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# Judah and Babylon.

A STUDY IN CHRONOLOGY.

BY THE REV. E. ELMER HARDING, M.A.

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## The Ethiopian and the Old Testament.

ACTS VIII. 26-40.

BY THE REV. GEORGE ADAM SMITH, M.A.

THIS is the story of an Ethiopian, who had been at Jerusalem to worship. It was a far cry from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. The capital of Queen Candace lay on the remoter Nile, over 1200 miles from the capital of Judah. More than the distance, however, was what came between. 1200 miles would be nothing to a man in search of religion, especially if he were of the patient and inquiring disposition which we see in this Ethiopian. But

the wonder was that the greater extent of these 1200 miles lay across Egypt—the most religious and fascinating civilisation of the time. Hosts of pilgrims sought Egypt from distances greater than Ethiopia: the study of her mysteries was fashionable in the great centres of Western civilisation. Her temples still spread their unbroken splendour across her sunny provinces: their vast walls covered with acres of sacred writing; their roofs, the platforms

of gorgeous ritual and processions, that flashing drew the eyes of the people from leagues across the civil country. It was the most visible religion that ever tempted the desire of the eyes. But for the mind it had subtler attractions still. Like those dark temple doors, which still break the long sunlit stretches of painting and sculpture, and invite the tired observer to brood in their cool shade, the popular religion of Egypt presented, through its gorgeous surface, opportunities to studious minds to penetrate the mysteries of conduct and life and God. While she paraded her idols before the crowd, Egypt took the thinker by the hand, led him into an inner chamber, and whispered to him of the One God. Sceptics, who thought they had found out every other faith, were awed into new religiousness by the devoutness of this one, by its hoary age, its fertility of symbol, its profound and exhaustless literature. Nor was the Egyptian religion all mystery and splendour. It spoke with the austere simplicity of conscience itself upon the thousand common duties of this life. It was equally explicit on what was laid up for the righteous in the life to come. And it even exhibited a righteousness already victorious on earth in the person of one born of woman. By uniting its votaries to this Osiris, it succeeded in inspiring them with a most powerful enthusiasm for virtue, and a most complete assurance of immortality.

Through such a religion with its attractions for every instinct of man's heart, this Ethiopian in search of a religion made his pilgrimage. He must have passed the open doors of a score of temples before he prostrated himself in front of the temple at Jerusalem. For half at least of his 1200 miles he must have been constantly in presence of a religion, the most visible and attractive in the world, hospitable to men of all nations, successful in lifting multitudes to communion with the unseen, not only vast and subtle for human curiosity, but clear and clamant to the conscience of man, and above all, with this glorious revelation in Osiris of righteousness clothed in man's flesh, suffering man's sorrows and death, and yet in the end victorious and the pledge of victory to others. How was it that this earnest pilgrim passed it all by, esteeming the religion of the little tribe of Jesus greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt?

The secret, of course, lay in his knowledge of a single book, for the religion of Israel had no other means than this of attempting the influence which Egypt exerted through her gorgeous ritual and vast literature.

This book is known to us as the Old Testament, and is commended to us by Jesus Christ as the revelation of His God and Father. But what would it have been to such a man as this Ethiopian, who had not heard of Christ? He had read it probably in the Greek version, which

circulated throughout Egypt, and may easily have penetrated with the Greek language to the realms of Queen Candace. To him it was, at first sight, but a collection of histories, laws, psalms, and addresses called prophecies. They had come from various ages, some of them from very back centuries. But they were all Jewish and all connected by one idea: the idea of a special covenant between God and the Hebrew nation. They told how the Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, had chosen this people to be a people peculiar to Himself, had made them the trustees for the race of the riches of His truth: the ministers and agents of His purposes for the whole world. When we consider this central claim of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the uncompromising spirit with which it is so often urged, we may wonder that any man, who was not a Jew, ever found his way as a worshipper to Jerusalem. That the God of this little tribe should be the Sovereign of earth and heaven! How stern He was to nations other than His own! A jealous and pitiless God engulfing armies to let His people free, depopulating a country to make room for them! How Jewish pride and passion grew rank beneath His partial providence! Jerusalem asserted to be the centre of the whole earth, to which the Gentiles should bring their substance—Zion and Jordan exalted above all the hills and rivers of the world—Jews to be kings and priests to God, but the sons of the alien their plowmen and vinedressers! Then what a people to be so favoured! According to their own records, an earthy, sullen, and at heart idolatrous people, unworthy of the least of the titles they claimed. And now as the Ethiopian lifted his eyes from the ancient Scriptures, which promised to such a people supremacy over the world, and the glory of teaching a docile humanity, what did he see as the result—but a people in the bondage and contempt of the world, their land a province of the great Roman Empire, themselves in the sight of civilisation an unhappy and uninteresting group of barbarians.

Think of these features of the Old Testament—and a hundred others like them which will easily suggest themselves—and you will wonder how this Ethiopian preferred such a faith to that great Egyptian religion, through which his long pilgrimage had carried him, and to which the civilisation of his day was pressing forward so ardently for the secrets of life and God.

What prevailed with him and led him—as Christian was led past the lions to the Palace Beautiful—past those grim obstacles to the secret place of Jehovah? What is it that has given the Old Testament religion its unique and unapproached influence among the religions of the world? What binds this book to Christ, and makes you and me feel it to be part of the same Divine revelation?

Is it that it claims to be the Word of God? So claim the sacred books of every other nation upon earth. Is it that it is verbally accurate and infallibly true in matters of history? That is not a question which the Ethiopian was likely to have put; but if he had stopped to answer it, before coming to Jerusalem, he would never have found God at all. Is it that all the predictions of fact which the Old Testament makes have been fulfilled? As we have seen, the time at which this Ethiopian came to Jerusalem was not a time of the fulfilment of prophecy, but, on the contrary, one in which history and providence did seem to go utterly against the predictions of Scripture. Besides which, the Old Testament itself gives a very explicit warning against the attempt to prove the divinity of any religious teaching by the fulfilment of predictions of fact which may accompany it—because the heathen themselves and the false prophets are allowed to have the gift of prediction.

Putting aside these things, let us grasp at what the Old Testament essentially is, at what it most urgently offers to us. This is plainly a Revelation of the living God—of His Person, His Character and His Will. To this, the main contents and delivery of the Old Testament, all else that it contains—whether prediction or historical narrative or oracles and laws—is plainly subordinate and secondary. It is this Revelation of God Himself which has prevailed, and must prevail, over all the undoubted difficulties that the Old Testament may cast in the way of those who approach it as this Ethiopian did from outside the limits of the covenant people. It is this to which every individual heart and conscience can feel itself drawn, and upon which it can make its decision. And besides,—which is of great importance to us, if not to the Ethiopian,—it is this which can be investigated by the exact methods of historical science at the present day.

Let us take the last of those tests. Scientific research has of late been busy among the religions of that branch of the human race to which the Jews were most akin. The result has been to prove that the system of religion, which prevailed among the Hebrews, had a very great deal in common with the systems of the neighbouring and related heathen nations. This common element included not only such merely material forms as ritual and temple-furniture, or the details of priestly organization and discipline, but even the titles and some of the attributes of God, and especially the forms of covenant in which God drew near to men. But the scholars who have been most successful in discussing these resemblances, have, at the same time, emphasized their sense of an entirely independent and original principle at work in the case of the Hebrew religion. In the Hebrew religion—and in this alone among Semitic systems of faith—historians

observe a principle of selection operating upon the common Semitic materials for worship, ignoring some of them, giving prominence to others, and with others again changing the reference and application. Grossly immoral practices are forbidden; forbidden, too, are those superstitions which draw men away from a single-minded attention to the simple moral issues of life; and even such religious customs are omitted, which, however innocent in themselves, might lead men into temptation. In short, a stern and inexorable conscience was at work in the Hebrew religion, which was not at work in any of the religions most akin to it.

We feel the same conscience when we pass from the priestly to the prophetic side of the Old Testament. But every one is so ready to admit the unique moral character of Hebrew prophecy, that we need not linger upon that point.

Now, when we turn to ask whence came this principle of selection that separated clean from unclean in Hebrew worship, and this inspiration that rendered Hebrew prophecy the unique moral phenomenon which it evidently is in human history, we find the answer in the character of the God of Israel. Each of the laws of the sanctuary is accompanied by the reason, *For I am holy*. And when we ask the prophets for the source of their unique doctrines of God, their testimony is that they received them in personal communication with their God, whose peculiar character is that, in their own words, *He is exalted in righteousness*; or that, as Isaiah said, *He is Holy, holy, holy, God high and lifted up*. Look where you will in the Old Testament, come to it with any faculty you please,—whether as critic or as worshipper,—and it is the revealed character of Jehovah which you discover to be the sovereign principle at work. Which of us that has sought any part of this old book with spiritual heart and quick conscience has not felt as Isaiah felt when he entered Solomon's temple—has not felt everything peculiarly Jewish, all the apparatus and provision of Semitic worship disappear, and the house fill only with the presence of the living God, and the heart give way before the majesty of His holiness! But it was the virtue of a great prophet like Isaiah not to remain contented with the vision, but to bring it to bear on the history of his people; and if, as critics, we follow that history, we shall find undeniable traces of its results. It is the character of Jehovah that draws His people from among the nations to their peculiar destiny; it is that character which selects and builds the law, that is as a hedge around them in the midst of heathendom; it is that which, in each revelation, discovers to the people alike the measure of their delinquency and degradation, and the new ideals of their service to humanity. Like the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, we see its presence before this favoured

people, and its evident leadership of them all,—van and rear, elect and bad, prophets and masses,—at each stage of their march down the ages.

But the character of Israel's God is far from being fully described, either in its nature when we have emphasized it as holiness, or in its effects when we have shown how the conscience of it built the law, disciplined the people, and inspired the prophets for their unexampled service to humanity.

For the God of Israel is not only holy, but sovereign; not only the Example and Conscience of Israel, but the Judge, Executor and Vindicator of Righteousness in the history of the world; not only the Ideal of morality, but the Power Who brings real history up to the ideal; the moral Governor of the world Who makes purity and happiness, justice and victory, sin and failure to coincide. On this familiar and evident feature of the Old Testament,—the people's conviction in the darkest periods of their history, and the mainspring of the most glorious hopes that have ever leapt to bring heaven down to earth,—I need not linger further than to point out that it gives us the explanation of one of the most difficult and forbidding features of the Hebrew religion. The cursing psalms have scared away many from the Old Testament, to whom, on the contrary, their very curses should only have been an attraction. For the cursing psalms are at least the witness, that in the Old Testament we have to do, not with mere dreamers of a heavenly ideal of justice, but with men actually engaged in the struggle for righteousness,—actually engaged in it with all the real passions of their manhood. The cursing psalms are inspired by the conviction that God will deal justice upon the wicked man and the tyrant. They were written in periods when that justice was delayed and the hearts of the people were starved by a famine of righteousness. When men take fever and become delirious in a famine of bread, we do not doubt—do we?—the naturalness of the appetite, although it finds voice in delirious language, nor does the raving of the patients throw any discredit upon the reality or virtue of the sustenance they crave. But, on the contrary, the very morbidness of their behaviour is to us the measure of the indispensableness and the reality of the bread. In the same way the presence in the Old Testament of the cursing psalms is proof that the nature from which they rose, and the religious system with which they are connected, moved not in a fictitious but in a real life; that the psalmists and prophets were no mere dreamers of a righteousness which human life had no need to feel realised within itself, but did hunger and thirst after righteousness with a very natural appetite and with every energy of their manhood.

But after emphasizing the Holiness of God, and His Power as Judge in the history of the world,

we are not yet in possession of the whole secret of the Old Testament.

The highest moral ideal is not the righteousness that is regnant, but that which is militant and agonizing. It is the deficiency of many religions, that while representing God as the awful Judge and Executor of Righteousness, they have not revealed Him as its advocate and champion as well. Do you remember the lesson Christ gave us upon this? As Christ clearly proved to us when He refused the offer of all the kingdoms of the world, the highest perfection is not to be omnipotence on the side of virtue, but to be patience and sympathy and love. To will righteousness, and in its favour to rule life from above, is indeed divine; but if these were the highest attributes of divinity, and if these exhausted the divine interest in us, then man himself with his conscience and capacity to sacrifice himself on behalf of justice and truth, man with his instinct to make the sins of others his burden and their purity his agonizing endeavour, would indeed be higher than his God. Had Jehovah been nothing but the righteous Judge of all the earth, then Jehovah's witnesses and martyrs, His prophets who took to themselves the conscience and reproach of His people's sins, would have been as much more admirable than Himself, as the leader who saves his country on the battle-field and lays down his life for his people is more sure to win their gratitude than the king who equips him and sends him forth—and stays at home.

But the God of the Old Testament is not such a God. In the moral warfare to which He has predestined His creatures, He Himself descends to participate. The sins of men are not only the object of His hate; they are the grief of His heart. That very feature of the Hebrew Scriptures, for which they are so often despised by unthinking people,—viz. that they too much represent the Deity as clothed in the armour and moved by the passions of men,—is their glory in so far as they thereby meet humanity's unquenchable desire for a God Who is not mere abstract Holiness or only Sovereign Justice, but One Who arises and comes down for their salvation, Who makes virtue His course, and righteousness His passion. He pleads with His people for their loyalty; He travails in pain for their growth in holiness; in all their affliction, moral as well as physical, He is afflicted; and He meets them not with the swift sentence of outraged holiness, but with the age-long sufferance that gradually softens their hearts and develops their minds; till these, at first of equal rudeness with other races, are warmed and moulded to the very highest spiritual temper and capacity. To such a revelation of God the slow, hard, sullen nature of the people only contributes a greater emphasis.

With what power of assurance did the message

of forgiveness come to sinful men from such a God! From some kinds of deity, the impure or the cruel, the word of pardon would sound simply ridiculous; from other gods whose holiness is unquestioned, a sinner could scarcely conceive it as coming at all. But from a God Who has not only set men's sins in the awful light of His countenance, but taken them upon His heart, Who has made them His concern, His affliction,—Who is pained by them and by their results more than the most contrite sinners themselves could be,—from such a God will not a sinner hear his pardon come with assurance? Must he not believe in the sincerity of the word which conveys it, as well as of the religious means by which, in sacrifice or otherwise, it is applied by the authority of that God to himself? And, finally, with what new moral force does pardon come from such a God; what horror of sin must it breed in the sinner; how it must infect his soul with God's own travail and sorrow for sin; how it must send him away to be, in the example of his God, an enemy of sin and a warrior against it!

These, then, are the facts about the Old Testament which may be said to have drawn this Ethiopian, as they will certainly, till the end of the world, continue to draw the conscience and the heart of man. A God pure and holy: the inspiration of the highest morality which history has ever known: Who, being lifted up before the vision of the purest men, casts them in dread conscience of guilt at His feet: and yet of sympathy and patience infinite: Who before the Incarnation was afflicted in all their afflictions, and before the Cross made their sin His burden and their salvation His own travail and agony.

So we may judge this Ethiopian to have found Him in His Scriptures, and to have been drawn by those voices that go home to the individual heart of man, whether Jew or Gentile, with irresistible force. The vision of this God wakened his conscience; the urgency of that love persuaded his heart to faith: all that grace came borne home to himself on some particular promise. On the strength of it he arose, and went and joined himself to the chosen people of God; he offered the sacrifices of righteousness, and his name was enrolled in the book of the living.

Surely he had now fulfilled to him the whole promise of the Scriptures. But no, as he returned from Jerusalem, he continued to read, and reading lighted on a passage, which, however full of those truths which we have supposed to have drawn him to Jerusalem, pointed beyond all that he had found there in the temple or in its system of worship. This passage was the confession of God's people, standing over against not only God Himself, but His Servant, with respect to whom the confession was particularly made. It placed all the people

on one side in trespass and guilt, this Servant alone on the other in absolute holiness. It owned that, though holy, He made the people's sins His conscience and His burden. He travailed in agony for them. Thus in two respects the servant was like God Himself: He knew no sin; and He made His people's sin His concern and His agony. But the confession also declared that the servant was to be in place of all those sacrifices for the putting away of sin, which the living God, in His concern for men's sins, had instituted. His life was to be a guilt-offering. And so by laying it down in death should He pass to be the people's champion and ruler. *Of whom*, said the Ethiopian to the teacher God had sent him in his difficulty, *of whom did the prophet write this, of himself or of another?*

*Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.* Preached unto him Jesus! It was, of course, a history he told him. He told him how there had lately appeared within the experience of men, One who was the counterpart of the confession of God's people in this Scripture: One Who did give Himself out for the Servant of the Lord: One Who did know Himself to be on one side, and all men on the other: One Who did feel that He lay under a commission from God to make the sins of the people His conscience and His cross. Jesus was holy and sinless, and was so accredited of men. Like God's own love, His love was urgent with them for righteousness and truth. With God's own passion, He sorrowed for their sins and bent Himself to bear on His heart their misery and their shame. In all points He was that living God whom the Old Testament revealed—that living God in His holiness, His love, His passion.

We cannot wonder that one who had already come so far to worship Jehovah, proving by the length of his pilgrimage and the obstacles he overcame, how well he knew Jehovah's character and will, should recognise Jehovah and Jehovah's purpose in Jesus Christ, and be willing to be baptized into Christ's name.

And for what else do *we* come to Christ, but this, that in His character and word and work He realises all the highest and most constraining, that has ever been revealed to us concerning God. It is not so much that this or that incident in His life fulfils this or that ancient prophecy. It is this, that the whole fulness of God, as far as our thoughts can bear it, as far as our needs have fathomed it, appears in Him. He is absolute holiness—and yet not far off. He is righteousness militant at our side, militant and victorious. He has made our greatest suffering and shame His own problem and endeavour; He is anxious for us just where conscience tells us we need to be most anxious; He is helpful to us just where our

helplessness is most felt. Never before or since in humanity has righteousness been perfectly victorious as in Him. Never before or since in the whole range of being has any one felt as He did all the sin of man with all the conscience of God. This is what He offers to do, what He claims to do: to remove our sins by bearing them Himself, and for the sake of that bearing to proclaim them, as from God, forgiven. The claim itself and the love in which it is made are them-

selves divine. But it is further accredited by His sinlessness; by His correspondence with the age-long instincts of the race; by His fulfilment of the hopes of every religion; and by the fact that He has satisfied whatever heart of man has trusted Him and taken Him at His word. If, as conscience tells us, the true God is the God who drew this Ethiopian to Jerusalem, then we can no more doubt than this Ethiopian did, that that true God was in Jesus Christ.

### At the Literary Table.

Several books must be left over this month, some to receive that fuller notice which they deserve. As:—

*The Jews under the Roman Empire.* Story of the Nations. By W. D. Morrison, M.A. T. Fisher Unwin.

*The Two Kinds of Truth.* T. Fisher Unwin.

*Life and Writings of Vinet.* By L. M. Lane. T. & T. Clark.

*Church and State.* By A. Taylor Innes. T. & T. Clark.

*After the Exile.* By P. Hay Hunter. Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier.

*The Seat of Authority in Religion.* By Dr. Martineau. Longmans.

*The Hereafter.* By J. Fyfe. T. & T. Clark.

*The Song of Songs.* By the Rev. W. C. Daland, A.M.

Besides the theological and sermon pamphlets mentioned below, we must draw special attention to some small books which have given us pleasure.

*Thoughts on Baptism*, by the Rev. W. Barry Cole (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, & Co., 1889, 2s.), is a beautiful crown octavo of 130 pages, bound in parchment. It is as absorbing within as it is enticing without—no toy, but a book to be reckoned with.

Two smaller books, by William Thynne Lynn, B.A. (*Bible Chronology* and *Brief Lessons on the Parables and Miracles of our Lord*. London: George Stoneman), are the very thing that Sunday-school and Bible-class teachers are searching for.

*The Forward Movement* (a pamphlet of 16 octavo pages, to be had post free for 2½d. from the author, the Rev. H. W. Horwill, M.A., at 6 Lockyer Street, Plymouth) will give readers the very best account of that movement which is to be had. And it is time more of us knew the meaning of that movement.

*Notes on Dealing with Inquirers*, by Charles Shirreffs, secretary Aberdeen Y.M.C.A. (32 pages, 16mo, price 1d.; 12 copies post free), we wish very specially to commend. The author enjoys the three C's—Conversion, Consecration, Capacity; the booklet is built on the three R's—Ruin, Redemption, Regeneration.

*The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice and Atonement.* By Alfred Cave, B.A., D.D. New edition, revised throughout and partly re-written, 8vo, 550 pp. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 1890. 10s. 6d.

This is a new edition after the manner of the Germans, where the whole book is revised and corrected, increased here and shortened there, and brought up to date in every particular, so that it is practically a new book. The additions are mainly two—(1) an important section (pp. 301–325), dealing with the New Testament doctrine of Atonement *as a whole*; and (2) a short and very skilful classification of theories of the Atonement (pp. 371–376). Amongst the theories classified we find that of Dr. Freeman Clarke, and the reference is to a later edition (1889) than we have seen of his *Orthodoxy: its Truths and its Errors*. So also full justice is done to Dr. Simon's new book, *The Redemption of Man*, of which the perfectly accurate remark is made in one place, that "Dr. Simon does not present any theory of the Atonement, biblical or otherwise, but only *contributions* to such a theory—some of which, as the discussion on 'The Anger of God,' are invaluable." Dr. Cave himself, on the other hand, does present a theory (after a delightful exposition, greatly needed, of the uses and abuses of the word "theory" itself)—a theory behind which lies a wide and accurate knowledge of previous theories, and in front of it an impartial and scholarly survey of Scripture doctrine. Let readers judge—the book is most readable—is this not now the best systematic study of the Atonement in the English language?

*The Scottish Sabbath School Teachers' Book.* Grade I., edited by the Rev. Thomas Nicol, B.D. Grade II., edited by the Rev. Professor Alexander Stewart, D.D. Grade III., edited by the Rev. Professor James Robertson, D.D. Three vols., 8vo—488, 485, and 490 pp. Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark. 1890.

In the issue of the EXPOSITORY TIMES for June, Dr. Stewart gave a most interesting narrative of the origin and general aim of these volumes, and his statement was supplemented on one point by Dr. Robertson. It remains for us now to record our impressions of the manner in which the work has been executed. But we shrink from the attempt. We quite agree with Dr. Stewart, that "only by subdivision could so extensive a task have been undertaken in the space of less than nine months"; but how is it possible to pro-