

The Bible Student and Teacher

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Notes Editorial and Critical

The writer once heard an eminent New England minister say: "I come to the Bible with my mind made up on certain matters; if the Bible does not agree with me, so much the worse for the Bible".

*Human Opin-
ion versus the
Bible*

Is not that exactly the position that underlies the whole new theological and religious thought of the day? It amounts to this: *I* think so and so; if *God* thinks otherwise, so much the worse for God.

A Pastor.

In the commentary on Judges in the Lange series, Professor Paul Cassell, of Berlin, wrote: "All science becomes impossible, when credible objective tradition is made the plaything of subjective caprice".

That is the fatal defect in all the work of the Radical Criticism; the subordination of facts to fancy. The aim is not to get at what is actually contained in the Scriptures, but to warp them into agreement with the Critic's presuppositions, notions, wishes.

*Facts vs.
Wishes*

And yet the results reached in this way are loudly and widely proclaimed as "scientific"! As Dr. Paulus said: No "science" can possibly be arrived at in this way. It would be a great gain if the man of average common sense, who is engaged in

such "scientific" work, could be induced to pause long enough to ascertain what genuine "science" is. In that event we would speedily have a decrease of the spurious product, i. e., "science falsely so-called".

We read of one occasion, and only one, when the "Man of Sorrows" is said to have "rejoiced in spirit"; and that one gives us occasion for the profoundest astonishment. In Luke x. 21, we read: "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said:

*I thank thee, O Father,
A Lesson for Lord of heaven and
our "Wise" earth, that thou hast
Men hid these things from*

the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight"!

The words acquire a deeper meaning if we accept the text of the Revisers (which it is not always well to do), and read: "*Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit*"; which brings distinctly into view the immediate Author of Inspiration, and the source of all spiritual enlightenment, as directly and personally responsible for this divine utterance of our Lord.

And the words have yet a reduplicative force, if, instead of the somewhat vague rendering of the A. V., "even so, Father", and the hardly more definite rendering of the R. V., "Yea, Father", we adopt the translation given by Hengstenberg, in the

Deut. xxxviii. 25. *The same unusual word occurs in all these cases.*

Admitting that these different prophets were thus influenced by an earlier expression, and that the original is found in Deuteronomy, at what date could this have been made? It is clear that it could have arisen only at a time when there was no single, special enemy that threatened Israel. It must have been when the exile was so far in the distance that the general fact of dispersion could be predicted without connecting such dispersion with any one people. This accords with the view of the early date of the book of Deuteronomy.

It may be said that most of these interesting passages occur in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and that they could have quoted from Deuteronomy, as on the critical view this was written in the days of Josiah. But this still would leave unsolved the problem of how the expressions "many peoples" and "all countries" could have originated at a time when there was but one threatening enemy. And besides it would remain hard to account for the same expression in Isaiah, Amos and Hosea, in passages that are not regarded as interpolations, at least on any good grounds.

God's Revelation of Himself to Israel*

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The Old Testament does not occupy itself with how Israel thought of God. Its concern is with how Israel ought to think of God. To it, the existence of God is not an open question; nor his nature; nor the accessibility of knowledge of him. God himself has taken care of that. He has made himself known to his people, and their business is not to feel after him if haply they may fumblingly find him, but to hearken to him as he declares to them what and who he is. The fundamental note of the Old Testament, in other words, is Revelation. Its seers and prophets are not men of philosophic minds who have risen from the seen to the unseen, and, by dint of much reflection, have gradually attained to elevated conceptions of him who is the author of all that is. They are men of God whom God has chosen, that he might speak to them and through them to his people. Israel has not in and by them created for itself a God. God has through them created for himself a people,

God's Revelation of Himself to Israel; not Israel's Notions of God.—If we are to attend at all to the Old Testament's own conception of the matter, therefore, it is a

mistake to look into the Old Testament for Israelitish ideas about God. What it professes to give us is God's revelation of himself to Israel. We may, of course, discern here and there, tucked away in some corner or other, certain ideas about God which are of human invention. These we are given to understand, are, for the most part, inheritances from a less instructed past, or borrowings from uninstructed neighbors; and it is the very purpose of God's revelation of himself to eradicate them from the heart of Israel, and to supplant them by the image of himself, the only true God. And no doubt Israel was a very stiff-necked people, slow of heart to believe all that was spoken by the prophets, slower still of mind to assimilate the entirety of their message and to frame its life and thought upon it. And therefore these evil inheritances and borrowings repeatedly appear in the background of the successive revelations, supplying often their occasion, often conditioning their form and their course. It is quite possible to gather them together and make a show of them openly, in contrast with the revelations of God. Thus we may form some conception of what the native thought of the Israelites was, and what we should have got from Israel had not God intervened to teach it what he really

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is, and how he would have his people think of him.

Similarly, today, a curious inquirer might doubtless uncover some very odd, some very gross, some very wicked notions about God, lurking in the minds of these or those Christians. But, as it would be unfair to look upon these strange, perhaps unworthy, notions of God as the God of Christianity, merely because they have been or are entertained by some Christians, so it would be unfair to think of those inadequate or debasing ideas of God which some Israelites betray clinging to their minds, as the God of Israel. The Christian God is not the God which some Christians have imagined for themselves; not even the God which all true Christians believe in; nor even the God whom the best of Christians intelligently worship. For who has availed to know him to perfection? The Christian God is the God of the Christian revelation. And the God of Israel is not the God which some Israelites have fancied to be altogether like unto themselves, or, mayhap, something indefinitely less to be admired than themselves; but the God of the Israelitish revelation. He must be sought, therefore, not in the thought of Israel, but in his own self-disclosures through his prophets.

The Unity and Personality of God the Basis of His Revelation.—At the center of the conception of God which was revealed to Israel lay the great fact of the divine unity. "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah"—so ran the fundamental confession; and in its stirring announcement, it came at length to be considered, that the whole religion of Israel was summed up. And little wonder. By the passionate conviction of the divine unity which was wrought into Israel's very soul, the Israelite was protected from at least the worst of the debasements of the heathen about him, with their gods many and lords many, each rivaling the others in iniquity. But we must bear in mind that the monotheism of Israel was ever concrete, never abstract. The real emphasis fell, after all, therefore, upon the high and austere Theism, which formed its foundation-stone. The God of Israel was above all else and before all else a Person. Here it is that the center

of the center of the revelation of God to Israel lies; and there is no period in the life of Israel reflected to us in the pages of the Old Testament where the personality of God has not already been made the unwavering conviction of its heart. There was, therefore, no temptation in Israel to think of God as some vague "ground of being", the substrate of all that exists; or as the undefined, perhaps undefinable, "principle of the moral order of the world". Over against themselves He stood, another Self, capable of communion with them as Person with persons; talking with them, concerning himself for them, showing himself their friend. They met with him walking in the garden in the cool of the day; they talked with him in the door of the tent; they reasoned with him and were sure he was open to their appeal. They looked to him to act, as persons do, under the influence of motives, and to be governed as persons are, by rational considerations.

The Uniqueness of God in His Holiness and Power.—So vivid an anthropomorphism might easily, it may be conceived, bring with it its own dangers. Israel's safeguard from these lay in the intense reverence with which it had been taught to think of its God. "Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" they asked in trembling awe; "who is like Thee among the gods, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders"? The sense of the uniqueness of God was as strong in Israel as the sense of his unity. As he alone was God, there was none like him—he was the only one of his kind. In the awful majesty of his Being there was nothing which could even represent him; Israel was forbidden therefore to form any similitude of God. If, then, God was a Person, it was not as a person among other persons that he was to be conceived. He was a Person infinitely exalted above all other persons. Like them in all in which the life of a free spirit consists, he was immeasurably removed from all the weaknesses which belong to humanity.

Of course one element in the incomparable glory of this great Being was his almighty power. There was nothing beyond his accomplishment. All that exists was

the work of his hands; and all that he has made he upholds and governs. As for men, he had made them all, and he had made them for himself, and he did his pleasure among them. None could dispute his rule; none withstand his will. No Israelite was permitted to imagine that there was anything too hard for God or that there was a limit beyond which he could not advance. His, in Robert Browning's phrase, was "the will that can". The heavens belonged to him to their utmost heights; the earth and all that therein is. It lay thus at the very basis of the revelation of God to Israel that he is the Omnipotent Person, in whose glorious will is found the ultimate account of all that comes to pass.

The Exaltation of God in Righteousness and Mercy.—But of course Israel was not permitted to imagine that it was his might alone which made God God; that it was the irresistibility of his will which constituted his majesty. Israel knew perfectly well that it is not bare strength which exalts a person. And Israel found the unapproachable greatness of God not in the mere fact that he has a resistless will, but in the nature of that will which none can resist. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—that was from the beginning the sure plea with which every Israelite approached his God. If he was the embodiment of all power, he was also the very impersonation of all that was right, of all that was faithful, of all that was true. Exalted in judgment, the holy One was sanctified in righteousness; just and righteous was he who has commanded his testimonies in righteousness and very faithfulness. Those who looked up to him in awe because he was so great, looked up to him in love also because he was so good. If men might not always perceive the righteousness of his acts, that was not because their righteousness admitted of doubt, but only because men are so blind. They knew beyond the possibility of mistake that whatsoever he should do would be right; and if they knew beyond the possibility of mistake what was right, they knew what he would do. Righteousness, always, and everywhere, therefore, he would reward; wickedness he would unfailingly rebuke. Nor was it a narrow conception of right-

eousness which the Israelites were taught to attribute to their God. And certainly it was no harsh one. He whose Name was "the LORD, the LORD, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and sin: and that will by no means clear the guilty"—such a God was assuredly not that "hard God" who the modern poet (but no ancient prophet) tells us "dwelt at Jerusalem". The God of Israel was not only a God who commanded and saw to it that he was obeyed. He was a God who loved and attracted love.

The Culmination of God's Revelation in His Grace in Redemption.—In a word, the God of Israel was the God of grace; and it is here that we at last reach the real heart of the revelation of God to Israel. He certainly made himself known as the God of nature. He was the maker of the heavens and the earth; all that is is his workmanship and all that he has made he governs in all its movements. He made himself as certainly known as the God of history; the courses of human life run only in channels of his appointing.

But he made himself known above all things as the God of Israel, who had chosen Israel to himself out of the purity of his unmotivated love,—not for anything good he had seen in Israel by which he might have been moved to love it, but solely that he might do good to Israel, and out of Israel create a people capable of responding to him in grateful devotion. For of what other people was it ever heard that God went to redeem it unto himself for a people, and to make him a name, and to do great things for it and terrible things? Of course, the great deliverance from Egypt rose in Israel's mind when it thought of God as its Redeemer. But it would be a mistake to suppose that Israel's thought of God as Redeemer was absorbed in the thought of this national deliverance to the exclusion of all else. Rather this stood out before it as the symbol of the unearned goodness of its God. In it Israel saw but a thrilling proof that the need of man is the opportunity of God. Knowing itself as the redeemed of the Lord it knew its God as the redeeming God, the good God who with outstretched hand and bared arm

delivers his people from destruction, and and saves it from its distresses. The proclamation to Israel of a redeeming God was in its essence thus the proclamation of a God who saves from sin; and it is distinctly over against a quickened sense of sin that the God of Israel made himself known as the God of grace who visits his people with salvation.

The Consumation of God's Revelation in Christ as Redeemer—Suffering Servant and Anointed King—Rejected.—Thus the revelation of God to Israel culminated in the revelation of God coming to save his people. It was not clearly revealed to Israel that this coming of Jehovah to redemption was one with the coming of the anointed King; as it was not clearly revealed to Israel that the anointed King was one with the atoning Servant. It required the fulfilment to weave together all the threads of the great revelation into one marvelous portraiture. But it was clearly revealed to Israel that God was its Saviour, and that he would visit his people in his compassion,

and that he would redeem them from all their iniquities. In this hope Israel rested, and by it Israel lived; and resting in and living by it Israel laid its ear to the ground and listened with beating heart for the voice crying, "Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of Jehovah, make level in the desert a highway for our God". Oh, the pity of it, that when at last the long expected voice went booming out from the wastes of Jordan, Israel's ear was holden that it should not hear; and it failed to recognize in the "Behold, the man"! of the Roman governor the "Behold your God"! for which it had so long been waiting. But verily it was he who came, as a mighty one, and his arm has ruled for him, and he has fed his flock like a shepherd, and gathered his lambs in his arms, and carried them in his bosom, and gently led those that give suck. And it is his voice, and none other, that is crying down the ages, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else".

The Book of Judges—Its Place and Plan

A. The Place and Scope of the Book

(A) *Recapitulation of the Movement of Revelation until the Time of the Judges.*

The Book of Judges is to be understood only in the Light of the Previous History of the Movement of the Religion of Redemption as the Law. Hence there is call for a brief Recapitulation of that History as we have found it recorded in the Scriptures.

I. *The First Stage in the Old Testament Revelation* was found to be "The Origin and Organization of the Divine Religion of Redemption as the Law".

It may be otherwise stated as "The Historical Introduction of the Law into the World through Moses". We have traced the record of it in the Pentateuch, or Five Books of Moses.

In *Genesis* was found the record of the Origin of the Divine Religion of Redemption in its Primitive and Abrahamic Forms, and the Origin of the People Chosen to be its Depository and Guardian in its later

Mosaic Form. It was a suitable text-book for use in the preparation of the Israelites for deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and for that later revelation at Sinai.

In *Exodus* was found the record of the Committal of the Law in its Mosaic form at Mount Sinai to the Chosen People, delivered from Egypt and trained for its reception and its Embodiment as the Way of Salvation in the Tabernacle; while *Leviticus* completes *Exodus* by setting forth the Ritual of Salvation under the Law, in other words, giving Jehovah's directions to the People how to approach Him on His Throne in the Tabernacle, the Mercy Seat, in order to obtain Salvation.

Numbers and *Deuteronomy* set forth the Organization and Preparation of the Chosen People for the Conquest of the Promised Land and the Establishment of the Divine Religion there: *Numbers* being devoted to the Preparations of Two