

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

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CHAPTER TWO

THE OLD TESTAMENT

FROM the consideration of the Bible as a whole we naturally pass to the study of the Old Testament.

The Bible has been given to us in two parts, both of which are essential and inseparable. The Old Testament is to the New as the foundation to the building.

The Old Testament is almost entirely an historical record of GOD's preparation for the redemption of the world, and the preparation as there seen is twofold:

- The preparation of the Messiah for the people,
- The preparation of the people for the Messiah.

It is consequently of the utmost importance that we know thoroughly the facts of the history at each stage of the development, for as nothing has been recorded without purpose, the fuller our knowledge the deeper will be our appreciation of the record and meaning of GOD's revelation.

Let us not think, therefore, that these historical facts and details are dry and unnecessary, for it is only on a foundation of these facts that we can build our edifice of spiritual teaching.

How shall we best acquire a general knowledge of Old Testament history?

If we follow solely the order of our Bible, we shall find it difficult to gain a chronological and orderly view of the course of events. What we need is some historical guide by means of which we may perceive the actual trend of events.

We therefore propose to give a summary of the Old Testament as a guide to its careful and detailed study.

The Old Testament however is not all history.

It contains records of individual's and experience which throw light on the history, and must be read side by side with it. We see this illustrated in English history, where we have records of facts, and also works like those of Chaucer, Wycliffe, Shakespeare, Spencer, Milton and others, which throw great light on the actual life of the times in which the writers lived.

So in the Old Testament we have the prophetic and poetical books, which should be read together with the historical books to whose times they refer. We shall therefore divide the Old Testament into eight sections, and distinguish the particular books as those of history and illustration.

THE CONTENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. Introduction. From the Creation to the Call of Abram. Genesis 1-11.

2. The Age of the Patriarchs.

(a) History. Genesis 12-50.

(b) Illustration. Job.

3. The Formation of the Nation of Israel.

(a) History. Exodus and Numbers.

(b) Illustration. Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

4. Conquest of, and Settlement in, Canaan.

(a) History. Joshua; Judges 1-16; I Samuel 1-7.

(b) Illustration. Ruth and Judges 17-21.

5. The Kingdom undivided.

(a) History. I Samuel 8-31; II Samuel and I Kings 1-11; I Chronicles.

(b) Illustration. Psalms 1-90; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Solomon's Song.

6. The Kingdom divided.

(a) History. I Kings 12-17; II Kings; II Chronicles.

(b) Illustration. The Prophets and most of the later Psalms. Thus:-

(1) Mainly concerned with Israel (Northern): Jonah, Amos, Hosea.

(2) Mainly Judah (early); Joel, Micah, Isaiah, Nahum.

(3) Mainly Judah (late); Zephaniah, Habakkuk, part of Jeremiah.

7. The Captivity.

(a) History. Parts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; Daniel 1-6.

(b) Illustration. Parts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; Obadiah; Daniel 7-12.

8. The Restoration.

(a) History. Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther.

(b) Illustration. Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi; and some later Psalms.

The above sketch in the last four sections is of course only approximately correct, because of the impossibility of fixing absolutely the dates of many of the psalms and of some of the prophets.

The arrangement now suggested is not according to the views of many modern scholars, but it may not be necessarily incorrect on that account. It follows the lines of a somewhat older scholarship, which is at least still worthy of being heard.

For those who wish to take up this study in detail, two books may be recommended; one is *The Bible Reader's Chart*, by W. C. Fletcher (Bryan & Co., Ship Street, Oxford, 6 d.), a very useful little compilation; the other is *Clews to Holy Writ*, by Miss Petrie (Hodder & Stoughton), which gives a plan for a consecutive reading of the whole Bible in chronological order. Differences of detail must necessarily arise in such a study, but there is very little variation in the main outline, and there is no doubt of its importance.

When we have thus mastered the facts of the Old Testament, we naturally begin to inquire as to the spiritual teaching of this library of history. This leads us to consider

THE TEACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

One word sums up all - CHRIST.

But let us see how this comes to pass.

We will imagine a stranger with an Old Testament only (that is, without the New Testament) opening at Genesis 1, and reading verse by verse. Soon he comes to chapter 3, with its promise of Someone coming. He reads on and finds a repetition with amplification in chapters 12, 17, 22, and 49. Still he reads, and finds traces of the same promise in almost every book; until as he reads from Isaiah onwards the very fullness of prophecy appears. But he comes to Malachi 4, and the promises have not been realized.

The reader has now become conscious that the Old Testament is-

1. A Book of Unfulfilled Prophecies.

He then turns back and starts again, and soon is conscious of something strange in Genesis 4 - sacrifice, offering. He wonders what can be the use of sacrificing; what can be the meaning of offering the life of an animal. He notices it again in chapters 9, 12 and 22; still more clearly in Exodus, until in Leviticus there is an entire organization of sacrifices, offerings, rites and ceremonies. He sees them referred to again and again, with very little explanation of their real meaning, until once more he reaches Malachi 4 without the light he needs.

He is now conscious that the Old Testament is also-

2. *A Book of Unexplained Ceremonies.*

Once more the reader recurs to Genesis, and it is not long before he is conscious of another great fact - the expression of desire for GOD and satisfaction on the part of man. He reads of this in chapters 4, 5, 15, 28 and 49, then throughout the rest of the history, but most of all in Job, Psalms and the Prophets.

From time to time man's heart cries out for the living GOD, and for the blessings GOD has promised. But though there is great, there is not perfect, satisfaction; the heart is ever longing and the soul ever desiring, until the book closes in Malachi 4 without this complete realization, and our reader becomes conscious of yet another fact, that the Old Testament is-

3. *A Book of Unsatisfied Longings.*

These are the three threads running through it, making it by itself an incomplete book.

It ought to be studied from this standpoint, and with this perspective, if it is to be rightly understood. Only thus will it be appreciated as the foundation of the New Testament, and the necessary preparation for all that is found in the latter book.

And we will imagine that our stranger (as above) has now given to him a New Testament. As he begins to read he finds there the very things he has failed to discover in the Old Testament.

On the very first page he reads: "**That it might be fulfilled,**" and soon he realizes that:

- (1) JESUS the *Prophet* fulfils (in His Life) the prophecies.
- (2) JESUS the *Priest* explains (in His Death) the ceremonies;
- (3) JESUS the *King* satisfies (in His Resurrection) the longings.

" JESUS my Prophet, Priest and King," is thus the key of the lock, the perfect explanation of the Old Testament revelation, and the justification of everything contained therein.

Let us then:

- Master the contents of the Old Testament,
- Meditate on its teaching,
- Manifest its message in our life and service.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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