

THE PROBLEM OF OLD TESTAMENT INSTRUCTION

RALPH LESLIE JOHNS, D.B.

Young Men's Christian Association, San Francisco, California

I

To many people the Bible is *the Bible*. Of one piece of cloth, true from cover to cover, all the inspired Word of God, a book no part of which may be taken away, no part of which may be added to, else "God shall add unto him the plagues written in this book,"¹ a book venerated for its age, for its completeness as a lamp and guide to rectitude, for its worthy heroes and its saintly men, a book to live by and a book to die by. To those who view it thus the Bible is a revelation of the past, an interpretation of the present, a prediction of the future. It is the arsenal of texts against all unbelievers, the scourge upon the heathen, the blessing upon the "saved." Every question of doctrine or conduct can be justified by a passage, every false passage proved to be of the evil one. Joshua and Samuel and Kings serve but to show the preparation for the coming of the Savior, and every book from Genesis to Revelation can be made to show forth the life of Jesus Christ. "Thus saith the Lord"—so says the Bible; therefore the Lord surely must have said it, else why should it have been in the Bible?

The Old Testament is the master of people who take this point of view. A verse or passage has pretty much the same significance to them wherever

found, and little, if any, thought is given to historical setting. The questions of Bible authorship or composition they do not wish to debate. It is easier to interpret from a passage as it stands than to ascertain the environment in which it was written or spoken. It is easier to force some present application than to face with candor the evidence of history, whether in rocks, in ruins, or in texts.

It would seem to these people that if Moses, or Abraham, or David, or any other of the prophets could make mistakes, then Christianity is a failure. If it could be proved that the sun did not stand still at the command of Joshua,² that men did not actually rise up from the valley of bones at a word, then the Bible ceases to be inspired. Inspiration and infallibility must go hand in hand. The fate of the Bible, the fate of the Christian religion, hangs thereon.

To an ever-increasing number of people the Bible is still *the Bible*; yet it is impossible longer to regard the thirty books from Genesis to Malachi as a uniform and unvaryingly harmonious exemplification of God and a perfect code of standards. The Bible is the record of divine revelation, but at the same time has a historical background which by no means may be ignored or overlooked. The Old Testament is a

¹ Rev. 22:18.

² Josh. 10:12 ff.

report of the development of an earnest people from a very crude faith and ethic to views of God and the universe which the world prizes as its most precious treasures. It is not correct to speak of either the Old Testament or the New Testament as uniform and comprehensive. It is incorrect to speak of them as being progressively revealed and perfect in all details, even the minutest. The Old Testament is not even a consistent collection of moral teachings,¹ though there is to be found within it progress from the crude to the divine.

Once our eyes are open to the diversity and unevenness of the perception of truth and right in the Old Testament, we have undermined any power the Old Testament may have for evil. Once we recognize the terrible old Hebrew divinity as "the terrible old Hebrew divinity" we have passed from an estimation of God at face value to a deeper understanding of man's longing to be in right relations with a power greater than himself. A divinity who could issue precise directions for the most revolting cruelties, the slaughter of whole nations of men, women, and children, as well as helpless animals, not to mention cities, whose sole offense was that they did not pay tribute to Jehovah's priests; a divinity who could hand down Ten Commandments writ on stone and at the same time instruct the Children of Israel to kill and rob their neighbors:

Howbeit of the cities of these peoples, that the Lord thy God giveth thee for an

inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth, but thou shalt utterly destroy them: the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Caananite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee . . . (Deut. 20:16 ff.; see also Deut. 7:1 ff).²

he is not our God! Our moral consciences will not permit us to claim him! Upton Sinclair calls him the "Butcher God" and rightly,³ for the records of this old Hebrew God are full of atrocities and terrors. He is not our God any more than he was the God of the great Isaiah, or of Amos, or of Hosea. The God we moderns worship is a God of justice, the very soul of religion, of righteousness, and of love. He is not "the old Hebrew God," neither is he a Jewish God, he is rather the universal Father of all mankind, interested in men as sons and as brothers.

Criticism has blazed a trail of light in one direction, at least. Man's conception of God at any period in history is co-extensive with his moral sensitiveness and can be no greater than the summation of his highest ideals concerning the power with which he seeks to come into right relations. Such being the case, it is fitting that we should label that which is immoral as immoral, whether it has a "thus saith the Lord" attached or not. That which is good, honest, and just we should embrace. The "hedging" occurs in calling black, black, and white, white, for we so often see only two shades of gray. "Criticism bears no sword

¹ II Kings 19:30 versus Hos. 1:4, and many similar instances.

² See also II Kings 10:6 ff. Rewards for observing this law, Deut. 25:7 f.; punishments for its violation, Deut. 28:15 f. While much of this is only a paper slaughter, as Judg. 1:21 f. shows, yet the stories stand plainly in our Bible texts.

³ Upton Sinclair, *The Profits of Religion* (1918), p. 35.

which can wreak the slightest injury upon any truth which is really true, nor diminish aught the force of any law or precept which finds the conscience of its own might."¹ Truth is truth for its own sake, and appeals to our consciences and intelligences as such. No "Thus saith the Lord" can ever make an untruth into truth. This much we know.

II

Bible teaching is no longer the simple matter which the current method of Sunday-school instruction would assume it to be. While it is true that the Bible is the natural textbook for the study of religion, one would never know it by investigating the method and material used in the Sunday school of today.

Exodus may be fine teaching material for young "scrappy" boys, who dote on seeing the Pharaohs "getting everything that is coming to them," but for more mature minds it becomes a stumbling-block. In the fourteenth chapter there is set forth the crossing of the Red Sea. Most of us, in reading our Bibles, read the story through verse by verse and draw the conclusion after having read it that God, by a mighty setting aside of natural phenomena, conducted the Children of Israel, dry-shod, through the Red Sea. But viewing the story critically it becomes apparent that we shall have to change our conclusion somewhat. Should we arrange the story according to the documents contained within it we will find that two stories, each quite different from the other, have been skilfully woven together:

JE

Exod. 14:21b and Jehovah caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night and made the sea dry land

vs. 24 and it came to pass in the morning watch that Jehovah looked forth upon the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud and discomfited the host of the Egyptians. And he took off their chariot wheels and they drove them heavily; so that the Egyptians said: Let us flee from the face of Israel; for Jehovah fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

vs. 27b: and the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared, and the Egyptians fled against it, and Jehovah overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

vs. 30 Thus Jehovah saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. 31. And Israel saw the great work which Jehovah did upon the Egyptians and the people feared Jehovah, and they believed in Jehovah, and in his servant Moses.

P

Exod. 14:21a And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea

vs. 21c and the waters were divided. 22 And the Children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 23 And the Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

vs. 26 And Jehovah said unto Moses, *stretch out thy hand* over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen,

vs. 27 And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea

vs. 28 and the waters returned and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, even *all* the host of Pharaoh that went in after them into the sea; *there remained not so much as one of them* vs. 29 But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

¹ J. M. Thomas, *The Christian Faith and the Old Testament*, p. 45.

It is apparent that in the older of the two stories the Children of Israel took advantage of a low ebb tide and successfully crossed the Red Sea, just in time to escape the returning tide. The Egyptians, on the other hand, were caught by the incoming tide and many of them lost their lives. "Thus Jehovah saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians."

For the priestly writer this story was entirely too simple and too plain; he must therefore write another, making sure that it is the priest, Moses, who performs the miracle at the behest of Jehovah, and that *all* the Egyptians, their horses, and their attendants perish in the sea. A redactor, in later years, re-editing many of the stories and putting them together with other material to form the Book of Exodus, took the JE story and the P story and wove them together to form what we now read in our Bibles. He had a priestly motive in gathering his material, and so when we read the story of the Children of Israel crossing the Red Sea, unless we separate the documents, the priestly conception is the one we most readily grasp. The story is naïve and unhistorical in its priestly garb, but there it stands, and as such is taught in most of our Sunday schools and from not a few pulpits.

The Old Testament as it stands today is dominated by the priestly notions of the time of Israel's decay. It demands the keenest and most painstaking

investigation to unearth the ideas of God and man, growing and developing, unfolding like the petals of a rare and beautiful flower, throughout the whole of the history of Israel, from the priestly covering spread like a pall over all. It is precisely this priestly domination which forms the framework, which thrusts its general scheme of history and its chronology of the Hebrew religion upon general acceptance and belief. The popular notion of the Old Testament is the priestly one. Amos and Isaiah, Hosea and Micah, and a host more of the great prophets, would fire their vindictive epithets¹ at the priestly notion today even as they did in the days of their active work.² It is not too much to say that the priests have concealed, from the eyes of those who would see, the true understanding of the greatness of the Jews, and the correct interpretation of their history.

One must search Judges and Samuel and the books of the Pentateuch with diligent and painstaking care to find the beginnings and the early stages of the belief in God and the effort to do his will. The prophets, as well as the "historical writers," have buried the development of the Hebrew religion in involved and difficult speeches. Only rarely does the prophet speak clearly, although when he finds opportunity to be heard he sounds his note of faith in no uncertain terms:

"For I desire goodness and not sacrifice: and the knowledge of God,

¹ See Jer. 7:22, 31 and 8:8.

² "They have sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes," perhaps the most potent and surely the severest indictment of the priesthood. Amos never compromised. He knew what wrong was and was not afraid to assail it, even though it meant to attack privilege and source of income.

ont burnt offerings" (Hos. 6:6 [750-735 B.C.]).

"But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24 [750-735 B.C.]).

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8 [725-690 B.C.]).

"But Jehovah of hosts is exalted through justice, and God, the Holy One, is sanctified [holy] through righteousness" (Isa. 5:16 [740-700 B.C.]).

"Thus saith Jehovah: Keep justice, and do righteousness" (Isa. 56:1 [Second Isaiah, ca. 500-460 B.C.]).

"Thou hast had regard for the gourd, for which thou hast not laboured neither madest to grow, which came up in the night, and perished in a night, and should not I have regard for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:10-11 [460-350 B.C.]).

But in the time of Israel's decay, when the priest had gained the ascendancy, the records were recast and re-edited by men of small capacity, filled with ritualistic zeal, and thus the whole was sicklied over with the veneer of priestly form and thought.

The Old Testament will ever remain the riddle of the universe until it is recognized as a growth in religion, a development through many and various stages of an aspiration toward God, and as a book wherewith one can live once one has rid one's self of the priestly domination and has come out into the clearer light of the prophets of the true

and living God. The average Bible student has never heard of the J document, the E document, or the P document, much less the blended JE sources and the D texts. They are all so much Greek to him. But the earnest seeker for religious truth must be brought to the point where he may discern for himself that which is false from that which is true; that which is moral from that which is immoral; that which is genuine from that which is redaction. Such discernment is taught in our schools of religion, in a few Sunday schools, in a few pulpits, and in numerous lecture courses, but what is most needed is that the results of scholarship and the attainments of researchers during the past fifty years shall be made the common property of every man, woman, and child who seeks to know God's truth. If we believe Sabatier spoke the truth when he said, "Man is incurably religious," why do we not conduct our teaching concerning the Old Testament as though we actually believed it?

III

Religious education, in the main, still pursues its way oblivious of the standards demanded by an enlightened twentieth century. The Old Testament is still taught a square inch here, a square inch there, with no general notion of historical continuity or development in religious ideas. One square inch, apparently, is as important as another, the object being to prove a statement of fact or truth by finding a portion of the Old Testament which will affirm or corroborate it. In teaching that God does not desire child sacrifice

the story of Abraham and Isaac is brought forward.¹ The instruction goes very well until someone asks if the story does not demonstrate the theory, then new, of substitutionary sacrifice; the animal caught in the bush being offered in the stead of Isaac. The development of a newer and somewhat high conception of sacrifice out of the primitive and barbarous child sacrifice holding sway for so many centuries finds no place in this lesson. There is not the slightest attempt to interpret folklore as folklore, nor to separate widely divergent texts wonderfully woven together by the redactor. It is simply: "given a doctrine, how can the Old Testament be made to prove it"—a method not uncommon in this day.

Everyone knows, or at least should know, that there is a decidedly different attitude upon the part of God toward mankind set forth in the later writings of the Old Testament from that to be found in the writings of the earlier period of Hebrew religion. The change is not so much one on the part of God as it is one on the part of the men who sought to interpret him to their fellows. The Hebrews during the cruder and more primitive stages of their national-God period had a definite idea of how Jehovah dealt with men. Jehovah was not interested in any particular individual man. Jehovah was, however, tremendously interested in His people—"You only have I known of all the families of the earth,"² interested in them as a people, as a group, almost as a herd. The individual was of no value. It was

the nation, the people, which counted. Whenever there were any rewards to be distributed, it was the whole people who benefited; whenever there were any punishments to be meted out it was the whole people who suffered. Group rewards and group punishments were part of Semitic custom. No one questioned the custom; it simply existed and was accepted and lived up to by those who sought to place themselves in right relations with Jehovah. Further, group rewards and group punishments were heritable. The son could receive from the father either a curse or a blessing, and the curse or blessing was a tribal and national, never an individual, affair. The iniquity of the fathers could be experienced even to the third and the fourth generations. The fathers lived, gathered together much goods, died and forgot all about how God dealt with their people, but the people never forgot. They bore the iniquities of the fathers.

As early as 650 B.C. there was a protest against this thoroughgoing national idea of rewards and punishments. The writer of Deuteronomy assailed in no uncertain terms this ages-old and universally observed Semitic custom. "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin,"³ was the way he thought and felt about it. He was the pioneer in championing the rights of the individual. He was the forerunner of many who could not wholly agree to the conception of God as a God who punishes or rewards

¹ An illustration taken from the instruction in a class the writer attended.

² Amos 3:2.

³ Deut. 24:16.

the group for the sins or the good deeds of a part of the group. But the writer of Deuteronomy put forward his idea of individual responsibility too soon to be readily accepted. In the end, his abrogation of group rewards and group punishments was but a feeble protest, for the tide soon returned to the deep and the people suffered on.

It remained for Jeremiah and Ezekiel to sound the note of defiance and to proclaim individual responsibility in its fuller and more complete aspects. It was the cry of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as it was of Deuteronomy, that the sins of the fathers need not necessarily be borne by the children. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son."¹ The individual that sinned, he was to die.

GROUP RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Exod. 34:7 (J, 850 B.C.) "I, Jehovah, . . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation."

Exod. 20:5 (E, 750 B.C.) "for I, Jehovah, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me."

Lam. 5:7 (586 B.C.) "Our fathers sinned and are not

Deut. 24:16 (621 B.C.) "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children; neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin."

Ezek. 18:20 (570 B.C.) "The soul that sinneth, it shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son."

Ezek. 18:2 "What mean ye that ye use this proverb in the

And we have borne their iniquities."

Ezek. 9:5 (592-570 B.C.) "Go ye through the city and smite: Let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity; slay utterly the old man, the young man and the virgin, and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary."

land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, saith Jehovah, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine, as the soul of the father so also the soul of the son is mine. The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Jer. 31:30 (626-586 B.C.) "In those days they shall no more say: The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity, every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge."

In gathering together into contrasted columns the materials from the sources, showing the change from the idea of Jehovah as a God who rewards or punishes the *group* to the idea of Jehovah as a God who rewards or punishes the *individual*, it is apparent that individual responsibility did not come in without a protest. Witness the fact that Ezekiel could play the part of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde with ease. He could speak in uncompromising terms against group punishment, then turn about and cause Jehovah to order the wholesale slaying of innocent men, women, and children because they did not bear the "mark."²

¹ Ezek. 18:20.

² See Ezek. 9:5, 15, and 18:2 f.

No great reformatory idea ever comes to be commonly accepted when first propounded. It takes time for old customs and old traditions to change; and so we must recognize that when Ezekiel spoke so vehemently for the individual he had not come to the point where the thing he so ardently advocated could dominate his whole life of thought and action.

In punishing the group God had certain specific means at hand. It was a settled habit of the Semites to explain every calamity or natural phenomenon as due to Jehovah's direct displeasure. Obviously no Hebrew had as yet any knowledge of natural law, but tragic events and great catastrophes were occurring not infrequently and some explanation had to be offered. Hedged about with numerous ceremonial taboos it was but natural that they should have thought that some violation of ritual had called down upon them God's vengeance. Amos, speaking for Jehovah, gives a catalogue of God's punishments, all with the ostensible purpose of causing the Israelites to return to Jehovah. "And I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities and want of bread in all your places, yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. And I also have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest, and I caused it to rain upon one city and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon and the piece whereon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water and were not satisfied. . . . I have smitten you with blasting

and mildew. . . . I have sent among you the pestilence . . . your young men have I slain with the sword, . . . yet have ye not returned to me, saith Jehovah." Isaiah and Jeremiah, too, are acquainted with the jealous guarding of his personal rights by Jehovah.¹ But Ezekiel, in one clear-cut passage, sums up the whole conception of Jehovah's punishments, "For thus saith the Lord Jehovah: How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem; the sword, and the famine, and the evil beasts, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast."²

In this day we shall have to ask these writers certain questions as to whether God actually uses his power only for moral ends. Does the punishment of good and bad alike become a God of justice and rightness? Do pestilences and famines, evil beasts, and wars come upon mankind because of God's displeasure, or because man fails to guard his body, his property, or his mind against the inroads of selfishness and disease? Does God give or withhold the rain according to the ritualistic zeal and devotion of his adherents? Does God cause it to rain upon one city and not upon another for moral or even for secular reasons?

There is not an Old Testament writer who in any thorough way answers these questions. It remains for Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mount to put to rest the whole conception of God's vindictiveness. Famine, disease, sudden death, depredations by wild beasts, failure in war, earthquakes, eclipses—these, as manifestations of God's wrath

¹ Amos 4:6 f.; Jer. 15:2; 42:22; Isa. 5:6.

² Ezek. 15:21; 23:27-29.

upon mankind, were all set aside by Jesus' words, "For He [God] maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."¹

Religious education, so far as I have been able to observe, totally ignores this change in viewpoint in the Old Testament. Religious education knows the facts but never applies them. I have looked through a dozen Sunday-school texts upon the Old Testament and I have yet to find one which makes any attempt to point out this radical change in God's method of dealing with mankind. The lesson helps are little better. All seem to have never known that at one time it was the group, the people, who were rewarded or punished by God, and that at a later and subsequent time God judged the individual as a separate entity and rewarded or punished him according to his deserts. They seem not to know that the teachings of Jesus cancel many of the Old Testament teachings, that many of them become immoral when judged in the higher and purer light of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

The story of the flood may serve for illustration. In Gen. 6:5-8 (J) God repents that he ever made man: he has become so wicked. The only way he can correct what he has done is to destroy man and start all over again. "The end of all flesh is come before me;

and behold I will destroy them from off the earth" (P), and God, according to the story, proceeds to carry out his intention. save that he spared Noah and his family out of all the people, and representatives from all life other than man,² causing it to rain forty days and forty nights. The flood rose, "and every living thing was destroyed that was upon the face of the ground, both man and cattle and creeping things and birds of the heavens," "and Noah only was left and they that were with him in the ark."³

Man as an individual finds no place in this story. Women and children are not even considered. It never entered the mind of the writer that there might be innocent children and women, let alone a few men, among the people God had created, who might not readily fall into the classification "wicked." That was not a matter with which he was concerned. Some of the group had sinned, some had gone astray ritually, and so the whole group must be punished.

In teaching the story of the flood why not be frank? Why not recognize moral values as moral values, immoral attributes as immoral? It was gracious of God to save Noah and all his family, to save some of the animals and birds, but how about the rest? How about the innocent men and all the women and children who were drowned by the rising

¹ Matt. 5:45.

² In Gen. 7:2 f. (J) it would appear that seven of every living animal and bird were to be gathered into the ark, but Gen. 7:15 (P) says that there went into the ark two and two of all flesh. It is evident that the priestly writer made use of certain sections of the J document in the formation of his account of the flood and omitted others. The sections which he used he did not completely harmonize with his other material.

³ Gen. 7:23 (J).

waters? Perhaps it was only the attempt of a struggling people to interpret a great catastrophe in terms of their highest conception of the deity they worshiped. The details we do not know, but we do know that the history of rocks and animals and man does not confirm the story of the great flood as set forth in Genesis. We also know that whatever happened the writers of the flood story interpreted a great natural phenomenon as being a judgment of God upon the group for the wickedness of a few individuals in the group. In the light of the teachings of Jesus Christ we cannot teach that God punishes in this manner or by this means. This does not mean that we shall have to discard the flood story. Far from it. The story has great value when placed in right relations with the individual responsibility of man for his own destiny, when Genesis is weighed in the balance with Ezekiel and with Matthew. Why not teach the story of the flood with all the evidence concerning the matter at hand? Why not abandon the old ready-made interpretation of the story as found in a dozen Old Testament Sunday-school texts and teach it as it really is? Perhaps if we did there would be more people in attendance upon Bible classes.

IV

There is no book about which so much has been written, so much spoken, so much taught, as the Old Testament. Yet the average student, even the average college student, who is supposed to be at least half educated and open-

minded, is nonplussed when asked the simplest question concerning that venerable book. He has heard more of Shakespeare or Darwin or Tagore than he has of Moses or Isaiah or Amos. He is much like the young man who had just returned home from his Freshman year at college. His aged father asked him what new things had he seen or heard at college. Whereupon the young man said, "Oh, father, I saw the most interesting book in the library the other day. It's called the 'Holy Beeble' and a fellow named Moses wrote it. It's a ripping good book, father; you ought to read it some day."

Our young men and our young women must be given information, not misinformation.¹ Reasonable grounds for morality must be offered, not the authority of a pope nor even the authority of a book. Modern thought has taught us that religion bases itself upon the facts of life as demonstrated by experience and reason; that religion is something other than religion when it appeals to anything other than our moral sense of justice and rightness. Validity does not depend upon authority but rather finds its recognition in the mind of man because it is true. Authenticity depends entirely upon the spiritual quality of the truth, not upon the mere fact that a command is found in the Bible. The sense of uniformity may be injured by this view, but it is more to be desired that we be right than that we be "orthodox." The simplest truth is more edifying and is more valuable than the most edifying error.

¹"Wenn ein Schüler nach der Geschichtlichkeit der Patriarchenzeit fragt, so haben wir vom wissenschaftlichen Standpunkt aus kein Recht, sie zu verneinen" (Frederick Flöring, *Das Alte Testament in Evangelischen Religionsunterricht* [Geiszen, 1895], p. 49).

A difficulty, however, presents itself at this point. There is in the mind of the individual who reads and studies the Old Testament a very present and real difficulty of "atmosphere." An atmosphere is an ever-present enveloping element, intangible but consciously felt and known. Just so is it in reading and studying the Old Testament. One has to forget, for the purpose of study, all the modern views of religion, of science, of art and philosophy, in which one has been studiously drilled for years. One has to forget that the earth is round and come to consciously feel that it is flat; if one sailed far enough in any direction one would soon drop off the edge, and that would be a catastrophe of no mean pretensions. One would have to think of the heavens as an inverted bowl set in a saucer, having windows through which rain could be poured as one would pour from a pitcher, having stars set at intervals in the blue of the convex side of the bowl, and being all together the support of a mighty body of water—the great deep. One would have to forget evolution and development, and all the discoveries of Galileo, Ferrer, Newton, Galton, and Edison. One would have to know that the Old Testament never rose to a true conception of immortality, for Daniel has only the first faint glimmer of a life after death.¹ One would have to forget our more or less pragmatic view of life and its problems and catch the subtle "atmosphere" of the orientalism of the Old Testament. For the time being, one would have to forget that Jesus ever lived; forget all his

teachings; forget all the noble words and deeds of his followers. To come into the "atmosphere" of the Old Testament one will have to dig down through a heavy deposit of crude tribal customs and low ethical standards, through priestly formalism and graft, through developments and cancellations of development, to find the true message of the books. A thoroughgoing knowledge of Aramaic and Arabian customs, of the geography, natural resources, and political ambitions of ancient Palestine, Egypt, and that hinterland of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley; a keen insight into and appreciation of the literature of a non-historic, unethical age, is prerequisite to the discovery of all that the Old Testament is capable of revealing. Yet the messages of the great prophets stand out, in their salient features, clear and unmistakable. It is as if Isaiah and Amos, Hosea and Micah, and even Jonah were speaking to you and me today. Their messages touch a universal human chord and, while oftentimes severe and uncompromising, point the way upward and onward. If it were not for the prophets the Old Testament would be dreary indeed.

To become a Jew, living in Old Testament terms and times, thinking the thoughts of a race struggling upward toward God, is not an easy task, yet that is precisely what is required of us if we would know and understand the Old Testament.

Today the student of the Old Testament wants guidance, not domination. He wants to get his idea of how God works in the lives of men everywhere in

¹ Even Daniel has to bring those who have died back to this life to be judged. See Dan. 12:2.

his own way with all the help which the whole history of biblical research, science, and philosophy can render. He is neither satisfied nor content with any half-way measure. He must have all the truth. He thinks, in this day, in terms of justice, right, and the international mind. He interprets his religion in terms of everyday life and is willing to try the truths of the great prophets and the teachings of Jesus in his dealings with men.¹ But he demands that he be taught in regard to the Old Testament, not a "system" but the origin, the anthropology, the philosophy, and the theology of the Old Testament, its application to the individual and to society, its relation to ethics and to religious and secular education, its cultivation and nurture, its organization and its use in daily and Sunday worship, that it become not a stumbling-block to the feet.

The problem of Old Testament instruction has thus been put squarely before religious education. The grain has been gathered into the elevators, a thorough milling process has been going

on for a considerable time, now it is meet that the finished product shall be distributed. Distribute, we must, but it is exactly this part of the whole process which is the most difficult.

"Every day convinces me more and more of the need of a different mode of teaching than that usually adopted for imperfectly taught people. . . . Who puts simply before peasant and stone-cutter the Jew and his religion, and what he and it were intended to be, and the real error and sin and failure? the true nature of prophecy, the progressive teaching of the Bible, never in any age compromising the truth, but never ignoring the state, so often the unreceptive state, of those to whom the truth must therefore be presented partially, and in a manner adapted to rude and unspiritual natures? What an amount of preparatory teaching is needed. What a labour must be spent in struggling to bring forth things new and old, and present things simply before indolent, unthinking, vacant minds! . . . It is such downright hard work to teach well."²

¹ Witness the movements toward industrial religion as seen in the widespread movement for truth-telling in advertising, for service in business affairs, and, to a limited extent, for co-operation in the place of competition.

² *Life of J. C. Patterson* (1869), II, 374.