

CHAPTER VII

OLD TESTAMENT DOCTRINE

WE have already considered the proper methods of studying the historical facts and the literary structure which lie at the foundation of the Old Testament. These facts, as we have seen, carry their own particular lessons.

It is necessary, however, to go further, and consider the spiritual teaching of the Old Testament in its entirety. The historical unity amid the diversity which we studied in our first chapter has its counterpart in the spiritual truths found from Genesis to Malachi, and it is at once our duty and privilege to discover what the Old Testament has to say on the great spiritual realities which concern the life of man.

It is only possible to suggest heads under which to study the particular doctrines. The student should arrange under each division or subdivision the results of his reading.

One great principle of immense importance must be grasped and ever kept in view in the doctrinal study of the Old Testament. It is that of the

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PROGRESSIVENESS OF REVELATION.

God revealed Himself, not only at "sundry times" but also in "divers manners," to the fathers (Hebrews i. 1). He taught men as they were able to bear it. He led them step by step from the dawn of revelation up to the meridian of fulness and splendour of His manifestation "in these last days in His Son" (Hebrews i. 1). We are to remember, therefore, that while each stage of the revelation was perfect, it was perfect for that time, and not necessarily perfect with reference to succeeding stages. A knowledge of this principle of progress in God's revelation of Himself enables us to avoid a twofold error: it prevents us, on the one hand, from undervaluing the Old Testament by reason of our fuller light from the New Testament; on the other hand, it prevents us from using the Old Testament in any of its stages without guidance from the complete revelation in Christ. We shall thus be enabled, in a word, to obtain the correct spiritual perspective from which to study the Old Testament, and to derive from it the wealth of spiritual instruction it was intended to convey to all ages (Romans xv. 4).

This principle of progress in God's revelation is also of great practical service in meeting certain current objections to the Old Testament. There are those who reject it because of its alleged cruel-

ties, such as the slaughter of the Canaanites, or because of certain manifestations in individual life and practice not consonant with New Testament principles. Now, while we are not to be guided to-day by many of the examples of the Old Testament, it is equally true that *in so far as what they said and did was due to a revelation of God, that revelation was perfect for that time*, whatever additional truth came afterwards for newer needs. We say *in so far as what they said and did was of God*, because not even in the Old Testament are we to understand that God necessarily approved of *all* that His servants said and did, even when they thought they were doing Him service. If this were the place to do it, the instance of the Canaanites, already referred to, could be justified without much difficulty in the light of the awful depths of sin to which they had descended, and it is at least suggestive that those who are so much concerned about the Canaanites were quite jubilant over the dispersal of the Khalifa's power as a blow struck for civilisation and human safety.

We have thus to distinguish carefully between what is called *dispensational* truth and *permanent* truth in the Old Testament—that is, between those elements of God's revelation intended solely for the immediate need and those which are of eternal validity. To put it in yet another way, we have

to remember the difference between what is written *to us* and *for us*. All Scripture was written *for our learning*, but not all was written *to us* directly. Much of it addressed to Jews was primarily and often exclusively for them, and is only for us to-day by way of application. To give one example out of many: the first commandment is of permanent and eternal value and force, but the introductory words giving the motive for it (Exodus ch. xx. 2) are no longer applicable to us except by means of a process of spiritualising. This distinction between the dispensations will solve many an Old Testament difficulty. But we must not continue. Suffice it once more to say that the progress of doctrine is one of the master-keys of the Old Testament. Let us now consider some of the main elements of the teaching.

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD.

Take, first, the book of Genesis, and consider its fundamental ideas of God—

1. As Creator.
2. As Lawgiver.
3. As Judge.
4. As Provider or Ruler.
5. As Redeemer.

Notice how these come out of the early chapters. In them we have the germ of all that follows, and everything else up to Malachi may be included in

these ideas. The revelation of God concerning Himself takes various forms, according as the media are patriarchs, judges, kings, or prophets, and the ever-increasing fulness from patriarch up to prophet affords a most fruitful study.

In this connexion a study of the names and titles of God is of great importance. For full and proper study here a knowledge of Hebrew is of course necessary; but there are many helps available in English which will be of real service. The names of God (Elohim), Jehovah, God Almighty (El Shaddai), the Everlasting God (Genesis xxi.), and the various titles associated with Jehovah (Jireh, Shalom, etc.) are illustrations from this field. The "Name" of God is the revelation of His Nature, and the various names and titles are so many aspects of His Divine character. It is important to note carefully, as succeeding chapters and stages are studied, what addition is made in each to the doctrine of God.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN.

Look again at Genesis, and see there a summary of the whole Bible concerning man.

1. His glory (in creation).
2. His humiliation (through sin).
3. His need (of redemption).
4. His longings (for God).
5. His endeavours (after righteousness).

Each of these can be traced right through the Old Testament, and illustrations almost innumerable found. Take, for example, under 4, man's yearnings after God, and read especially Job and the Psalms for these. Consider, too, under 5, man's efforts by his own works of sacrifice, etc., to merit God's favour; and then note the true idea of sacrifice, as taught in Psalms l. and li. and Micah v. 5-8. Study well the Old Testament picture of man, and from it will come a deeper realisation of what grace must and can do for him.

THE DOCTRINE OF RELIGION.

This will show the Divine dealings with man, and how the doctrine concerning God comes in contact with the life of man. We find religion in the Old Testament under three successive and yet co-existent forms :—

1. The Theocracy or the direct government of God (from Creation to Samuel).
2. The Monarchy or Divine government through the kings (Saul to the Captivity).
3. The Hierarchy, or Divine government through priests and prophets (the Captivity and Restoration).

We have said successive, yet co-existent, because in the second as well as in the third period the prophets and priests were influential as media of Divine revelation, even though they were not actually in direct authority over the people.

In the whole course of these three forms there seems to be one main principle—Education. God's people were being trained and led upwards and onward from a religion of *outward restraint* to a religion of *inward constraint*—from a system of outward precepts to a system of inward principles. In other words, God was dealing with the world as we deal with children. We impose our will from without, and so train the child gradually until the power for right-doing is found in his own will from within. The Old Testament is the record of the world's moral childhood "under governors until the time appointed of the Father"—until the moral and spiritual manhood of the revelation in Christ (Galatians iv. 1, *f.*). Traces of this gradual progress can be seen right through the Old Testament—the growing subservience of the outward to the inward, the superiority of the spirit to the letter, and the gradual progress and development of religion leading up to the "worship in spirit and truth" of the New Testament.

There are other aspects of Old Testament teaching arising out of these, on which we cannot now enter. But perhaps the most important—certainly the most immediately important—aspect remains to be considered. As this will require fuller treatment we must reserve it for our next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE main purpose and supreme glory of the revelation of the Old Testament are summed up in the well-known words of our Lord: "They are they which testify of Me." Everything else, however important and necessary in itself, is subordinate to this one great end, the anticipation of and preparation for the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of Man. No study of the Old Testament can be complete which does not include and emphasize the spiritual element of the Divine revelation of the Messiah. In it we find both prophecy and preparation—prophecy of and preparation for the Messiah. These two ideas are brought forward in several aspects, each needing separate study, and all combining to give the full picture of "Christ in the Old Testament."

CHRIST IN PROPHECY.

As we saw in a former chapter, there is a thread of prophecy, of anticipation of Someone coming, from

Genesis iii. to Malachi iv. The Old Testament is assuredly a book of prophecy, of hopes raised by the promises of God, and yet of prophecy mainly unfulfilled, of hopes unrealised. We can only suggest in merest outline some methods of exploring this wealth.

1. Consider the prophecies in their chronological order :—

- (a) The prophecies of Genesis.
- (b) The prophecies of the Exodus. (Exodus—Deuteronomy).
- (c) The prophecies of David's and Solomon's reigns.
- (d) The earlier prophets of Judah.
- (e) The prophets of Israel.
- (f) The later prophets of Judah.
- (g) The prophets of the Captivity (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel).
- (h) The prophets of the Return (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

Under these divisions the particular Messianic prophecies of each writer may be studied and the torch of hope seen to be handed on from one to another until we come to the last of the prophets, and then to the four centuries of silence.

2. Consider the prophecies in their details.

We should look for the contribution of each writer to the complete picture of the Messiah. We may thus consider Him as the Seed of the Woman, the

Source of Blessing (Abraham), the Shiloh (Jacob), the Prophet (Moses), the Star (Balaam), the King (David), the Sufferer (Isaiah), the Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah), the Son of Man (Daniel), the Fellow of God (Zechariah), the Lord (Malachi). These are but a few of the varied aspects, and each adds something to the Divine completeness of the representation. We should notice, too, how the prophecies commence with the broadest and most general reference to the Messiah as the Seed of the Woman, and how the subsequent additions give definiteness to the picture. His nation, His tribe, His family, His birthplace, His title, His date—all are gradually given.

And when we have gathered all these materials, let us pause to remember that these prophecies date, at the lowest, from three or four hundred years before the birth of the Lord Jesus in Bethlehem, while many date from six hundred to more than a thousand years before that event. We are thus face to face with the element of *prediction*, of "history written beforehand" by the hand of God. This is part of that miraculous Divine element which gives to the Old Testament its character as a Divine revelation.

CHRIST IN RITUAL.

We have already noticed that the Old Testament

is a book wherein various religious ceremonies are prominent, ceremonies needing explanation, and not receiving their full interpretation within Old Testament times. Consider some of these :—

1. The Sacrifices. They were intended to reveal the true methods of approach to God, and, under various aspects, they emphasize reconciliation, consecration, and fellowship.

(a) Study the beginnings of sacrifice in Genesis.

(b) Consider their development under Moses.

The basis was the Passover Sacrifice of Redemption, and then followed the sacrifices of Leviticus i.-iv. (See *Studies in Leviticus*, by Rev. Hubert Brooke.)

2. The Purifications. These taught another aspect of religion, the need of purity in drawing near to God. They will bear the most careful study. The ritual of the cleansing of the leper is a striking instance.

3. The Priesthood. This brings before us the agents by which the people might draw near to God. (See for this and the former points Mr. Brooke's valuable little work.)

4. The Festivals. These give the particular occasions on which the people could worship God. The daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, seventh year, jubilee year, and other services were all so many

times of preparation for the worship in spirit and truth (John iv.) of all times and places. "Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us, therefore *let us keep continual festival*" (Greek).

CHRIST IN PERSONAL TYPES.

The question of Old Testament ritual is inextricably bound up with the people of the Old Testament, and consequently we have Christ not only prefigured in *things*, but also in *persons*. This is usually called the study of the types of the Old Testament. A type has been defined as an illustration in a lower sphere of a truth belonging to a higher. There are various forms of illustration, such as type, prophecy, allegory, simile, symbol. Types are illustrations in *facts* and *deeds*, as contrasted with illustrations in words, fancies, and pictures.

In no study do we so much need "sanctified common sense" as in the study of the types. So much fancifulness and absurdity have been shown by some writers that many are tempted to go to the other extreme and abandon the study altogether. But "abuse does not take away use," and we do not hesitate to say that, if prosecuted soberly and prayerfully, no study can be more fruitful.

The best way is to begin with those Old Testament subjects which are referred to in the New Testament as anticipatory of Christ. We have Divine and

apostolic warrant for seeing this in the Manna, the Lamb, the Rock, the Brazen Serpent, and other similar instances. In the same category is the use made in Hebrews of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices.

When we leave the safe ground of the New Testament we must study with two important and connected truths in mind: (1) The great difference between primary interpretation and spiritual application. The primary meaning of a passage, i.e. what it was to those to whom it was addressed, is one thing, but our spiritual use of it may be quite another, and the latter was probably not in the writer's mind at all. (2) The great difference between a type and a coincidence. The former is an illustration Divinely given and intended. The latter is what we see in the narrative, but which was not necessarily purposed by God. For instance, Jonah's circumstances were typical of our Lord's burial and resurrection. This is a type. The story of Joseph, with its wonderful likeness to our Lord's history in its detail, may not have been intentional. This would be a coincidence.

With these safeguards let us consider some of the aspects of this truly wonderful field.

I. The personal types (or coincidences), e.g. Adam, Noah, Melchizedec, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David.

2. The facts of the history typically used, e.g. Jacob's ladder, the tabernacle, Canaan privilege, brazen serpent, manna, and many more.

3. The peculiar details of certain occurrences giving different *aspects* of teaching.

(a) The two birds (Leviticus xiv.) ; the two goats (Leviticus xvi.) ; suggesting the aspects of death and resurrection.

(b) The two priesthoods (Aaron and Melchizedec) ; the two leaders (Moses and Joshua) ; the two kingships (David and Solomon).

No one type is sufficient to anticipate the fulness of the person and work of Christ.

(c) The details of Joseph's history, e.g. beloved of father, hated of brethren, sold, suffering, exalted, feeding the world. Considered with care, the coincidences are remarkable.

On this subject we may refer our readers to *A Study of the Types*, by Miss A. R. Habershon. We do not by any means endorse all its teaching, but there is much that is suggestive and helpful, and if read with a critical mind, it will provoke thought on this fruitful subject. A valuable and suggestive work, entitled *The Five Offerings and their Law*, by E. M. S. (Marshall Bros.) can be warmly recommended. Fairbairn's *Typology of Scripture* (two volumes, 21s.) may also be mentioned for reference.

4. The appearances of the Angel of the Covenant

are to be noted. These are not strictly types, but actual anticipations of the Incarnation by the Second Person of the Trinity. A careful study of such passages as Genesis xviii., Joshua v., and Judges xiii. will show that the references are not to a created angel, but to an actual appearance of God in angelic form.

One additional caution may be added. The types are not to be regarded as our primary source of doctrine, but only used for the confirmation or illustration of doctrine deduced from clear statements of Scripture.

It will be seen from the above fragmentary sketch what a wonderful field we have to traverse. Christ is verily the substance and Subject of the Old Testament, and the more deeply we study the records of the Old Covenant, the more we shall be convinced that even there "Christ is all and in all."