
A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL IN THE LIGHT OF THE RELIGIONS OF THE ANCIENT EAST

PROFESSOR MAX LÖHR, D.D.
KÖNIGSBERG, PRUSSIA

THE more completely we become acquainted with the spiritual world of ancient Babylon and Egypt, the more clearly we perceive that Israel's intellectual, and especially her religious life was not without contact with that spiritual world. The Old Testament itself appears to indicate as much when it regards Babel as the original home of all nations, and "the River," according to its usage, is not, as one might assume, the Jordan, but the Euphrates. Then, Abraham comes from Mesopotamia, and Moses sustains intimate relations to the court of the Pharaohs. This testimony of the Old Testament is confirmed to a certain degree by the profane history of Israel and by the excavations which have been made in Palestine during the last generation. If what the spade of the excavator has brought to light has to do principally with the civilization of the outer life, and indeed more with that of Egypt than of Mesopotamia, yet we cannot conceive of the political connections of Israel with the East and South without her acceptance of elements of worship from Assyria and Babylon and Egypt — and in fact, such elements may be pointed out. With entire reason has it therefore been said that the problem of placing the religious development of Israel in due relation with the spiritual conceptions and customs of Western Asia and Egypt, and of forming our view of that development in this light, is the chief problem of Old Testament science.

In taking up this problem we are met at once by the difficulty that we have had to the present time only a very defective knowledge of those spiritual ideals and customs, so that there are decided differences among specialists in

respect to many particulars; and then by the further and greater difficulty that we have very little well-grounded knowledge as to the means by which those ideals reached Israel, whether directly or through the Canaanites. It is commonly assumed that Canaan before the Israelites arrived, was an uncontested domain of Babylonian civilization — this word taken in its widest signification — and that this Babylonian civilization was communicated by the Canaanites to the uncivilized Israelitish people at their entrance into Canaan. But the first assumption must be decidedly limited, to say the least. And it is a very difficult problem, even for the expert, to decide how far the Canaanites offered the Israelites at that time their own, that is to say the Babylonian or Egyptian, elements of civilization.

Again, if one may regard Mesopotamia and Egypt as the most important sources of the spiritual culture of western Asia at the time, they were by no means the only ones. The Canaanites and other nations which may be considered in this connection, yes, even the Israelites themselves, have spiritual characteristics, peculiar to themselves. The Phœnician cosmogony exhibits essential departures from the Babylonian, and with all the relationship between the Code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant in the Old Testament, there are yet different legal usages among the Israelites, and they had a different legal development. And spiritual influences seem also to have been exerted by these western peoples upon the East and South. In short, in the period of the first to the third millennium B.C. many spiritual filaments stretch from East to West, from North to South, hither and thither, and the work of comparison is far more difficult than appears at the first glance.

Finally, we have to bear in mind that in the case of related phenomena we do not need always to suppose the existence of influence or derivation: in matters of religious development there may be parallel phenomena. This holds true, in my opinion, especially where we have to do with the relations of the human individual to God.

The theme of the present article is therefore as difficult as it is interesting; and that which may be offered at the present time cannot pretend to be more than an attempt — do not view it as anything more — an attempt to paint upon the background of the spiritual life of the ancient Orient a picture of the religion of Israel as far as our present knowledge enables us to do this.

First, we may define certain international situations, views, and customs, and also certain literary phenomena.

The entire life of the peoples of western Asia both public and private is controlled by religious ideas. We must everywhere distinguish between a higher and a lower *stratum* in these peoples. Certain particulars essential to worship are everywhere repeated, temple and altar, offerings and oracles, higher and lower officials from chief priests down to doorkeepers.

Again, certain animistic ideas are international, such as the belief in the existence of demons and their activity, in part helpful, in part injurious. Such are, for example, the spirits of the dead, who inflict injury on men when their corpses do not receive due honor, when they are "thrown out under the open heaven and not covered with earth," as we read in the series of exorcisms of "evil Demons." There is a certain modification of this view in the Old Testament, of which examples occur in the cuneiform literature, viz., that the soul of the unburied dead itself suffers. That is what Amos had in mind when he threatened the high priest Amaziah, "Thou thyself shalt die in a land that is unclean." From this source came the care shown for burial and the sanctity of the grave, which we find in Israel as well as among the Phœnicians and Egyptians. Akin to the idea, or perhaps the worship, of the spirits of the dead is that of the spirits of the underworld, such as, for example, the spirits of the fields which grant or deny fruitfulness to a field; or of those who establish their haunts in trees or fountains and manifest themselves to men in various ways. They were known to the peasants of the entire region from the Euphrates,

through Syria and Palestine, even to the Nile, and worshiped by them.

As a matter of course the people were everywhere acquainted where animism prevailed, with means by which its dangerous manifestations might be avoided.

Thus the custom of wearing amulets was an international custom, international also the belief in a magic power residing in word and name. The rightly spoken word in a formula of exorcism or in a formal blessing or a curse, possessed a secretly operating power; and the name of a demon or of a god had the same power as the spoken word. "The word," i.e. the name Marduk, we read in a hymn addressed to Marduk as the god of the storm, "terrifies the sea and stirs the river to its depths." In the Old Testament we find the view that whoever knows the name of a demon possesses the power of making that demon do his pleasure by invoking him. In like manner we find in the cuneiform exorcisms the mention of different demons, in order to hit upon the name of the one who did the evil, and thus by naming him, make him subservient to the worshiper. The Egyptians also laid great emphasis upon knowing the name of a god, because his power resides in his name. If one pronounces it upon the bank of a river, the river dries up; and if one pronounces it upon the land, this will scintillate with sparks of fire. The name of a being is also that which first imparts to him independence, or even existence. "When above, the heavens were not yet named, and beneath, the earth had not been called by a name," i.e. when neither had yet come into existence, — thus run the well-known words with which the Babylonian cosmology begins. The sun-god in Egypt is designated as his own creator when it is said that he has himself "given" to himself "his name." And in the Old Testament man names the beasts which Jehovah has formed and brought to him.

Side by side with these religious views stood also definite ethical views which had a widely extended acceptance.

In a well-known Babylonian exorcism the attacks of the

demons are conceived as divine punishments for sins committed, and the question is asked whether the sufferer can have incurred guilt in any one of the following ways:—

"Has he despised Father or Mother, or insulted his elder sister?
Has he said 'Yes' instead of 'No,' 'No' instead of 'Yes'?
Has he used false weights?
Has he accepted a false sum?
Has he encroached upon the possessions of his neighbor?
Has he approached his neighbor's wife?
Has he shed the blood of his neighbor?
Has he stolen the garment of his neighbor?
Was he upright with the mouth, but false in heart?
Has he dishonored the name of his god by a gift?
Has he dedicated and vowed anything and then holden it back?"

How close is the relationship of these ethical conceptions with the commands of the Mosaic decalogue!

Another question reads:—

"Has he had to do with magicians and wizards?"

Even at this early point, to have fellowship with sinners, to eat and to drink with them, is forbidden. Who does not recall the first Psalm, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked"?

In another text, we are earnestly warned against sins of the tongue:—

"Do not calumniate, speak what is favorable.
Speak not evil, let thy speech do good.
Make thy mouth not great, guard thy lips."

Are not these well-known words to which it were easy to produce many parallels from the Psalms and the Proverbs?

The same commands are found also in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Here the soul of a departed man mentions in his confession to the Judges of the dead among other things the following:—

"I have not killed.
I have not committed adultery.
I have neither enlarged nor diminished the measure of corn.

I have not increased the weights of the balance.
I have not stolen.
I have not reviled the King.
I have not blasphemed God.
I have satisfied God with that which is well-pleasing to him.
I have given bread to the hungry.
And to the thirsty water,
And to the naked clothing,
And to him that had no ship a ferry-boat.
I have made offerings to the gods,
And to the dead, the offerings of the dead."

The international dissemination of many forms of literature, and their often striking similarities with one another, is almost greater still, at any rate it often appears in a more striking form. Let us begin by considering religious poetry.

Since the worship of the Sun was extended throughout all western Asia and Egypt, we shall do well to give the hymns to the Sun the first place. For Egypt, the hymn of the Pharaoh Echnaton may be mentioned, which has points of contact with Psalm civ. Many of the Babylonian hymns to Shamash, which on the whole belong to the most meritorious of the cuneiform hymnology, remind one vividly of the Biblical psalms upon the natural world, as, for example, this:—

"Merciful God, who liftest up the lowly and protectest the weak,
Hopefully, with lifted head men look towards the sunlight.
When thou appearest, they exult and shout.
Thou art the banner for the wide earth.
Multitudes look up to thee with joy."

The private and public dirges and the so-called penitential psalms constitute a special branch of the religious poetry of Babylonia. Their similarity in form to the corresponding poetry of the Old Testament is quite striking.

Not only do we find among the Babylonians as well as the Egyptians the parallelism of the lines which is characteristic of Hebrew poetry, as well as the division into strophes; not only do we find the use of the acrostic; but there is a whole series of poetical expressions which are

almost stereotyped in the lyric poetry of Israel as well as of Babylon and Egypt. Thus, when the saint, languishing for the divine help, sighs: "O Lord, how long?" or when he represents his sufferings under the figure of a painful sickness, certain death before his eyes. "My tears have been my food day and night," says the Old Testament poet, and in the Babylonian penitential psalm the troubled soul complains: "Weeping was my refreshment, tears were my drink." The words of another song remind one vividly of Psalm vi.:—

> "Mine eye is filled with weeping,
> Upon my bed I lie, full of sighs,
> Weeping and sighing have brought me low."

Psalm vi.:—

> "I am weary with my groaning,
> Every night I make my bed to swim,
> I water my couch with my tears."

To the "panting of the hart after the water-brooks" in the psalm, corresponds the groaning of the wild cow, the complaining of the dove, which serve the Babylonian believer as a comparison. Like comparisons are found also in the Egyptian poetry. The believer vows that if he receives the grace of his god, he will proclaim it through the whole world:—

> "Thy name will I proclaim,
> Thy fame declare among the black-headed."

International was especially that courtly style of address which we note particularly in the Messianic psalms and in passages of the prophets, exactly as it was found in Nineveh and in the kingdom of the Pharaohs.

The secular poetry of love, as well as proverbial poetry, was old and widely extended in western Asia. In Egypt there are parallels to the proverbs of Solomon in those of Ptahhotep, and others, and parallels to Job and Ecclesiastes in the poem of One Weary of Life. In the same way one might cite counterparts of Proverbs and of Job in the

cuneiform literature. The Old Testament itself indicates the international character of this species of literature when it says that "Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt."

Of the prose literature of the ancient Orient we will mention at this point only the fables. Egypt has fables of the sycamore and the date-palm and Israel those of the cedar and the thistle, as well as the so-called parable of Jotham. This species of fables, based upon plant-life, had a great vogue in Mesopotamia.

The foregoing discussion exhibits a not inconsiderable amount of similarity in the intellectual life of the peoples of the ancient Orient. With so much as a basis, there may be established a series of essential differences in the intellectual traits of these peoples.

If we now leave the style of literature which we have been discussing, we shall find at one point in the Old Testament no kinship, but rather a wide difference, or better a great superiority to the remaining literature of the Orient, viz., in the historical books. Israel has not only passed beyond the annalistic kind of historical composition, but has produced genuine historical narrative. The Old Testament contains the elements which constitute the foundation upon which universal history was raised, viz., the two conceptions of the unity of the human race, and the conduct of that race by a divine will towards a definite goal.

This preëminence of the Old Testament has a characteristic origin, which is to be sought in Israel's idea of God.

The God of Israel is a being independent of the concatenation of natural causes, whose sphere of operation is history, and, in the first instance, the history of Israel, but more broadly considered, the history of the entire world. In the rest of the Orient, especially in Babylon and Egypt, the divinities are personifications of cosmic powers, deities of the constellations, gods of the plant-world, etc. Jehovah is the God from eternity to eternity, the "Ancient of Days," who bids men and nations come and go. And how

firmly fixed was this view of God in the minds of the noblest of the people! However the Old Testament poet may allow himself to personify nature, as when he calls the darkness of the cloud and the wind of the storm God's messengers, however much the glory of the starry heavens of the East, or the brilliancy of the sun, before which nothing can be hid, enraptures him, they are, nevertheless, only the work of Jehovah's hands and proclaim his glory; and the poetic genius of Israel who has painted Jehovah's creative work in the most magnificent manner, has only done something characteristic of them all when he has glorified Jehovah as both the creator and governor of the world:—

"It is he that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain
And spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in;
That bringeth princes to nothing;
That maketh the judges of the earth as vanity."

This spiritual view of God, leading directly to monotheism, is involved in the teaching of Moses. From the beginning, Jehovah has neither wife nor son. The great mass of Israel is inclined, it is true, to do homage to Astarte, or the Queen of Heaven. The pure religion of Jehovah rejects all that. It is also true that the Old Testament mentions in passing intermediate beings between Jehovah and his people; but they belong, for the most part, to the popular superstition.

From the moment when Israel enters history, her idea of God passes beyond national limitations. Jehovah enters upon a relation to all humanity in consequence of his spiritual and ethical being. The result is a monotheism which rests upon an ethical basis. It is the distinction of the prophets of Israel to have first introduced this idea of God, one of significance not only for the religious development of Israel, but also for the spiritual development of humanity. To Isaiah, the struggle of the peoples of his time appears as the conflict of flesh and spirit. Against brutal power and shameless greed the victory

must remain with the cause of the right and civilization. So judges the prophet in the eighth century B.C. Has the modern view of the world to this day passed beyond this ethical optimism, which regards the history of the world as the judgment of the world?

I do not intend by all this to deny that in the religions of the ancient Orient there are currents which one can, if need be, call monotheistic. I regard myself justified in employing this very restricted formula, because the question whether this or that divinity might alone possess independent existence was never raised either in Mesopotamia or in Egypt. We nowhere find such a putting of the problem as undoubtedly occurs in the episode of Mount Carmel in the story of Elijah: "Is Jehovah the one God, or Baal?" The cases which can be adduced are only expressions looking in that direction. For example, the god Anu, who is the personification of the sky, has in Babylon precedence over the other gods. At another time a poet shows an especial reverence for the god of the moon:—

> "In the heavens who is exalted? Thou, thou alone, art exalted!
> Upon earth who is exalted? Thou, thou alone, art exalted!"

Finally one God, like Marduk, in consequence of political conditions, arrives at an undoubted supremacy. It was from political considerations that Amenophis IV.–Echnaton attempted, in the first half of the fourteenth century, to introduce in the old provinces of his kingdom a common worship of the sun.

The words of the royal poet in his hymn to the Sun are indeed beautiful:—

> "The earth is in thy hand as well as men whom thou hast made.
> When thou risest, they live; when thou sinkest, they die.
> Thou thyself art our natural life, and we live in thee.
> All eyes gaze upon thy beauty till thou settest."

But the entire hymn contains no single clear expression of monotheism.

Finally, the sevenfold divinity of Mesopotamia, the "Lord of gods" and the "Lord of the heavens" worshiped

by the Canaanites and Aramæans might be mentioned here — all conceptions which might have led to monotheism, but which never really attained it. What is everywhere lacking is exclusiveness with reference to other gods, that sound intolerance which is characteristic of the religion of Moses; and it must be declared an undeniable historical fact that the religious genius of Israel alone has produced a real monotheism, and that the knowledge of her God which she possessed, is in respect to its origin, as well as its consequences, essentially different from that of the rest of the civilized peoples of western Asia.

This religious superiority of Israel is especially revealed in the ethical character of her deity. From the beginning, Jehovah is the God of righteousness, the God who prescribes to his people in the Decalogue (however it may have originally run) fundamental commands that are distinctly ethical. These duties, which are principally ethical in substance, are proposed as religious, and are prescribed as the fundamental conditions of a course of life pleasing to God. The importance which is conceded to these commands in the religious circles of Israel is characteristic of the religion itself. One of its principal merits lies in the social activity which it imposes upon its adherents: "Deal thy bread to the hungry, bring the poor that are cast out to thy house, when thou seest the naked, cover him."

True, the gods of Babylon and of Egypt did not lack certain ethical attributes. We shall come to speak of these in a later connection. But they were, so to speak, only an adjunct, an element formed from a trait, at first only secondary, of the original god who was not distinguished from nature. The nature-god became the god of a racial stock, of a city, or of any human community, out of which grew an ethical relation between him and it, and consequently certain ethical attributes. In order to view this matter from the correct angle, note the following: that the gods of western Asia and Egypt, with all possible virtues which are ascribed to them, have also quite grave

ethical weaknesses. The holiness of Jehovah is emphasized in the Old Testament again and again. Isaiah's customary designation of God in more solemn expressions is "the Holy One of Israel." The ethical element belongs to his essence as a constituent factor.

This fundamental difference in the conception of the divine being comes to expression in still another direction, viz., in the worship, particularly in the absence of artistic representations of Jehovah. Every such representation was forbidden. It is easy to understand how the high conception of the religious leaders and the necessities of the great mass of the people gradually developed antagonism at this point. But those leaders were and remained inexorable, for they truly estimated the dangers which pictorial representation of the deity involved for his spirituality as well as for his unity. And it must be esteemed a preëminent spiritual achievement of the representatives of the pure religion of Jehovah, that in spite of the prohibition of pictures and statues, Jehovah was always conceived as a living personality, a God to whom the individual soul and the nation felt themselves in near relation. How many psalms are but an audible echo of the consciousness of the gracious nearness of Jehovah! And Deuteronomy is justified in its query, "What nation is there that hath a god so nigh unto them as Jehovah our God is whensoever we call upon him?" But the spiritual nature of Jehovah has affected the worship still more permanently. The simplicity and crudeness of the original religion of Moses, a religion of a nomadic people, justifies the assumption that the worship of Jehovah was of the simplest character. The greater culture of Canaan first introduced display and everything else conceivable into it, as, for example, the well-known orgies which were peculiar to the worship of Baal and Astarte. Against all such corruptions, in part only temporary, the religious consciousness of Israel always raised opposition. But not only that. Her prophets and psalmists came to understand that a worship abounding in material sacrifices is without all

worth, that man, the spiritual creature of Jehovah, is permitted to worship him only in spirit. Obedience to his commands and a humble heart are the sacrifices which are well-pleasing to him. This consciousness constitutes nothing less that an epoch in the history of religion. None of the religions of the ancient Orient has attained such a height in the estimation of forms of worship. True, the Babylonians had begun to introduce into their religious festivals a spiritual element, the public reading of stories about the gods, but this expedient falls far short of the divine consciousness which marks the Old Testament.

Sharp as the characteristic traits of Jehovah were drawn, it is a sign of the soundness of the religious development of Israel that she could introduce into her idea of her God many an element from the religious culture of western Asia. The idea of Jehovah was by no means changed in its innermost essence by this, and no alteration in the principles of the religion of Israel followed thereupon. But a certain enrichment of her conception of God was nevertheless produced.

The clearest example of this is found in the change which the god of the pastoral nomads undergoes in the civilized land of Canaan into the teacher and promoter of agriculture. A presumably old song in the Book of Isaiah tells how Jehovah instructed the countryman how to sow and reap. We may also assume that the healing activity of Jehovah, and the expressions found especially in Jeremiah and the Psalms as to Jehovah who healeth all diseases and giveth life, may have been fertilized by Babylonian and Phœnician ideas of a healing god.

Still another feature of this kind may have received enrichment from the same source, viz., the redeeming work of God. From the very beginning Jehovah is the austere God, the unapproachable God, the God of consuming holiness. When in later times he is styled "the Redeemer," "the Helper," we hear the voice of the times, and that of the individuals who name him thus; but it is possible and accordant with the history of religion to assume that

Babylonian and Phœnician ideas have exercised an influence at this point. The idea of redemption, however, which in those nations sprung up from the natural world, in Israel was transferred to the spiritual world of salvation.

The idea of Jehovah received, however, a very essential enrichment through the contact which Israel experienced with the mythological treasures of Babylon. From the confused multitude of mythological forms and acts which have to do with the creation, the Flood, etc., Israel incorporated many an element in her idea of God, and reshaped it after her own ideas. Since the thinking of Israel had no place for the animation and personification of the forces of nature, the mythological character of the literature which Israel copied had of course to be eliminated. Best known is the transfer to Jehovah of the famous struggle of Marduk with the monster of the vasty deep, by which Jehovah becomes the God who slays the dragon (Isa. li. 9, Ps. lxxiv. 13). The poet says of him that he divided the sea; by his might the heads of the dragon were broken in pieces in the water. But the interest of the matter lies in the application of this display of the might of Jehovah. It is the proof of his wisdom: "How manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all!" — the proof of righteousness and faithfulness towards his people: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne, loving kindness and truth go before thy face."

The *motif* of the struggle with the dragon is exclusively employed in poetry; but an enrichment of the religious thinking of Israel derived from the myth of creation is found in the adoption of the Babylonian conception of the universe. This was divided into realms of air, earth, and water, a division which is reflected in the Old Testament, as, for example, in the Decalogue, where we read, "in the heavens above, the earth beneath, the waters under the earth." The "waters above the firmament," or, as we read in the psalm, "the river of God, which is full of water," are expressions which reflect the Babylonian idea of the

ocean of heaven. The "sea of brass" in the temple is certainly also closely connected with it.

But we ought also to mention an essential difference between the Babylonian and the Biblical description of the creation. In the former the entire process is founded upon a wearisome struggle which even Marduk, the representative of light, must sustain with the dark, chaotic waste of waters. In the latter, it is from the beginning the creative power of God which is in operation, restrained by no opponent. He calls all things into existence by his word. And what he creates is perfect.

More significant yet is the difference between the Babylonian account of the Flood and that of the Old Testament. The Flood must come as a judgment of the holy God on account of the sin of men, but the pious individual is rescued. Of course, we do not by this affirm that the Babylonian story was entirely lacking in ethical elements. These are particularly prominent in a recension of the story of the Flood in which we are told of divine visitations which have come in consequence of the wickedness of men, and of which the Flood is the climax. But in the best known recension, the gods themselves do not know what has led them to bring in the Flood. The god Ea rescues his favorite secretly. When the Flood is on, even the gods become anxious. After the Flood they refresh themselves with the offering of the rescued, and fall into a very vicious quarrel. One is angry that even a single man has been rescued. Another declares the whole affair to be an act of folly. What a difference between the cuneiform story and its Biblical derivative!

The way in which the story of the Tower of Babel is adopted and utilized is unique, and significant of the peculiar genius of the Hebrew religion. The Babylonian tower, wherever it may have stood, was to reach to Heaven, but the envy of the gods laid this Titan structure in ruins. The Old Testament narrator makes this uncompleted work of men the source of the multiplicity of languages and peoples. This is the consequence of man's sin, something

unnatural, something which God did not purpose. According to his decree harmony and mutual understanding were to reign among the nations. There was to be a kingdom which should serve the cause of peace and right living. The prophets and poets of the Old Testament have again and again given expression to precisely this thought which came forth from the depths of the Hebrew soul. How far are we still from realizing it even to-day! The religious and moral ideals of the Old Testament are still unappropriated and still unexhausted.

The value of a religion is, in my opinion, especially evident in the views which it produces as to the relation of the individual soul to God. Certain thoughts on this point have struck their roots deep in every man's breast, and there appears therefore in this direction no small number of like phenomena.

Fear of the wrath of the deity, modified here and there but not removed by another point of view, is especially strong in the religion of Babylon, whether it was viewed as acting directly, or as giving scope to some particular evil powers. And this divine wrath — so they believed — visited sometimes upon the son the sins of the father, or caused a single one to suffer for the whole family. "They that do evil, their posterity shall not endure" declares a Babylonian hymn. These are views which have their well-known parallels in Israel.

Men sought to meet this wrath of the gods by adjurations. This tendency was so strong in Mesopotamia that adjurations formed the foundation of the religious and ecclesiastical life. One needed for this purpose a man who was able to conjure successfully: the layman needed the priest. He must conduct the conjuration, make the offering, and point out the future fate of the suppliant by oracle or omen. Individual piety was naturally greatly suppressed by this indispensable coöperation of the priest, and what we shall have later to produce of this kind must necessarily be considered under this limitation. Fear of God among the Babylonians is for the most part fear of

demons, piety in Babylon moves in the leading-strings of the priest. How different in Israel! The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom. This word, although of late transmission, is by no means of late origin. It shows that the religion of Israel rests upon an ethical foundation, upon the happy obedience with which man fulfills the commands of his God. He who fears God rejoices in his law. Accordingly the relation between God and man is also one between person and person. I regard the proposition that in Israel the individual is of strikingly little importance in comparison with the community, in religious matters at least, by no means true. Without intending to maintain an entire opposition to the presence of some sort of personal relation to the divinity in the other religions of the ancient East, for without such a relation religion is scarcely conceivable, yet this is precisely the great peculiarity of the religion of Israel, that it has produced a multitude of religious men, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, the prophets who have committed their prophecies to writing, the authors of the Psalms, the writers of Job and Ecclesiastes. They are in part brought before us by others, in part we meet them directly. In any case, their line runs through all the centuries of the history of the spirit of Israel, beginning with the earliest. And not that only! Not a few of those names had so rich a religious experience that they were able to accomplish their emancipation from the authority of the priesthood.

But however great the chasm is which separates the Babylonian and Hebrew piety, ethical earnestness was by no means entirely lacking in the other peoples of western Asia or Egypt. It existed, though side by side with other elements, and it was able to produce religious frames and ethical points of view which sometimes come exceedingly near to those of Israel.

The god Shamash is judge of Heaven and the Earth, the incorruptible judge, the light of the nations. Another time we read of Marduk: "He sees beyond the mouth, he looks upon the heart." He is termed the merciful Father,

who lifts up those that are bowed down, and protects the weak. Both rule over mankind by righteous principles.

Of Shamash we read:—

> "Who carries out evil purposes, his horn dost thou destroy.
> Who is well-pleasing to Shamash, his life shall be prolonged."

And of Marduk it is said:—

> "Whoever is faithful to Marduk, his foundation shall stand.
> Whoever is faithful to the son of Bel, shall endure forever."

The same is true of Egypt. Amon is the protector of the weak. Thus one prays to him: "Amon, lend thine ear to one who stands alone in judgment, who is poor and his antagonist mighty."

Every one of these citations might, with certain changes, be found in the Book of Psalms. Scholars have already often referred to these parallels to Old Testament ethics, not without mention of the hate of one's enemies which often finds so intense an expression in the Psalms. I would like, on the other hand, to emphasize the fact that for a correct judgment of this hate, we must bear in mind that it sets forth not a personal antagonism but one of principle. The more flaming the enthusiasm for Jehovah, the more intense the abhorrence of every one who resists his commandments. Thus Jeremiah, one of the noblest and most refined personalities of the Old Testament, repeatedly prays for the punishment of his enemies, because they are Jehovah's enemies. And the delicate writer of Psalm cxxxix. asks:—

> "Should I not hate them, O Jehovah, that hate thee?
> And loathe them that lift up themselves against thee?"

Besides, we are to remember that those who give expression to such hate are persecuted and tortured men.

But still closer does the spiritual relationship appear

when we think of the rôle which sin plays in the religious poetry of Babylon and Egypt about the close of the new kingdom. We frequently meet in Babylonian hymns the petition for the forgiveness of sins. Thus we read in one passage: "In the night season may I receive redemption from my sin, mayest thou forgive my transgression!"; or: "Since thou art merciful, I turn to thee, free me from sin, release my transgression"; or: "Many are my sins."

An Egyptian saint of the new kingdom declares that he "is a foolish man," and begs: "Punish me not for my many sins."

The consciousness of sin is great — even unknown sins are mentioned — but in the extra-biblical hymns, it consists essentially in the harassing feeling of being exposed to a gloomy, capricious power, and confession is nothing more than a supplicatory complaining and begging that the heart of the angry divinity may be soothed and led to put an end to the punishment of the sin, which is almost always designated as sickness.

We can by no means deny that the Old Testament is familiar with such a resort to painful complaints, nor that even the official worship of Jehovah sees in the material sacrifice a means of quieting the wrath of God in quite the same way as the other religions of the ancient Orient. And yet the Old Testament towers like a giant above their feeling as to sin, since it never forgets, in its desire for deliverance from the consequences of sin, the essential thing, viz., the change of heart. One looks in vain for such a psalm as the fifty-first in the religious lyrics of western Asia, and so far, in those of Egypt. It is the divine mercy alone which blots out sin, no offering of bulls and goats. The offering which Jehovah demands of the sinner is rather a humble and glad obedience to his commands. "Create in me, O God, a pure heart and renew a right spirit within me."

Those thoughts which men have everywhere had in view of the thousand riddles of human existence, when one asks whence this life has come and whither it goes, are to be

found also in the religions of western Asia. True, there is not lacking the expression of trust in the deity on the part of those who faithfully follow his commands. Thus Asurbanipal prays to Nebo: "I am thy servant, forsake me not when my enemies are so many." And Nebo answers:—

> "I will protect thee to the end of the days.
> Thy feet shall not grow lame, nor thy hands relax.
> Thy lips shall not grow weary of calling upon me."

Similarly runs the prayer of the great Pharaoh, Ramses II.: "Amon is more to me than millions of foot-soldiers and hundreds of thousands of chariots. The works of men are nothing, Amon is of greater worth than they. I am of greater value to thee than a hundred thousand."

But in general, man found himself, and the pious man not less than others, face to face with riddles often without solution. We can therefore understand the rise of the view, when we meet it in Babylon or in Egypt, that man is a perishable being, that everything upon earth is determined beforehand and the fate of each one is fixed till death, which is designated in an official Egyptian document as decreed by God. In Babylon there was a corresponding idea of tablets of fate and the book of fate which possessed the magical power that those who were written therein should continue to live, while those blotted out of it must die. Nebuchadnezzar prays to Nebo: "Upon thine unchangeable tablet which determines the limits of Heaven and Earth, fix the length of my days, inscribe my posterity." This view may have been adopted in the circles of the Jewish exiles in Babylon, and so it came about that we find it reproduced in one of the later Psalms: Before I entered into life were my "days ordained, and in thy book they were all written."

But if man stands face to face with dark fate, the real question is what he does with the days that are actually bestowed upon him. He might easily come upon the thought of enjoying the short respite of to-day, careless of the morrow.

In an Egyptian poem, the so-called Song of the Harper, we read:—

"Laments save no one from the grave.
Therefore celebrate the joyous day and be not weary of it.
For never was it granted to any one to take his possessions with him,
And no one who had departed has ever returned."

Is it not as if we were listening to the Preacher, Solomon?

But not every one was able to content himself, once for all, with this solution. The problem remained, like all the others, really unanswered, especially the most tormenting of them all, that pertaining to the sufferings of the righteous. The problem which forms the theme of the Book of Job reappears in Egypt in the poem of one "weary of life," and in Babylon in a poem about a king of Nippur. To be sure, those poems make no approach to so mighty a creation as is the Biblical Book of Job. For that, the high level of one of the saints of Israel were required. Still less do we anywhere find such a solution of this problem as is presented in the seventy-third Psalm:—

"According to thy counsel dost thou lead me,
And afterward receive me to glory.
If only I have thee, I ask not for Heaven and Earth.
When my flesh and my heart fail,
Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion."

This poet has given us in his verses *the* solution, a solution beyond which no other religious genius has pressed, up to the present hour.

While we are upon the theme, God and Man, there should be added a word upon God and the King. The institution of the Kingdom was common to the nations of western Asia. Since Israel took this over from foreign lands, it is important to determine how far she assimilated it. It is a distinctive mark of the Kingdom upon the Euphrates and the Nile to maintain an intimate relation between the King and the Deity. In both places the king receives, or claims, divine honors. Kings are, with slight

limitation, looked upon as gods, or at least as the sons of gods. This view is the more intelligible because the gods themselves were not much more than greater men, not beings of a peculiar nature. In Israel, on the contrary, no king is ever apotheosized. The Hebrew view of God makes that impossible. Rather, Jehovah is himself king, and strictly consistent followers of Jehovah sometimes go so far as to reject the earthly king. Now, it could not, of course, fail that there should arise in Israel with the institution of king and court, especially with the inclination of Orientals to hyperbole, a court style, and this led to the designation of the Israelite ruler as "god," as is said in Psalm xlv., and as "son of God," as we find in Psalm ii., and hinted at in 2 Sam. vii. But in all three places the expression is a purely figurative one. It was a natural result of the court style and court etiquette that the people wished the king eternal life, and swore by the king. And since his person was regarded as sacred, it appeared also a special crime, and one worthy of death, to curse him or to lay hand upon him; for he was put in his place by God, the Jewish king no less than the king of Nineveh, for example.

At another point still Israel took over a distinctive trait of the heathen Kingdom, for the great king was ruler of the world. So Israel's king of the future was to possess dominion over the world. The thought, as such, was borrowed by Israel, but what a form it has taken upon itself! It is converted absolutely into a religious ideal. The Messiah-King is the representative of a kingdom of peace, to which all nations belong, in which the laws of Jehovah control, in which every individual has his rights. When an Old Testament poet comes to speak in the loftiest tones of the King, the reader often does not know whether the real king is meant, or the ideal king of the future, — so complete has the religious idealization of this earthly, originally heathen institution finally become in Israel.

The future king is one of the figures in the picture Israel

painted of the Messianic future. The question as to the fate which men meet in death is also closely connected with this Messianic future. How is the dead saint to have share in the future blessedness? There is no other answer but that the righteous God shall call him back to life, and this hope is repeatedly expressed in the Book of Job, and in Psalms xlix. and lxxiii. as well as in the Book of Daniel. Thus the heroic spirit of Old Testament faith, after a method peculiar to the inner life of Israel, developed the hope of a world beyond the grave, and of a life there for man.

Since this hope was developed only at a late point in the Old Testament, it is not impossible that Israel received the suggestion of it from abroad. Even in Egypt, the thoughts of men upon the future world, which passed through a marked change and became vastly more profound, were guided in this development by ethical ideas, for in death the righteous man should have a higher place than he who on earth merely possessed might and power. There follows in the underworld a judgment for every man. The pious man will be received into the place of the blessed: the wicked man will be condemned to special sufferings.

As it is possible that we find here a source of influence upon Hebrew thought, so there may have been influence exerted by Parseeism, which assumes an individual resurrection.

Another supposition has been expressed in recent times. Attention has been directed to the worship of Adonis by the Phœnicians, and that of Tammuz by the Babylonians; to the thoughts peculiar to these two cults about the dying of the vegetation that springs from the earth, and its revivification; and it has been suggested that this thought, derived from the life of inanimate nature, may have been transferred by Hebrew thinkers to the life of man.

Whatever the course of development may have been, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at any great degree of certainty about it. One thing deserves

attention, in my opinion, viz., the ethical element in the hope of resurrection in the Old Testament; and this is so distinctive of the religion of Israel that I should be glad to have it receive acceptance as the driving force of the whole doctrine.

I have thus labored to show, in the narrow limits of an article, wherein the positive and negative relations of the religion of Israel to the spiritual culture of western Asia and Egypt have consisted. I have had to make a selection in doing this, and I have not been able to spin to its end every thread which I have actually taken up; but I hope that I have omitted nothing essential. Let me make this remark in conclusion, that however much enrichment the religion of Israel may have received from abroad, however much she may have assimilated, against however many religious and cultural elements she may have shut herself, the most important element, and that peculiar to her, is, next to the work of Moses, the labors of her prophets. By Moses the foundation of a religion of the spirit was laid, by the prophets was there built upon this foundation through uninterrupted spiritual struggle and progress, an edifice which may challenge admiration and wonder in the spiritual history of mankind, and shall find such on the part of unprejudiced investigation to the end of time.