To Alberta Williams King

[October 1948]
[Chester, Pa.]

Soon after entering Crozer Theological Seminary, King wrote to his mother recounting experiences from his first months at school. He tells of his difficulty with assignments in Hebrew, probably referring to James Bennett Pritchard’s survey course on the Old Testament, one of King’s first classes at Crozer. King also reports on his relations with women friends and tells of dining often at the home of J. Pius Barbour, a family friend and pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Sunday Night

10:30

Dear Mother,

Your letter was received this morning. I often tell the boys around the campus I have the best mother in the world. You will never know how I appreciate the many kind thing you and daddy are doing for me. So far I have gotten the money (5 dollars) every week.

As to my wanting some clippings from the newspapers, I must answer yes. I wondered why I you hadn’t sent many, especially the Atlanta world.

You stated that my letters aren’t newsey enough. Well I dont have much news. I never go anywhere much but in these books. Some times the professor comes in class and tells us to read our [strikeout illegible] assignments in Hebrew, and that is really hard.

Do you know the girl I used to date at Spelman (Gloria Royster). She is in school at Temple and I have been to see her twice. Also I met a fine chick in Phila who has gone wild over the old boy. Since Barbor told the members of his church that my family was rich, the girls are running me down. Of course, I dont ever think about them I am to busy studying.

I eat dinner at Barbors home quite often. He is full of fun, and he has one of the best minds of anybody I have ever met.

I haven’t had time to contact any of your friends up this way. Maybe I will get to it pretty soon.

I hope you will explain to the members why I haven’t written any of them. I am going to write a letter to the entire church next week. It should be there by the 1st Sunday.

I hear from Christine every week. I try to answer her as regularly as possible. I hope she will somehow get adjusted to that accounting.

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1. King’s sister, Christine, was in the first term of a master’s program in education at Columbia University in New York.
Rev. Ray was here Friday at the state convention. He told me to come up anytime I get ready. He is looking for you and dad in November.

Well I guess I must go back to studying. Give everybody my Regards.

Your son
[signed] “M. L.”

ALS. CKFC.

“Light on the Old Testament from the Ancient Near East”

[14 September–24 November 1948]
[Chester, Pa.]

Written during King’s first semester at Crozer Theological Seminary for James Bennett Pritchard’s class on the Old Testament, the topic and content of the essay reflect Pritchard’s interests in biblical studies, which was the strength of the seminary’s faculty. Pritchard exposed his students to ancient Near Eastern texts, his edition of which secured his professional reputation. Pritchard later recalled: “I do have, of course, vivid memories of [King] in my class in Old Testament and of his interest in the Hebrew Prophets. On a more informal level were the numerous occasions when he came to our home on the campus to stay with our two young daughters when we would be out for the evening. They too came to know and to appreciate him.” Pritchard gave the paper a B and commented: “Good conclusion! You must watch spelling, be consistent in your use of caps, etc. You have organized your material in such a way that it is apparent that you have grasped the significance of extra biblical matter for OT study.”

With the rise of the science of archaeology many valuable facts have emerged from behind the fog of obscurity into the light of understanding. For years the door of the ancient near east remained locked, and the average mind was content with it being locked; it was content in accepting legendary truth for historical truth. But beginning with the year of 1890 the pendulum of interpretation began swinging

1. James Bennett Pritchard (1909–) received an A.B. from Asbury College and a B.D. from Drew University. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania. He taught biblical studies at Crozer Theological Seminary from 1942 to 1954, at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific from 1954 to 1962, and at the University of Pennsylvania from 1962 to 1978. His major works include Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (1950); The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament (1954); and Archaeology and the Old Testament (1958).

2. James B. Pritchard to Coretta Scott King, 22 February 1987, MLKJrP-GAMK.