

CHAPTER II

THE OLD TESTAMENT

FROM the consideration of the Bible as a whole we naturally pass to the study of the Old Testament. The Bible has been given to us in two parts, both of which are essential and inseparable. The Old Testament is to the New as the foundation to the building.

The Old Testament is almost entirely an historical record of God's preparation for the redemption of the world, and the preparation as there seen is two-fold—the preparation of the Messiah for the people, and of the people for the Messiah. It is consequently of the utmost importance that we know thoroughly the facts of the history at each stage of the development, for as nothing has been recorded without purpose, the fuller our knowledge the deeper will be our appreciation of the record and meaning of God's revelation. Let us not think, therefore, that these historical facts and details are dry and unnecessary, for it is only on a foundation of these

facts that we can build our edifice of spiritual teaching.

How shall we best acquire a general knowledge of Old Testament history? If we follow solely the order of our Bible, we shall find it difficult to gain a chronological and orderly view of the course of events. What we need is some historical guide by means of which we may perceive the actual trend of events. We therefore propose to give a summary of the Old Testament as a guide to its careful and detailed study.

The Old Testament however is not all history. It contains records of individual life and experience which throw light on the history, and must be read side by side with it. We see this illustrated in English history, where we have records of facts, and also works like those of Chaucer, Wycliffe, Shakespeare, Spencer, Milton and others, which throw great light on the actual life of the times in which the writers lived. So in the Old Testament we have the prophetic and poetical books, which should be read together with the historical books to whose times they refer. We shall therefore divide the Old Testament into eight sections, and distinguish the particular books as those of history and illustration.

THE CONTENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

1. Introduction. From the Creation to the Call of Abram. Genesis i.-xi.
2. The Age of the Patriarchs.
 - (a) History. Genesis xii.-l.
 - (b) Illustration. Job.
3. The Formation of the Nation of Israel.
 - (a) History. Exodus and Numbers.
 - (b) Illustration. Leviticus and Deuteronomy.
4. Conquest of, and Settlement in, Canaan.
 - (a) History. Joshua; Judges i.-xvi.; 1 Samuel i.-vii.
 - (b) Illustration. Ruth and Judges xvii.-xxi.
5. The Kingdom undivided.
 - (a) History. 1 Samuel viii.-xxxi.; 2 Samuel and 1 Kings i.-xi.; 1 Chronicles.
 - (b) Illustration. Psalms i.-xc.; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Solomon's Song.
6. The Kingdom divided.
 - (a) History. 1 Kings xii.-xxii.; 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles.
 - (b) Illustration. The Prophets and most of the later Psalms. Thus :--
 - (1) Mainly concerned with Israel (Northern): Jonah, Amos, Hosea.

(2) Mainly Judah (early) ; Joel, Micah, Isaiah, Nahum.

(3) Mainly Judah (late) ; Zephaniah, Habakkuk, part of Jeremiah.

7. The Captivity.

(a) History. Parts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel ; Daniel i.-vi.

(b) Illustration. Parts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel ; Obadiah ; Daniel vii.-xii.

8. The Restoration.

(a) History. Ezra ; Nehemiah ; Esther.

(b) Illustration. Haggai ; Zechariah ; Malachi ; and some later Psalms.

The above sketch in the last four sections is of course only approximately correct, because of the impossibility of fixing absolutely the dates of many of the psalms and of some of the prophets. The arrangement now suggested is not according to the views of many modern scholars, but it may not be necessarily incorrect on that account. It follows the lines of a somewhat older scholarship, which is at least still worthy of being heard. For those who wish to take up this study in detail, two books may be recommended ; one is *The Bible Reader's Chart*, by W. C. Fletcher (Bryan & Co., Ship Street, Oxford, 6d.), a very useful little compilation ; the other is *Clews to Holy Writ*, by Miss Petrie (Hodder & Stoughton), which gives a plan for a consecutive

reading of the whole Bible in chronological order. Differences of detail must necessarily arise in such a study, but there is very little variation in the main outline, and there is no doubt of its importance.

When we have thus mastered the facts of the Old Testament, we naturally begin to inquire as to the spiritual teaching of this library of history. This leads us to consider—

THE TEACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

One word sums up all—CHRIST. But let us see how this comes to pass. We will imagine a stranger with an Old Testament only (that is, without the New Testament) opening at Genesis i., and reading verse by verse. Soon he comes to chapter iii., with its promise of Someone coming. He reads on and finds a repetition with amplification in chapters xii., xvii., xxii. and xlix. Still he reads, and finds traces of the same promise in almost every book ; until as he reads from Isaiah onwards the very fulness of prophecy appears. But he comes to Malachi iv., and the promises have not been realised. The reader has now become conscious that the Old Testament is—

I. A Book of Unfulfilled Prophecies.

He then turns back and starts again, and soon is conscious of something strange in Genesis iv.—sacrifice, offering. He wonders what can be the use of sacrificing ; what can be the meaning of

offering the life of an animal. He notices it again in chapters ix., xii. and xxii. ; still more clearly in Exodus, until in Leviticus there is an entire organisation of sacrifices, offerings, rites and ceremonies. He sees them referred to again and again, with very little explanation of their real meaning, until once more he reaches Malachi iv. without the light he needs. He is now conscious that the Old Testament is also—

2. A Book of Unexplained Ceremonies.

Once more the reader recurs to Genesis, and it is not long before he is conscious of another great fact—the expression of desire for God and satisfaction on the part of man. He reads of this in chapters iv., v., xv., xxviii. and xlix., then throughout the rest of the history, but most of all in Job, Psalms and the Prophets. From time to time man's heart cries out for the living God, and for the blessings God has promised. But though there is great, there is not perfect, satisfaction ; the heart is ever longing and the soul ever desiring, until the book closes in Malachi iv. without this complete realisation, and our reader becomes conscious of yet another fact, that the Old Testament is—

3. A Book of Unsatisfied Longings.

These are the three threads running through it, making it by itself an incomplete book. It ought to be studied from this standpoint, and with this per-

spective, if it is to be rightly understood. Only thus will it be appreciated as the foundation of the New Testament, and the necessary preparation for all that is found in the latter book.

And we will imagine that our stranger (as above) has now given to him a New Testament. As he begins to read he finds there the very things he has failed to discover in the Old Testament. On the very first page he reads: "That it might be fulfilled," and soon he realises that

(1) Jesus the Prophet fulfils (in His Life) the prophecies.

(2) Jesus the Priest explains (in His Death) the ceremonies; and

(3) Jesus the King satisfies (in His Resurrection) the longings.

"Jesus my Prophet, Priest and King," is thus the key of the lock, the perfect explanation of the Old Testament revelation, and the justification of everything contained therein. Let us then master the contents of the Old Testament, meditate on its teaching, and manifest its message in our life and service.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we have already seen, the New Testament is to the Old as a building to a foundation ; it is the completion and crown of all that had been foretold and provided. And as with the Old Testament, so with the New, Christ is the subject and substance of it all.

The method of mastering the New Testament must be very similar to that employed in the Old Testament, by reason of its structure being also historical. It is based upon facts, and these facts must be known if we would rightly profit by the teaching. It cannot be stated too clearly or emphasised too frequently that no fact or incident of the Bible is without some bearing on the revelation of God contained in the Scriptures. Following the same general plan as before, we will consider first the history and then the teaching.

THE CONTENTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

In the New Testament also, the order of the Authorised Version is not chronological, and we shall

therefore divide the contents into eight sections, for the purpose of studying it in historical sequence as closely as possible. We shall find that here too we have books of fact and of illustration.

1. The Life of our Lord. The Gospels. Four characteristic pictures of the one Saviour. They should be studied separately, and then together, under the guidance of a good harmony. A summary of the harmony is found in most Teachers' Bibles, but a harmony with the full text is of course to be preferred. A good cheap one on the Authorised Version is Fuller's (S. P. C. K., 1s. 6d.), which is careful and accurate, and adequate for all ordinary purposes. The best on the Revised Version is the American one of Stevens & Burton (Gay & Bird, 6s.).

2. The Early Church.

(a) History. Acts i.-xii.

(b) Illustration. Epistle of St. James.

Study carefully the beginnings of the Church, and see illustrations in the Epistle of the type of its Christianity.

3. St. Paul's First Journey.

(a) History. Acts xiii. and xiv.

(b) Illustration. Galatians.

The first missionary work proper is recorded in the Acts, and the Epistle was (almost certainly) written to those in Asia Minor evangelised on this journey.

4. St. Paul's Second Journey.

(a) History. Acts xv. 1-xviii. 21.

(b) Illustration. 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

5. St. Paul's Third Journey.

(a) History. Acts xviii. 22-xxi. 17.

(b) Illustration. 1 and 2 Corinthians,
Galatians, Romans.

Galatians appears here again because it illustrates the *thoughts* then rife in St. Paul's mind, which are so thoroughly dealt with in Romans.

6. St. Paul's Captivity.

(a) History. Acts xxi. 18-xxviii. 31.

(b) Illustration. Colossians, Ephesians,
Philemon, Philippians.

7. St. Paul's (probable) Release and Second Imprisonment.

(a) History. } Hebrews, 1 Timothy.

(b) Illustration. } Titus, 2 Timothy.

8. Closing Years of First Century.

(a) A.D. 70-85. Revelation, 1 and 2 Peter,
Jude.

(b) A.D. 85-100. 2, 3, and 1 John.

For valuable handbooks to the life and work of St. Paul, consult Findlay's *Epistles of St. Paul* (2s. 6d.) and Stalker's *Life of St. Paul* (1s. 6d.). But first let the general facts be mastered from the Bible only. Miss Petrie's *Clews to Holy Writ* covers the New Testament as well as the Old.

THE TEACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

It is very important to study this carefully, for it is full of spiritual profit. There is a beautiful progress of thought from first to last. Note the different aspect in each division and subdivision.

1. The Person of Christ. (Biographical.) The Gospels.

(a) Working out Salvation.

(b) Providing materials for faith. John
xx. 31.

(c) Founding a Church in the world.

2. The Preaching of Christ. (Historical.) Acts.

(a) Offering Salvation.

(b) Affording opportunities for faith.

(c) Gathering out a Church from the world.

3. The People of Christ. (Practical.) The Epistles.

(a) Manifesting Salvation.

(b) Showing results of faith.

(c) Dwelling in the Church for the world.

4. The Providence of Christ. (Prophetical.) Revelation.

(a) Completing Salvation.

(b) Bestowing rewards of faith.

(c) Ruling over the Church and the world.

For this phase of Bible study there is a book, a classic on the subject, Bernard's *Progress of*

Doctrine in the New Testament, which is one of the books indispensable to all Christians.

It will be seen that Christ is the warp and woof of the New Testament. He is its centre, its lines, its circumference. Christ is the Prophet : let us hear Him ; the Priest : let us accept Him ; the King : let us obey Him.