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The Old Testament Doctrine of Immortality.¹

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. A. B. DAVIDSON, D.D., LL.D., EDINBURGH.

THE call for a second edition of this large work in so short a time is perhaps higher testimony to the worth of the book than the reviews of critics, laudatory and enthusiastic though they have been. This call shows that the book has not merely been praised by a few, but read by many.

Of the three great sections into which the work is divided,—the heathen, the Old Testament, and the Christian doctrine of immortality,—the last is no doubt of the most absorbing interest. The heathen and Old Testament doctrines, however fascinating the first be, and however fundamental the second, and however full of pathos both are, are only preliminary; the Christian doctrine is of paramount concern, because it is final. And in recent years the interest attaching to it has been enhanced by attempts that have been made to traverse or modify, in various directions, the traditional, and what seems the natural, sense of the New Testament. The confusions created by these attempts imperatively required to be cleared up by subjecting the New Testament statements to a fresh analysis and interrogation. This has been done by Dr. Salmond, and in no part of his book are the qualities which distinguish his work, the exhaustiveness, the candour, and the imperturbable judicialness, so conspicuous. The author probably, like most men, has prejudices and predilections, and very possibly his predilections pulled in a different direction from his conclusions. If so, they have not been allowed to modify them, and the general effect of his conclusions is to confirm the traditional idea of the meaning of the New Testament, that it is in the present life that the destinies of men are wrought out and fixed, that as the tree falls it lies. It will not be easy to break the serried ranks of the author's arguments, and no serious attempt appears yet to have been made to do it. The question, however, may not be finally disposed of. It is conceivable that those whose instincts or sympathies lead them to a different goal from that reached by Dr. Salmond's investigation may argue that, though the

New Testament writers themselves stop short at the point of view fixed by the Old Testament and by reflection on it previous to their day, there are in their statements of the gospel principles which overshoot this point and would lead us rightly to a position considerably in front of it. Whatever may be supposed to lie implicitly in the New Testament, it is of the greatest moment to have in the meantime a clear statement of what it teaches explicitly.

An important part of the book is occupied with the Old Testament as a preparation for the Christian doctrine. Such questions as these occur to one: (1) What views regarding immortality are to be found in the Old Testament? (2) What were the modifications these views underwent before or while they were assumed into the Christian faith? The last question might raise some other questions in reference to the modifying forces, whether they were external, such as the influences of Persian and Greek thought, or whether they operated from within the community in the shape of reflection and religious intuition, stimulated, it might be, by the expansive energy of some new elements contributed directly by Christian teaching. The inquiry regarding Old Testament beliefs on immortality is, as Professor Salmond says, encompassed with difficulties, not the least of which is 'that of transporting ourselves into a world of ideas on the present and the future, on good and evil, on what makes life and what makes death, which are singularly unlike all those that the Western and modern mind is accustomed to.' Practically the difficulty is increased, as he proceeds to say, by the fact that, with our practice of using the Old and New Testaments together, we are always tempted to read New Testament ideas into Old Testament phraseology. It must be recognised, however, that the Old Testament is characterised by modes of thought on this subject different from those of all other religions, and not at once to be identified even with those of Christianity. It may be found that the results reached in the Old Testament approximate to Christianity, but these results were not the beginning but the end of a process; and it is

¹ *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality.* By S. D. F. Salmond, M.A., D.D. Second edition. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 1896.

this process, with the circumstances, experiences, and needs which suggested it, gave it impulse and brought it to its conclusion, that has to be investigated.

These distinctive views of the Old Testament are discussed by the author in two important chapters, entitled 'Negative Aspect' and 'Positive Aspect' 'of the Old Testament Preparation.' In the former, 'certain ideas foreign to the Old Testament' are enumerated, namely, the idea that death was the extinction of the once existing person; the pantheistic idea; metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls, and the pre-existence of souls. The two last seem to have no points of contact with the Old Testament. And in regard to the first, though the language used regarding death be often exceedingly strong, the existence of the idea of *Sheòl*, the place of departed persons, necromancy, and similar things, show that the Old Testament assumed a kind of subsistence of all persons after death, however shadowy it might be. The exact sense of Eccles. iii. 21, 'Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goeth downward to the earth?' is obscure; but the references to *Sheòl* in other parts of the book make it improbable that the idea of annihilation at death is contemplated. Pantheism might seem to lie much nearer Old Testament modes of thought. The ideas so strongly expressed of the universal divine causality, that God is the immediate author of all phenomena in nature, as well as of all movements in the history and life, and even in the mind of man, might naturally have led to the notion that the material world as well as mankind were but extensions or modes of the existence of the Divine Being. But no traces of such an idea are to be found. The senses in which the phrase 'Spirit of God' is used are sometimes vague and elusive; but in the Old Testament God is not said to be 'spirit,' and, even if He had been, 'spirit' is not regarded as *substance*. The Divine Being is not *ousia*, but energy; His relation to all things is causality, not identity. The spirit of God is God exerting power, particularly vital power. All life is due to God exercising this energy; it continues while He continues to exercise the energy; it ceases when He no more exerts it. It was natural, however, to speak of this spirit of life as something of the nature of an entity, just as we speak of 'the principle of life,' a phrase the meaning of which it

would puzzle those who use it to state. But the spirit of life is really nothing but the divine energy which causes life, and it is idle to ask where it goes at death; it goes nowhere. Such language as that in Eccles. xii. 7, 'the spirit returns to God who gave it,' merely means that the energy which causes life is withdrawn by God. Such an idea as that the spirit of man is part of God and reabsorbed into the Divine Spirit would carry implications in regard to the nature of God altogether foreign to the Old Testament idea of the Divine Being. In point of fact, the idea of essence or substance hardly appears. Neither the being of God nor the human soul, scarcely even nature, is thought of as substance.

In the chapter on the positive side of the Old Testament preparation the author discusses the idea of God, of man, of life and death. To begin with the last, death is just what we see it to be. But it is also more than we see; death includes the state of the dead. The deceased person does not suffer extinction, but continues to subsist in *Sheòl*, the place of departed persons. The vagueness of Old Testament thinking appears from the fact that it does not call the beings in *Sheòl* either spirits or souls. Dr. Salmond calls attention to this, though he appears to think that after all it is the *nepheš* or soul, that to which the personality adheres, which descends into *Sheòl*. This may have been the idea later, but it is better perhaps to avoid such precision. Phrases like 'Thou hast brought up my *nepheš* from *Sheòl*,' being said of the living man, do not refer specifically to the immaterial part. The Hebrew had no knowledge of the mode of subsistence in *Sheòl*; he knew the present life, and he thought of subsistence in *Sheòl* as a dim and nerveless reflection of life here. It is not individuals only that go into *Sheòl*, but larger subjects, as tribes and nations. Society here is continued in a shadowy form also there—kings sit on thrones, with their subjects around them. Now with regard to this idea of the underworld, two things may be said: (1) It is scarcely Old Testament teaching; it is a popular belief which all kinds of persons in Israel, the pious and others alike, are represented as sharing, but it is one which lies behind Old Testament revelation. Indeed the Old Testament doctrine of immortality, so far as the individual is concerned, may be said largely to consist in the reaction of the pious mind against this popular conception.

And (2) it is an idea which in itself has no religious worth. The state of the dead or the place of the dead is not one of rewards and punishments. The 'lowest Sheòl' (hell of A.V.) means merely 'Sheòl beneath,' while the passage Isa. lvi. 24, 'their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched,' is not said of those in Sheòl, but of the impious dead who lie on the face of the earth as a spectacle to men and an awful evidence of God's wrath. The author's exegesis of this passage is certainly more correct than Cheyne's. On the other hand, his interpretation of the phrase 'the stones of the pit' (Isa. xiv. 19), in agreement with Cheyne and others, is less acceptable. The imperfect rhythm shows that the text is in some disorder, but that stones of the *pit* should mean a noble, paved mausoleum, implying an honourable burial, is anything but probable. At all events, Sheòl has no compartments and no degrees; there are no aggravations in death; death itself and the state of the dead is the highest aggravation known to the Old Testament. Hence any development observable runs on other lines: (1) A distinction is not drawn between the condition of the righteous and the wicked in Sheòl, but the righteous escape Sheòl: 'God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheòl, for He will take me.' (2) The unrighteous still fall victims to Sheòl, they die, and they remain the captives, the flock of death—Death shepherds them (Ps. xlix. 14, 15). No further aggravation is alluded to. But (3) in the period between the Old Testament and the New the idea of Gehenna arose, a place or state of torment by fire. Whether the old idea of Sheòl was transformed into the idea of Gehenna, so that Gehenna became coextensive with Sheòl, is a point that would need inquiry. Our Lord's parable of the rich man and Lazarus goes beyond the Old Testament. One would scarcely think that 'Abraham's bosom' or 'Paradise,' though perhaps in some sense an intermediate state, was in the sphere of Sheòl. The ideas of the parable rather run on the lines of Ps. xlix. See, however, Dr. Salmond's full discussion, chap. v. of his Third Book.

Again, in the Old Testament 'life' is just that which we so call, the existence of the whole man as we observe him. And as to 'man,' an essential element of his being is the body. Life is life in the body, such as it is before that analysis which we call death, and corresponds therefore to the

Christian synthesis called the resurrection life (cf. Job xiv. 13 ff.). The really important point, so far as the doctrine of immortality is concerned, is the moral conception both of God and man. God is an ethical Being, and so is man, and the universe is a moral constitution. And ethical in God is more than mere righteousness, though this is perhaps the most fundamental part of it; it is also consideration, goodness, compassion, and grace. And the fellowship in righteousness of the two moral beings, God and man, is the starting-point of the doctrine of immortality, although the doctrine may develop along the two lines of religious emotion and religious reflection. To sum up these distinctive positions: (1) The Old Testament is not materialistic, death is not the extinction of the formerly living person. (2) It is not philosophical, regarding the body as the prison-house of the soul, released from which it can spread its wings and soar unfettered into regions of pure and perfect life. Neither is it philosophical in the sense of regarding the soul as an indestructible substance, and therefore immortal from its nature. Nor (3) is the Old Testament Christian to begin with, though it gradually gives expression to all the main Christian ideas,—partly on the line of the immortality of the people of God, and partly on that of the individual (see below).

In the following chapters the author investigates the positive contribution of the Old Testament to the hope of immortality, considering first the contribution of the poetical books, *e.g.* such Psalms as xvi., xvii., xlix., and lxxiii., and Job; and secondly, the prophetic literature. This order may have been suggested by the fact that some prophetic books, such as Isa. xxiv.—xxvii., and Daniel, go so far as to teach plainly the doctrine of a resurrection, while the poetical books, if they refer to this, do so in a manner more obscure. Possibly the inquiry would have gained in clearness if the historical order had been followed, the prophets, at least the earlier ones, being investigated first. For even on this subject, as well as on others, the prophets are the pioneers of thought and faith in Israel. The poetical books are secondary; the psalmists offer few new thoughts, they operate with convictions and beliefs inherited from the prophets and long current, and these current beliefs they combine, just as hymn-writers do in all ages, into pictures of consolation or hope

or assurance, as their times needed. The great prophetic idea of the 'judgment' reappears in the Psalms, and there, as Dr. Salmond remarks, 'it is essentially on the same level as the prophetic doctrine.' The Psalms indeed would acquire a more definite sense to us if we regarded them less as the expression of mere general aspirations than as the reflection of definite faiths long assured; if, for example, in Ps. xxxvii. 10, 11, the words, 'For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; but the meek shall inherit the earth,' were felt to express not a mere general moral hope, but that definite faith inherited from the prophets of the imminence of the great day of the Lord. Of course it is impossible to review in detail Dr. Salmond's exegesis of the various passages bearing on his subject; but no one can read it without admiring the candour, the keen exegetical instinct, the remarkable felicity and elevation of language, and the full body of cultured and varied thought, everywhere characteristic of his inquiry. The reader will nowhere find a treatment of the question so fair and full, and so suggestive.

It is not easy to give or to receive a clear idea of the Old Testament contribution to the Christian doctrine of immortality. There are two immortalities in the Old Testament, a corporate, national one, the immortality of the people of God; and an individual one, the immortality of the single person. Historically the former, in its main conceptions, is the earlier, and is developed by the prophets. And the conceptions thrown out along the line of this development are of fundamental moment, and have, with some modifications caused by the other or individual idea, been assumed into Christianity. Some of the ideas are these: (1) The idea of the kingdom of God and its necessary character of righteousness—the righteous Lord loveth righteousness. (2) This righteousness is wanting in the people of God and in the world. Therefore a judgment, or rather the judgment, is inevitable, at many moments is felt by the prophets to be imminent. This judgment, otherwise the day of the Lord, is universal. It is the Lord's manifestation of Himself to assume His kingdom. (3) This judgment is not altogether penal, it is redemptive; its purpose is greatly to reveal God, to make Him known, whom to know is eternal life. And behind the terrors and the darkness rises clear the morn of eternal joy. The kingdom is the Lord's, His people are all righteous,

He is their God, and they His people. Now here are certain main Christian ideas, the judgment and the eternal perfection behind it. This final state, characterised by righteousness and peace and joy, corresponds to what we call heaven. Such an idea of heaven may differ somewhat from ours; but the difference is not essential, for even the New Testament leaves heaven very indeterminate as to locality, and that presence of God in His fulness which to Christian thought makes heaven is already there. With this idea of the final state of felicity is often combined the Messianic hope—the Messiah is King of this perfect kingdom of God. (4) This might seem an immortality in which death has no part. Even here, however, the *idea* of death appears. When Ephraim 'sinned in Baal he died,' and the restoration of the nation is a resurrection in Hos. vi., and more clearly in Ezek. xxxvii. And at a later time, as in Isa. xxiv. ff. and Dan. xii., there is combined with the judgment a resurrection which is literal. The feeling expressed by Schopenhauer, and even by Kant, as quoted by Dr. Salmond, that the idea of immortality was foreign to the religion of Israel, appears due to their having exclusive regard to the fate of individuals as we perceive it, and assuming that that alone is to be called immortality, the road to which is intersected by death. But such an idea has no support either in the Old Testament or the New. The final condition of felicity supervening upon the day of the Lord was the immortality of the people of God,—though the prophetic views may not be quite consistent,—and the individual entered into it as belonging to the people. And what seems so strange to us, namely, that death is so little contemplated, is partly explainable by the fact that just as to the early Christians the coming of Christ appeared imminent, so to pious Israelites the day of the Lord appeared at hand, and godly men might enter immortality without tasting death, even as St. Paul says, We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed.

The immortality of the individual person is little developed in the Old Testament, and the development is obscure. This obscurity arises from various things. The 'I' who speaks in the Psalms frequently interchanges with 'we,' and though an individual may speak, he speaks as one sharing the general hope of the people. And then when he says, 'God will redeem my soul from

Sheòl,' it is difficult to say whether 'my soul' refers specifically to the immaterial element or be equivalent to *me*; in other words, it is difficult to say whether death be contemplated, or that great crisis called the day of the Lord, which introduces the people and the individual as part of it into the final condition of blessedness. Individualism was really never full born in the Old Testament, which pursues the destinies of the people of God collectively; while we, having death more in view, pursue the destinies of the individual. There may thus be two classes of passages: (1) Passages which, though spoken perhaps by individuals, express the hope of the living people, and refer to that great change which the day of the Lord introduces, and which the individual, as part of the people, shall experience without tasting of death. And (2) passages where the individual contemplates dying, but expresses the hope that he will not, like the ungodly, fall into Sheòl, but have another destiny. The words of Ps. lxxiii., 'God is good to Israel,' might assign it to the first class. Ps. xlix. has two peculiarities: (1) its opening verses imply that its teaching on immortality is no more merely a hope or aspiration of the soul, but a dogma, a firm conviction. And (2) it seems to start from the assumption that death is universal. If this be the case, the words 'God will redeem my soul from Sheòl' must refer to what happens to the godly at death. Ps. xvii. may even go further. At all events, in all these poetical passages, the real point is the difference between the ungodly and the righteous in their relation to God. This difference arises and is observable in this life; whether the unchangeable consequences of the difference be realised at the great crisis of the day of the Lord and the judgment, the national view of immortality still prevailing, or at the death of the individual persons, the idea of death coming in and the destiny of individuals in particular

being pursued, may need discussion. Thus it may appear that even the earlier prophecies furnished general *ideas* and categories, which were taken up into Christian teaching. These ideas received greater precision in an individualistic sense in later prophecies and in the poetical literature, and probably still further precision in the same direction through the thought of pious minds in the period lying between the close of the Canon and the Christian era.

It has always been felt strange that the Pentateuch, which gives the constitution of the people of God, should be silent on death and immortality, or only refer to the popular idea of Sheòl. And this may seem doubly strange when the Pentateuch is brought down to a late period in the people's history. The truth may be that the Pentateuch, just like the poetical books, is secondary and a reflection of the prophetic teaching. Deuteronomy reposes on Isaiah and the prophets of the Assyrian age, and the Priests' Code on Ezekiel. The constitution which they furnish for Israel is the embodiment of the prophetic conceptions. But the conceptions of the prophets are ideal, their pictures of the true Israel are pictures of Israel of the future, Israel of the perfect and final state; in other words, of Israel in what may be called its condition of immortality. The legislation seeks to impose this ideal upon Israel of the present. Of necessity, when applied to the conditions of the actual Israel, the ideal became broken and a thing of patches; nevertheless, its outline and general scope was preserved, and sustained the aspirations of the people.

Dr. Salmond's work has been put forth by the publishers in a style worthy of its importance. A few trifling errata occur, only one of which is worth mentioning. On p. 208, 'the Day-star, the Sun of the morning,' read *Son*.

The Expository Times Guild of Bible Study.

WITH the month of November the Guild of Bible Study enters upon its seventh session. The purpose of the Guild is to encourage the systematic study as distinguished from the mere reading of Scripture. Two portions are chosen, one from the

Old Testament and one from the New; and those who undertake to study, with the aid of some commentary, one or both of these portions of Scripture between November 1896 and September 1897 are enrolled as Members of the Guild.