended by Pharaoh's chariots, officers, and people, when he went up to meet his father; the affecting scene which then took place, together with other remarkable incidents. This beautiful narrative might justly be entitled, the triumph of virtue and piety; and it is presumed that few can peruse it, unmoved by sentiments of the highest admiration, mixed with the deepest feelings of sympathy. The history of the Israelites during their sojourning in Egypt contains an account of many interesting particulars not noticed in the Bible. Toward the latter end of this period, Balaam, Job, Janes, and Jambres, appear to have acted their respective parts in some memorable transaction.

This book clears up the reference in 2 Samuel, ch. i., by showing that David, in the commencement of his beautiful elegy on the death of Saul and Jonathan, revived an injunction given by Jacob in his dying charge to his son Judah, contained in Jasher in these words:

אך למד נא בניך קשת וכל כלי מלחמה

“But teach, I pray thee, thy children the use of the bow, and all instruments of war,” &c. This goes far to prove the authenticity of the book, as it beautifully clears up what was always considered obscure.

If commentators upon the holy Scriptures have sought for illustrations in the works of Homer, Pliny, Herodotus, and other profane writers; if they have anxiously caught at glimmerings among the absurdities of Paganism, and the obscurities of Heathen fables, the translator humbly and respectfully hopes that they will now grant a favorable reception to evidence of an entirely opposite character, which is presented in the Book of Jasher.

He does not recommend it to their notice as a work of inspiration, but as a monument of history, comparatively covered with the ivy of the remotest ages; as a work possessing, in its language, all the characteristic simplicity of patriarchal times; and as such, he conceives it peculiarly calculated to illustrate and confirm the sacred truths handed down to us in the Scriptures.

But in making these observations, he is far from offering it as a perfect record. Like all other ancient writings, (except the inspired volume,) it has in some respects suffered from the consuming hand of time; and there is reason to believe that some additions have been made to it. In fine, it contains a history of the lives and memorable transactions of all the illustrious characters recorded in sacred history, from Adam down to the time of the Elders, who immediately succeeded Joshua.

CERTIFICATES.

UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, April 10, 1840.

I have compared a large portion of the translation of the "Book of Jasher" with the original Hebrew, and find it faithfully and elegantly rendered into English. The Hebrew itself is of a very pure character.

ISAAC NORDHIEMER,
Professor of Oriental Literature.

I am acquainted with the "Book of Jasher," having read a considerable part of it while in the hands of the translator in England. The Hebrew is very purely written, and the translator is an eminent scholar and has done it ample justice. It is full of interest throughout, and breathes a pure spirit of piety and religion, and I am satisfied that this is the first English translation ever made of that work, the Royal Asiatic Society at Calcutta never having completed the translation of their copy as anticipated.

April 14, 1840.

H. V. NATHAN,
Minister of the English and German Synagogue, Kingston, Jamaica.

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, CHELSEA SQUARE, N. Y., April 28, 1840.

I have sufficiently examined the English version of the Rabbinical work which heads the title of the "Book of Jasher," to satisfy myself of its general correctness. I have carefully compared three chapters of the translation with the original, and have no hesitation in saying that in general they give a correct representation of the author's meaning, and as literal as the different idioms of the two languages would allow. In some instances however, it would have been desirable that every word of the Hebrew should have been rendered into English. For instance, in ch. i. v. 2, the translator has omitted the word *dust*, in mentioning man's formation "from the ground," and in v. 4, the literal version after the middle part would be "and he took away one of his ribs and built flesh upon it, and made a woman and brought her to the man." In v. 6, also, the Rabbinical writer does not say "called their names Adam and Eve," but in the very words of the Hebrew Bible, v. 2, "called their name Adam." In chap xx, v. 4, the version reads thus: "And the servants of Abimelech went to Abimelech, saying," in the original it is, "and the servants of Abimelech came and praised Sarah to the king, saying," etc. In v. 19, the name of Pharaoh is omitted, and occasionally the word "subject," is substituted for "servants."

It is possible that the translator made use of a copy of some other edition which may have varied in a few words from that examined by me. The points referred to, are, on the whole, unimportant, and do not detract from the general accuracy of the translation.

I am respectfully, your obedient servant,
SAMUEL H. TURNER

NEW YORK, April 30, 1840.

I have examined portions of several chapters of the "Book of Jasher" in the original, carefully comparing with it the translation put into my hands by the publishers. The work itself is evidently composed in the purest Rabbinical Hebrew, with a large intermixture of the Biblical idiom, and I consider the translation as a whole, not only as decidedly *faithful*, but as peculiarly *happy* in retaining the air of antique simplicity which distinguishes the original, and which constitutes the matchless excellence of our English version of the Hebrew Scriptures. In a few instances I have noticed slight verbal variations from the original, similar to those adverted to by Professor Turner, as in one case "choice of our *sepulchres*" for "choice of our *land*;" but they are of too little moment to detract from the character of *general fidelity* which I do not hesitate to assign to the translation.

Very respectfully, yours etc.,
GEORGE BUSH.

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