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## INTRODUCTION

WITH regard to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, Paul wrote, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope." He thus clearly revealed the true mission of these sacred writings in our day, as he declared that they "were written for our learning, that ... we might have hope." Their mission is that of teaching, in order to the inspiration of hope.

This view of the value of the Old Testament Scriptures reveals a most important conception of their nature. The apostle did not suggest that the writers of olden times wrote with the men of later ages in their thought. They wrote for their own age, and for the men by whom they were surrounded. Nevertheless the apostle declared that these things were written for us. It is evident, therefore, that he believed that behind the authors there was an Author; that encompassing the minds of the men who wrote in different places, and at different times, was one master Mind; and that this Author had in view not only the age in which these things were written, but all successive ages.

The peculiar value of these ancient writings for the present time is that they inspire hope in those who read. Hope is an attitude of mind in the midst of conflict, danger, and difficulty. In the age of God's ultimate victory, hope will be changed into sight and possession. What a man sees, he no longer hopes for. The sacred writings of the Hebrew people contain the stories of men in the midst of conflict and peril, reveal the confidences that filled them with hope, tell of the victories they won, of the defeats they suffered; and the supreme value of these Scriptures is that they create hope for those who are still upon the pilgrimage, who are still in the thick of the battle, who are still carrying on the work of building. The words and works of God in ancient times, the victories were won, and the defeats they suffered, all serve to fill the heart with hope, as they reveal the way of victory, and utter the word of warning.

The apostle with equal clearness revealed the method by which the Scriptures of the old economy fulfilled this mission. This is indicated by the words patience and comfort, which with equal accuracy might be rendered endurance and encouragement.

The meaning of endurance is perhaps best illustrated for us by the eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews. To read that chapter is to pass in review the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. The great outstanding names are mentioned, and others are referred to, whose names are not given. Throughout the whole chapter, faith is revealed as the principle of victory. All these men are seen passing through circumstances of difficulty and of danger, with their eyes set upon an ultimate purpose, which they supremely desired to be accomplished. None of them reached the ultimate goal, but they died contented, having seen it from afar, and having endured, in their movement towards it, "as seeing Him Who is invisible."

The final declaration of the chapter shows that the men of faith to-day are in the same process. Referring to those named, the writer said, "These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." Thus the things written aforetime produce in the minds of those who are continuing the conflict the quality of endurance.

The word encouragement is perhaps even more full of suggestiveness. It is closely allied to the word in the New Testament which is used of the Holy Spirit, the word Paraclete. All the spacious value of the word Paraclete, as used of the Holy Spirit, is contained in the word encouragement when used in reference to the Scriptures of truth. It suggests appeal and advocacy. The things written aforetime make their perpetual appeal to men as they advocate the true principle of life in the midst of conflict.

To summarize, the Scriptures of the Old Testament were written by many men in varied circumstances. These men were thinking in all probability, for the most part, of their own age. They wrote songs of their own sorrows and aspirations. They wrote the history of their own times, declaring the faults and sins of the people, as well as their victories. These things they wrote for their own age. That, however, is not all the story. Encompassing them, teaching, guiding, instructing, was the One Who knew all the ages, and saw the long process clearly to the consummation ; and therefore they contain living messages to us. In these writings of the old economy the final message is not to be found, "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." The final message is the word of the Son, and in it all those of the past merge into perfect harmony; yet these things written aforetime help us to understand more perfectly the all-inclusive message of the Son.

From this general study we may now make certain deductions which will have a direct bearing upon this series of studies in the messages of the Old Testament.

As to origin we believe the Old Testament Scriptures to be human in workmanship, but Divine in compulsion. The holy men of old wrote with perfect naturalness things of their own age, but they wrote better and more comprehensively than they knew. Any careful study of the New Testament will show how these writers perpetually quoted from the Old in such a manner as to show that its statements were more full of meaning than the men who wrote them knew. The quotation immediately preceding the passage which we have been considering is a remarkable illustration of this fact. "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me" was a human statement describing a then present experience. Yet the writer was guided, perhaps all unconsciously, by the great master Mind, in order that ultimately the final and supreme suffering should be more perfectly understood. Wherever there is Divine compulsion behind human workmanship, that workmanship becomes more than human; it is Divine.

As to history, we believe the Old Testament to be accurate in statement and faithful in presentation. Again, to take one illustration, we believe that the Hebrew race, which, having lost its nationality, has never been overwhelmed by, or absorbed into, other races, sprang from that one man who was the friend of God, and who at His call went forth from his own land a pilgrim of faith. We moreover believe that the present "scattered and peeled" condition of that race is the direct outcome of the sins and failures chronicled accurately and faithfully in the Old Testament.

As to religion, we believe the Old Testament to be a foreshadowing of, and process towards, the ultimate revelation which is contained in the New Testament. Christ Himself is the Goal towards which all the religious thinking of the Old Testament Scriptures moves. Finality in religion is not found in the things written aforetime. The symbolism of the ancient worship is a foreshadowing of that which is to come after. The messages of the prophets and psalmists are whispers which merge into perfect music only when the Son Who is in the bosom of the Father declares the God Who has never been seen. All the highways through the centuries lead on towards the city, but the city itself, the city of God, can only be built by the King Himself. From the darkness, through the twilight, men moved towards the perfect light. Through all the ages God followed His perpetual method, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. Through all the centuries He said in effect to men what Christ actually said to His disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Thus, quietly and surely, if slowly, God moved on to the final Word, Who was made flesh. We do not go back to the Old Testament to find the religion of to-day. We do go to it to discover the highways which led to finality in religion.

As to value, we therefore believe the Old Testament Scriptures to be a revelation of God and man preparatory to the final revelation of the New. To read the Old Testament writings from Genesis to Malachi, and to have no acquaintance with the New, is still to be imperfectly acquainted with God and man.

At the heart of the Old Testament may be found the insignificant "What is man?" At the heart of the New is the great exclamation, "Behold the Man." Yet the Old is of value as it reveals clearly the true principle of human life, the real reason of human sorrow, all the highways that lead towards human redemption.

So also the revelation of God in the Old Testament is valuable, but incomplete. He is introduced by the simple statement of His infinite Majesty as Creator. In the presence of that first statement man stands a submissive worshipper, but yet without any intimate knowledge of God.

The Word must become flesh, must be seen, be looked upon, be handled, be touched, ere man will know God.

The chief value of the revelation of man and of God in the Old Testament is that it makes perfectly clear man's need for God, and God's method with man. Yet it leaves us crying with Job for a "Daysman" able to put His hand upon man in his helplessness, and upon God in His holiness, and make them both one.

Recognizing these values and limitations of the Old Testament Scriptures, we proceed to our study, upon the assumption that every book has some direct and living message having application not to its own age merely, but to every succeeding one. The principles abide; their applications vary with the varying ages. We desire, then, in our new series to discover in each book the central truth, and to make application of it to the age in which we live. The method to be followed, therefore, will be that of stating the permanent values, and from these deducing the living message.