

SONS OF ADAM

Studies of Old Testament Characters in New Testament Light

by

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INTRODUCTION:

On the Relevance of the Old Testament

ONE COULD fill a volume with extracts from great poets and scholars in tribute to the beauty and truthfulness of the Old Testament. Hall Caine the novelist, for example, wrote:

"I think that I know my Bible as few literary men know it. There is no book in the world like it, and the finest novels ever written fall far short in interest to anyone of the stories it tells. Whatever strong situations I have in my books are not my creation, but are taken from the Bible. *The Deemster* is the story of the Prodigal Son. *The Bondman* is the story of Esau and Jacob. *The Scapegoat* is the story of Eli and his sons, but with Samuel as a little girl; and *the Manxman* is the story of David and Uriah." [1]

The author of *Moby Dick* was a lover of the Old Testament.

"Call me Ishmael," so the great novel begins and in its pages we have Ahab, Nathan, Seth, Bildad, Ezekiel, Jonah, and Peleg. Even the whale is called Leviathan! Melville's mind was saturated with the Scriptures. He does not so much quote its actual words but exhibits its inmost spirit and essence, its grandeur and tragedy. One cannot read *Moby Dick* without being introduced to the saints and sinners of the Old Testament.

Those who claim that in the twentieth century the Bible has faded from modern poetry are grotesquely in error.

One must read Kipling's *Collected Verse* with the Old Testament at one's elbow to understand its allusions.

Yeats, Masfield and T. S. Eliot are other examples; while E. L. Masters wove into the texture of his *Spoon River Anthology* such a plenitude of Bible references "as is found in few modern books, and he did it so deftly that it passes unnoticed." [2]

During the last ten years more than forty-eight Biblical novels have come from the press.

Eighteen are based on Old Testament characters. The outstanding ones were Thomas Mann's monumental Joseph series, Vladimir Jabotinsky's *Prelude to Deliah*, Gladys Schmitt's *David the King*, and Franz Werfel's story of Jeremiah in *Hearken unto the Voice*. Mann and Werfel rise to the height of their theme. All other Biblical fiction, in general, discards the miraculous and is often untrue to the Bible facts in its sexual emotionalism. [3]

The dogma of Evolution, however, and the critical theory of Wellhausen, together did their utmost toward the Close of the nineteenth century to shatter all belief in the historicity and authenticity of the "*Five books of Moses*" and the rest of the Old Testament.

But there are those, also, who defended the Pentateuch against others who undermined its authority.

Professor Frederic Godet, in 1869, delivered a memorable address on *The Sanctity of the Old Testament* in reply to attacks by some of his colleagues. He opened with these words:

"I am here to plead before you, Not Guilty. What do I say, Not Guilty? Holy, Thrice Holy." [4]

For what right have men to speak of a Holy Bible when following the Radical critics whose fantasy dissects and parcels out the books of the Bible far more extensively than the first disciples of Wellhausen did?

There is, moreover, utter lack of agreement among them.

They invented a whole alphabet of authors, redactors, and revisers - *J,E,P,D,Q,R*, etc. One reads with astonishment how the simple Scripture narrative was made both incredible and unintelligible in their hands. Their method was by pedantic analysis, illogical presumptions and anti-super-natural bias to refuse any quarter to the inspired writers for the slightest imperfection.

"They slashed to the marrow, cut and re-cut the text, transposed, suppressed or substituted for the received wording." [5]

It seems almost sacrilege to old-fashioned believers when such modern scholars still write on the relevance of the Old Testament or the historicity of its contents. Once the text has been cruelly murdered, to commit mayhem on it becomes only a post-mortem misdemeanor. Nevertheless, when we read or study the Old Testament, the choice must be made. If we accept the position of the Liberal scholars, we can only come to the conclusion that the Pentateuch was written long after the days of David and that much, if not most, of its material is myth of a much later date than Moses.

These theories, as well as the position of present conservative scholarship, are all excellently summarized by Professor Henry S. Gehman in his revised *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*. [6]

He concludes:

"In order to understand the religious history of Israel it is necessary to retain the view of the Pentateuch that Moses was a monotheist and that his GOD was Jehovah . . . and he remains, whether in a direct or more or less indirect sense, the author of the Pentateuch."

Professor J. Coppens goes farther and states:

"We have seen that the classical Wellhausen system is now shattered. What can it oppose to the archaeological data with which exploration in the Near East has enriched man's knowledge? . . . From the standpoint of the religious history of Israel the basic Wellhausen positions are out of date." [7]

Why do we believe these Old Testament stories to be true? First, because they are and always have been part of the Law and the Prophets which JESUS CHRIST accepted as the Word of GOD, final and unchangeable.

His general endorsement puts the seal of His approval on the contents and alleged authorship. And in the four Gospels, CHRIST refers to the following Old Testament characters not as fabulous figures or myth but with the greatest solemnity, as historical:

- Adam and Eve (Mark 10:6); Abel (Matthew 23:35); Noah (Matthew 24: 37); Lot and his wife (Luke 17); Moses (Matthew, Mark, John);
- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matthew 22);
- The twelve tribes, (Matthew 19);
- David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Naaman, Zacharias, Abiathar, Daniel, Jonah: the last as type of His resurrection.

It is no longer necessary, therefore, to follow the crazy patchwork of documents since recent scholarship has made the old view not only "intellectually respectable" but spiritually far more profitable.

When we open Genesis or any part of the Old Testament in the atmosphere of Modern doubt and criticism, it loses its beauty and flavor. We are lost in a maze of conjecture and doubt.

There are always those who regard the Old Testament stories as the picturesque folklore of an ancient people, comparable to the primitive annals of other races. They object specifically to the miracles of the Old Testament and use the word "myth" for that which the Bible narrates as fact. Berdyaev is a profound thinker and savant but he depreciates the Old Testament. Its GOD is not the GOD of the New Testament. The early chapters of Genesis are mythological and not historical (*The Meaning of History*, pp. 83-85).

Reinhold Niebuhr bluntly states that "the story of the fall is not historical; it does not take place in any concrete human act."

"The Christian religion may be characterized as one which has transmuted primitive religious and artistic myths and symbols without fully rationalizing them"· (*Beyond Tragedy*, pp. 7-13).

Karl Barth, in his otherwise great book, *The Word of GOD and the Word of Man*, says:

"Biblical religious history has the distinction of being in its essence, in its inmost character, neither religion nor history - not religion but reality, not history but truth," and that the truth of religion is "its other-worldliness, its refusal of the idea of sacredness, its non-historicity" (pp. 66, 69). If this is indeed the case, what matters it whether figures like Abraham and Moses are products of later myth-making! [8]

The fundamental error of the mythological school is that by undermining faith in the historicity of the Old Testament they remove the foundations of the New.

"If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?" asks the Psalmist (11:3).

From my earliest youth I was taught to read the whole Bible as GOD's own Revelation and as a Holy Book. My mother's Bible is still my Bible. And all its stories, read as a boy, still ring true when I remember that JESUS CHRIST and His Apostles endorsed them.

The Lord created Adam, called Abraham and wrestled with Jacob. The Egyptian princess took no ordinary babe from the ark of bulrushes but the seer of the Old Covenant. Long ago it was said that in the Old Testament the New Testament lay concealed and in the New Testament the Old Testament was revealed.

We still believe this of all the types and shadows and Messianic promises.

They point to the One who is Chief among ten thousand and the Altogether Lovely. We see the Promised Messiah in the wistful longings, the prophetic dreams and the glorious visions of the early patriarchs.

The chapters that follow are only sketches, not portraits; not of all but of a few men. Our prayer for ourselves and for our readers is that of John Donne:

"And let Thy patriarchs' desire,
Those great grandfathers of Thy Church, which saw
More in the cloud than we in the fire,
Whom nature cleared more, than us grace and law,
And now in heaven still pray, that we
May use our new helps right
Be satisfied and fructify in me;
Let not my mind be blinder by more light,
Nor faith by reason added, lose her sight."

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1 *The Bible in Literature*, p. 215

2 Lawrence E. Nelson, *The Roving Bible*, pp. 161 and 260.

3 "Ten Years of Biblical Fiction," by Balmer H. Kelly in *Interpretation*, July, 1949.

4 *Life of Godet*, p. 356.

5 J. Coppens, *The Old Testament and Its Critics*, 1942, p. 75.

6 *Pentateuch*, pp. 465-470.

7 *The Old Testament and Its Critics*, pp. 115-116.

8 Cf. "Miracle and Myth," by Philip E. Hughes B.D. in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, July, 1949.

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