

# The Bible, Music, and Israeli Culture: Thoughts on Contemporary Jewish Identity

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This paper discusses the Bible in relation to the history and culture of the Jewish people along with its place in world culture. Through translation and Christianity its influence extended into the development of literacy among many of the language's world. The biblical promise to Abraham continues today in the reemergence of the Jewish people as a sovereign nation in the land of Israel after two millennia of wandering. While Bible stories and poetry, primarily through the Psalms, inspired creativity in the visual arts, literature, and music throughout in the Western world.

*Keywords:* Bible, Jewish people, heritage, identity, Christianity, Israel

## Introduction

It is not for nothing that the Jewish People are called the *People of the Book*, for it is the source of their language, their culture, their history, and their destiny. From it the child learns to read and to chant its words. Its letters form his literacy. Its phrases become his vocabulary. Its stories tell of his heritage and ancestry. Its message of justice teaches him morality. Its message and promise of a divinely chosen land in which to dwell gave direction to his history and hope for his posterity.

No matter where the Jew lived he carried this book with him. It was the source of his joy and his pride. It comforted him in times of sorrow and gave him hope against all odds in all times and climes and conditions. These words were tried a hundred thousand times and proved faithful to the Wandering Jew when he had nothing—no place to hold onto, no sense of what was right and wrong—these words, proved his hold on reality and hope.

## Bible and World Heritage

Christianity translated this book into all the languages of the world. Its words and translation became the foundation for countless languages and literatures that, if not for the Bible, might have remained illiterate to this day. Its stories and wisdom were learned, while its promise to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and its message of salvation was appropriated by others. Through Christianity the Bible became a world cultural heritage.

If so, then the Bible or Old Testament, *Tanach*, or Hebrew Bible, is the greatest contribution of the Jewish People to civilization. This collection of books extending, commenting upon, and adding to the Torah (Pentateuch

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or Five Books of Moses), Prophets, and Writings is the basis for all the apparatus of Jewish Oral Law and Tradition be it Midrash, Mishnah, Talmud, or the various Codes of Jewish Law.

If we take the Bible as just another book, then its stories and promises may be viewed as literature. But if we see it for what it is, the heirloom and peculiar treasure of the Jewish People, then it behooves us to integrate it into our lives, beaconing us to build a new world from its pages and create a renewed cultural experience from its message of faith, for it teaches that man is not alone but rather chosen for a destiny and a land to call his own.

### **Israeli Experience**

If we have the opportunity now, in Israel, today that the Jewish people have come home once more to their ancient homeland and language, then it is our prerogative, even obligation, to embrace the age-old doctrines of the Bible and endow them with new life, dignity, and the stature they deserve in our personal, national, and cultural lives.

### **Conclusion**

The Bible is a way of identifying with the Israeli experience. Its narrative, prophecies, and poetry, are perhaps often seen as two dimensional, when only read from the printed page—a kind of complicated verbal litany of archaic words and phrases, demanding clarification and interpretation in order to fathom their meaning and morality. But behind it all is a texture, a quality of intent, and an emotional depth that hardly, if ever, comes to the surface. It is this quality that I have sought to understand and endow with a creative and personal musical voice.