

14. *William Blake's Illustrations to the Bible*

London: The Trianon Press for the William Blake Trust, 1957

Blake had an interest in illustrating the Bible from his early years when he produced drawings of figures such as Moses, Abraham, Saul and David, the King of Babylon, Joseph, Jesus, and Job. He never lost interest in the story of Job and in 1793 circulated a "Prospectus to the Public" in which he offered one of his first separate prints, "*Job, a Historical Engraving.*" Blake's largest watercolor and painting project of biblical interpretations was commissioned by his friend and patron, Thomas Butts. Of the 212 pictures Blake finished that could be classified as illustrations of the Bible, 155 have been known to have been purchased by Butts. In 1863, William Michael Rossetti compiled a "Descriptive Catalogue" of as many biblical titles as he could locate for Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*. In the years following, Blake's biblical drawings and paintings were scattered and they have scattered even more since. The last time a substantial number of them from one collection were together was at the Graham Robertson auction at Christie's Sale Room on July 22, 1949, a day also marked as an "historical occasion" by the introduction of the Trianon Press.

This Trianon edition is made up of nearly 200 illustrations interpreting various figures, moments, and scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Taking his imaginative cues from the words of other writers for a change, Blake made some of his most powerful and moving drawings and paintings. In addition to the many black and white illustrations, this book includes nine beautiful reproductions in color, among them from the life of Christ: *The Adoration of the Kings*, *The Third Temptation*, *The Last Supper*, and *The Agony in the Garden*. With their somber focus on institutional religion and on mortality, many of the works resonate with deeper, darker tones than those in early illuminated books such as *The Book of Thel* and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.