


JEWISH ETHICAL  
IDEALISM

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# JEWISH ETHICAL IDEALISM

By

FRANK H. RIDGLEY

*Professor of Hebrew, O. T. Literature and  
Exegesis, in the Presbyterian Theological  
Seminary, Omaha, Nebraska.*



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## PREFACE

**T**HE following study is the result of researches pursued in connection with the preparation of a thesis upon the same subject presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Ph. D. The full thesis is now in the possession of the University of Pennsylvania, and may be consulted in manuscript form through its Library. In this thesis will be found much of the merely introductory material underlying the present study, and there will also be found indicated, more fully than seems justified in this less technical and more compact presentation of the theme, the dependence of the author upon the wide range of literature touching upon the fields investigated. I have thought it sufficient to indicate in a list the more important and the more easily available literature upon the historical, literary, exegetical and critical problems involved. Apart from these elements of form, however, I present here my original thesis in its full force and essential content.

My interest in the problems of Old Testament literary and religious history has steadily increased under the demands laid upon the teacher of the Old Testament, in attempting to make the

message of the ancient Hebrew literature a vital factor in a present-day interpretation of Christianity. Past is the day when the Theological Seminary can look upon its chair of Old Testament exegesis as but one of the storage houses from which may be drawn well selected texts expounded to meet the demands of its system of theology. Old Testament exegesis must justify itself by bringing the message of Hebrew history and prophecy, of Jewish sacrifice and ritual, into vital relations with the great ethical and spiritual, as well as religious message of the Prophet of Galilee, the Christ of Calvary.

I cannot refrain from acknowledging my debt of gratitude to my friend and first guide into the deeper messages of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Rev. Professor James A. Kelso, Ph. D., D. D., now President of the Western Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, at Pittsburgh, but to me ever and supremely a matchless teacher and a true scholar. The inspiration thus implanted was widened and deepened by two other great teachers and recognized scholars, Principal George Adam Smith, of Aberdeen, but late of Glasgow, and Professor Rudolph Kittel, of Leipzig. The genial personality of the one and the kindly interest of the other stamp their lectures and every word of their gifted and trained pens with untold force upon my mind, and I do not venture to define the limits of their influence upon my own view of many phases of Hebrew prophecy and history. And finally, it is with some hesitation



but yet with keen appreciation of their helpful sympathy and kindly encouragement, that I mention Professor Morris Jastrow, Jr., Ph. D., and assistant Professor James A. Montgomery, Ph. D., under whose direction I pursued my special studies in Old Testament religion and literature at the University of Pennsylvania. Their peculiar authority in their special fields, and their common interest in the great religious movement herein surveyed in its development and its culmination in the message and mission of Jesus, have been a constant inspiration to me, and again I must thank them for unmeasured contributions to my understanding of the history of the Hebrew people and their religion, at the same time assuming entire responsibility for the form and issue of the thesis herein maintained. Nor am I forgetting the kindly incentive of the genial enthusiasm of Professor Albert T. Clay, of Yale, but formerly of the University of Pennsylvania.

I stand therefore between these trained and inspiring masters and my own students, urged on by both influences to seek the deep currents of divine revelation running through the history of the ancient Hebrew and the post-exilic Jew, God's preparation for the message and mission of the Prophet of Nazareth—a revelation which was not that Christ indeed, but which was none the less the fore-runner of the Christ. How the Law related itself to the message of the Prophet in this preparatory period is the problem before us. That the former interpreted and preserved the latter

is the burden of our conclusion. That the whole study may prove to any who follow it an incentive to reread the Old Testament in terms of a movement divinely inspired to prepare the way for the supreme expression of God in human life and thought through Jesus Christ and his Gospel, is the aim and sufficient reward of the labors thereinto wrought.

FRANK H. RIDGLEY

*Omaha, Neb..*

*June 1, 1918.*

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DEDICATION

TO MY FATHER AND MOTHER

Cherished memories of a long sainted  
Father's love for the Old Book,  
And the abiding inspiration of a  
Mother's faith in its message,  
Are firm foundations  
Undisturbed by life's trial  
Or critic's proof.

## INTRODUCTION

A study of the religious history of Israel shows that the relation between the ritual legalism of the Priests and the ethical idealism of the Prophets is not that of an absolute contrast, but rather that of an inevitable and almost imperative development. Ethical idealism never freed itself wholly from practical legalism, nor does legalism necessarily exclude ethical piety, for legalism may easily subordinate the ritual to the ethical. It is this ethical idealism of the Jewish reconstruction which revealed it to be the expression of Hebrew Prophecy. The prophets but vaguely touched upon the relation of true religion to its outward manifestation in the Cult. What they had left undone, the law attempted to do. It became the mediator between the high ideals of the prophets and the practical problems of the priests. It reveals God to man, and enables man to attain unto God.

In developing a discussion of the relation of the completed ritual system of the post-exilic community to the spiritual concepts of the prophets we can begin at no better point than that of the state of religion among the Hebrews at the period of the finding of the Book of the Law in the Temple at Jerusalem, during the reign of Josiah. Three currents of influence unite in various pro-

portions to form the stream of religious life which marked this period. As a background to any deeper and richer elements were to be found the common rites and traditions belonging to the great Semitic stock from which the Hebrews had come. As a distinctive possession, however, the Hebrews inherited the traditions and religious customs and ideals connected with the worship of Yahweh, the God of Moses. But permeating this whole fabric were the influences, both ideals and institutions, borrowed from their Canaanite neighbors. We find, then, the basal concepts of sacrifice, with its altars and its priests, with its feasts and its ceremonials, all shot through by the lofty concept of a covenant God, bound to his people by ethical bonds. But human nature has its universal elements, and Semitic culture has its racial tendencies, and Yahweh worship was set in conflict with human weakness clothed in ancient Semitic traditions and new Canaanite environments. Many altars threatened the unity of God, ashera and pillars materialized the concept of deity, and joyous festivals of seed-time and harvest, of springing life and ripening fruits, all threw wide open doors of sensuality and corruption. Thus even Yahweh worship could not maintain its integrity when expressed in countless sanctuaries and under the shadow of the sacred post and the stone pillar, with even the great sanctuary at Jerusalem not free from ministers of impurity and emblems of pagan origin. It is not strange, but natural, that Israel fell a victim to the lower elements of Canaanite religious custom.

# JEWISH ETHICAL IDEALISM





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## CHAPTER I

### HEBREW PROPHECY

**T**HE ethical weakness found in the heathen rites of the Canaanites and in the lower elements of the popular religion of Israel, gave rise to the greatest movement in all human history. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of Hebrew Prophecy.

While we recognize the spirit of prophecy as manifest from the beginning of Hebrew history in the personality of men of God, seers, whose character and calling gave them special insight into the divine purposes and activities, there is a real sense in which Hebrew prophecy belongs to the closing century of the joint kingdoms. This movement is recognized to have had its rise in the days of Samuel. Around this ancient seer we see gathered companies of religious enthusiasts, 'prophets' uttering divine oracles. These 'prophets' we have reasons for regarding as adapted from Canaanite usage. While the true Hebrew prophet is not a mere member of a class of oracular seers or enthusiastic proclaimers of divine purposes, but a specially gifted individual who has vitally touched the movement of Hebrew religious thought, yet there is in later prophecy a blending of elements drawn from two sources, the

relatively native seer and the Canaanite prophet. In the prophetic companies of which we find a Samuel, an Elijah or an Elisha, a leader but not a member, the old religious inspiration of the seer is laying hold upon these bands of enthusiasts and adapting them to the interests of the Yahweh worship. This seizing of the prophetic guilds, bands of enthusiasts in moments of national and political crisis, by the spirit of the man of God, the seer of old, is not without significance. It suggests that in later prophecy a new element is added, or a latent element is emphasized. The prophet becomes not merely a diviner, opening up the purposes of God, but an interpreter of God's purposes in the national history. He becomes the expression of the national spirit, filled with deep religious enthusiasm for the welfare of the nation.

#### *The Full Tide of Hebrew Prophecy*

The full tide of Hebrew prophecy is to be found in the work of the writing prophets whose literary remains have come down to us. Although these men wrote during a period of more than three hundred years, the stream of their literary art and religious inspiration rises to the flood at once, and in three great names, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, we have the highest types of Hebrew religious art and influence. A Jeremiah has a further message, an Ezekiel has a mission, and the post-exilic prophets meet the needs of

their day, but all these merely build upon the foundation which had been laid in the last half of the eighth century. It was a wonderful impulse, and the eighth century prophets have made an impress upon religious thought such as no other force until the teachings of the Galilean Prophet began to transform the modern world.

Suddenly Amos, a herdsman of Tekoa, appears in the streets of Bethel. In that lonely shepherd in the streets of the national sanctuary we see the greatest figure in the Northern Kingdom. Jeroboam, with all his splendor, only serves to date the coming of this humble man from the Judean hills. The key to the importance of the message of Amos lies in a "therefore," with its unheard-of sequence of cause and effect. In the words, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities," Amos announces a message of judgment, not upon the enemies of the people of Yahweh, but upon the people whom Yahweh himself had chosen. Herein lies the great step taken by the Hebrew prophet. Its significance is found in the popular and widely accepted religious ideas current in Israel, not only among the cruder, superstitious people, but even among the princes and leaders. The establishment of the nation under the direction of Samuel, the traditions concerning David and Solomon, popular interpretation of the work of Elijah against the foreign cult of Baal, all these things blended into a confident religious faith in Yahweh as the covenant

God of Israel, bound to his people by natural bonds, no more to be broken than those binding Kemosh with Moab. Already in Amos' day Assyria was looming high over the eastern horizon. Could Israel escape the impending disaster? What will Israel's God do for his people? The popular faith, doubtless urged on by the popular prophetic guilds true to their religious patriotism, declared that he would, yea, that he must save his people, lest he perish with them. But Amos has his eyes upon the sins of the pampered devotees at the sanctuaries of Yahweh. His concept of God allows of no fellowship with his people. For him, Yahweh is God of right as well as and more truly than God of Israel. It is not without significance that he never calls Yahweh God of Israel. Yahweh acts toward Israel under a higher law than that of natural bonds with his people. Amos had seen Yahweh in the neighboring peoples, and in the approaching power of Assyria. His sway broadens beyond the range of the land of Israel, his power reaches beyond the hosts of Israel. The Lord Yahweh has become to him the God of nations, the Lord of unlimited forces, the God of Hosts. It was a strange message, that Yahweh would smite his own people. But when Amos learned that Yahweh was Lord of Assyria as well as Israel, he could read Israel's fate in a new light. In Israel's defeat he could see the victory of the righteousness of the God of Hosts. Thus Amos loosens the bonds which bound Yahweh to Israel by mere

formal kinship, and renewed them in surer fetters of moral affinity and formed a tie which held even over the fall of Samaria, and ultimately over the period of the exile. The only God of Israel, whom Elijah had proclaimed, has become the powerful God of Hosts, the Lord of principalities and powers. The God who could send Hazael as the scourge of Israel for her sin in the matter of Baal is sending Assyria to destroy her for her sin at Bethel. The latent monotheism and the searching ethical conscience are becoming clearer.

Even to Hosea, the blow must fall. The love of God is intense, his pleadings with Israel are tender, yea, he has drawn her back again and again. But the sterner side of love must show itself. Thus Hosea sums up his message with the same anomaly as Amos, that the God of Israel is against his people—because of their sins. For even love may fail in the face of rebellion, and then must come destruction. Even Yahweh must face the fact: "My people are bent on backsliding from me." But let us note that the ethical message of Hosea goes one step further than that of Amos. Amos had made clear the truth that Yahweh must punish his own people, when they continue in immorality. But Hosea shows that God himself suffers in striving to rescue his people from their sins and their consequences. Surely the tender strings of this man's heart had not been so rudely touched in vain! He learned and taught that the sinned against bears a burden as

heavy as the sinner—that Divine Love yearns and labors over the wayward child, the faithless one.

If Judah's sin is the fruit of a false idea of God, Isaiah found a gospel message as the fruit of the impression of Yahweh which he received in that vision of his youth. All that was symbolized in temple worship, all that is revealed in human history, bursts upon the prophet in the person of Yahweh of Hosts. Isaiah was a disciple of the new prophetic movement. To him, as to the earlier prophets, the God of Israel was Yahweh of Hosts, and to him the majesty of his sway was most clear. By a strange discipline he had come to realize this majesty of God, not from the victorious guidance of the armies of Israel, but through the solemn lesson of the fast approaching and inevitable fall of his nation, and the prophet's faith came out most fully at the hour of diasaster. The God of popular faith must vindicate his integrity by maintaining the cause of his people, but Yahweh was revealing himself in the moral reaction of his nature against their sin—a reaction which was to manifest itself in their fall. We cannot doubt that in addition to the moral necessity which had impelled the prophet, a consciousness of the issue of the advancing power of Assyria helped to direct the prophet's thought. Yahweh's glory filled all the earth, and for him Assyria was under the sway of Yahweh of Hosts. It may be too much to say that Isaiah was a monotheist in our sense of the term, but after all the

matter is so largely one of terms, and the God of his temple vision, and the God of his life-long message is beyond all compare in majesty, beyond all limits in power, and even Assyria is but an instrument in his hand to be used and laid aside at his will. It was this assurance, so different from the old and the popular faith in the God of battles, which sustained Isaiah and which he urged upon Ahaz and Hezekiah. "The only, yet at the same time an overwhelming, counterweight to Assyria was not political nor human; it was the power and purpose of Yahweh. . . . Not man, but God, determines history—that is the keynote to Isaiah's political action and advice; not by clever alliances, but by watching for and quietly carrying out the will of Yahweh is the true welfare of the state to be secured." (Gray, *Is.*, Vol. I., lxxxi.) And thus he takes an advance stand on the firm ground of practical monotheism. Yahweh is in very truth the God of all nations, and beyond all gods. As Smend says, "He even called Yahweh Spirit (31:3), that is, the One absolute Agent, besides whom there is only impotent flesh." (Smend, *Alttestamentliche Religions-Geschichte*, 220.) Surely there is nothing left but the formal statement of the absolute and solitary unity of the deity!

We need only mention the last prophet of this period, Micah, the Moreshite, a man unknown to us save by his writings and a message which Jeremiah says he delivered in the days of Heze-

kiah. Prophesying at the close of the eighth century, we find him in the midst of the same scenes which brought forth some of the deepest of Isaiah's messages. But, while Isaiah was a citizen of Jerusalem and a member of the aristocratic classes, Micah was from Moresheth, "a small town in the maritime plain near Gath." The contrast is chiefly revealed in the point of emphasis. The man of the people, familiar with life in the rural districts and among the poorer classes of the people, Micah saw more clearly even than Isaiah the oppression on the part of the rich, the corruption of the religious and moral leaders, and the general immorality of the national life.

Thus, in the face of a great moral crisis and a sure national decline with its approaching foreign control, the prophet utters his message of warning and condemnation, with its call to repentance, and its expressed or implied word of hope. Two notes had sounded in the old prophetic guilds, an awakened patriotic zeal and a renewed religious enthusiasm. Two notes sounded in the new prophecy, a vital moral consciousness and a religious patriotism. In the earlier period, the patriotic national interest had a dominating place, in the later period it was distinctly subordinate to the ethical motive and the religious interest. The prophets laid hold upon the old covenant bond between Yahweh and his people, but they interpreted it in a moral rather than in a merely formal sense. The bond was one of moral



obligation, with mutual responsibilities. They felt that Yahweh had rejected his people, because the moral and religious elements had outweighed the national interests. It was this very habit of interpreting all events in terms of religion which won for them their place in religious history and Israel its power to outlive the exile. On the other hand, it was an undue emphasis upon the national and merely political elements of their message, with a zealous but mistaken and misplaced patriotism, which characterized that group of leaders whom the writing prophets oppose as false prophets. Their whole point of view centered in the concept of Yahweh as the God of Israel, bound to his people by natural bonds. Assuming such a position, the prophet is led to take a false ethical stand at times, presenting the bright side, supporting the nation in its course even when that course may be false and its issue destruction. We must not misjudge these men, but only recognize the limits of their vision. All were not false men, only at times were they especially corrupt. Their fallacy lay chiefly in the difference of emphasis between them and their opponents.

### *The Great Concepts of the Prophets*

Passing from this phase of our discussion, let us gather up some of the great concepts of the early writing prophets. We cannot but note that no small factor in the development of the

content of the prophetic consciousness was to be found in the rising and overwhelming power of Assyria. With the native instinct that Yahweh could not forsake his people, even in the face of a world empire, the prophets were driven to a higher concept of God. Yahweh thus became Lord of nations, and into his hand is given the reins of an ever-widening empire. The God of Israel is shown as able to sway as an instrument of his own wrath a foreign people, even against their own will. Here we have all the essentials of a conception of Yahweh as the sovereign ruler of men and nations.

That the ethical premise is the basis of Hebrew prophecy is evident on every page of its message. Especially is this true of the eighth century prophets. This gave them the basis for their 'novel' interpretation of the signs of the times, and it caused them to emphasize the much neglected but essential moral nature of the covenant relation between Israel and Yahweh, a relation dependent for its interpretation upon the moral nature of God. The social corruption of the people gave them a constant text for a call to penitence, and a firm foundation for their assurance of the fatal issue of the approaching conflict with the outside world-powers. It was this reaching down of the religious consciousness into the daily moral life of the people, their judgments and social relations, which marked the power of the prophet's message. That Israel's call carried with it a duty was a thought upon which the

popular mind had not taken hold. But that was the central thought of the prophetic message, and thus the prophet ever deepened and exalted the ethical being of God. Even the anger of Yahweh loses all the arbitrary zeal for the good name of his people, to say nothing of mere capricious vexation over the slights of men, and becomes always ethically pure. God and his ethical purity are made the central factors in all judgments of men and events.

We hear much of the ethical monotheism of the Hebrew prophets, and, of a truth, it is because of this corner-stone of their faith that the Hebrews have become the greatest religious teachers of the world. Practical monotheism as revealed in Israel means the recognition of two elements in the nature of Yahweh, his sovereign majesty and his matchless and unapproachable holiness. The great message of the scene between Isaiah and Ahaz is that the concept of God which calls upon men to trust implicitly his sovereign and holy sway in the affairs of men and nations is the only true one. All the elements of One God of sovereign might and universal sway lie in the prophet's conception of Yahweh's interference in the affairs of the nations, and Yahweh of Hosts meant in practical religious influence to Amos and his successors all that the Yahweh of Jeremiah meant to him, all that Jehovah means to us. Without defining their position, these men were in all essentials, and virtually influential as, monotheists.

Much has been made of the attitude of the early prophets to the cult, the extreme of critical scholarship asserting that there was an uncompromising antagonism between the prophetic message and the cult. It is doubtless true that the great spiritual prophets represented in our book of Jeremiah, or in Deutero-Isaiah, were striving after the ideal of the New Covenant, wherein God is seen to be a Spirit to be worshipped in no restricted place or manner, but only in spirit and truth. But with the early prophets, the practical development of moral and religious consciousness had not attained that height. Their polemic was directed against the cult so far as it gave expression to grossly materialistic conceptions of deity, and unethical ideas of the divine will and activity. It is not out of harmony with the prophetic message that Isaiah was followed by reforms based upon the newly found Book of the Law, or that the Priestly Code was accepted as the highest expression of Yahweh religion. These things were but the working out of latent elements in and behind the message of the prophets. Much of Israel's religion, inherited from common Semitic stock and augmented by Canaanite elements, was morally corrupt. It is this sensual element which calls forth the prophet's bitter charge against the sacrificial cult of his people. With the rite comes the concept of the deity. Israel cannot keep her faith and life pure and hold fellowship with the neighboring cults. They might wrap up their

sacred sites with garments of patriarchal legends, but still the pagan features show through, and the immoral influences tell. On the other hand, for the prophet there was a sense in which ritual observance must be a practical essential of religion. Observance of rites was a form of obedience to the known will of God, and obedience is no mean moral virtue. This was the position of the post-exilic community, and there was doubtless a similar attitude in popular religion in the days of the prophets, and the prophets themselves were under its influence. They merely sought to recall the people to the real content and purpose of public worship. All of which shows the prophets to have been in a somewhat ambiguous position. They were feeling after the high spirituality which needs no material forms in approach to the deity, but they were preaching to a people who could only think in terms of the traditions of the past. They stood between the Law, the great Schoolmaster of human progress, and the Gospel as interpreted by Paul, the great Liberator of the spirits of men. It was the legal element which won the day in Judah, but not without a constant stream of prophetic influences striving with and against it.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEUTERONOMIC REFORMATION

**I**N our Introduction, we showed the elements which entered into the popular religion at the time of the finding of the Book of the Law. First were those coming into Israel's religion through its common inheritance from its great Semitic stock. Into this mass of higher and lower elements was injected all that is meant by Yahweh worship, with its great principles and purer ordinances. Upon the entrance into Canaan both these elements were modified by coming into contact with the Baal cults of the land, and the sensual rites of their neighbors. While this contact must have tended toward a certain refining and civilizing of the crude nomad elements of the people, it also gave vent to a lower moral life than that of the simpler plane of the Yahweh faith. Against these enervating and demoralizing forces we saw the prophets contending. Meeting the great social and political problems of their day with all the vigor of vital religious enthusiasm, they attacked the moral corruption and the religious formalism with stern judgment. Reading from the signs of their day of vast political movements and threatened social upheavals, they asserted the universal

sway of Yahweh and the moral purity of his judgments. Thus he assumes a place of unique power and authority which involves the great essentials of practical monotheism. Thus, again, not only were all forms of idolatry condemned, but idolatrous worship of Yahweh came under the ban, and even all forms of Yahweh worship in so far as they tended to take the place of true moral relations with the Holy One of Israel.

But this prophetic movement was not esoteric, in the sense of being aloof from the great social and religious life of the people among whom it arose, and we are not disappointed in seeking practical reforms as a result of its influence. The most distinctive of these reforms are to be connected with the movement which culminated in the finding of the Book of the Law in the temple in the days of Josiah. This movement had its inception in the preaching of Isaiah and the reign of Hezekiah. It had its victory in the triumph of the message of Deuteronomy as carried out in the reforms of Josiah. It has its sifting in the crucible of Jeremiah's deep spirituality. It has its supreme vindication in the restoration of Israel under Ezra and Nehemiah and the adoption of the Priestly Code as the constitution of the Jewish community. It has its keenest judgment in the two great commandments of the Prophet of Galilee and the law of love of the Apostle to the Gentiles.

*Preparation for Deuteronomy*

The fall of Samaria and the preaching of Isaiah led Hezekiah to take a firm stand for the purity of the worship of Yahweh and the sanctity of the temple at Jerusalem. Whether the prophet's vision was thus receiving its highest fulfilment, we may well call into question. The gross reaction of Manasseh points in the other way, but religious progress must be upon the foundation of human experience, and is very slow and often sorely retarded. So a Deuteronomy must come before a Jeremiah and the Babylonian captivity, and a Priestly Code must come before a Jesus and the Roman diaspora.

The work of Josiah is set against the dark background of the religious reaction manifested in the days of Manasseh. But we must not think of this age as an irreligious one, but rather as one of frenzied striving after a true basis of faith and life. So far as the record goes, the court expression of this was a wholesale commitment to the manifold enticements of the sensuous and spectacular rites of the splendid Assyrian cults, and the familiar ones of Canaan and Phoenicia. The popular religion seems to have been an unreasoning syncretism of native and foreign elements, summed up in the question asked in Mic. 6: 6-7. The prophet answered this question with an emphatic denial, but to the people there seemed to be but one answer, and that was, Yes. It is no stress of religious psychology, therefore, to



believe that the impress of the bloody zeal of the days of Manasseh was a potent factor in changing the emphasis from the sacrifice of festal communion and votive dedication to that of bloody atonement. A growing sense of sin had led to the putting of the sense of atonement into the prominent place in the old sacrificial rites, and no element lent itself to the purpose more readily than life itself as conveyed in the poured-out blood. And thus the man whose name is scarcely mentioned by the historian save as the embodiment of all that is opposed to Yahweh worship, was the indirect means of charging the Hebrew ritual system with the message of salvation from sin through atonement made, which has made it the great evangelistic message of the world's history, especially as interpreted in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whom his followers have set forth as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world for the remission of sins. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (I John 2:1-2).

Josiah succeeded to the evil as well as the good of the reign of Manasseh, and it was his mission to strive to undo some of the evil. Let us not forget that it was in the thirteenth year of his reign, and yet five years before the finding of the Book of the Law, that Jeremiah began to prophecy. It is hard to overstate the importance of the work of this man. G. A. Smith has said

that all which henceforth was dominant and creative in the history of Israel, however ancient its sources, was recast in his personal experience, so that personal piety in later Israel grew out of his personal struggles, as may be seen in many Psalms, and chiefly in that great prophetic figure of Deutero-Isaiah, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh—largely painted from a study of Jeremiah's life. In any case, we may recognize none greater under the old covenant. His special mission was to add the individual note to the idea of God and his relation to man. Job alone had asserted more strenuously his own personality over against God's. Jeremiah was the great psycho-religious analyst of the O. T. Sin lies in the heart, which is desperately wicked and fearfully weak. Reform must begin there, in a thorough renewal of all the springs of a man's nature—a work to be undertaken only at the call of God himself. It is not without significance that even in his earlier prophecies Jeremiah lays special emphasis upon the heart in the religious life. The great prophet of individual religion could brook no reform which was merely external. His prophetic conservatism might call him back to the old Yahweh worship, but not in formal service. For Jeremiah the deepest, truest, heart reform alone could avert the impending destruction. It was because he found his people hard and obdurate, like brass and iron, that he gave them up. It was only the faith that Yahweh knew the heart of man that could sustain the prophet in these dark moments.

When we consider the emphasis which these early chapters place upon the condemnation of Judah for her sins of false worship, in strange gods and local cults, we may well believe that Jeremiah's early ministry was in line with that movement of priestly and prophetic thought which was to culminate in the reform of Josiah. So, while we cannot think of Jeremiah as involved in the forming and issuing of the Book of the Law, we may think of him as helping to form that atmosphere of Yahweh worship and moral purity in which Josiah received his impulse toward the support of the truer worship of Yahweh, and our minds turn to the opening verses of the eleventh chapter, where we seem to see the prophet grasping at the new hope offered by the recently revealed covenant of fidelity to the Yahweh of Mount Sinai. We recognize the strong opposition to the acceptance of this passage, and yet its spirit is in no real sense out of harmony with the attitude of Jeremiah at the time. As a mortal foe of the nature cults, opposed by D, there is no reason why he should not find in it much that was congenial, even if he had had no active part in its inception.

### *Deuteronomy*

In considering all those movements out of which the reforms of Josiah arose, we must give first place to the Book of Deuteronomy. Apart from all critical questions as to the date and

authorship of the book, the account in Kings of the reform of Josiah clearly shows that it was dependent upon the book of Deuteronomy. In itself and in its relations to the great critical problems of O. T. history, it stands out as one of the great literary products in all racial and religious history.

We cannot go into the whole problem of the date and authorship of Deuteronomy, but the explanation of the religious conditions before and after the reform of Josiah involves the general outlines of the critical conclusion that Deuteronomy was the product of the movements and religious developments which led to the reforms of Josiah, as well as being the immediate inspiration to the more systematic carrying out of those reforms. We cannot harmonize its central doctrine—the one place of acceptable worship,—with the religious history prior to Josiah's day, but we can see in the troubled days preceding Josiah and the prophetic message before Manasseh the ground out of which it could have sprung. It comes most probably as a reaction against the corruptions of Manasseh's reign. Thinking men could see no way out of the corruption inherent in the popular cults and aggravated by the innovations of Manasseh, save in a radical revolution in worship. If written in the stormy days of Manasseh's persecutions, it may well have been concealed in the temple for safe keeping. During those days of gross corruption of Yahweh worship and open adherence to pagan cults, the

prophetic party and the pious in Israel were forced to conceal themselves, but this concealment only served to deepen their attachment to the true worship of Yahweh. The closing of the temple to true worshippers of Yahweh,—closed because prostituted to foreign worship,—did not crush out the deeper spirituality or destroy the zeal for the established rites. They did learn by practical experience the prophetic truth, that it was possible to hold fellowship with Yahweh apart from outward forms, and yet they yearned for the old expressions of a deepening spirituality. Thus a blending of prophetic spiritualism and popular worship developed a code of practical procedure. This was D, a protest against the syncretism of Manasseh's day, a practical attempt to apply the prophetic principles of One God, to be worshipped in spirit and truth.

There can be no doubt that the chief emphasis of the book lies in the centralization of the worship at one authorized sanctuary. The early Hebrew walked in an atmosphere of religious observance, and acts of worship might be rendered at countless places. Thus Israel was a land of many altars, and varied sacred objects, and Yahweh worship was rendered at many places and with many rites and symbols adopted and adapted from local Canaanite cults. It was this element in the worship at the local sanctuaries which became obnoxious to the spiritually minded, and the subject of warning on the part of the prophets. It was not hard to see that even

Yahweh worship rendered in the scenes of the traditional nature worship and through symbols associated with heathen and often grossly sensual cults, could not maintain itself in purity. And again, the Yahweh of Bethel, and Dan, of Shiloh and of Jerusalem, would easily break up in the popular mind into distinct personalities, and even 'Yahweh' became the collective term for many gods. Men's minds were confused by altars many—yea, Yahwehs many. In D we find the effort to solve in terms of practical religion this great spiritual problem, an effort of the prophet and the priest to meet in a solution of the great religious problem which the people faced, especially in the light of the trying days just passed,—the days of Manasseh.

With the thought of one legitimate place of worship there goes the thought of one group of ministers at that sanctuary. Formerly each household as well as each community could have its altar. Any man, especially the head of the house, could offer sacrifice as acceptably as the specially appointed or prepared functionary. There were central sanctuaries, there were recognized priests, but true worship was not limited to either. The whole family and communal life was permeated with the religious impulse, and centered about the family altar and the village high place. At one stroke D transforms the whole scene. The family altar is no more, and the local sanctuary is gone. The priest-father and the village priest disappear. In their stead are the

altar at Jerusalem and its Levitical priesthood. We may think of the early Levites, not as poor local ministers, but as wandering religious enthusiasts and priestly mendicants. They attached themselves to the local sanctuaries, and were dependent upon them for support. All this D changed. It not only removed the sacerdotal privilege from the head of the house to the Levite, but it thereby established a privileged class in the community. D restricted the legitimate worship to one sanctuary, and limited the priestly functions to one group of ministers. The natural result was that these ministers at the sole temple of Yahweh recognized by this written code of prophetic inspiration became the exclusive custodians of the ceremonial and ritual traditions and the priestly functions of the Yahweh cult. The longest step toward P had been taken.

But we must not leave D with the thought that it was a mere legalizing of prophetic doctrines. Of vastly more importance was its mission as a refiner and moralizer of the popular religious expression. It was this tone which won for it its matchless influence in the days of Josiah, it was this which stamps its thought and language upon the pages of Jeremiah's prophecy, it was this which made it the book of instruction and inspiration for the Prophet of Nazareth. Religious consciousness has never reached higher than the thought: "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy

might." It is no wonder, then, that it took, to use the thought of G. A. Smith, the profoundest religious genius of their age to see its defects. And even Jeremiah's judgment fell not so much upon the Deuteronomic code, as upon its interpretation by the following generation.

### *Immediate Influence of Deuteronomy*

The reforms of Josiah were the first fruits of this book. His great work was the removal of the high places. When he began his active religious life by repairing the temple, he showed his heart to be good soil for D. So, when he lights upon the Book of the Law, he plunges into a campaign of fulfilment of its precepts and ideals. By one blow he struck at the whole system of foreign cults by destroying all the high places throughout the land. This was "the most revolutionary act" of Josiah's reform, but true to the distinctive message of D as compared with the Code of the Covenant. This movement was the carrying out of a covenant entered into by the king and the people. In solemn covenant they had pledged themselves to the high ideals demanded by the newly discovered book. "And all the people stood to the covenant." This expression is an emphatic one, used nowhere else. Curtis sums up the whole phrase thus: "kept the law;" and Chronicles merely enlarges upon the thought when he says: "And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of



their fathers." This covenant was sealed by the observance of the Passover. Two facts are stated: that it was kept at Jerusalem according to the book of the covenant, and that there had been none like it since the time of the Judges. It is impossible to speak with any assurance of the passover of Josiah, except that it was observed at Jerusalem. But this is significant. It was meeting the crucial demand of D. It was the Deuteronomic passover that Josiah observed, and we do not wonder that it surpassed all others. It is not without significance that this is the only use of the word "passover" apart from the Hexateuch before the book of Ezekiel. Even in Chronicles there are but two passovers, that of Hezekiah and Josiah's. Ignoring the serious question of the historicity of the one assigned to Hezekiah, there are but two passovers recorded from that of the children of Israel on entering Canaan till that of the restored community after the Babylonian exile. While this tends to prove the purely local and private character of the earlier passover festival, it points to the powerful domination of D over the reform movement of Josiah, and the outstanding significance of this seal to their covenant upon the basis of the new Law.

The results of the acceptance of D and the operation of the reforms of Josiah may be summed up in a few points. And first of all, it regulated worship. By the centralizing of the cult and the regulating of the worship by a written code,

there was a transformation at a stroke of all religious rites, and the old household and communal elements were removed. As the code involved the appearing at Jerusalem for public worship, the distance and expense must have led to a reducing of the free-will offerings and a limiting of the seasons of worship largely to the set feasts, which were exalted at the expense of the private and spontaneous. All this regulated worship leads to a special emphasis upon the ritual of public service. Regulated worship tends to preclude voluntary, non-ritualistic, worship, and formalism becomes immanent. The religion of Judah after D did not escape this influence, as we shall see by Jeremiah's protests and Ezekiel's symbolism. Once more the old state so abhorrent to the prophet threatens. Holiness becomes the attitude of the body, not the mind—external not internal—not love to Yahweh, as D intended, but fidelity to his ordinances, as P enjoins. Thus the very goal of the Deuteronomic movement was missed. The "Book of the Law" becomes the guide of life. In it was found a finished and authoritative code of religious direction. Here we have for the first time "Holy Scriptures," binding on all for all time. We cannot forget the practical value of these authoritative Scriptures in the preservation of the religious community, and we shall see that we shall have to add rather than subtract P from this conserving force. But popular sentiment seized upon the written word as a sufficient

touchstone to test life and service, and the spiritual leader could only repeat the code or suffer the fate of a Jeremiah or a Jesus.

In looking back over our study thus far, we find we have traversed some interesting ground, and gathered some material of real value in meeting our larger problem. In viewing the popular cults of pre-Deuteronomic Israel, we find primitive Semitic and crude and often sensual Canaanite elements blending with the higher Yahweh ideals—producing a syncretism ever tending toward the side of heathenism and sensuality, and culminating in the extravagant eclecticism of Manasseh's reaction. Against these crude and immoral elements the prophets raise their voices, holding up Yahweh as the one God of Israel, appearing in growing clearness of ethical purity and sovereign sway, until he reaches his height in the Holy One of Israel, the Lord Yahweh of Hosts, of Isaiah's message. But foreign dominance and the corruption of worldly prosperity bring forth fruit in an official syncretism of Yahweh traditions and pagan extravagances, in a wild frenzy of devotion to outward forms and the suppression of the messengers of high spirituality. Forth from the persecution and corruption there bursts a matchless utterance, blending high prophetic ideals and practical priestly precepts into one supreme effort to stem the downward tide and to direct the devoted people. The spoken word, and the popular or priestly tradition, give way to the

written message and the inspired code. A reformation takes place, purifying the worship, centralizing the cult, and regulating the ritual. High religious ideals and pure moral precepts become the common property of the people. The Book of the Law is found. But with a regulated worship and a centralized cult comes a priestly monopoly. With a written code comes a check upon spontaneity and spirituality. The message of the prophets becomes hardened into a ritual code, the spirit of prophecy passes into the dogma of inspiration, and Israel becomes a Church with a Creed. Thus she is carried over the exile, and thus she is prepared to cool down into the rigid mold of Judaism. Prophetic inspiration has become ecclesiastical dogmatism. Have we not here the key to P's influence in Judaism?—or perhaps better, have we not here at least one important key?

## CHAPTER III

### THE POST-REFORMATION MOVEMENTS

**T**HE great social and religious movement which centers about D proved to be one of the closing scenes of the tragedy of Hebrew history. The doom which it was intended to forestall was only held back a moment, and in 35 years the great central sanctuary, the temple at Jerusalem, fell into the hands of the Babylonians. For 70 years Israel, so solemnly taught that at that place which Yahweh had chosen there alone could men offer acceptable service, must worship God without temple or appointed sacrifice. For nigh unto 250 years that temple had stood as the chief high place of the Hebrews and as the royal sanctuary of the house of David. During these seven generations of temple worshippers and priestly ministers, a ritual usage and sacrificial worship developed which found classical expression in D, which became the ideal code for the closing days of Hebrew national history. The history of these closing days is full of interest, full of deep import in the development of religion. One name stands out in special splendor during this generation. Jeremiah began his work five years before the finding of the Book of the Law, and he stood among the remnants as

Jerusalem lay in ruins and the temple lay stripped of its treasures and reduced to ashes and charred heaps. From the pen of this martyr to the cause of his doomed people, and from his faithful companion and chronicler, Baruch, has come to us a vivid picture of these sad scenes, or, may we not say the more truly? pen sketches of dramatic scenes and striking characters of this national tragedy. The Post-Reformation Movements are among the most vital to the understanding of the later history of the people of Israel, and they form a foundation for the legalism of Judaism and the spirituality of Christianity. Two streams flow side by side, blending into practical synthesis of official religion, diverging into ever widening circles in personal life and far-reaching effects. These two forces are the growing legalism and the prophetic reaction.

### *Growing Legalism*

In our last study we saw that the introduction of D wrought a vast change in the Hebrew conception of the Torah and its place in the religious life of Judah. The spontaneous faith and devotion of an Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, or a Micah, did help to inspire the authors of D, and gave impetus to Jeremiah's first messages. But D's code and Jeremiah's call to repentance bore fruit among the leaders and their easy-going followers in a growing legalism. It is easy to trace these influences in the message of Jeremiah. In 8:8

we see the place assumed by the Torah as expressed by the code of D. Cornill says of this verse, "One of the most noteworthy and weighty verses in the entire book of Jeremiah." He regards the phrase 'the law of Yahweh' as the essential one, and that it can only refer to a definite written book, and of course that book is D. This great work with so much of which Jeremiah must have been heartily in sympathy, the scribes had made a falsehood through their dependence upon the effective working of the letter of the law. Surely we find Jeremiah face to face with the deadening effects of a formal dependence upon a written code!

In the prominence given to the temple we find another phase of this growing legalism. We may confine ourselves to two passages. In 11:1-12:13, we have what purports to be Jeremiah's attitude toward the covenant, which can be no other than that of D. Having received an explicit command to announce the word of Yahweh, he undertakes a mission to the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. But his preaching was largely in vain, Judah turns to her idols. In an abrupt change of attitude at verse 15, the prophet seems to grasp all the emptiness of the whole system of legal conformity, and he bursts forth into the passionate charge, "What hath my beloved to do in my house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil then thou rejoicest." The whole passage is difficult, and the 15th verse

is doubtless corrupt. Cornill argues with keen judgment against the Jeremian authorship and the historical accuracy of the pictured relationship of Jeremiah to the law. Whether we accept his conclusions or not, the import of the passage beginning with the 15th verse is the same. Jeremiah finds his people depending upon material offerings to avert their doom, and costly sacrifices for immunity from danger, giving no heed to the deeper moral conditions. And what is obscurely revealed here is clearly manifested in the great prophecy of the 7th chapter and its corresponding Baruch narrative of the 26th. Blind confidence in the temple had become characteristic of the people, and they pointed to its massive piles as a touch-stone of magic virtue, reciting the formula, "The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, (the temple of Yahweh), are these." The preaching of Isaiah, pointing to the security of Jerusalem, the mount of the Temple of Yahweh, and the blessing of D upon those who kept the law, have become a dogma of formalism. To Jeremiah this appeal to the temple was "false" because their trust in it was false. Verses 9-11 picture the popular and formal religious attitude in all vividness, and the key to the whole scene lies in the 10th verse, and the heart of the corruption lies in an 'in order that.' In verse 10b the word is to be translated with Graf (Cornill) as 'in order that' (damit), and we follow Cornill who quotes with approval Graf's statement that they made their offerings in order that they



might continue in their evil ways. We have here a vivid picture of a conscious or unconscious, but not the less real, dependence upon the outward forms and legal conformity of the temple ritual for acceptance with Yahweh. And, as if the prophet struggled to picture the extent to which they had gone in their legalistic dependence upon the temple worship, he brands the temple as a den or cave for robbers (violent ones), a hiding place to which they may resort after their deeds of violence.

### *Prophetic Reaction*

But against the deadening effects of the great message of D there was a deeply ethical and spiritual prophetic reaction. With the quick moral judgment of their predecessors, Ezekiel as well as Jeremiah sees the sins of the people, and both proclaim the call to the ethical concept of divine government and human obligation. With the failure of the sacrificial code comes a deepening sense of sin, heightened importance is given to the individual, and all hope centers in the renewal of the heart.

Against all the growing legalism Jeremiah protests, and his message becomes a sorrowful announcement of the rejection of the nation. For him the whole social and religious fabric was resting upon a false foundation. A covenant relation built up upon a temple ritual and a written code could not bind a righteous God to a

corrupt people. In striking figures and solemn fulness he announces the rejection of his heritage, even the dearly beloved of his soul. A true sense of historical relations leads him to remind his boasting people of the fate of the ancient sanctuary of Shiloh, with its sacred ark. There Yahweh had caused his name to dwell at the first. With it were associated some of their most sacred traditions, and its temple had all the sanctity of the resting place of the ancient ark of the covenant. Yet, see, has God spared it? Will he spare Jerusalem? For Isaiah, it is true, the sacred associations of Mount Zion formed an impassable wall against the forces of Assyria. But for Jeremiah, Israel's sin had broken that barrier down, and no sacred house or fulfilled ceremonial can stop the avenger of the broken covenant of righteousness. The message of the Hebrew prophet ends in a lamentation over a forsaken people, 8:20-9:1. Has this long line of inspired teachers failed of its mission? Has Hebrew prophecy issued in the destruction of the people of God? It seems so, but only does it *seem* so. Prophetic idealism must needs clothe itself in ritual formalism to meet times which were to try men's souls, and D was the beginning of this movement. But these testing times had not fully come, and Jeremiah's mission was to sound forth in its last and clearest notes the old prophetic ideal of moral purity and spiritual worship. In him the true Israel watches its own death struggles. But in himself lay the solution

of the dark problem. Not compromise, but greater reality was his final message.

Not a covenant renewed upon the basis of written law, and sealed in temple ordinances, but a new covenant of personal relation to the God of righteousness, this is the height of the prophetic reaction. How did Jeremiah attain and express this truth? The key lies in his sense of the deeply seated nature of sin. We have already noticed that in his earlier work Jeremiah sought a reform which was not that of outward conformity, but inward, for their sin was bitter, reaching into their very heart. All through his later message he makes the stubbornness of the evil heart to be the source of all sin. It is because man's heart departeth from Yahweh, that the curse falls. Israel's sin is graven upon the tablet of their heart as well as upon the horns of their altars. This sin in the heart is not concealed from God, for it is he who tries the heart, and upon that intimate judgment he passes sentence. But is not this heart found to be deceitful and desperately affected? Had not the prophet's search for the depth of sin led him to utter hopelessness? A rejected nation and a deceitful heart! The nation condemned to destruction, and the heart—but here Jeremiah finds his solution. Even God cannot destroy one righteous heart. Jeremiah had no problem as to the ethical nature of Yahweh. For him it was an axiom of faith bearing fruit in a most powerful personality, whose own moral individuality was highly developed. In Jeremiah,

then, enters into the Hebrew faith the note of individuality. Driven by the hopelessness of his mission and the opposition of his countrymen, into the recesses of his own nature, he found God there, but he never lost himself in God. He refuses to be involved in the guilt of his people, and even bitterly differentiates himself from them in rebellion against unjust treatment and in curses upon his enemies. Nor does he hesitate to make his appeal against God himself, and to contend his cause with him. In Jeremiah we see the emancipation of the individual strongly emphasized, even against God himself, avoiding both the old oneness of the people, and also an irresponsible absorption into God. It is with such a soul that Yahweh is about to enter into a new covenant, 31:31-34. Now a new conscience has arisen and men shall know that each suffers for his own sin. For God is willing to enter into a new Covenant, sealed in the old Torah written upon the tablets of the heart, and then each shall know for himself Yahweh and his mercy. We cannot better grasp the supreme reach of Jeremiah's message than by referring to Cornill's masterly study. Having shown that there is no conflict between prophetic and Deuteronomic religion, since in both the basis is one, viz., the moral law of Sinai, he emphasizes that the distinctly new element of this covenant lies in its being written upon the heart. The seal of the new relationship lies in the turning to Yahweh with the whole heart, that is, the submitting of the

will to him wholly. The old law, once written on cold stone, becomes anew the covenant bond, but now written on the warm flesh of the heart. Not by nature is this law learned, but from grace, for the heart must be circumcised, the soil must be broken up, and the old sins which 'bear witness against us' must be healed. Thus out of the bitterness of his own experience, he learns and proclaims a message of deep spiritual hope. With his feet firmly planted upon the ground and his heart open before us and Yahweh, he stands between Yahweh and his people. Out of this close personal contact with the God of the ancient covenant, Jeremiah was able to see over the sins and rejection of his people into a future of a people made up of human hearts, purified by God's grace, strengthened by his presence, and controlled under a new Covenant by the ancient Law of Yahweh written in their hearts.

Turning to Ezekiel, we find a keen moral judgment upon the social evils of his day, with a sense of sin marked for its emphasis upon the individual and its expression in terms of moral obligation. If Jeremiah met his problem by appealing to the individual, Ezekiel much more so. For him the God of Israel deals with the individual apart from the past or the future. The culmination of this thought is in 36:24-29, one of the most remarkable passages in the O. T. Here we have the evangel of the O. T. in terms almost Pauline in their insistence upon individual spiritual relations with God. As with Jeremiah,

an essential element in the thought of Ezekiel is the Covenant, in fact it is fundamental to his system, more fundamental than it was to Jeremiah's message. As with Jeremiah, this is the one covenant which bound Yahweh with his people from the beginning. But, while Jeremiah's emphasis is upon the covenant sealed upon Horeb, Ezekiel's thought goes back to the separation from Egypt and the divine choice with the divine oath. It will be noted that Jeremiah is in harmony with D in his reference to Horeb, while Ezekiel goes back to God's revelation of himself as "I am Yahweh." The frequent repetition of this expression, over 80 times in the book of Ezekiel, forms a keynote to his conception of the covenant. He has passed over the wilderness experience to the call in Egypt, rooting the covenant relation in Yahweh's gracious revelation of himself through Moses. It is this God of covenant grace, revealed in the history of his people, who works together all things for his name's sake. Therefore, while he thus carries his charge of rebellion to the very foundation of the nation, and can recognize no good time in Israel's history, he can deliver a message of hope. That blessing which should have been theirs, they have forfeited by their attitude toward the covenant, but that does not prevent Yahweh's fulfilling his covenant. That old covenant of grace, which has been spurned by a rebellious and wayward people, is never forgotten by Yahweh, and now the prophet sees in it a covenant of

salvation, and, since the emphasis is now upon God's covenant fidelity, it becomes an everlasting covenant. Upon this faith he builds his hope for the future, and makes his plans for the restoration.

The culmination of the doctrine of salvation through the redemption of the individual lies in the great Servant of Yahweh passages in Deutero-Isaiah. While we accept the essential unity of Is. 40-55, we must look upon these passages as citations as it were, from the pen of another writer, adapted by the present author to his conception of the Servant. So, while we cannot understand Dt.-Is. apart from them, it is possible and of real value to seek the meaning of this picture of the Servant in its original integrity. To this great Character, painted by a seer who was uttering the inspired ideals of the heart of the exilic period, we shall now turn. In this short poem of less than 30 verses in the Massoretic text (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-6; 52:13-53:12), one of the greatest messages of the O. T. is found. Apart from its place in Christian thought through the direct Messianic interpretation of the concluding section, it must be assigned a most exalted place by all students of Hebrew religious thought. When we look at these passages alone, we see that the Servant is not the true Israel over against the false, but rather Israel among the nations in the midst of whom she suffers. Here Israel is not thought of in her historical and present weakness and sin, but in her ideal nature as the

people of Yahweh groaning under the hand of oppression. She is not merely the 'pious exiles only,' but Israel of the exile as only pious in contrast with her ungodly neighbors. Sore was the problem of the godly in exile. But their faith was firm, and out of it sprang a hope triumphant. What she had been suffering for was the good of the nations of the world. This deepening of their religious consciousness, and broadening of their religious sympathy was the fruit of the exile and the glory of the exilic faith. The great message of the exile was the making of religion a matter of the inner man, and to the author of the Servant of Yahweh belongs the greatest credit for this movement. By this concept the whole problem of suffering was solved in terms of martyrdom. Thus Israel, because of her faithfulness, and because of her possession of the revelation of God, becomes the great witness to all the nations. But when we turn to the Servant of Yahweh passages as used by the author of Dt.-Is., we find that he has exercised some freedom. For him the Servant of Yahweh seems to mean the true Israel within the false. His whole message is one of comfort. This comfort is grounded in a faith in the saving power of the grace of God. But Yahweh is checked in his work of mercy by the present sinfulness of his people. In the midst of Israel, however, there is a faithful few, showing special piety and bearing a special burden, a part of the sinful, suffering people, but free from the burden of guilt. This is the problem



of the Sodom narrative. As Gunkel says, "The narrative treats of a religious problem: Whether a righteous minority is in a position to prevent the destruction of a godless people." This is the problem of Dt.-Is., and its answer comes to him in the message of the Servant of Yahweh, who was chosen, suffered, and died, for those among whom he lived. This solution, ready to hand, he inserts into his discussion, bringing it to a conclusion in the great passage, 52:13-53:12. In it he teaches that the suffering of the few can be accepted by God "in full satisfaction for the sins of the nation as a whole." Whether the Servant's suffering atoned for his own nation or for the Gentiles, the religious import is the same, and of deep spiritual value. It is not too much to recognize in this doctrine of the Servant of Yahweh one of those elements in Judaism which Harper has significantly characterized as "prenatal Christianity." Montefiore has spoken of it as a reversion to an exploded sacrificial theory. As Christian students of the O. T., we might better look at it as the spiritualizing—the expressing in terms of moral values—of the same old material and non-moral symbolism. Is it too much of a reflection of Christian interpretation to say that here God does actually share in the conquest of sin, not by acceptance of an artificial 'trespass-offering,' but by suffering in sympathy with the sinner in the person of his own chosen and beloved Servant? Just as the prophetic message was about to harden into the cold

mold of legal formalism, the Great Unknown brings forth this thought. The burden of guilt has led Jeremiah to search the human heart, and the watchman's call has sent Ezekiel to seek lost souls. A national covenant, broken by false approach to God, had driven both prophets to seek consolation in the vision of a new Covenant kept by regenerated hearts. God himself must save his own—one by one. Dt.—Is. is confident that there is grace sufficient for this salvation. And this not because of any conformity to a ritual of atoning sacrifice, but because of the atoning sacrifice of his own, chosen, faithful, Servant. God himself forgives all who present themselves through the sacrifice of one whom God ordained and inspired to serve, and suffer, and save.

#### *Priestly Syncretism*

As the Hebrew people entered into the experience of the exile, there seem to be two elements in their religious life—inconsistent in principle, insistent in precept. The ancient traditions of sacrificial ritual had crystallized into the elaborate cult of the Jerusalem temple under the influence of political movements and the Deuteronomic reforms. But still the lofty idealism of Amos and Hosea, the stern denunciations of Isaiah, and the bitter reproaches of Jeremiah, sounded in the ears of the people. The reform seemed to have made real the ideals of the prophets, but a Jeremiah showed the emptiness of

their service, an Ezekiel showed the vanity of their hopes. Even the holy city must fall because of her sins. The Great Unknown has no other message of hope save Yahweh's sovereign grace and the Righteous One's unmerited sufferings. Is Judaism to be an empty cult of sacrificial ceremonial at a central sanctuary, or is it to be a pure idealism trusting in the saving grace of the loving Lord of the loyal Servant? The immediate answer to this question was neither yes nor no. The solution of the problem lay in a priestly syncretism.

The name which stands out most prominently in this movement is that of Ezekiel. He sought to supply the spirit of religion with a body. The spirit was an expression of the holiness of God, the body was a ritual of holiness, and in each case 'holiness' reverted to its early suggestion of 'separateness,' and thus the whole concept was, it cannot be denied, materialized. That it gave rise to legalism arose from this material concept of holiness. The aim of making the land fit for God's dwelling took a form which tended to materialize worship. Yet to Ezekiel himself the moral purpose was not lost sight of, but was in a sense fundamental. Israel's restoration must be upon a moral basis, however corrupt her past history, and however helpless seems to be her present moral state. A deeply seated corruption and the stain of a long history of sins, call for a radical cleansing. This God alone can do. This deeply ethical consciousness gave rise to the con-

cept of a new start, based upon the grace of God, maintained by conformity to a divinely imposed constitution. This sacred constitution lays special stress upon the priestly office and functions. The only mediation between a holy God and a rebellious people is through a sanctified priesthood. Thus Ezekiel makes a special effort to purify the priesthood of all that might profane the approach to the Holy One. A most significant element in his system is the place assigned the prince. He is no longer Israel's warrior king, but merely Israel's prince. His is not the sanctuary of Yahweh, but he is merely the chief of all the profane hosts of Israel. The prophet's political economy has no place for a king. The pre-exilic state is now gone, and in the future the church, not the state, is the form in which Israel's life is to develop. Judaism has arisen, with the temple as its centre, and with the priest as Yahweh's representative among the people.

A study of Haggai and Zechariah, the two prophets of the early restoration period, reveals a development of that syncretism of prophetic idealism and priestly formality which is so prominent in Ezekiel. Driven by the practical exigencies of the time, a supreme place is given to the work of rebuilding the temple. Under the influence of the development of the priestly control in the days of no temple and foreign environment, and caught in the political isolation of a subject state, the Messianic hope centers in a subject prince, and the religious consciousness

gives growing prominence to the head of the priestly caste. Yet there is not here a cold or even chilling formalism, for there is still the clear ethical consciousness with a due sense of individual responsibility, and a keen sense of the spiritual element in the relation between Yahweh and his people, particular, but rooted in his sovereign grace.

Likewise Malachi's interest in the cult was a religious one, and sprang out of a true spiritual motive—the desire to conserve the true concept of the deity. He would not have Yahweh brought to shame through a shameless observance of his cult. In that most interesting verse, 1:11, we see the breadth of the man. According to the interpretation generally accepted, this prophet, so interested in the authorized worship of Yahweh at the temple of Jerusalem, reaches to the concept that even the worship of the deity at heathen altars is to be recognized as acceptable to the God of Heaven. Surely this is not narrow legalism after the type of Pharisaic Judaism! And thus again we see the ethical note in later prophecy. For, whatever be our interpretation of the passage, Malachi wanted the priests of Jerusalem to know that Yahweh was not dependent upon their corrupt service for his honor, for men might everywhere offer true service to Yahweh the God of Israel. Thus Malachi's message, while giving special emphasis to the sins of his people in their indifference to the established ritual of the temple, calling the ministers at the temple

to special account for their laxness, still lacks not that high ethical tone which places it among the words of the prophets. His high ideals for the ministers of religion and his pure ideals for all social relations make him a moral teacher in Israel. In him we see the blending of the ritual legalism and the spiritual individualism of practical religion in all ages, and especially at this time of transition and testing.

### *Summary of Post-Reformation Movements*

We are now about to take that step which meant so much to later Hebrew history, transforming the prophetic nation into a priestly church. Already we have practically answered the question, How can these things be? In the great work of Ezekiel and the prophetic message of the restoration prophets, we have seen how the people who could seize upon D as a solution of the problem raised by the influence of a cult threatened by the corruption of local heathenism, were preparing themselves to seize upon the fully developed code of the priests of the great central sanctuary of Yahweh to solve the problem raised as they faced dissolution in the midst of an alien sovereign power. In this pre-exilic and early exilic period we see an inevitable and practically expedient priestly syncretism of prophetic spiritualism and legal materialism in matters of public worship. The moral and legal blend as interdependent parts of one whole, facing the opposing

forces of sin within and oppression without. While Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah attempted to check the growing legalism which the acceptance of D encouraged, even prophecy itself fell under the influence of the inevitable. Nor was there in any strict sense a real falling away from their high calling, but rather the turning of their gifts to the solution of a new and difficult problem. It was theirs to remove the heathenish element from the popular religious life, and the most direct and effective way was by giving the people a purified cult. It was theirs also to be the leaven of spirituality which permeated the heavier mass of cruder outward forms and legal ceremonialism. It was they who ever kept a certain element of inconsistency active in the Jewish constitution and community. The developing system kept calling for a more uniform type of religious expression. That an element in the people should abuse the formal side is not to be wondered at. That practical reformers should upon occasion especially emphasize it, is but part of the development of human institutions. That this period illustrates such a movement, we have seen.

The mission of prophecy in ridding Israel of the corrupting influences of inherited institutions and acquired customs—of a conception of God and his worship bound to place and precedent—an emphasis on ritual rather than morality—a confusion in the conception of the nature of God, due to the local traditions and practical deductions

of manifold sanctuaries, each significant and sacred—the prophet's mission had been faithfully accomplished, and, in a fallen temple and a scattered people, divinely corroborated. Now a new problem arises—how conserve all this treasure of prophetic truth—how preserve the worship of Yahweh and the integrity of his cause? To this problem the spiritual and religious leaders of the restoration gave their best thought and effort. That they opened the sacred codes of the past, that they turned to the ruined altar of the God of the covenant, is but natural. With the faith of their fathers in their hearts, and the code of Moses in their hands, they began anew the worship of Yahweh of Hosts—the avenger of his own glorious name, and the fulfiller of his own eternal promises. The Torah of Yahweh is now the message of the past, prophet's and priest's. No longer is it the living message of the inspired man in their midst, but the sacred word interpreted by priest and scribe, executed by priest and people. The final steps in this movement from the guidance of the Hebrew prophet to the dominance of the Hebrew canon, is the burden of our next study. There we shall see that not all is lost, however true be Wellhausen's conclusion in discussing the passing from the oral to the written Torah: "When it is recognized that the *canon* is what distinguishes Judaism from ancient Israel, it is recognized at the same time that what distinguishes Judaism from ancient Israel is *the written Torah*. The water which in old times rose from a spring, the Epigoni stored up in cisterns." (Wellhausen, *History of Israel*, 410.)



## CHAPTER IV

### POST-EXILIC PRIESTLY RECONSTRUCTION

**I**N passing from the closing days of the history of the kingdom of Judah to the scenes portrayed in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah, we overleap a very obscure but most important section of the history of the Hebrew people and their religion—that process through which the Hebrew nation became the Jewish church. When we remember that Jerusalem fell in 586 B. C., and that 445 B. C. is a convenient date for the movement represented by Ezra-Nehemiah, a period of a century and a half must be taken into account, and the work of such men as Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah, and Malachi, must be given its full significance. Here we have some of the highest reaches of spiritual idealism on the one hand, and the interpretation of the ethical and spiritual concepts of the covenant with Yahweh in terms of religious community on the other. With all this stored up in the movement, rich is the field, if only we had a clear view of its contents.

#### *Exilic Influences*

The Babylonian exile began with the stripping of the city of Jerusalem of the flower of its popula-

tion, royalty, nobility, and leading citizens, when Jehoiachin was taken captive, 597 B. C. This involved the best of the people in captivity, yet we must not think of their being in sore distress. It could not have been until the fall of Jerusalem, and probably then only for a season, that any real harshness entered into the lot of the people in the land of exile. Yet to the loyal Hebrew the experience was that of exile, and upon his conscience there rested the sense of divine judgment. The prophets had foretold the event as a penalty for sin, and now they are looking forward to a day when they can again worship him in an acceptable manner. God's judgment upon the past, and their own consciousness of the faults and failures of their present state are thus potent factors in this exilic period of training for Judaism.

The influence of the isolation of the Israelites from the problems of government and the affairs of state must have its due consideration. Civil leaders and priests, moral thinkers and religious ministers, had little for trained talents save the organization of the exiled community and the solution of the practical problems sure to face them in the day of promised deliverance. A people of deep reverence and strong race consciousness must express themselves. That a priestly code, such as we find in later Judaism, not merely a handbook of ritual usage but the history and development of a revealed social and religious organism, a sacred constitution to guide in the establishment and maintenance of a theocracy,

should be the product of the isolation of such a race of men is not hard to understand. Nor must we lose sight of the fact that in the midst of this exiled community was a group of men deeply revered by the mass of the people, the traditional custodians of the religious treasures of the nation, and themselves deeply steeped in the traditions and intellectual atmosphere of the cult. Reared at the altar of Zion or some other sacred site, bred in the handling of sacramental symbols and mystic rites, their whole sphere of thinking was ritual and ceremonial, and their whole mode of expression must have been legal. However deeply spiritual their personal concepts and experience of God, and however real their intercourse with him, their natural mode of expression was in terms of rite and law. The early literature is full of indirect references to ritual usage and sacrificial customs. The exiled priests must have been the custodians of vast treasures of tradition and ritual. Shall we think of these priests and Levites in Babylonia as forgetting all this rich heritage? as sealing it up in their own persons? Every evidence points to them as the leaders in the great literary activity of the period of the exile. Not only did they copy and enlarge the literature of the past, but new material, inspired by new experiences and intended for an untried but rich future, must have been produced. The result is a constitution wrought out by devout Jews cut off from all secular authority under Persian dominance, and left not merely to meditate upon the

holy law, but to reduce its treasures to a system adequate to meet the demands of a growing priestly party. There is a sense in which all this is but a blending of influences set agoing by the legal impulse in D and the individualism of Jeremiah. Thus arose a distinct interest in the cult together with a lofty personal piety. Surely a striking juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous elements, but only revealing the compromise which constitutes the essence of Judaism. All the force of the deepest truths of prophetism was used to give weight to a carefully prepared code of priestly authority, resulting in a deep devotion and sincere piety in the observance of religious legalism. But more of this again. Suffice to say, the idle priesthood had wrought well.

We must not forget that these were not the only influences active during the exile. A growing spirituality accompanied these influences tending toward the growth of legal ideals and institutions. The ground for this is that the exilic period was dominated by a cherished treasure of spiritual power in the prophecy of the past. We cannot ignore the dominance of prophetic ideals in the formation of the legal codes, and in Judaism we find an effort to realize the prophetic ideals in the keeping of the law. So that Stade has said, "Right here it is especially to be noted, that it is not sufficient for an understanding of the course of history to relate Prophecy and Christianity to one another simply as prediction and fulfilment, but that Christianity

attaches itself immediately to Judaism and only through it to prophecy." (Stade, *Alttestamentliche Geschichte*, I., 553.) Christianity could only come from Judaism because Judaism came from Hebrew Prophecy.

One of the elements of spirituality in this period must have been prayer. Prayer was doubtless an element in primitive worship, and all sacrifice must have been accompanied by some form of address to the deity. But prayer, apart from sacrificial approach to God, prayer as immediate fellowship with God, seems to have gained for itself special prominence during the exile. Cut off from the ordinary means of approach, yet conscious of the immediate presence of God in their lives, the exiles must have sought that simplest form of public worship, prayer. And as the diaspora left thousands far from the renewed altar of sacrifice, the lesson learned in the exile was never lost. And so with the Sabbath. Carried into the exile because of its distinctly Hebrew associations in the midst of their heathen captors, the day of rest for religious freedom must have been seized as a most convenient and expressive means of cultivating the spiritual life. Left to hymns, and prayer, and Scripture reading as the only means of observing such a day, the spiritual elements of their faith and cult must have been cultivated by the Sabbath observance of the exile. Out of the same conditions, and with the same spiritual power, must have come forth the synagogue. This so-called "Sunday

School" institution of the Jews stands as one of the most potent spiritual influences of all religious history, and its rise was doubtless during the exile.

Our last witness to the growing spirituality of this period is the Psalter. It is frequently called "the hymn-book of the Second Temple," and, whatever its origin, so it proved to be. But that all its contents is post-exilic, and most of it quite late, is a view which we may regard as extreme. There is strong evidence for sacred songs, such as may be found in the Psalter, produced in the pre-exilic and exilic period. The development of these religious lyrics, such a natural sequence to the spirit and gifts of an Isaiah and especially a Jeremiah, must have been one of the most spiritual elements in the exilic experience. We shall only note the fact and its significance. We shall not even attempt to pick out the Psalms of this period. But a point not to be overlooked is that even later Psalms may show us the deep spiritual emotions with which the Jew of the exile or many centuries later could look upon the cult and its rites. A glance at such a table as that given by Briggs reveals what, to one careful student, must have been the rich store of sacred lyric upon which the exile fed his spiritual life, and also the rich fruitage of that life. An extreme criticism like that of Duhm or Cheyne, placing not merely the majority of the Psalms as post-exilic, but all, and making the vast majority to be the product of generations dominated by the rod of the Law, only serves to emphasize, as we shall have need to

observe again, that the interest in the cult and its ceremonial and sacrificial ritual does not crush out all spirituality. So long as the Psalter is in our hands, we cannot deny that alongside of the tendency of Judaism toward mere formalism there existed a vital energy which constantly revealed itself in a growing and deepening spirituality.

### *Conditions in Jerusalem*

Probably one of the most far-reaching minor mistakes in the popular conception of the history of the exile is that it was a period during which all Israel was in Babylonia, and the land of Judah lay absolutely desolate and uninhabited. A literal understanding of Jer. 44:2 leads to a false impression of the conditions, for there must have been a substantial remnant both in the city and the villages left after the deportations of Nebuchadnezzar. In addition to this must be taken into account the inroads of the neighboring tribes, Edomites, Moabites, etc. Over this mixed community, Jerusalem would still hold the supremacy. Thus we find much of the old life maintained, with sacrifices and priests. Especially must we recognize that the outlying districts were probably left largely unmolested. This means that in the environs of the desolated city was no wholly insignificant remnant of Jews who would very naturally turn toward the sacred site and make its deserted streets their dwelling

place. To this Jerusalem community some think Haggai and Zechariah made their appeal. Better, perhaps, we should say that this element was the dominant factor in the people to whom these prophets spoke. We find then that the returning exiles found themselves in the midst of the increased remnant of the original people—increased by natural processes and foreign immigration. They found a people treasuring old customs, traditions and sites, not least the holy place and its authorized ritual. A people, however, sorely corrupted by feeble leadership and foreign contamination.

A careful study of the literature of the period leads to the conclusion that there was a return under Cyrus soon after his occupation of Babylon, but that such a return must be recognized as but slightly interesting the exiles. Only a small band of enthusiasts could have answered the first call. All the evidence indicates that "the great moment of deliverance had found a puny race." This applies to the Jews both in Jerusalem and Babylon. It was only as such men as Haggai and Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah, came to the front, that the movement in Babylon toward Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem toward full reconstruction, became energetic and effective. In Jerusalem, the result of the exiles' enthusiastic idealism and the residents' determined conservatism led to a compromise and a secession. Compromise led out of the willingness to broaden and develop. Secession grew out of a guarding of



sacred rights and rites. The one developed into Jewish universalism, the other culminated in the Samaritan schism. The potent force in either case was the exclusiveness of the exiles as expressed in the law of the priests.

### *The Priestly Reconstruction*

The thinking men of the exile were facing a sore problem. The experience of the past must be explained, its burden in national captivity and individual hardship must be avoided in the future. A world of heathen influences surrounds them, threatening to engulf them. The deep spirituality of the prophetic message was beyond the reach of the average man. All these weakening facts and threatening dangers called for caution and preparedness. The repetition of the divine judgment could only be warded off by avoiding the evils of the past. The threatened absorption in the world of heathenism about them served to remind them of the necessity of purifying their worship, and of making most clear the fellowship between the people and the deity. But to express this effort in terms of pure spiritualism was to carry it beyond the religious sensibilities of the dominant mass of the people. Judaism was the resultant of an effort to make real the solution of all this mass of human possibilities. The basis of the great priestly reconstruction, then, lies in an effort to put into permanent form the lesson of the exile. Add to this the guarding against the

influence of the surrounding and native heathen cults and customs, and we find the explanation of many of the points of emphasis in the priestly legislation. The horror of the catastrophe which had befallen them led to the emphasis upon the ritual of atonement, the central element of the legal code. The whole Priestly Code shows the effort to hedge against the influence of alien worship, the influence of heathen elements in the popular cult. Not as discarding prophecy, but in order to conserve its spiritual treasures, the exilic leaders turned to the legal precepts.

Passing from the elements of the problem which faced the men of this period, we turn to seek those personal influences which were most potent in the solution of the problem. Two names stand out most prominently, Ezra and Nehemiah, however many were their predecessors and companions. A critical study of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah has raised the question of the order in time of the activity of the two men. The chronological question may not be so vital here, but the religious development calls for the work of a Nehemiah as a preparation for the great religious movement centering in Ezra. Which ever came first in fact, Nehemiah's reforms formed the good ground in which Ezra's law book took root and grew into completed Judaism. His work was the preparation for the great assembly. He was that link between the mixed people of the reoccupied city and the somewhat idealized vision of reconstruction which was being crystal-

lized in the code forming amid the peculiar conditions surrounding the exiles. In him we find the great force sent from the East to prepare the way for the new code. And when the code appeared, it showed the influence of the movement in Jerusalem as well as the meditation in Babylon. We are not told what influences impelled Ezra in undertaking his expedition. It is not improbable that Nehemiah himself won him to the support of the cause in Jerusalem. It was not hard to find support in developing the material forces, but to purify and develop the social order required just such a kernel of religious enthusiasts and just such a standard of procedure as was found in Ezra's band and Ezra's book. This raises the fair question whether Nehemiah had not had some influence in preparing the code for the people as well as the people for the code. In any case, Ezra came into prominence, so far as the introduction of the law was concerned, after Nehemiah had prepared the way by some radical and practical reforms. The natural opposition to a code, which in some elements must have been looked upon as superimposed from without, also required just such a leavening influence as the band of enthusiasts come to permeate the social structure with the living working out of these new ideals and precepts. Ezra's band must have been as vital to the success of the movement as was Ezra's book, and more so than Nehemiah's preparation. Thus, and only thus, a reform of far-reaching import and involving elements most

radical was started with no overwhelming disturbance in its introduction. Master hands at a moment of opportune crisis guided the people through a period of vital transition.

### *Summary*

In glancing back over this period and movement, we see that its trend is that of conservation of the sacred treasures and traditions of the past, in passing into an era of unknown possibilities and sure problems. The central fact in the movement is the adoption of the systemtized code of religious and communal law in which the *spirit* of all that was permanent in the past and vitalizing for the future was objectified in a permanent *body*. When we approach the question of the adoption of the law, and state it as a contrast between adherence to the high ethical and spiritual standards of the earlier prophets, and the lower one of adherence to formal precepts and systematized cult, the problem becomes a very different one from that which arises if we attempt to put ourselves at the close of the Babylonian captivity, and seek to gather up the treasures of the past and make our chart for a bold plunge into the untried seas of the future. It is but fair to the leaders of that day, and to the spirit of rational purpose running through the history of men, to do so. Our attempt has resulted in the recognition of the effort of men of wisdom and spiritual impulses to send forth the spirit of

ethical monotheism clothed in terms suited to meet the world's chill and fire. Law and spirituality are not necessarily antagonistic terms, but rather complementary. Spirituality fares best in the world of sinful conflict clothed in the garb of law. The garb must not be taken for the real, but the spirit must not be left carelessly exposed to the hard knocks and rude comments of the world. The whole legal movement may be viewed as an attempt to embody for practical preservation and transmission the spirituality of Hebrew prophecy, the rich spiritual treasures inherited from the past by Judaism.

In pre-exilic Israel some of the world's greatest treasures of religious truth and moral idealism had been brought to expression. In their history and literature God had wrought to the highest revelation of his moral and spiritual nature. By a long process he had led them to the consciousness and expression of the world's loftiest concepts of his unique nature and of his ethical character. One God, the Holy One of Israel, was a treasure in earthen vessels, but of priceless value. In the Babylonian captivity, in the reconstruction under Persian overlordship, all this hard-won treasure of untold human value was at stake. Stored up in a band of war captives and political exiles, committed to a weak community of far-distant subjects of a world-power of alien race and religion, how shall these riches be conserved? That was the problem which faced the leaders of the restoration. The law book which Ezra

brought with him from Babylon was an answer to this problem. A recognition of this purpose is essential to a true understanding of it. This code is not intended to form or feed the spiritual nature so much as to conserve those priceless stores of religious truth and spiritual idealism uttered by the prophets and treasured up in the hearts, lives, and literature, of the spiritually receptive among the people. The code is not the kernel of Judaism but the shell, for the preserving and conveying of the kernel. The spiritual treasures are stored up in this sacred casket and handed down the ages, and at no time was the casket a mere case of dry bones, for it was always kept alive in individual human hearts and lives. There were spiritual values to be conserved, even when men forgot them in their pride in the treasured casket. It might become a fetish but never a tomb.

And now we are ready to gather up our threads and bring our discussion to a close. We have remembered the spiritual struggle conducted by the prophets, battling against false rites and customs, distorted conceptions of God and sin, inherited from a pagan past or pagan environments. We see that battle apparently lost in the fall of Jerusalem and the scattering of the best of her people. Suddenly there appears in the ancient site of Israel a new Israel, organized and dominated by a constitution expressing the priestly ideals of religious life. Not the changing voice of inspired leaders, but the unchanging word of a

written code guides the moral and spiritual destinies of the people of God. Must we concede that all the struggles of the prophets have been in vain, that all spirituality has gone out of Israel under this reign of written law? Our answer has been in tracing the steps leading up to this new Israel. We have seen the law grow out of the blending of influences pouring in from the prophetic voices and the terrible experiences of the past, from the national isolation, religious enthusiasm, and literary activities of the exile, from the sore trials and faithful struggles of a feeble remnant in the desolated home-land. We have seen all blend into a code of Priestly Law, gathering up the rich treasures of prophetic faith in the one and holy God of Israel, and enfolding but not embalming them in the familiar forms of a ritual of unknown antiquity and sacred tradition. We have refused to see the spirit wholly crushed in the body, the kernel wholly hardened in the shell, and the moral and spiritual wholly lost in the ceremonial and outward.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LAW VINDICATED

**I**N rapid strides we have swept through the religious history of Israel, with our minds centered upon the problem of the relation of the post-exilic ritual legalism of the priests to the pre-exilic ethical idealism of the prophets. Granting full value to all the factors in the problem, our conclusion must be that, so far as the O. T. itself is concerned, we do not find in Judaism the Pharisaic legalism so often charged to it. What we do find is a consistently maintained ethical idealism, struggling with the practical problems of most trying times, but never sacrificing the essential spirituality of its prophetic inheritance, even when placing a temporary emphasis upon the visible forms called forth by a faith which was laboring for expression in a hostile environment. Whatever may have been the hardening and externalizing effects of the dominance of the law in the later Judaic community, even the greatest spiritual Prophet of the Jews began his ministry by declaring that "it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," even the most formal of outward ceremonies, and he went to his death from the table of the paschal lamb, not as a mere custom of his people, but under an impulse leading him



to say, "With desire I desired to eat this supper with you before I suffer." The very One who was most keen in his denunciation of mere Pharisaic legalism saw the conserving value and the spiritual energy stored up in the legal expression of Hebrew faith. That a canonized literature and a legalized cult are full of grave dangers to pure spiritual and ethical idealism, we are free to concede. That the threatened evils were realized in well-known phases of Rabbinical Judaism, we have no object in denying, even where we may easily argue extenuating circumstances. What we have found is that the passing from one emphasis to the other was dominated by a desire to conserve the spiritual rather than by degeneration into the mere formalism which is capable of expression in empty legalism. The ritual legalism of the priests was the expression of the vital energy of the religion of Israel, seeking to hold and discipline the social community in the adoption and transmission of those lofty spiritual truths inherited from the past and developed by the prophets. Christianity is but the fruit of that endeavor. The historic Christian church is but a repeating of the same process of conservation of the spirit through the outward form.

### *The Prophetic Struggle*

There can be no doubt that the most significant fact in all the history of the Hebrew religion lies

in the struggle of the prophets for ethical idealism. The centuries preceding the period of the great prophets had left a rich legacy of lofty tradition and noble aspiration after God, but also a vast heap of ancient Semitic rubbish and modern Canaanitish corruption. Against these latter forces and in conservation of the ancient spiritual treasures, the prophets labored. In such a task "foundations alone remain firm," but these men found the foundations, even by tearing down long-treasured towers of corruption, and thereon they built anew and for all time. Their demand for a spiritual form of approach to God was grounded in the depth of the prophetic grasp of the great concept of ethical monotheism. The deepest plunge of O. T. prophecy into this mystery of godliness is to be found in Hosea's doctrine of the jealous love of Yahweh for his people, with the complementary love of Israel for its God. This was but a vital expression of that principle of ethical monotheism which binds the heart of his people to one holy God. The vast movements among the world-powers, and the inevitable fate awaiting the restless little state amid the Judean hills, were interpreted as evidences of the sovereign might and absolute world-sway of Yahweh the God of Israel. All Israel's boasted confidence in her sacred sanctuary and orderly rites was as nothing in the face of the wrath and power of the God of might and right. And thus the prophets have ever stood as the world's greatest teachers of the essential truths concerning the moral and

unique character of God. The words of Christ, "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth," are but the conclusion to the argument presented to the consciences of men by the ancient prophet of Israel.

### *The Exile and Restoration*

All that the prophets foretold of Yahweh's destructive wrath was fulfilled in the heavy blows which fell from the mailed hand of Assyria and Babylonia. Samaria fell, and the northern kingdom was dismembered never to be restored. Jerusalem was burnt by the destroyer, and Judah went into captivity to return to the home-land after a period of discipline in a land of strangers. The blow which smote the holy city seemed to fall heaviest upon the house of Yahweh and the ministers of religion, but when the battle cleared and the dust of conflict had settled, it was seen that not the temple of God, but the palace of the king had fallen never to be restored. Israel as a nation had fallen never to be revived. In the house of David only spiritual idealism and patriotic fanaticism found visions of a glorious future. Thus it seemed as though all that rich treasury of spiritual truth committed to the Hebrew people was about to be lost in the overthrow and dispersion of its unworthy custodians. "Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?" What has become of the message of the prophet? It has been vindicated in the destruction of his own

people. That God who could raise up Hazael, the Syrian, to lift the sword of wrath against Israel, his covenant people, could fulfil the strange message of an Amos or a Jeremiah. The smoke from the sacrificial altar had not blinded the eyes of their God to the scenes of oppression and licentiousness in the midst of the people. The sweet savor of the far-brought spices had not deceived the God of purity. The sacrificial vapors and the very incense itself were heavy with the stench of corruption and death, and all these things became an abomination to God. "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone," said the prophet Hosea. And another has said in a striking passage, "And I saw, when, for this very cause that backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorce, yet treacherous Judah her sister feared not; but she also went and played the harlot." Wherefore, "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuseth to be comforted for her children, for they are not." And by the rivers of Babylon the men of Jerusalem sat down, yea, they wept, when they remembered Zion, for Yahweh had cast off his people.

Yet exiled Judah forgot not the city of Yahweh, for Yahweh forgot not his people. The mission of the Hebrew nation was completed, but in the keeping of the exiled people had been committed a treasure of spiritual truth vital enough to endure transportation, precious enough to be the in-

heritance of all the coming ages. Thus Judah, a feeble remnant in a desolated land, and an obscure people in a vast alien civilization, kept alive the consciousness of a common faith and a common mission, and an opportune moment in the vast swing of the wheel of national destiny was seized, and the exile returned to the home-land. Amid the strenuous struggles against the difficulties raised by ruined walls and burned temple, by feeble friends and fierce foes, by corrupt priests and greedy people, the temple was rebuilt, the city was rewalled, and a social organism was effected, and Judaism was firmly established. But in Judaism the Hebrew nation was no more. Instead of the Hebrew nation is to be seen the children of the congregation of Israel. Israel is no longer a political state among the nations of the world, but a religious community in a little Persian province, a Church among the sons of men. The key to the transformation lies in the adoption of a constitution touching the whole social organism, and dominated by a consistent and pervading religious motive. This constitution was the so-called Priestly Code.

### *Israel under the Law*

All the fruits of exilic experience and of priestly activity were summed up in that book of the Law of Moses. Heirs of the spiritual treasures of the past, and regarding themselves as the guardians of the eternal issues of the future, the formulators

of this legislation built carefully, and the effect of their labors shows that in a broad and far-reaching sense they built wisely. That Israel at times seized the concrete to the rejection of the ideal, that she followed the easy course of ritual observance rather than the harder path of devotion to the spirit, does not condemn either the purpose or the method of the post-exilic leaders, but only shows that their problem was real and that their method of approach was after all the only feasible one in seeking to win a firm foothold for spiritual religion in a people of common human impulses.

The essential weakness of the law lies in the emphasis upon the formal element of religious relations over the moral and spiritual content. The idealism of the prophetic message was obscured by this emphasis, and some of the vital energy was threatened. Religion in its outward expression became an orderly and strictly ordered series of sacrificial and ceremonial ritual. In the place of that piety which is satisfied with direct fellowship with the divine, and spontaneous expression in word and act, there was offered an ideal of Pharisaic righteousness summed up in a punctilious performance of the appointments of an established cult. It was against this one-sided development of the concept of religion under the dominance of the law, that Jesus uttered his most searching woes. And yet, with Jesus there is to be noted the recognition that "these ought ye to have done, and not have left the other

undone," even though they include but the minutiae of the most developed ceremonial code. The law of Israel was not all weakness. The whole process of centralization and canonization was one of prophetic purification of a convenient instrument, a ready vehicle of religious truth and expression. Purged from its cruder elements, it became a custodian of vital truth and an expression of the religious consciousness. Surely this does not necessarily make life artificial and religion formal and God a stranger to the soul! Can we not look for evidences of a high mystical piety under such influences? That the former occurs is chargeable to man's weakness, that the latter is in evidence is to the credit of the legal system. We are reminded of Montefiore's question, "Are you going to judge it by its sinners or its saints?" That emphasis upon God's personal presence among his people in the daily rites of a central sanctuary—that emphasis upon the religious import of all the details of life—all these things not merely permitted but even encouraged a longing for his approval and a consciousness of his personal interest in his people, which has expressed itself in some of the most spiritual songs of personal piety. We have in the hymn book of the second temple treasures of spiritual aspiration and devotion dear to the heart of true piety at all times. We may readily call to mind some of these mystic Psalms, hymns of devout and immediate fellowship with Yahweh. The varied sources and the long time represented

in the Psalter show that legal religion did not discourage, but in some hearts at least, developed a lofty type of piety. Thus, in the sacrificial and ceremonial cult, full of lower elements and appealing to inferior motives, there was, nevertheless, a force laying hold of the popular mind and conserving the great concepts of the prophets of spiritualism. The spiritual idealism of the ethical monotheism of the prophets was the leavening influence in the inception and working out of the Priestly Code, and the Code thus inspired served to conserve to legal Judaism the unrivalled treasures committed to it, to become the inheritance of Christianity and so of all mankind.

#### *The Resultant*

In attempting to define the resultant which arose from the expression of prophetic idealism in terms of priestly legalism, we can only summarize briefly the chief results of our historical survey. Any concise definition would prove to be little more than a restatement of the problem. That the resultant was a syncretizing compromise, is the briefest statement of results. The measure of the varied ingredients is purely a question of fact, and largely a question of time and place, of community and individual. In times of distress, such as the persecutions of Manasseh, or the Babylonian exile, the faithful in Israel learned that neither sacred place nor rite was essential to the maintaining of a real fellowship with God.



Thus arose the Deuteronomic movement for the limitation of the dangers inherent in local cults, by the acceptance of one central sanctuary as the exponent of all outward religious activity. In the priestly legislation, the logical working out of this proposition is found in the absolute control of all public worship to the exclusion of the corrupt and the development of the ideal. That the material outward forms, interpreted in terms of the expedient, should assume the place of the essential is not a necessary development, even if a very natural one. If an effort to analyse and explain the motives underlying the adoption of this formulated system in place of the immediate and spontaneous religious expression demanded by the severe logic of the prophetic message, ends only in raising a question to leave it unanswered, we need not feel that nothing has been done, and that no gain has accrued. Not impertinent is the reminder of Ruskin, "you will discover that the thoughts even of the wisest are very little more than pertinent questions. To put the difficulty into clear shape, and exhibit to you the grounds of *indecision*, that is all that they can generally do for you." If we have shown that there is good ground for *indecision* in trying to explain the relations existing between pre-exilic prophetic ethical idealism and post-exilic priestly legalism, we shall have done something toward removing too widely accepted false judgments as to the legal system and its effects upon Israel.

Prophetic idealism was not lost in priestly legalism, when the religious customs of the past were systematized and authorized in the post-exilic law-book. But the law became a common carrier of all the treasures of prophecy, placing them at the door of every man in Israel, carrying them down the ages to be deposited within the storehouse of Christian spirituality. The whole legal system, even in its most material symbolism, was dominated and inspired by prophetic ethical idealism. There is no better evidence of this fact than the power which lay in the cult of manifesting itself in lives of true piety. Legalism wrought out in life belied the charge that it was void of all spiritual and moral force, and showed that the Jewish constitution was successful in its aim of preserving and transmitting Israel's religious treasures. It gave rise to that mass of individualistic and intimate piety which so permeates the O. T. No better proof that ceremonial ritual did not dominate the interpretation of the law can be found than in the 119th Psalm, in which there is no mention of the ceremonies of sacrifice, purification or atonement. Thus the truly religious idealism of the Hebrew constitution burst through the bonds of the practical fetters of legal regulations, and manifested itself in the hymns and lives of the pious members of the Jewish community. To this movement in Hebrew religious history Christianity is not the antithesis but the ideal culmination. It is not a break with the past, but the seizing of the real

treasure of its origin and the handing of it down to the future. Jesus of Nazareth never broke from the fellowship of his Father's house, but only from the fellowship of those who would make that house a sheltering den for thieves.

Our study has thus brought us to the climax of a long course of religious development. Jastrow drops, by chance as it were, a most significant phrase. "It is this idealism issuing from the direction taken by the religious thought and by the religious institutions of the Hebrews that eventually brings about the wide departure from Babylonian and Assyrian counterparts, . . . ." (Jastrow, *Hebrew and Babylonian Traditions*, 318.) It is "the direction taken," not the stage but the trend of a movement which is the vital factor in the problem, the significant element in the process of evolution. The fundamental element in our problem is not so much the moral and spiritual faultlessness of the priestly reconstruction of the post-exilic community, but the trend of that movement. We have seen that "the direction taken" by religious thought in the common institutions of sacrificial ritual and ceremonial worship developed out of the Jewish legal system, not a mere materialistic formalism, but a deeply spiritual and ethical personal piety—that out of the threatening dangers lurking in priestly legalism Judaism developed into Christianity, the highest type of ethical idealism. In other words, there was such a thing as Jewish ethical idealism, as well as Jewish ritual legalism.

And this Judaism became Christianity. In Jesus the prophetic inspiration found permanent expression, but in the law the prophetic message was preserved until a better spokesman arose. Then, and only then, could it say with the last great impersonation of the O. T. dispensation, John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Have we solved our problem? Who can say? But we have shown that the priceless jewel of Hebrew religious development, a pure ethical idealism of the prophets, was not lost to the religious experience of Israel, but was rather preserved for her and for all ages and all races through the ritual legalism of the priests. The world's richest treasures of religious and moral truth are the gifts and fruitage of Jewish ethical idealism.

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