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The Old Testament, Keystone of Human Culture by William F. Irwin

William A. Irwin was Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at Southern Methodist University, formerly Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at the University of Chicago. He is the author of The Problem of Ezekiel, and The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, and many other books. This material was published by Abelard-Schuman, London and New York, 1959. Prepared for Religion-Online by Paul & Shirley Mobley.

Schools of interpretation agree and affirm the unique historic significance of the Bible. Coupled with God's people down through the centuries is revealed the influence of the Hebrew people, and the Bible, on those who interacted with the Hebrews, and remoter cultures surrounding them. From these Old Testament studies come a better understanding of the Hebrews, and therefore the Old Testament.

Chapter 1: The Hebrews in Their World

Israel came late into the course of Oriental history. Though a small nation, there is need to understand how she differed from her neighbors and contemporaries. Israel transcended them attaining a world of thinking and concepts much like our own. Though Greece has distinct regards in some attributes for us today, Israel can be considered the great divide of humanity. Through commerce Israel affected all who came into contact with her.

Chapter 2: The Hebrew Thought of God

Surrounding cultures worshiped multiple gods. In sharp contrast, the Hebrews had one God who was personal, their national God, and for them the God of all the earth and everyone in it. Being loyal to, and trusting in, one god, was not always understood by other cultures, but the Hebrew culture influenced others by their beliefs and religious practices.

Chapter 3: What is Man?

Israel was fully aware of that most critical question of all man's thought -- the problem that man is to himself. So here the question of what is man is delved into seeking the answers that the Hebrew arrived at, and thought processes which we can use today.

Chapter 4: God and Man

Man has always considered his relationship to the stars, sun, moon, weather, and the physical earth. More than these has been his relationship to each other. Above all is his relationship to God. All these are considered yielding thinking and positions useful for man today.

Chapter 5: The Theory of Law

Jewish thought favored an honest acceptance of government, whatever it might be, and loyal conformity to promulgated law, but only within the limits of Jewish conscience.

Chapter 6: History and Nature

The Old Testament is a history of peoples, but primarily the Hebrews. Necessarily a part of history is nature, or natural events such as planting and harvest seasons, the great flood, etc. And nature connects with God.

Chapter 7: Nation, Society, and Politics

The Israelites thought of themselves as a nation with loyalty to one God which in practice affected their personal lives, their religion, and their national and social obedience. Yet their practices were affected by nations about them, and by their own interpretations and desires. Nonetheless, the experiences of the Israelites can benefit us today.

Chapter 8: The Hebrews and the Bible

Merely in terms of its creative influence upon human society, far and away the greatest of the books is the Bible. However, personal opinions do not enjoy the repute of the ages. A look then at the Hebrews and the Bible is worthwhile.

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Chapter 1: The Hebrews in Their World

Israel came late into the course of Oriental history. When the Hebrew tribes broke into Palestine in the fourteenth century B.C. in the invasion that was to prove the beginning of their career as a nation, the glory of Egypt was already waning. Her imperial greatness and her intellectual creativeness had become matters of the past. Sumer was but an echo of half-forgotten history, though Its remarkable achievements had passed into the rich treasure of Semitic-Babylonia. But of this, too, the great age was gone, save only as the glories of Hammurabi were later to he revived for a brief period by Nebuchadnezzar. By the time of Israel's first great era of constructive thinking in the age of the prophets, Assyria had reached almost its zenith, soon to totter to its eternal doom. The fruitful period of Israel's maturity, too often lightly dismissed as "late," paralleled in time the greatness of the Aehaemenids in one direction and in the other the supremacy of Athenian leadership in the age of Pericles, later the career of Alexander, and then the dominance of Hellenism throughout the East. Of these matters we shall speak in a moment.

It is no surprise to find that, heir as she consciously and obviously was of the achievements of he Orient and continuing her vigor into what we commonly speak of as the Classical age, Israel's intellectual life bridges two worlds. Her primitivism is apparent, perhaps the most striking feature brought into relief by the critical studies of the last hundred years. It would serve no good end to delay over lt here; suffice it that a large portion of the popular concepts of the ancient East find their parallels, if not direct survivals, in Israel's outlook on the world. It is clear that the founders of the Hebrew nation and their heirs and successors for many generations brought with them and continued to live in the pervasive thought-life of the world of their times.

But if this were all or even the significant aspect of Hebrew thinking, there would be no occasion for discussing it. Israel was a small nation, relatively unimportant among the powers of the ancient East; in so far as she conformed to the pattern of her contemporaries she has now no

better claim on our attention than have Edom, Moab, and Damascus. We do scant justice to historic reaIity-indeed, we fail completely to understand the genius of lsrael-if we do not recognize wherein, and the extent to which, she differed from her neighbors and contemporaries, great and small alike. For rooted and molded in the cultures of the ancient East, Israel yet far transcended them and attained a world of thinking and of concepts much like our own. In this area the differences that separate us are much less than those that set Israel off from the peoples with whom she was in close contact, both in space and in time. Or, to put it in other terms, the boundary between the ancient world and the modern is to be traced, not in the Aegean or the middle Mediterranean, but in the pages of the Old Testament, where we find revealed attainments in the realms of thought, facility in literary expression, profound religious insights, and standards of individual and social ethics, all of which are intimately of the modern world because, indeed, they have been of the vital motivating forces which made our world of the human spirit.

Nor should this situation astonish us. In a peculiar sense Israel was the Great Divide of human history. There are, we must recognize, those who would claim this distinction for ancient Greece; and in some very significant regards they are right. Yet, more deeply it is true of Israel. She stood central in the world of time; and strikingly this is related to her geographic centrality. The visitor to present-day Jerusalem is shown in one of the rooms of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher a brass plate fixed in the floor, which for the fancy of an earlier age marked the center of the world! He smiles, doubtless with superior indulgence, at the naive concept of a pre-Copernican (lay, but comes presently to realize that, in a way never dreamed of in that age, the idea is true. From a more remote time the view is found in the Book of Ezekiel: "This is Jerusalem; I have set her midway among the nations and the countries that are around her" (Ezek. 5:5). Palestine lay at the heart of the ancient world; and it is sobering to consider how central it still is, in the vastly enlarged world of the scientific age.

The great northward thrust of the desert of Arabia, creating-if we choose thus to think of it-the so-called Fertile Crescent, with Babylonia at one extreme of the arc and Palestine at the other, entailed the channeling of traffic down the narrow corridor of Syria and Palestine. The great cultures of the ancient world lay at the two ends, Babylonia near where the sweep of the Zagros Mountains terminates its length of eastern bulwark and barrier to the Semitic world, and Egypt nestling among her brooding deserts at the northeast corner of Africa in the perennial delight of her sunny clime and her life-giving river. Through these lands Stone-Age man had tramped and lodged for countless hundreds of thousands of years, leaving pathetic remnants of his savage life that have persisted to our day: remains of his stone industries, ruined traces of his homes, bits of his artistic expression, pitiful burials into which he gathered the needed treasures of his departing life, and through all, evidence of his groping for meaning and significance and some adequate answer to the riddle of existence.

Babylonia was rich in its alluvial soil, the age-long deposit of the Euphrates and the Tigris, those two great rivers that year after year unceasingly carried their load of silt to a resting-place,

first in the Persian Gulf, then in the swamps that were slowly forming, and at length in the plain which gradually emerged from the waters, though at inundation each year it once again was claimed by the floods that had made it. Here came the Sumerians some time in the early half of the fourth millennium, and here they built their remarkable civilization. They created a system of writing that was to dominate Hither Asia for centuries, and then, though gradually giving way before more facile methods, still survived as a living means of communication to a total of more than three thousand years. They brought into being a great literature which made a deep impress on subsequent cultures; its echoes reverberate to our own distant time. They were great in architecture, discovering principles and methods that became a heritage for all time; their art, in some of its expressions, is of surprising truth and realism; they wrestled with the incipient problems of mathematics and of science. More significantly, they gave serious thought to the deeper problems of man's being. Yet ultimately the importance of Sumer was rooted in the soil. The inexhaustible fertility of the alluvium gave birth to great cities, and in them to characteristic motivations toward wider horizons, not least of which were industries and export trade. From the plain, ancient caravans went out, apparently east and north and south as well as to the west. The asses of the time were much less efficient than the camels that were to come into use many centuries later; nonetheless Sumerian commerce ventured far, blazing many a path followed by the merchants and adventurers of long succeeding ages.

A brilliant achievement of Sumer was the impulse given to the Stone-Age cultures of Egypt, which, soon after 3000 B.C., responded with the sudden upward surge of the first dynasties and then the majesty and enduring wonder of the Pyramid age, great in its architecture and engineering, notable for the realism and yet the impassive dignity of its art, and memorable for the brilliance and varied richness of its thronging life. For five hundred years the god-Pharaohs ruled a wealthy and vibrant realm; to all it must have seemed that its bases were as enduring as the rich earth from which it sprang. Yet slowly the permanence tottered, then collapsed. But Egypt's "tumbling joy of life" vented itself afresh in a "Middle Kingdom," still more in the far-flung pomp and splendor of the Empire that established Egypt's sway through all Syria and Palestine and far up the Nile. In its declining days the despised Aperu slaved on the mighty works of the pharoah, until hardy spirits among them made a bold bid for freedom and exodus under their shepherd deliverer.

In all this time, history was running in broader and deeper course throughout the Near East. The Sumerian dominance was interrupted, then terminated by two great movements of the Semitic peoples best known by the personal names of Sargon and Hammurabi, standing though they do some five centuries apart. Hammurabi with his famous code of laws attained a position in social evolution not unlike that of Justinian ages later. His personal repute has suffered sadly since the records from Man revealed the cold-blooded scheming of this selfish master of Realpolitik. Still, Hammurabi's Babylon marked the zenith of its ancient glories in stability and wealth, in literature and thought and the varied outreach of the human spirit. Soon his kingdom reeled under the blow of a far-raiding band of Hittite invaders from Asia Minor, then succumbed to Kassite horsemen from the eastern mountains. They were one more of the ceaseless ethnic

upheavals from central Asia which for ages past had poured and were yet through many future centuries to continue to pour their human tide downward through Iran into the Fertile Crescent or westward across the Urals into Europe. The Kassite rule was a retrogression; but the life of Hither Asia had become rich and complex. Assyria on the middle Tigris was already laying the foundations for that imperial sway which presently was to overrun all the civilized world. Hurrians -- the Horites of Biblical record -- soon after 2000 B.C. established themselves midway on the Tigris, and from there spread throughout the Crescent. The Hyksos broke out of their northern homes, and passing down the length of Syria-Palestine, made fast their hated rule upon Egypt. A Hittite empire arose on the ruins of the older kingdom, and from the highlands of Asia Minor stood poised to swoop when it might upon wealthier lands, or sent wandering emigrants afar, like those who sold their cave at Hebron to Abraham. The Canaanites had long held Syria and Palestine, succeeding earlier races whose life stretched back and back, no one knows how many hundreds of thousands of years; through more than a millenium they built a notable civilization, of which the most important and most enduring element was the alphabet, lineal ancestor of those of the modern world. At length weakened by inroads of Horite and Hyksos, of Amorite and Egyptian and Philistine, they fell, under the continued pressure of Hebrews in the south and soon after of Arameans in the north.

The earliest East had run its course. There was a lull, while these little folk established themselves. Then the day of Assyria arrived. It was foreshadowed in notable campaigns of the thirteenth and of the twelfth centuries, but broke in savage fury on all Hither Asia in the ninth. Again there was delay; it seemed that Assyria might be swept out of existence by the mountain folk of what we now call Armenia; but from the third quarter of the eighth century until the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C., the Assyrian empire was the supreme political fact of the Near East. At its greatest, just before decline set in about the middle of the seventh century, the empire included within its borders the ancient imperial powers, Egypt, and Babylonia, besides much else that made up the total area from the Persian Gulf in a great arc through western Iran and Armenia as far as Cilicia, and all of Syria and Palestine. When the cruelties of a hundred years found retribution, and Nineveh fell to her foes, "to heaps and ruins they turned it," as the Chronicle relates in seemingly casual terms borrowed from the boastful records of the mighty monarchs themselves.

The Assyrian period of Israel's history was the great age of prophecy. Hosea and Amos warned of conditions which foreshadowed the annihilation of the northern kingdom in 722; Isaiah interpreted the terrifying events as God's scourge of recalcitrant Judah and lived to see them reach their climax in the siege of Jerusalem in 701. A hundred years later Jeremiah and then Ezekiel told of impending judgments; but now the prime political reality was a revived Babylon and its great king Nebuchadnezzar, famed to this day for his threefold deportation of Jewish people into Babylonian captivity.

Babylon's dominance was of short duration. In 538 came Cyrus and the line of Achaemenid monarchs: Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, and the others, ruling, from the fabled glories of royal

Persepolis, over an empire vaster than yet had been. It stretched from the western approaches to India all the way across Iran and Mesopotamia, through Asia Minor, to the Aegean, where it struggled long, with sword and silver, against the Greeks. It ruled all Syria and Palestine, and intermittently Egypt as well.

This was the time of the restoration and rebuilding of Judaism in Palestine. Cyrus issued a decree permitting the captives to return. The result was not unlike the sequel of the Balfour declaration in our own times: initial indifference on the part of many, a growing interest fostered in part by external circumstances, then in spite of hostility from the people of the land, steady increase in numbers and power, crowned at length by the establishment of a Jewish state. But this took much longer than its modern counterpart. First the East was to witness the decay of the Achaemenids, their overthrow by the brilliant and daring young Alexander, and the division of his eastern holdings between two orientalized Macedonian dynasties, the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Asia. They spent themselves, rotting away in self-seeking pleasure that commonly fills the vacuum left by a lack of meaning in life.

We may pause to ponder, that while these royal morons disported themselves in beastly passion in Antioch and Alexandria, a petty hill town of their domains, age-old Jerusalem, followed its Temple services that went their quiet way, day after day, year in and year out; and there, groups of thoughtful men reflected upon the nature of human life, reasoning that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," that "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," or fervently ejaculated, "Oh, how I love thy law! It is my mediation all the day."

Between two such worlds a great gulf is fixed. And when those who had seen things not seen, by which alone life is redeemed, were apparently overwhelmed by military might, some unknown thinker committed to writing the strange symbolism of the ultimate triumph of right, which we now have in the Book of Daniel. And at about that point one breaks off the survey of Israel's world, just before he would be obliged to relate the coming of the Romans to the East.

Such were the facts, and such the forces that created the centrality of Israel's land. Up and down its narrow valleys and across its great plain went the pomp and panoply of the ancient world, and its more commonplace traffic as well: rich argosies from far Babylon, carrying the wares down to Egypt; royal messengers of the great kings who ruled in Persepolis, bearing decrees for the officer in charge at the frontier station of Assouan; plenipotentiaries of Hatti and of Egypt, seeking a modus vivendi in the political stresses of the thirteenth century; conquerors with their chariots and footmen and their tale of atrocities behind and yet before; wandering bands of foot-loose adventurers, seeking a good land where they might strike roots into the soil-all these and hosts of others were led among the Palestinian hills where went the great trunk roads of the ancient world, camped in the plains, bartered in the little cities, or stayed to lay permanent claim to some hit of the land. For the northward thrust of the Arabian desert decreed that the highways of the nations should wind their ways, not direct across Arabia, but by the longer route around the Fertile Crescent. Hence it was that when Israel made her first violent inroad into the land,

the cupidity of a common soldier was unable to resist the lure of a "wedge of gold and a goodly Babylonish garment" (Josh. 7:21), true symbol of the traffic that had saturated the land for centuries past. Even today, if one stands in the valley by Ibleam, where the converging lines of Gilboa and Carmel literally funnel traffic into a narrow pass, the lulls seem still to reverberate to the hoof beats of the centuries. Or perhaps he looks out from the hills where once Megiddo defied the armies of imperial Egypt, and listens while afar beneath the moon there comes to him across the wide plain the distant tinkling of camel bells, from the caravans journeying as they did long before Abraham, carrying their goods down into Egypt. If he is in a sensitive mood he may enter the Wadi Arab with bated breath, at each turn of the narrow glen almost expecting to meet face to face Thutmose's confident chariots moving northward to battle, as they did on that April morning nearly thirty-five centuries ago.

It is a wonderful little land-scarce more than a hundred and fifty miles from Dan to Beersheha and perhaps fifty across at Jerusalem, though much less from Haifa through Tiberias. History cries out of every hillside and from every city, storied in the past. Already when Israel entered it was a very old land wrapped in its tales of great deeds of days gone by. A brooding sense of tile ages is one of its great things, potent now as it was when the Hebrew seer in mystic vision beheld the enthroned "Ancient of Days." Yet one must not overlook its physical charm- indeed he is uncertain at the end whether he has seen more than physical reality, in the all-pervading presence of the past. Its brilliant sunlight, its limpid air lift the expectant spirits, and the shouts of peasants at work on the land come soft in the springtime air. Then the fields of Esdraelon slope up toward Galilee in an immense checkerboard of green and brown, while through a break in the hills distant Hermon looks down from its snows upon the idyllic scene. From the steep slopes of Carmel above Haifa the gaze follows down across the city with its white walls and red roofs and dark upreaching pinnacles of the cypresses, looking like so many church spires. Beyond is the harbor, deep with the blue of the Mediterranean, and to the right the white sweep of a semicircle far round to Accho, where the coast falls away in the distance, and sea and sky and shore blend in one mysterious whole. No one can forget the view from a spot halfway up the Galilee hills toward Safed, where he looks down upon the whole valley of the upper Jordan, with Hermon beyond, and upon the two little lakes that seem like sky-blue jewels caught in the tawny setting of the hills.

It is a land of many moods, sensitive to the moving season. In the springtime it lies glorious in its profusion of flowers and a forward look of hope and joy, yet one may watch on a belated day the black tempest beating up from the Jordan to overwhelm Moreh, envelope Tabor, and assault with its chariots of wrath the bulwarks of Galilee. Later the growing crops stand rich in green, then gold, and the landscape becomes vital with the joy of harvest. As summer wanes the pulsing life falters, and except for the olive groves and vineyards and a few spots blessed with sources of water, the ground lies bare and sere as the desert, a naked land, trodden by the foot of flock and herd and dotted with scattered black tents of the Bedouin. Then one may watch across the great plain while evening declines over the shoulder of the hills of Israel, silhouetting the high lookout of Elijah's Place of Sacrifice and picking out with its last rays the church-crowned

summit of Tabor; he may follow the gliding cloud shadows over the wide slope toward Galilee, and cling entranced to the fleeting tints of rose and gold and violet that enshrine the friendly heights while the last rays of the westering sun, far out over the Sea, touch lightly with a ruddy promise of hope and joy the last summits of the hills.

Southward the road leads through many a glen and past many a rocky slope. At one point it swings round the summit of a hill where the traveler delays to gaze far to the west, across a sea of lesser heights, to a thin line of white merging imperceptibly into the deep blue of the Sea, highroad of the imagination to wonders afar. In Palestine, said George Adam Smith, one goes up on his high places: those high places with their distant vistas and luring thoughts of worlds of romance and glory! Here and there one glimpses a quiet vale with a single tree overhanging a well, the typical "peaceful valley"; or he may see the flocks waiting under the midday sun, as they did in biblical times, while the shepherds draw water for them. Yet on the whole the beauty is not tranquil. It is a rugged and strong land, a land whose charm is austere: rocky hills climbing their juniper studded slopes steeply to the sky-line, narrow glens, hasty watercourses, but ever the sudden view from a hilltop over peopled valleys and far regions where mellowing distance clothes the hills in a veil of allurement and entices one on to things that the eye hath not seen nor the ear heard.

One of the most amazing of these outlooks is from the summit of the ridge north of Olivet-from Mount Scopus, well named the "mountain of outlook." There one looks downward across the ever-descending hills of the Wilderness of Judah lying beneath and seeming more a relief map than an actual landscape. On and on range the barren, yellow hills, until in the distance one feels rather than sees the deep depression of the Jordan bed, and catches a sparkle from the waters of the Dead Sea. Beyond, the mountains of Moab stand blue and mysterious. To the west, the vista leaps across the plateau of Judea, until hidden from view it takes its sudden drop to the foothills and the plain, the land of the hated Philistines along the Great Sea. But wait! At one 5 feet the mountain descends steeply to the deep valley where the Kidron far below wends its way, companying with a road along the ancient course by which David fled from Absalom, and hosts of travelers and pilgrims, before and since, have come and gone. From the valley the mountain rises sharply, carrying the eye upward to the proud old city that has crowned that spot of ground for more centuries than any other human habitation can claim. How absurdly near and small it looks, as one gazes down into it, indecently searching the Sacred Area, where prophet and priest and apostle have moved and taught. Jerusalem: how the word thrills! Jerusalem-that kills her prophets and stones them that are sent to her; but Jerusalem, too, the Holy City, with power to stir men's hearts as no other can!

It is a land where alone one may understand the haunting sensuous beauty of the Bible, a land where poetry seems to spring from the stony hillsides, where poets lived and walked whose words are known and cherished more than those of any others, and, rendered into hosts of tongues of which they never heard, are loved and repeated the world around.

Still, it was the more prosaic aspect of Palestine as the highway of the nations that constituted its unique opportunity, which of all peoples Israel alone was endowed to seize. The traffic of those ancient roads with its color and romance, and pomp and might, brought much of undeclared import. Here at the crossroads of the world the Hebrew people were sensitive to stirrings of thought through all the vast area from the plains and mountains of Iran to the mysterious regions where the upper Nile springs forth from central Africa. Darius' famous Passover decree for the Jewish garrison of Yeb on the island of Elephantine came by royal post along the ancient routes of Mesopotamia through the ravines and plains of the land of Israel almost under the shadow of the rocky heights of Judea. Jeremiah knew of the conditions of his fellow citizens, captives in Babylonia, and Nehemiah in the palace in Susa received news of conditions in the homeland. Perhaps more impressive is the evidence of modern excavation, revealing as it does the influences that beat upon this little land in every age from all the cultures of the ancient East. We turn again to the Bible and in chapter after chapter, find scarcely less notable marks of Israel's intimate converse with all her neighbors. Formerly this was an occasion of theological contention and religious perplexity, hut seen more deeply it is a matter of which to boast. The Bible was not the ingrown musing of some remote peasant folk; it was the achievement of a people whose painful destiny it was to live at the crossroads of the ancient world; it gathered up the best that that ancient world had created and, under the genius of a people who were uniquely fitted for their task, transmuted all into forms and expressions of their own incomparable convictions.

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Chapter 2: The Hebrew Thought of God

Three great problems have possessed and perplexed the human mind since first man became self--conscious. True there were other problems--those of food and shelter, safety and procreation, sickness and death--which he shared and continues to share with the animals, but at some point he became aware of issues of which apparently there are no more than crude, embryonic apprehensions in the animal mind. He saw his physical environment as something more than a place for hunting and being hunted: it took on a character; it became a cosmos.

Here was the first question: what is the ultimate nature of the world ? That such world was primarily the region of the group's habitat means little for our purpose, except as the limitation added to its mystery when distance beckoned in all directions into the unknown. Not are we concerned to trace the varying answers which successive of mankind advanced--the gods and devils and magic forces that make up the stuff of primitive faith. It is universally recognized that the long story from our earliest remains of human life onward through the great civilizations of the ancient east witnessed remarkable advances. The religions of Egypt and of Sumer and Babylon attained worthy concepts. But the important matter at the moment is that all this is but a phase of the perennial struggle of man's mind to understand the ultimate nature of the world in which he finds himself.

The second question arose out of self-consciousness. Man discovered that "I am I," then asked, "What am I?" The third problem is then obvious: somewhere about this time, if not indeed before his self-consciousness, man was confronted with the issue of the relations between the two entities, the world and himself. These three problems have persisted through all the ages; they are still with us. Doubtless what Cassirer meant, when he remarked that all philosophies are a philosophy of man, is to be discovered somewhere about this point. Perhaps too it is only a slight overemphasis to claim that all answers are the same answer, and that through the

centuries man has merely sublimated and refined the answers which his most remote ancestors first vaguely apprehended. But if so, then we must recognize that differences of degree not uncommonly can amount to differences of kind. In this long course of discovery the Israelites' attainments stand high. We turn first to their answer to the problem of cosmic mystery.

It was too early for science to assume a significant place in investigations of the nature of the physical universe. Presently a real astronomy (as distinct from astrology) had its beginning in Babylonia. Mathematics also made notable advances; the medical sciences were at home in Egypt, and engineering in both lands. But Israel's thinkers were not pioneers in these directions. To the end, such science as they possessed was accepted uncritically from their great contemporary cultures. They lived in a completely geocentric world, with the heavenly bodies as subsidiary attendants commissioned to sprinkle down the various accompaniments of the changes of day and night and the succeeding seasons. It serves no useful purpose here to pursue the matter. It is apparent that all this is only incidental, in any case, to the real issue; for let the material world be what it may, does it evidence an intangible reality ? When the question is so framed, in its most significant relevance, the Hebrew thinkers have come into their own.

Israel's great achievement, so apparent that mention of it is almost trite, was monotheism. It was an achievement that transformed subsequent history. Our indebtedness at this day is evident on a moment's thought. With some entailment of that danger always implicit in superlatives, one may raise the question whether any other single contribution from whatever source since human culture emerged from the stone ages has had the far-reaching effect upon history that Israel in this regard has exerted both through the mediums of Christianity and Islam and directly through the world of Jewish thinkers themselves. Over against the polytheistic naturalism of Babylonia and the confused "consubstantial" ideas of the Egyptian pantheon, Israel affirmed, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one"; "All the gods of the nations are vanities, but the Lord made the world." Traditional dogmas have robbed the Hebrew thinkers of their proper due through a doctrine of divine revelation which has lifted the achievement out of human categories of thought. But our function here, while not calling in question the former, is to show the reality of the latter and to appraise the achievement of Israel's speculative thinkers.

The story of this achievement is one of the contentious issues of Hebrew history. Was Abraham a monotheist? Or did this concept come into Hebrew history with Moses? What was the faith of Samuel, of David, of Amos? On all such questions students of the Old Testament fall into diverse groups, although indeed there are few who would deny that in the patriarchal period the Hebrews were polytheists, as indeed the Bible explicitly states (Josh. 24:2; cf. Gen. 35:2-4). The issue centers about the faith of Moses; a considerable number insist that he was monotheistic in the full sense of the word, that there was no difference between his belief and that of the prophets. Others are equally emphatic that available evidence is of a contrary relevance, so that we must regard Israel's knowledge of God as a great achievement which was won by centuries of struggle and came to clarity only through the stern discipline of chastisement that destroyed political independence and left the nation nothing but its intangible resources. A matter so

strenuously debated is not to be settled by a few casual comments; yet certain facts and agreed opinions have in the heat of controversy received less than their proper attention.

The basic difficulty relates to our sources for the career of Moses. Notwithstanding all that archeology has done for us, and the careful reconsideration of accepted positions in study of the Pentateuch, it still remains that as historic source material the Pentateuch is at its best only hazy-and we have no other for the religion of Moses, except such light as subsequent events can reflect upon it. We may, however, safely concede--and dissidents are few indeed--that Moses was a great, creative, religious thinker and leader, assuredly not below the best of his time, and rather, in all probability, well beyond.

Now certain bold claims are made about the religions of the Orient in the time of Moses. It is said that they had attained practically to monotheistic thought; also that the concept of a cosmic god was widespread. But, the first claim dissipates under examination. The alleged monotheism of Babylonia, it has well been pointed out, is only a disguise of unrelieved polytheism, at its farthest outreach little else than pantheism. The prize example of non-Israelite monotheism is that of the "heretic" Pharaoh Akhnaton; yet Professor John A. Wilson is authority for the view that it was quite different from, and lower than, that which Israel presently attained. The Hymn of Akhnaton is striking, probably the most remarkable religious document from the ancient Orient outside Israel; yet Professor Wilson regards it as merely an expression of a sort of ancient "monophysitism." The argument about "cosmic" gods comes close to a confusion of the problem. Certainly such notions were widespread; every primitive tribe the world over has attributed some sort of creation to its god--which is only another way of saying that it was wrestling with the first of the three great problems of which we have spoken. The cosmic gods of the Near East were commonly gods of the heavens, or else resident in the heavens. But what of it? Even when the point is fully conceded, the supposed conclusion is still several logical steps away. What the case demands is not a god of cosmic forces but one who is universal. There our evidence fails completely, even when we recognize that the term would of necessity cover much less than for modern geographic and astronomic knowledge.

Still, the case appears to be confused by a more basic error. It is quietly assumed that monotheism, per se, must be higher than polytheism, hence the higher religion of Moses must be monotheistic. But the Orient of that time was not thinking in such terms at all. This implies a developed philosophic speculation which lay yet many centuries in the future. The exaltation of Moses' faith is to be sought in other directions, specifically that the God whom he taught was good (vague as the term must remain) and that in establishing close relations with the Hebrew people he made certain high demands upon their conduct. This belief could lend itself to monotheistic evolution, as it actually did if this premise is correct; but it was yet some distance short of the concept of a single God of all men everywhere.

It is quite out of the question to postulate monotheism of the crude conditions declared by our earliest authentic historical sources, the old stories in the Book of Judges. Even centuries later

the thinking of Elijah and Elisha belongs more with the concept of a localized national God than with the thought of a single Ruler of all the world. In this period, it is true, the J writer, according to the generally accepted view, was penning his remarkable history, which, like every history worth reading, was also a philosophy. It is notable that in the account of Moses' work in Egypt he gives no attention, except by a very slight allusion (Exod. 8:19), to the Egyptian gods, but instead represents Israel's God as the supreme power, who had actually put Pharaoh on his throne (Exod. 9:16). Yet it is possible to exaggerate the meaning of this. The Lord had gone down into Egypt to deliver his people; hence consistency would demand just such relations with Pharaoh as are described. Moreover the entire account is reminiscent of the stories pervasive through the ancient Orient of intellectual and magical contest in the presence of a monarch. Moses, it should be recognized, is presented in the role of protagonist of Hebrew powers over against those of Egypt. Although we admit freely that none of the evidence may be lightly handled, yet the most probable view is that the notable contribution of Moses did not consist in the discovery and dissemination of a belief in a single God of all the world, but instead that monotheism was a crowning achievement of the prophetic age, wrought out in the very time when the brute might of Assyria was overrunning the world and threatening the extinction of Hebrew nationality.

However all this may be, even if we were obliged to qualify the belief that in the opening oracles of the Book of Amos we actually see Israel's monotheism taking its nascent form right under our eyes, yet at least the passage reveals the sort of thinking that certainly at some time led to Israel's great discovery. The words are familiar:

Thus says the Lord,

For three trangressions of Damascus and for four I will not turn back its punishment,
because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sleds of iron;
but I will send fire into the house of Hazael
and it shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad
[Amos 1:3-4].

And thus in reiterated phraseology the prophet moves round, as in the swing of a scythe of destiny, from Damascus to Gaza, to Tyre, to Edom and Ammon and Moab, before coming at length to his own people. It is the accepted critical view that the list has been somewhat expanded since Amos' day; but the reduction so demanded does not affect the basic significance of the passage. Two things stand out for present consideration. Note how the accepted limitations of the thought of the prophet's time have been ignored or transcended. Here is no little national god minding his own business strictly behind the borders or at most the military outreach of his own

people. Indeed, one may speculate on the absurdity of Amos' position, as it must have seemed to his contemporaries, and most of all to the foreign lands here so boldly castigated by this peasant

spokesman of a petty deity. What had the God of Israel to do with Damascus, the power that for a hundred years had wasted and ravaged his land, had enslaved and despoiled and brutally maltreated his people, while he looked on impotent? How well the "practical" men of the time might scoff! But indifferent to all alleged lack of realism and logic, Amos swept on round Israel's land with words of rebuke for all these neighbor and enemy countries. Here, then, is our first observation: the "national god" concept is for Israel broken and discarded. The God of Israel is a being who has powers and responsibilities and authority over all the lands of Israel's neighbors. We must admit notable exceptions from the list. There is nothing here about Egypt, not a word of Assyria or of Urartu, whichever seemed to Amos' day the dominant power. The list concerns only the principalities round about Israel. But the prophet has gone too far to stop here; he has set out on a line of thought that has no proper boundaries short of attributing toYahweh universal rule. And, indeed, in further oracles of his book Amos introduces some nameless nation of his age in a role of divine judgment that implies the Lord's dominion far out also into the midst of the great powers of the time.

But this in itself could be of little more significance than the oriental trends toward monotheism already mentioned. Monotheism in itself may be no more than despotism in religion. The great achievement of Israel was not primarily that she asserted the oneness of the world and of God, but rather the character of the God so affirmed. Amos' thought goes beyond a mere implication of the supremacy of his God. The Lord's coming punishment of Israel's neighbors is for moral reasons. Damascus and Ammon have practiced barbarities in war; Tyre and Gaza have inhumanly sold whole peoples into slavery; and so the indictment runs on. Now, all these practices were standard, accepted conduct in the eighth century B.C. Once more the scoffer might have found occasion to jeer: this common peasant getting himself excited over what everyone was doing! The independence of Amos' thinking here evidenced is of less importance for us, however, than his moral judgment. The nations are condemned for the depravity of their morals. And here is the point: they are so condemned in the name of the God of Israel! It is his righteousness, be it observed, not his might or his glory or any other of the divine qualities prized in the time, which provides the ground of his supremacy. Here we see the meaning of that phrase so commonly employed in the study of Hebrew history: Israel's monotheism was an ethical monotheism.

Those who sat in the history classes of the late James H. Breasted will recall his treatment of the alleged solar monotheism of Egypt of the fourteenth century B.C. He pointed out that it came as the culmination of a century of Egyptian imperialism. In his phrase, this "monotheism was imperialism in religion." The Egyptian sun worshiper leaving his narrow valley found the same sun shining not only in the hills of Palestine and Syria but also in the upper valley of the Nile beyond the traditional limits of Egypt; and so he was impelled to conclude that there was but one sun, hence, sun-god. It appears to be a comparable process that we see working itself out, first in the mind of Amos, and then becoming the accepted faith of all the prophets and later of the nation.

The standards of decency and honor and human compassion which were valid and prized among individuals in the little communities of Palestine did not cease their high demands when one stepped over the boundary into Syria or Philistia; but there alike men were human, with human needs and, consequently, with human standards. Amos would have denied emphatically the light assertion of Kipling's nostalgic old soldier that "east of Suez" there "ain't no Ten Commandments." Indeed, in one famous passage which again witnesses the incredible vigor of thought of this simple peasant, Amos does more than imply, he asserts in unmistakable language the common human bond among diverse and remote races.

Are you not as the Ethiopians to me,
O children of Israel, says the Lord; Did I not bring up Israel
from the land of Egypt;
and the Philistines from Caphtor,
and the Syrians from Kir?
[Amos 9:7].

The Negroes of central Africa, and Israel's two traditional enemies, the Philistines on one side and the Syrians on the other, as human beings stood on the same footing as the "chosen people" themselves. The passage is a valuable commentary on the judgments found in chapters I and 2 of the Book of Amos, for it might be claimed that some at least of these are partisan in their motivation--that Amos thunders his denunciations because his own people were the sufferers. But even in that list of divine judgments there are some that cannot be disposed of so lightly; and this utterance about God's care of the Philistines and Syrians serves to corroborate what one may deduce there. The basis of Amos' moral thinking is a sense of common humanity.

And this, it will be observed, is carried over into the concept of the nature of God: God utters his judgments upon cruelty and inhumanity. Now this is a line of thought that was to receive notable development in the course of time and to provide one of the distinctive aspects of the Hebrew outlook on the world. Notwithstanding the passages we have mentioned and others not less worthy of remark, Amos appears in the record we have of him somewhat as a stern moralist. He is a prophet of impending doom; he utters the judgments of God upon a careless and selfish people. Only at one or two points do his pronouncements leave room for argument that at heart he cherished a deep hope for the reformation and salvation of his people. But when we move on to his immediate successor, if not younger contemporary, all is changed. Though Hosea was not less concerned with the ruin that social selfishness was bringing upon the nation, yet his mood is emotional rather than judicial. He is a man of deep affection and tender motivation. It is he who has left for us that striking and charming picture of God as a loving father leading his people as though holding the hand of a toddling infant in its first uncertain steps:

I taught Ephraim to walk;
I took them in my arms...; with human bonds I drew them,

with cords of love
How shall I give you up, Ephraim; how shall I let you go, Israel?
My heart turns within me;
all my tenderness is kindled.
I will not perform my fierce anger,
I will not turn about to destroy Ephraim;
For I am God and not man
[Has. 11:3-4, 8-9].

We recall too, the famous passage with which the Book of Jonah closes. The ill-tempered prophet wanted the great city destroyed just to "save his face" as a predictor; but the Lord rebuked him. "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hands from their left; and also many cattle?" (Jon. 4:11). One thinks as well of the words:

Like as a father pitieth his children,
so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame;
he remembereth that we are dust
[Ps. 103:13-14].

And the corollary and complement of all is represented by an equally famous passage, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5). Here we see what may well be adjudged the culmination of Israel's monotheistic achievement: the one God of the universe is a God of righteousness, but still more he is a God of love: "His tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9). The significance of this in the long sequel of history a moment's thought will suffice to show. And the revolutionary nature of Israel's discovery becomes evident by study of the great religions of Egypt and Babylonia, dominant through Israel's world, as well as of those of the lesser peoples of the time. All of them alike, to the question of the attitude of the gods toward mankind would have responded that while these could at times be most beneficent, their relation with man was on the whole little better than one of indifference. They had their own concerns, and only by special effort could they be induced to turn aside to the troublesome interruptions of mundane affairs. Here, it will be seen, we have come upon an aspect of the third of the great persistent human questions referred to above. It is said that a religious thinker of the past generation, when asked what inquiry he would make of the Sphinx if assured that it would answer truly just a single question, replied, "Is the Universe friendly to me?" It was a profound insight; for man's most poignant question throughout all ages has been "What is my place in a world of immense and seemingly callous might?" And Israel's great attainment was the vision that we may walk this earth with the confident tread of a son in his father's house.

Much time has been expended upon detailing the attributes of Israel's God; he was creator, sustainer, the source of all good, a God who spoke, who revealed himself, a God of judgment

who brought just punishment upon the wicked, but also a God of forgiveness, a redeemer God--and so on. It is all quite good; and useful for those for whom it is useful. Yet all is comprised in the simple points we have suggested. For Israel, God was the ultimate reality, he was all power (though that is very different from the concept of omnipotence of later centuries), and he was good--not a being concerned with selfish interests, but his character was grace and love.

Implicit in monotheism is a movement toward transcendence. And in Israel's monotheism it was inevitable. A God such as envisaged by Israel must be exalted in divine quality far above puny man, above this earth, and above all that is of the earth and earthy. A pregnant symbol of the many expressions of this throughout the Old Testament is the great vision of Isaiah; he "saw the Lord seated upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him were the seraphim . . . and one cried to another and said, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who cried and the house was filled with smoke" (Isa. 6:1-4). Israel's characteristic thought of God was that he was awful in holiness, terrible in righteousness. And on this side of the vast gulf in quality that separated him from the divine stood man, frail, mortal and sinful, whose best righteousnesses were, in the light of that pure countenance, "but as filthy rags." This will make clear one reason why Israel abhorred apotheosis, whether of the king or of any other; for the Hebrew thinkers, God was in heaven, and man below. This provides also the basis of their concept of sin, on both of which topics more must be said presently.

Such, then, was the Hebrew view of the nature of the world. At its center there sat enthroned a Being of unutterable greatness and holiness, who was at once its creator and sustainer. But Israel never went the distance of abstracting this One into a cold and remote absolute. It is of the very essence of Hebrew thought that God is a person. The I-Thou relation in which primitive man saw his natural environment was maintained--no, rather, was sublimated--in Israel's faith: the world was to be understood in terms of personality. Its center and essence was not blind force or some sort of cold, inert reality, but a personal God. And for them personality meant the sort of concept that they, and we, in turn, apply to human nature.

Now a person, so understood, can be in only one place at any one given time. Yet our uncertain ideas of extrasensory perception provide an analogy to Israel's thought at this point; for God had, as it were, extensions of his personality so that he could reach out into many places. His proper abode was, for later thought at least, in the heavens, where he sat on a throne of majesty, surrounded by the host of his ministrants. But from him went out powers comparable with the later notion of emanations. By his spirit or by his word, he accomplished his purposes. And in the course of time still other mediums of his activity were conceived.

Yet, even so, the religious demand for the omnipresence of God was not met. In earlier times, it would appear, there was a belief in a sort of differentiation of localized manifestations of God. Thus Absalom, while in Geshur, vowed a vow to the Yahweh in Hebron (or so he claimed as part of his scheme of revolt) and, in course of time, went away from the official shrine in

Jerusalem in order to pay this vow in Hebron. Such appears to be the implication also of the assurance that "in every place where I record my name I will come to you and bless you" (Exod. 20:24). It is difficult to see how in that time such local manifestations of the deity could fail to be credited with diverse qualities dependent on the nature of such manifestations and so to assume almost the status of separate personalities. It would seem, too, that we are to recognize a handling of the problem in the famous vision in chapter 1 of the Book of Ezekiel. It describes a remarkable structure on which the God of Israel came down out of the north along the road which his people had taken in their mournful journey into captivity; and there he, too, came seeking his lonely, heartsick exiles.

So far as this goes, then, it indicates that Israel's answer was in freeing God of the limitations of fixed abode: He could leave his house and go where necessity of whatever sort called him. Yet it is apparent that such explanation will not take account of all Israel's thought. For although to the devout, even of a later time, God was in his holy temple, yet he could and would hear the prayer of his people afar in Palestine or in the lands of the dispersion. Apparently this was in large measure accomplished by an extension of the divine personality or of the divine powers so that God could hear, see, and act at a distance which for man was quite out of consideration. For practical purposes of religious faith the result was not unlike the later concept of the immanence of God.

The substance and features ascribed to this cosmic Person are not clearly grasped; indeed, it is probable that Hebrew thought recoiled from the question. This at least seems certain, however, that the Person was conceived of as possessing a quasi-human form. There can be no doubt that such is the meaning of the account in the creation stories where man was made in the image of God; and a large number of other passages corroborate the view. Many of these are poetic and in their details must be discounted as mere symbolism; still so much is an irreducible minimum. But the divine substance is far from certain. It was a later teacher who declared that "God is a spirit"; yet the belief is not diverse from that of the Old Testament. But what was a spirit? It could flit about here and yonder, could suddenly appear or disappear, could exercise superhuman powers; but none of this is determinative, for we find that certain human beings could do the same. One thinks, for example, of the stories of Elijah and Elisha. For popular thought of our day, a spirit presumably is a personality without a material body. But it is far from clear that such was an ancient concept. We recall Paul's discussion of spiritual bodies, apparently composed of some nonearthly substance (I Cor. 15:35-58). Whether, then, the Hebrews conceived of spirit as a finer kind of matter, as in certain strands of Greek thought, is not apparent. We find considerable use of the imagery of fire relevant to the person and appearances of God. Notable is the explicit statement in Ezekiel I :27. Still it would be bold to claim that Israel thought of God as possessing a body made up of some sort of celestial fire. And with that we must dismiss the problem.

However, another question comes into consideration at this point. In proportion as God is exalted in transcendent holiness and power, he is removed from human approach. A comparison

with concepts of the manlike God of earlier time will make this clear. God came down and walked in the garden and talked with the guilty pair; he accepted Abraham's hospitality one afternoon as he journeyed across the Judean hills; he informed Noah of the coming flood, and, when the latter had obeyed the divine warning and gone into the ark, he shut the door. Hosts of similar incidents will suggest themselves. Briefly, such a God was so close and approachable that one never knew at what casual moment, coming suddenly round a corner, he might meet him face to face. The significance of this for religious faith is obvious. But the transcendent God is liable to be thought of as remote, and furthermore, as preoccupied with his mighty concerns. How can frail man hope that such a one will be interested in the needs and hopes and fears of a tiny spark of animated dust? It is a problem that higher religion carries implicit in its advance. As man exalts God in transcendent quality, at the same time he pushes him steadily farther off from human need. It will serve the purpose of orientation for us to realize that to meet just this problem is one of the functions of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Obviously this was not the formulated solution of ancient Israel. Indeed Israel's answer was diverse and complex. Consideration of it must be postponed a little.

Revolutionary as much of this was in the history of human thinking, yet, in surveying it, one is conscious of a certain impatience to get on to the basic problem that confronts us in this discussion: What were the processes of thought by which Israel came to such views? Rooted in the past as she was, intimately a part of the culture of the ancient world and heir of its thought, it is apparent at once that such wide divergence unavoidably implies bold and vigorous thinking, not by a few individuals, but by a long succession of them through the nation's history. Our inherited doctrine of divine inspiration has functioned to obscure this inescapable conclusion. We must later take note of the understanding of this mystery that Israel's own thinkers held, and we shall see that it effectively spans the gulf between the seemingly irreconcilable opposites of the dilemma. Israel could be the medium of divine revelation and yet could in the same act preserve her intellectual independence; indeed, only because of this independence could she be such a medium. For the moment, however, the important concern is the searching criticism which Israel applied to the thought that she inherited from and shared with her world. Creative skepticism was at home in this profoundly religious people. Here is the seeming paradox that a people, freely recognized as supremely *the* religious people of the ancient world, at the same time were without a peer in the power and scope of their critical intellectualism. But indeed it is not paradoxical, for religion that is not criticized quickly deteriorates into mere superstition. It was only by virtue of their skeptical mood that the Hebrew thinkers were able to attain a view of the world that still shapes our outlook.

This critical mood is well manifested in Israel's attitude toward the pagan gods and their symbols. Although deeply dependent on the mythology of their contemporaries, the Hebrew thinkers yet came to repudiate the reality of the symbols in which these clothed the physical reality of the world. We know very little of the story, doubtless of protracted question and debate, that lies back of Israel's attainment of this uniqueness in the ancient world. There is some reason to believe that it rests ultimately in a deep moral conviction. The religions of

Canaan, ornate as they were with divine symbols in public worship and private shrines, were in large measure characterized by the features of so-called nature worship. And everyone knows what this has inevitably entailed. Canaanite worship of the forces of life meant public immorality as a sacred rite and commonly of a disgusting depravity.

It is true that Israel in considerable measure gave herself for a time to this as the accepted means of securing the increase of the fields and of flocks and herds; we recall the reiterated complaint that they "forgot the Lord their God and went after the Baals and Ashtoreth." Yet there were, even in early times, and increasingly with the passing of the centuries, men who stood aloof and condemned the thing for the depravity that it was. It is such moral revulsion that speaks in the prophetic warnings and denunciations where we commonly meet the scathing summary of this whole system of religion: "On every high hill and under every green tree you prostrated yourself as a harlot" (Jer. 2:20). It was apparently, then, a deep ethical motivation that at length found expression in the dogma now familiar but in its cultural environment of astonishing radicalism: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image nor any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters that are under the earth: thou shalt not bow clown thyself to them nor serve them" (Exod. 20:4-5). And, be it observed, the passage runs on, "For the Lord thy God is a jealous God." All was gathered up in Israel's theological uniqueness and in her consciousness of that uniqueness. The righteousness and holiness of God imposed upon the Israelite an exacting standard of action and thought and, in turn, revealed the depravity of pagan religion, however pompous or ancient.

Such is the mood that finds notable expression in a term somewhat widely employed for the pagan gods. In a number of cases we are told that they are "nothingnesses"--so we render the contemptuous word; but indeed it has common use as a normal term for foreign images: all alike, the gods and their symbols were nothing at all. It is now believed that the Hebrew word is an adaptation of a foreign one meaning god; and so we see how the Hebrew mind operated in relation to this matter: from foreign god to nothingness--they were intimately one and the same! However, what was here only implicit in a word was fully developed by the great prophet of the Exile, whom, for lack of better information, we call Second Isaiah. And such is the depth of the Hebrew conviction that he applies it to the most august gods of his time. With biting wit that might do credit to Lucian, he laughs the great gods of Babylon out of countenance. He had watched the sacred New Year procession; he had seen, for the pious but benighted Babylonian, a profound mystery taking place under the eyes of the beholder as Marduk and Nabu went out in solemn pilgrimage to the Akitu house, there to settle the fates of the incoming year; he had witnessed the annual festival in which Marduk triumphed over all his foes, cosmic and terrestrial, and himself died that life might once more return to the world. But this critical Jew saw, not the mystery of an ancient Mass, but a solemn farce: two great hulks of dead matter nearly breaking the backs of suffering brutes condemned to carry the weight of alleged gods!

Bel stoops; Nabu leans!
Their idols are on beasts, on cattle;

what you revere is loaded up,
a burden to the weary
(Isa. 46:11).

Again, with like sarcasm, he ridicules the entire faith and vogue of idols: one cuts a tree for firewood, using it for heating and for cooking; but still a sizable piece remains, until as an afterthought it is given to a craftsman who, with a deal of labor, shapes it into a pretense of human form--and then men bow down to it and say, "Deliver me, for thou art my god!" (Isa. 44:9-17). What useful material is a stick of wood, he seems to say, You can cook your meals with it, you can heat your house, and, if any is left, you can make a god to which you may pour out the deepest aspirations of your soul! All alike wood!

Yet all such thought might well seem no more than a sort of sublimated national bigotry. The crucial question is whether Israel's thinkers could apply the same rigid standards of criticism to their own inherited dogmas, in particular to those of the nature, attributes, and activity of Yahweh himself. Their intellectual attainment will be realized only when we admit fully, as the evidence demands, that Hebrew religion achieved freedom from an idolatry (to use a common term) similar to that of the rest of the ancient East--Yahweh was, through the earlier period of the nation's life in Palestine, worshiped in physical form, just as Marduk or Amon or any of the rest of them in their lands. It argues much ,then, of the intellectual vigor and independence of generations of unknown Hebrew thinkers that still far back in the nation's history the invisibility of Yahweh had become a dogma of the orthodox religion. In full repudiation of the power and mystic realism of symbols, a writer in Deuteronomy argues that even in the personal presence of their God, manifest in the great theophany on Sinai, no physical form was apparent, but only an invisible presence felt in power and in religious perception:

The Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of words, but ye saw no form; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform. . . . Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of form on the day that the Lord spoke unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire; lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female . . . and lest thou lift thine eyes unto heaven and when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars, even the whole host of heaven, thou be drawn away and worship them and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath allotted unto all the peoples under the whole heaven" (Deut. 4:12-19).

How characteristic of Israel's religion this feature became is so well known to us that its force is in danger of being blunted. But, for the contemporary world, it was heresy of the first order, such, in fact, as to set the Hebrews off as a peculiar people in a sense quite different from what their own thinkers boasted. An aspect of this is portrayed by a dramatic incident of a later time. When Pompey in 63 B. C. stormed Jerusalem, he forced his way into the Holy of Holies, much to the horror of the Jews, in order to see for himself what was the inmost secret of this unusual

religion. And there he found--we all know what: nothing but an empty room! The perplexity of this leader from the image--ridden West, standing in the presence of a mystery that still evaded him, is a true symbol of Israel's place in the ancient world: a place that might well be equally unique in the modern, save for our debt to Israel herself.

But Israel's heterodoxy did not stop here. The very existence of her God came in for critical examination. Only so, it would seem, was the certitude of orthodoxy attained; when questions of his reality and his nature had been honestly met, then, and then only, could the best thinkers affirm: "All the gods of the nations are vanities; but the Lord made the heavens" (Ps. 96:5). The full story of this intellectual quest is not preserved; we are dependent in considerable part on casual allusions, but fortunately also we possess some more formal discussions of the problem. One familiar expression of the skeptical mood reveals a group of thinkers who had gone far to the left in their conclusions. The orthodox, as always, despised the skeptical as "fools"; and so we read, "The foo has said in his heart, There is no God" (Pss. 14:1; 53:1). Our accepted exegesis of this bold denial is that it means only a repudiation of divine activity in human affairs, since, so it is said, the Hebrews never doubted the existence of God. But surely such reasoning does little credit to our intellectual integrity; could there be a worse case of prejudging an issue? The words, both in English and in Hebrew, say as clearly as can be, "God does not exist."

It is quite possible that these bold heretics arrived at their conclusion through a failure to see any evidence of divine participation in current affairs; but certainly they reached a denial of the reality of God. It may be that they anticipated modern atheists who see no need of a God, since the world is getting along tolerably well without one. Indeed, this is the implication of the criticism turned against them by the pious author of the psalm: when God looks down to see if there are any wise, he finds godless oppressors who "know nothing" and consequently "eat up (his) people as they eat bread." Still, the writer proceeds, though these folk are subject to great terror, they lack wisdom--they cannot read meaning in their disturbing experiences. Then, as though thinking of unmistakable evidence of the reality of God, he concludes with a pious wish that the salvation of God would come out of Zion.

Comparable to this heresy are the musings of a thinker who relates his search for evidence on which to base the grandiose claims of orthodoxy, but all he found was emptiness and his own frustration. To understand the fine flavor of his barbed cynicism, we must attend even to his introduction in which, with assumed pomposity, he mocks the very words of prophetic announcements:

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the prophetic utterance, the oracle of a mere man, Le'ithiel:

Indeed I am a subhuman brute;
I have not the intelligence of a man.
I have not learned wisdom

nor attained knowledge of holy things.
Who was it that went up to heaven and came down again?
Who gathered the wind in his fist?
Who bound the waters in his garment?
Who set firm the limits of the earth?
What is his name, and what his son's name?
For you know
[Prov. 30:1-4].

Little need be said in exposition of the passage. It will be apparent how the writer scoffs, not alone at the prophets with their bold claim of direct knowledge of the unseen, but at the priests, who proclaimed proficiency in holy things, and at the wise men, also, with their confidence in intelligence and "wisdom." By contrast all he will assert is his humanity; indeed, worse, he must be a brute, for he knows nothing of all these boasted attainments. But where, he asks, is empirical evidence for such claims? Who went up to heaven and saw all this with his own eyes? Then, listing the cosmic ascriptions with which orthodoxy loved to embellish the might of God, he poses the troublesome query: "Where is the objective evidence on which this imposing structure of faith (or credulity) is reared?" With biting irony he turns to his pious contemporaries, and, leaving them in full possession of the field of dispute as with a bow of mock humility, we can imagine, he asks simply: "You know the answer; won't you tell me?"

Once more it is claimed that the writer does not question the reality of God. But, however that may be, he certainly denies the existence of any real knowledge of him. The term atheistic can be applied just as truly as to present-day humanists who refrain from denying the existence of God, but merely insist that nothing is known of him, hence a reasonable person will concern himself only with what is "this side of the clouds." Similarly the Hebrew skeptic demanded sound evidence for the claims of current belief. As D. B. MacDonald comments, he "has his place in the purest rationalistic tradition." It may be that his thinking is too materialistic; like the Apostle Thomas, he seems to say that only the evidence of the senses is valid. But, whatever uncertainty we may retain on details of his outlook, it is important to recognize his demand that religious thinking must be honest and subject to the same rigorous standards as any other reliable processes of thought.

But in all this we must not minimize the importance for our purpose of the besetting tendency in Israel to what is sometimes described as practical atheism, the denial that God concerns himself with human affairs, however real he may actually be. Everyone is familiar with such pervasive mood against which the prophet known as Malachi uttered his reproofs. In this case the public attitude expressed itself in habitual carelessness in the practice of the public rites of worship. Since God had not fulfilled the promises of the prophets to re-establish the Judean state, so the interpretation runs, the Jews in Jerusalem were swept along from disappointment to despair to infidelity. But it is important to realize that this was no new thing; the pre-Exilic prophets were obliged to take account of the same cynical mood. A brief but arresting passage occurs in

connection with the work of Jeremiah. The people are quoted as saying: "It is not he, neither will evil come upon us, neither shall we see sword and famine" (Jer. 5:12). The situation is apparent. Jeremiah had warned them of impending disaster, at the same time arguing divine displeasure as the cause of present troubles. But they denied this facile interpretation. The course of events was following natural laws; the trouble was the might of Babylon and its aggressiveness--what need to bring the Lord into consideration at all? A hundred years before, the same skeptical mood was directed against Isaiah; he quotes his critics as jeering, "Let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come about so that we may see it" (Isa. 5:19)--they turned his own words back against him with the mocking comment, "We've been waiting a long time for something to happen." But indeed something similar is to be said about the famous incident of Elijah at Mount Carmel: his effort was to convince a populace who disbelieved in the day--by--day interest and activity of Israel's God. It becomes evident that a certain incredulity rooted so far back in Israel's history that we may with some qualification regard it as a national characteristic. For all such mood and questioning, the prophets were obliged to find an answer. Of similar implication was the violent disagreement through the eighth and seventh centuries within the ranks of the prophets themselves, the canonical prophets denouncing their popular colleagues for false leadership, and the latter retorting in kind. A typical example is the public dispute of Jeremiah with Hananiah (Jeremiah, chap. 28), which entailed the problem of the ultimate authority and sanction of the prophetic utterance. The so-called true prophets seem to us commanding figures, and their pronouncements appear to have been turned off easily under divine inspiration, however we conceive that process; but it is important that we recognize the course of serious thinking entailed before they dared appear in public and announce themselves religious leaders. The attitudes and objections here sketched insured that intellectually, as truly as in other regards, it was no light matter to be a prophet of the Lord.

But the most famous skeptic of the Old Testament is the writer who, for lack of further information, we call by the title we have attached to his book. There is no denying that Ecelesiastes admitted the existence of a God. But what profited such a God--remote, selfish, indifferent, jealously watching the presumptions of troublesome man, and at the most conceding certain meager favors that served to redeem human life from stark intolerability? This is incidental, however. What we note is the free and frank doubt of orthodoxy which reveals itself in every chapter of his book. Over against it he sets up a philosophical system of cosmic determinisrn, a sort of universal wheel of time on which life and nature and history are forever wearily repeating themselves as often as the cycle of time brings round once more the things that have receded into the past.

Now it is clear, however we may regard such conclusions, that they are the outcome of vigorous, independent thinking. And the book shows unmistakably the nature of that thinking. Ecelesiastes tells us that he undertook certain experiments. He tried wisdom and folly; he investigated the seeming solace of wine; he gave himself to the pursuit of pleasure -- but in all, he is at pains to assure us, his heart guided him in wisdom. Or, rendered in intelligible modern terms, he was prompted, not by the frivolity of the voluptuary, but by a serious philosophic

purpose. He was conducting a scientific experiment upon himself, observing his own reactions and earnestly seeking through these experiences to find the abiding value, if any, that life possesses. And further studies were based on observation of the steady flow of events past his place of quiet reflection. It was because of what he saw in the widest survey of life that he concluded, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Actually this phrase--which many an unthinking person today bandies about glibly--contains a deeper implication not fully suggested by this common translation. The Hebrew word "all" here has the definite article. What Ecelesiastes says is that "the all"--that is, the totality of things, the entire purport of the universe -- lacks meaning or value. Whatever may be thought of this conclusion, at least here is philosophy in the full sense of the term, though certainly not in its full scope as we have come to know it. But for the moment our interest is more in the philosopher's methods than in either his results or the extent of his research. And what has been said leaves it abundantly clear that, admitting some unevenness in his application of the method, his thinking was of the sort that we have come to call empirical. He reasoned from observed facts.

The Book of Ecelesiastes is regarded as quite late. As a matter of fact, definite criteria of its date are meager. Nonetheless it is well to concede its late origin, in a time when the Jews were in touch with Greek life and when some of them had grown familiar with Greek thinking. How far, then, are we to discount the book as an example of Hebrew methods of thought? The answer would seem to be that we have for long put this sort of question on a false basis. We are steadily learning the debt of Greece to the Orient; and although no serious person could deny the opposite influence so long affirmed, still the greatness and the long course of oriental thought, in the full tradition of which Ecelesiastes stood, render it wiser to recognize that in his mental furnishing he was a thorough Jew, though it is undeniable that his thought was stimulated and, in some regards, shaped by the speculation of the West. His conclusions are not in the tradition of Jewish orthodoxy, but his type of mind and his methods are intimately a part of the questioning mood that had been at home in Israel for many centuries.

This will perhaps suffice to show the remarkably modern character of Israel's mental equipment, though indeetl, as our discussion proceeds, much more that has relevance l)ere will come before us. However, we turn to the question that has been forcing itself on our consideration: What evidence could suffice for a people of such pronounced critical disposition to support their unique and astonishing religious beliefs?

Unfortunately for this purpose, the Hebrew thinkers, unlike the Greek, commonly left not so much a record of their processes of thought as of their conclusions. In particular this is true of those whom we may call the orthodox theologians. What information is provided, for example, of the basis of Abraham's faith? Or of that of the author of the pentateuchal narratives in general? And the prophets were characteristically concerned to hurl their denunciations and promises in telling phrase such as might bring conviction rather than to carry their audiences along by reasoned processes to a desired conclusion. The apologetic for Israel's faith thus does not lie on the surface. Still, if one will dig a little deeper, the facts will in some part presently

reveal themselves.

Israel, we must keep in mind, was an oriental nation among the great nations of the ancient Orient. Their culture was the matrix in which hers was shaped. And it is to be borne in mind also that the religions of both Egypt and Babylonia find a ground of explanation in the physical conditions in which the peoples lived. The sun drenched valley of the Nile and the flooded plains of ancient Sumer both exerted profound influence in the molding of the outlook of ancient men for whom Egypt and Babylonia were the world and their forces the realities by which man must direct his life. A similar approach to the religion of Israel could prove fruitful. The rugged terrain of northwest Arabia, of which Syria and Palestine, it has sometimes been remarked, may be regarded as merely the largest and richest oasis, the numerous mountain peaks, the volcanoes apparently active at some period in ancient history, the desert with its speaking silences, the uncertainties of the weather in a land where all is dependent on the annual rainfall--all these and much more of the same sort are reflected in Israel's religion. Of her earliest faith we cannot safely say more than that it was inherited and uncritically accepted from ancestors who had come, by the ways that have shaped the mind of primitive man, to a relatively high polytheism. And it is against this background that all her later speculation must be examined, just as we, too, however secular and objective we seek to make our investigation of the nature of the world and of man, have come to it through a long heritage of the past that accepted fully the personal explanation of the world. The problem, then, for Israel, just as for us, is not how she came to believe in the existence of the divine, but rather how her experiences shaped that belief and how her people supported it when they had arrived at some sort of intellectual self-consciousness.

A basic fact for Israel's faith was the physical world. But here we encounter one of the prime distinctions between this nation and her neighbors. For Israel's God rose out of, and transcended the status of, a nature-god. God and nature were intimately related, as the Babylonians and Egyptians also believed, yet for Israel they were nonetheless distinct and diverse. This may be described as a debasing of nature, since it remained no longer divine. Yet the actuality of Israel's thought was rather the reverse. Nowhere in the ancient East do we find such sublime concepts and descriptions of nature as in Israel. It is more accurate, then, to speak rather of the sublimation of God and the elevation of nature as an expression of the divine power and activity. In reality the highest concepts of her neighbors are so fully carried over that one could easily confuse the situation and regard Yahweh as a God of mountain and earthquake and storm and fertility in just the same sense as for the others. His voice was heard in the thunder; he shook the world in earthquakes; his rain fell on the thirsty ground; he flashed abroad in the lightning; he was present in birth and increase. But the essential distinction is supplied by a Hebrew writer, who, though speaking of a single incident, employs language that is a symbol of all:

Behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake,

bu the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire.(I Kings 19 :1 I-I 2).

These were but "the whisper of his word, but the thunder of his power who might understand?" (Job 26:14). The point is obvious. God, for Israel, was supreme above nature and employed it for his purposes. However intimately related to natural phenomena, God was more than, and distinct from, them. For "after the fire" came "a still, small voice."

Yet the intimate relation of God and the forces and phenomena of nature gives the latter a quality that one searches far to find, short of the English romanticists of the eighteenth century. All nature was the work of the Lord and visible evidence of his reality, of his power, and of his immediate participation in affairs of the world. Yet the notable skeptical mood of Israel insures that, though we cannot trace the process as fully as we would, still the argument was certainly subjected to steady re-examination and maintained its supremacy only after debate. Some of this we have already sketched.

A significant contribution to this line of thought came about through the experience of the deported Jews in the Babylonian captivity. Carried off from Jerusalem, which they had in their provincialism supposed to be one of the great cities of the world, and planted in the plain of Babylonia not far from the great imperial city itself, the exiles, when the first pangs of homesickness had passed, began to realize wonders and achievements of Babylonian civilization such as shamed their poor rustic culture. And, as time went on, the more open-minded learned of the pomp and magnificence of the religion of their captors and the might of supreme Marduk before whom, by the accepted test of arms, Yahweh's puny strength had but mocked his people's need. A mood of disillusionment, it would seem, set in and carried many of the Jews far along the road of assimilation and denial of their religious heritage. It was a larger world into which they had come.

For imperial Babylon lines of close communication led out eastward into Iran, of which the first captives had scarcely even heard and westward through Asia Minor to the Creek world. In the city itself merchants and governmental officials from the far ends of the known world might be met day by day. How petty and remote Judah and all for which it stood must have seemed to the ostensibly liberal-minded. And as a climax of aaa this impact of foreign culture that was slowly eating the vitals out of the Jewish faith was the fact that at just this time the Babylonian study of the heavens was attaining the status of a real science. Before the astonished Jews there was unfolded a world of immensity, of wonder, and of regularity such as to render ludicrous the traditional claim that Yahweh, god of the tiny land of Palestine, had made not alone the sun and moon but the host of the stars also.

Here we meet, certainly not the first interrelation of science and religion (for that reaches back into the very beginnings of man's thought about the world), but one of the earliest clashes of the two, in a form much like what has been familiar right to our own day. Indeed, these very

considerations arose within our own times relevant to recent disclosures of astronomy. But how could they be met in the sixth century B.C.? Did the Jews abandon their faith for the new--found false messiah, science? Certainly not the best of them! Did they retire into intellectual isolation and refuse to admit the findings of science? Did they satisfy themselves with reaffirmation of ancient dogmas? Not at all. It is again an index of their intellectual vitality that instead they met the problem with high courage, recognized the validity of the new knowledge and its destructive implications, and then, embracing the facts, rebuilt their faith on a new and better basis into a greater religion than it was before.

Fortunate it was that there lived among these perplexed people the great poet--thinker Second Isaiah. He realized that the difficulty was inherent, not in the character of Yahweh, but in the unworthy thought of him which his people held. Seizing boldly on the very findings of science which were sweeping more tender minded Jews off their feet, he claimed that, far from nullifying faith in Israel's God, these were but evidences of his greatness and of his reality. For God was maker and master of the physical universe. "Lift up your eyes on high and see who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number; he calleth them all by name; great in might and strong in power, not one is lacking" (Isa. 40:26).

However, already familiar elements of the cosmological argument also received fresh and vigorous handling by Second Isaiah. It was not merely the enlarged world of his time that impinged on his consciousness with fresh conviction, but in a mood very much like that of the philosophic scientists of today he adduced the consideration that the ordered world declares its origin in a universal mind.

Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
and hath meted out the heaven with the span,
and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure,
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?
Who directed the spirit of the Lord?
With whom took he counsel?
Who. . . . taught him knowledge
and showed him the way of understanding?
(Isa. 40:12-14).

This was evidently a real contribution to Israel's thinking, for in a later age the wisdom writers turn frequently to it as a favorite theme, and in particular it serves as the basis of the lengthy dissertation upon the transcendent intelligence of the divine that is put into the mouth of the Lord in the latter part of the Book of Job.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Declare if thou hast intelligence.
Who determined its measures?--if you possess knowledge.
Whereupon were its foundations fastened?
Or who laid its cornerstone? . . . . Host thou commanded the morning since thy days began, and caused the dayspring to know its place? .. . .
Where is the way to the dwelling of light?
And as for darkness, where is its place? . . . .
Canst thou bind the cluster of the Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion?
Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth?
Or canst thou number the months that they fulfil?
(Job 38:4-39:21).

And so this lengthy survey of the complex interaction of animate and inanimate creation runs on. It will be noted that, in part, this is a mere disparagement of human knowledge: that the world contains much more than mortal mind can compass. But basic to the discussion is that it treats of the wonders of the infinite intelligence which not alone established these wonders but holds them in their proper relations.

It is important to realize that Second Isaiah wrote with conscious recognition of the problem of apologetics; he took up the issue specifically and of set purpose. It is a sort of undertone running through his poems. He treats it relevant to the claims of the great contemporary pagan gods; but this does not alter the point of prime interest, namely that he was answering the question "How can man know rationally that God exists and that he is the sort of being which Jewish tradition claims him to be?" To this end his favorite device is to picture a cosmic assize in which Yahweh is at once plaintiff and judge; he advances his arguments and introduces his witnesses and then challenges the defendants to make out their case. But at this point only silence ensues; and the decision goes toYahweh, not by default, but by the demonstration of the complete powerlessness and inanity of the others. And Yahweh's argument, in addition to what we have already noted, is that he has been operative in history and still is the vital force in the affairs of men. Notwithstanding certain new features which were introduced into this consideration, it is important to recognize that Second Isaiah is here but applying an opinion that was very old among Israelite thinkers. It had received notable expression by Isaiah a hundred and fifty years before in his bold claim that the God of Israel was using the Assyrians for his great purposes. But it was not uniquely his; for it is the theme running throughout the Old Testament. The Hebrew thinkers, with a penetration that might have spared some later thought its worst blunders, recognized that the meaning of the world can be understood, if at all, only in the light of, and by inclusion of, human life, which is its highest expression. For them "the proper study of mankind was man."

This is peculiarly the field of investigation of the wise men. They were primarily students of human life from the ethical and metaphysical point of view. In their age-long investigation, carried on by successive generations of scholars, history and society provided facilities in a

sense comparable with those offered in modern scientific experimentation. It is scarcely an exaggeration to claim that they were empirical, though admittedly the method had not yet come to self-consciousness and hence could easily fall below scientific strictness or give way to traditional dogma. Nonetheless, their activity is in itself demonstration of the keen intellectualism of ancient Israel and the distance this people had gone in methods of sound thinking. The wise men sought to evolve codes of conduct that might conduce to the accepted ideal of the good life, but as well they saw everything taking its place in a continuing stream of action and history which was leading on to determined results in the divine purpose. This very alluring topic we abandon with cursory comment, to take it up at more length a little later. However, a related aspect of the topic has already been mentioned and calls for some orientation at this point. We took occasion to note that Amos' thought of the universality of God was in some way dependent on his sense of a common human standard of right and wrong. It is clear, then, that in this was one of the fruitful sources of Israel's convictions as to the being and nature of God. The universality of the human regard for those higher qualities which the Hebrew gathered up in the concept of righteousness found rational explanation best in a cosmic origin which some modern thinkers describe as a Process; but, for the Hebrew mind, that Process was personal. In the unceasing human striving from the good to the better, in the contempt of the base and mean, in the universal homage to the true and noble and unselfish, there was, for Israel's thought, just as for ours, a profound mystery that compelled speculation to venture beyond the immediate and tangible, out into the region of cause and nature and being. Israel's thinkers concluded that here is the ultimate revelation of the character of God: He is righteousness and truth.

In addition to the argument from the wonders and the apparent intelligence of the world, and from the course of human history, past and future, as he believed it might he calculated, Second Isaiah had one other consideration which is presented with such brevity that there is danger of reading into it perhaps more than he meant. In his favorite figure of a great court scene, he has the Lord in several passages say of Israel, "You are my witnesses" (Isa. 43:10, 12; 44:8). The context in some measure may suggest that he is thinking of Israel as the recipient of God's bounty and his notable interventions in her history, of which now she could testify. Yet though this may be uppermost in the passages, the further concept cannot be absent that Israel can testify out of her whole knowledge of God. However that may be in these passages, it is certain that such consideration came to have force in Jewish thought. A psalmist exclaims, "0 taste and see that the Lord is good"; again:

The iudgments of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether
More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold
Sweeter also than honey
and the droppings of the honeycomb
(Ps. 19:9-10).

O how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day (Ps. 119:97).

And this is but the merest sample of the immense bulk of such utterances that one might excerpt from the Psalms and other poetry of the Old Testament. The devout Israelite felt and knew that in his experience of his God he had a treasure of the rarest quality. And in this, finally, it would appear, he found the proof of the reality and the goodness of the Person whom his traditional faith postulated as the center and meaning of the physical universe It is apparent that the question of the validity of such thinking comes into consideration. Did the Hebrew ever go behind his processes of observation and thought to question their finality ? But this question we can take up more effectively as part of Israel's whole understanding of human life.

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The Old Testament, Keystone of Human Culture by William F. Irwin

William A. Irwin was Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at Southern Methodist University, formerly Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at the University of Chicago. He is the author of The Problem of Ezekiel, and The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, and many other books. This material was published by Abelard-Schuman, London and New York, 1959. Prepared for Religion-Online by Paul & Shirley Mobley.

Chapter 3: What is Man?

It is said that, for the Ancient Hebrew, there were three realities: God, man, and the world. The remark is, however, less profound than it may appear; for what more is there? And how could he have taken account of less, being the person that he was? But, in any case, it is now time to turn to the second of these entities.

Israel was fully aware of that most critical question of all man's thought -- the problem that man is to himself. The Hebrew thinkers meditated upon this strange two-legged creature that struts about in such a pompous mood, arrogantly rivaling the gods yet knowing full well that he is much less than divine, conscious of his close relation with the beasts but refusing to be a brute, and always -- even in his proudest moments -- haunted with a sense of insufficiency and with the knowledge that the nemesis which dogs his every footstep will ultimately overtake him. And what, then, of all he has hoped and done? In itself such thinking is not remarkable, for even primitive man had early learned to ask questions about his origin and nature. But the uniqueness of Israel's thought is in the elevation of its conclusions, an answer to the problem of man that even in this modern day some regard as superior to much of recent thought as well as to the aberration which Greek speculation fastened upon Western culture.

The consciousness of the problem was widely diffused among Hebrew thinkers, if we may judge from frequent allusion and formal discussion. One of the notable passages of more extensive treatment is Psalm 90, which in majestic wording sketches the agelessness of the world, and the eternity of the divine, by contrast with which man is transient, frail, and fallible:

Before the mountains were brought forth
or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world,
even from everlasting to everlasting

thou art, O God. . .
A thousand years in thy sight
are but as yesterday when it is past,
and as a watch in the night (Ps 90:2-4].

But as for man:

Thou carriest them away as with a flood;
they are as a sleep;
in the morning they are like grass that groweth up:
in the morning it groweth up and flourisheth,
in the evening it is cut down and withereth.. . . .
Thou hast set our iniquities before thee,
our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. . . .
We spend our years as a sigh (Ps.90:5-9).

Scarcely less deserving of mention is the explicit formulation of the question in Psalm 8:

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy
name in all the earth!
who hath set thy glory upon the heavens. . . .
when I survey thy heavens
the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars
which thou hast ordained,
what is man . . .?
(Ps. 8:1-4).

In the immensity and might of the physical universe, man is so fleeting and so little; yet, as we shall see, man, so this thinker maintains, holds a place of unique significance.

One influence that stimulated Israel's interest in the problem was the obvious similarity that exists between man and the beasts. We are told that in his three thousand proverbs Solomon "spoke of birds and of beasts and of creeping things" (I Kings 4:32-33). But this had been a very old interest in the Orient, where fables of plants and animals of the sort familiar to the modern world under the title *Aesop's Fables* had long been employed in teaching and speculation about the nature of man. The well-known fable of Jotham in chapter 9 of Judges is the clearest illustration of this that we possess from Israel, but certain passages in the Book of Proverbs, some prophetic figures, and, most of all, this clear statement in the account of Solomon's career demonstrate that the Hebrew thinkers recognized our kinship with the lower animals. But then what? Is man nothing but a more intelligent brute? In view of the freedom of Israel's skeptical thought, it is not surprising that the question found answer in the affirmative. Nor shall we think

it remarkable that our familiar acquaintance, Ecelesiastes, is the one to voice this with frankness. He states his conclusion:

I said in my heart in regard to the sons of men that, since God has created them and he sees that they are in their nature but beasts, the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is one: as this dies, so dies that; they have all the same spirit, and man has no superiority above the beasts, for all is futile. . . .

Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? (Eccles. 3:1-21).

There we have frank and complete repudiation of man's higher claims. Our life, just like that of the animals, is told in purely biological terms. And when death overtakes us, nothing has happened but biological and then chemical dissolution. But the very terms of Ecclesiastes' pessimism reveal that the consensus of Hebrew thought was against him. He is clearly at pains to criticize and repudiate an accepted belief.

Similar is the mood of the "friends" in the Book of Job, although their traditional piety is far from the radicalism of Ecclesiastes. But at least it is apparent that they too assign man a lowly place. Bildad, indeed, alludes to man that is a maggot, and the son of man that is a worm" (Job 25:6). And Eliphaz, in a comparable utterance, stresses the frailty and transcience of human life:

. . . .them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth !
Betwixt morning and evening they are destroyed;
they perish forever without any regarding it.
Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them?
They die, and that without wisdom (Job 4:19-21).

But we must beware of deducing a like inference from the contrite confession of a psalmist:

But I am a worm and no man,
a reproach of men and despised of the people [Ps. 22:6]

It means, indeed, just the opposite of the view of Job's friends. For it is clear that it is the writer himself who, as a worm, is less than human --- so he claims. The characteristic belief of Israel, indeed, finds nowhere more challenging formulation than in the Psalter, and most notably in that Eighth Psalm, from which we quoted a moment ago. The relevant passage is rendered in the King James translation:

What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?
For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,
and hast crowned him with glory and honor (Ps. 8:4-6).

But the word here rendered "angels" is *'elohim*, the familiar and regular term for God. And nowhere does it certainly mean angels. There is no evidence whatever that would support the action of the seventeenth-century translators at this point; it rests only on dogmatic presuppositions which precluded their rising to the boldness of the Hebrew concept. The passage says as clearly as may be: "Thou hast made him a little lower than God"! The essential meaning of the passage, as well as its astonishing character, is very little altered if we should admit, in accordance with some recent thought, that "man" is here the half-mythical, primeval man.

In few regards is the uniqueness of Hebrew thought more evident than in this concept of the basic character of human life. Indeed to this day (not merely until the time of King James' translators), we have but inadequately approached the majesty of the conception that man is in his nature but "a little lower than God." And such a view was propounded by a people who had no less painful cause than our own generation to know the depraved possibilities of the human heart, and who, on the other hand, maintained an unrivaled faith in a transcendent God. But yet the paradox --- for them, man is but "a little lower" and "crowned with glory and honor." Here is none of the contamination of flesh, of the essential badness of matter, of the evil of the world and all that it signifies: ideas which we have erroneously fathered upon the Orient, and which in turn have distorted our religious thinking for two millenniums. But they are Greek and not Hebrew, traceable not to Moses but to Plato True, the Hebrew would grant the terms of our familiar hymn, "Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail"; but in that feebleness there was no taint of worthlessness. On the contrary, man is of exalted origin; and his destiny, by implication, is likewise one of majesty. Echoing the words of the creation story, our psalmist goes on: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Ps. 8:6).

It is, indeed, in the accounts of the Creation that we find the basic and almost complete statement of the Hebrew answer to the problem of man. God made him in his own image. Or, in another narrative, he was shaped by divine hands from dust of the earth, and then God blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. There is at once both man's earthy and his divine nature. But the important thing to emphasize is that our mention of such antithesis is un-Hebraic. For Israel it was a single and consistent idea. God had made the world also; and on all that he made, step by step, he pronounced the judgment that it was good. The world, like man, came fresh from the hands of the Creator, trailing clouds of glory. Such was Hebrew and Jewish thought throughout. However bad the troubles that might fall, however thick the gloom, yet Israel's basic conviction was that the world was permeated with its divine

origin and high purpose.

There exists an unsolved problem as to the ultimate nature of matter. Our theology has postulated a dogma of *creatio ex nihilo*. But certainly this is not asserted in the Old Testament. On the contrary, a question has arisen whether Gen. 1:1 does not actually imply the reverse. The sentence is of unusual Hebrew construction. And it has been boldly asserted that the correct meaning is that given by the Chicago translation: "When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth being a desolate waste, with darkness covering the abyss and the spirit of God hovering over the water, then God said, 'Let there be light!' " That is, matter was not created but was preexistent. The world is of dual origin: a shapeless chaotic mass of matter, on the one hand, and God and his work on the other. Unfortunately, further references in the Old Testament to the origin of the world fail to clear up the problem, and we are compelled to leave it in this uncertainty. But the situation does not qualify the major emphasis which we have sought to make at this point. For even if Israel did actually think of matter as eternal and pre-existent still there is nowhere any suggestion of stigma upon it as matter. Instead it was worthy to be the medium and content of God's work of creation, so that in the end the complete work was "very good."

But the thought carries still further. It deserves repetition that man as a creature of flesh bore thereby no stain of uncleanness or unworthiness. Of man's sinfulness we must speak in a moment, and it was very real for Israel's thought. But it did not derive from his fleshly being. God had made man, and in those primeval days of more than Elysian bliss he had associated freely with our first parent, a being of just our nature. But, further, God had given to the first couple the injunction: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and have dominion." It is a command that remained basic in subsequent Hebrew life. However black the present and future, the devout Israelite might not seek racial release by abstention from begetting children and through them children's children. Jeremiah, it is true, had taken that course, but to that extent he stood apart from his people. God had commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply." Apart from some practice of ritual fasting and other restraint, there was no asceticism in Israel, with but the exception of the Essenes, who fall in a period so late that they may not be cited as typically Hebraic. Celibacy and a special "immaculate conception" are ideas that have come into our religious tradition from sources other than the Old Testament. For Israel, every conception was immaculate; it was instituted of God and, to their simple scientific ideas, was in detail a direct gift from him. True, they knew well the biological sequence; nonetheless, it was the Lord who gave conception or, it might be, withheld it. Children were a blessing of the Lord and a sign of his grace.

The bases of these exalted concepts of man and the world are not such as to permit of conclusive analysis. Indeed, we seem here to deal with a mood rather than with a reasoned position; for Israel's thinkers were deeply conscious of the darker side of human nature. They had painful occasion to know the badness of their environment, both physical and racial. Nonetheless, they held firm the faith that man is a being essentially of noble nature set in a

world that is essentially good. It has been our habit to comment on the liberty of the Greek mood that looked the gods in the face in a relationship similar to that between equal humans. And what was it that brought the Greeks to this? Was it that they, too, were Mediterranean folk, who reveled in the long and cheerful sunshine of the region, and that they, like Israel, were a mountain people, living a socially atomistic life in their secluded valleys? Are we, then, to search in environment rather than in racial heritage of reasoned processes of thought for the source of such ideas of God and man? However that may be, it is apparent that Israel's position here transcends that of Greece in that her God was exalted far beyond the human weaknesses of the Greek deities. But environment does not tell all, for Israel was unique in the Orient. The Syrians and Moabites also were mountain dwellers in the Mediterranean world, and there is no need to delay over the inferiority of their religious achievement. We are driven to hold that the Hebrews' concept of man cannot be understood in isolation, but only as a part of their whole remarkable system of thought. They recognized that man is superior to the brutes --- even the tempered pessimism of Ecclesiastes cannot hide his admission of the fact --- and then, realizing a strange quality in human character that is more than biological and that, for them, as we shall presently see, was nothing less than a divine endowment, they were brought to the conclusion that man's nature somewhere between the brute and the divine could be only " little lower than God."

Yet every Bible reader will recall the contrite confession in the Fifty-first Psalm:
For I was shaped in iniquity
and in sin did my mother conceive me
(Ps. 51:5).

Notwithstanding its false use in support of a doctrine of total hu man depravity --- which is completely un-Hebraic --- the passage is one of great depth and meaning, highly significant for an understanding of the full biblical doctrine of man. These ancient thinkers were fully convinced of the reality of "original sin," though at risk of repetition it most be pointed out that this is very different from total depravity, and also distinct from the idea of inherited racial guilt. This devout soul in the great Penitential truly expresses in matchless fashion our proneness to wrong-doing, which is so deeply ingrained that it can be regarded as nothing else than a part of our nature The thought receives elucidation in the famous story of the guilty couple in the Garden (Gen. 3). It is of far reaching relevance, such that no one may hope to exhaust it; also it is profound in its mythical presentation of the truth that freedom and evil are inseparable, hence to be human entails a state of sin.

Yet this is not to minimize Israel's thought of man's sinfulness, for it is one of the great and creative ideas of tile Bible. Nowhere has there been such a sense of the depravity of sin as among this people; and we in turn have entertained a comparable view only by virtue of our Hebraic heritage. The sinfulness of sin, if one may clarify through the obscurity of redundancy, was the counterpart of the transcendence of God. Here again is an eloquent paradox. All Israel's thought traces back ultimately to her great confession, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

The idea of sin was very old in the Orient, as doubtless it was in human life long prior to the rise of the earliest oriental cultures. But there is a great gulf between that and Israel's thought. The simpler notion is of action which displeases the deity. And when that deity is merely the enlarged stature of a man, with much of human caprice, then sin can have little if any of moral relevance. At the most, the general Orient had moved noticeably in the direction of a transcendent concept of sin. But, for Israel, sin was offense against a supernal holiness and righteousness that far transcends our highest attainments or even understanding. True, this holiness was a Person : for Israel, other thought was impossible; but his exalted nature suffused all their thinking, transforming personal affront into moral evil. There remained the personal relationship in even the deepest individual experiences of guilt; the great Penitential confesses:

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight (Ps. 51:4).

And another psalmist, expressing human fallibility, says:

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance [Ps. 90:8].

By contrast with the pure light of that ineffable presence; "All our righteousnesses are but filthy rags."

And there, in such a paradox, is Israel's thought of man. He was made in the image of God, but a little lower than he, worthy to companion with him, but yet so far removed that the highest human attainments, even the best aspirations, are acceptable only by divine grace. The paradox merits repetition; for in it, beyond a doubt, lies the source of Israel's best and highest thought and her unceasing moral striving. Yet we must set limits and guards to the concept, for emphasis on the transcendence of God has led into devious ways in the history of theology, not least within our own times. God was exalted, yet he was not separated from man. God and man were alike in nature. Even if man's frailties were such as to make the resemblance a caricature, nonetheless he was in the image of God. God is in the heavens; God is far other than man. But it is entirely false to Old Testament thought to claim that he was "wholly" other. Israel's thinkers would have repudiated such an idea with indignation. There were exceptions, it is true, such as are represented by Ecclesiastes and the "friends" in the Book of Job. But the cynicism of the former resulted in a grotesque caricature; and the latter are properly held up for censure, by the great author of the dialogue, as a little weak in their logic.

Certain trends in current theology seek to explain sin as in essence pride: man is a creature of empty and excessive self-assurance, proud of every conceivable possession, material or other, and even proud of his humility. It is no part of our present task to assess this idea, but only to point out that whatever its source or worth, it is not Israel's concept of sin. Instead the remarkable fact is that in both Testaments the common word for sin means basically "missing the mark." There are other words as well; but the entire view is indicated by this simple,

realistic approach to the problem. Man is of high origin and possibilities; but too often he misses his mark. The mistake might be, and commonly was, disastrous; but still it was only a missing of the mark. Man aimed at something, but hit what was not of first importance. More perverse "missing" was spoken of as rebellion; yet too, guilt might be entailed by accident, or unconsciously through forgetting God by absorption in other interests.

What then could man hope in this life ? One answer we have already noted. Ecclesiastes admitted no outcome but complete despair. Man dies like the brute --- and that is the end! Even while he lives he is able to accomplish nothing so that the best answer to the problem of life is "Live it as comfortably as you can; and don't think much about it." But it is obvious that such a view would not satisfy the great stream of Israel's thinkers whom we may call with admitted inaccuracy "the orthodox." In time they came to accept the belief long cherished in Egypt and doubtless well known throughout Israel that death is not the end but the beginning. It is a portal through which man goes out into a larger life. This belief came so late in the Old Testament period that little can be said about it. One of our very few treatments of the theme speaks briefly of "everlasting life" (Dan. 12:2); another summons: "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust" (Isa. 26:19). Contentious as the view is, one may make bold to assert that this belief, or hope, is an important theme of the Book of Job. For those who will dissent, evidence is immediately at hand; for there is nothing so emphatically denied by Job as hope beyond death. But to stop with this is to confess a failure to understand the favorite methods of the author. Certainly in chapter 14, where the denial is most clear, he has Job wistfully entertain the possibility that after his descent into She'ol he may yet enjoy the favor of God. And the great passage that in the present fragmentary condition of the book comes near the culmination of the Dialogue, chapter 19:25-27, can best be understood as postulating experience "away from the flesh." However, the debatable nature of these views is eloquent of the entire situation. And it is an enticing question why Israel continued so late to reject the faith she had long known. We do not know; but it is suggested that the reason lay in an intimate relationship with the pagan cults against which earlier Israel had been compelled to struggle.

For Israel, through the greater part of the Old Testament period, man's destiny, then, was a mundane affair. His personal good was to be found in this life, and his achievement, whatever it might be, related only to this world. He had a sort of survival, however, in his family. So it was that children were prized even more than is common in human society. The tribe and nation also were vehicles to carry his significance into far-distant times and, as such, commanded his loyalty. The idea is not strange to us, unless in its formulation; for it is essentially the motivation that in our age impels hosts of men to give themselves freely on the battlefield: they do so for an idea, for the survival of human freedom, that is, for the persistence of our culture with its possibilities and promise of a much better culture arising therefrom. But apart from such hopes, the Israelite sought meaning and satisfaction within the days of his own years.

The wholesomeness of Israel's thinking insured that basic in the conception of the good life was a sufficiency of material things. The Hebrews were no starving saints or unwashed ascetics.

They accepted the good things of life with zest. The emphasis of the prophets and other religious leaders on intangible values must not obscure for us the fact that all alike recognized the indispensability of at least reasonable physical provision, if life was to be satisfying. This was the hope and promise of the land into which the nation had come by divine promise: it was "a good land, a land of wheat and vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land in which thou shalt eat bread without scarceness: thou shalt not lack any good thing in it; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills thou mayest dig copper" (Dent. 8:7-9). Poverty and suffering could be borne through faith in unseen realities, but they were not desirable. Equally a desire for great wealth was only seldom encouraged. The enthusiasm of the historian of Solomon's reign appears to measure the king's happiness in direct relation to his wealth. Similarly Job's prosperity is presented as an item of his good fortune, though literary needs may here have enhanced the mood. Elsewhere we find rather an ideal of moderation. One writer deprecates alike wealth and poverty (Prov. 30:7-9); and the Deuteronomist's attitude just now cited must be qualified with his warning: "when thou hast eaten and art full, then beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6:11-12; cf. 8:11ff.). Such an ideal of the happy mean in all life was expressed by Ecclesiastes; we can imagine he wrote it with his tongue in his cheek!

Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself overwise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself ? Be not overmuch, wicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldst thou die before thy time?. It is good that thou take hold of this and withdraw not thy hand from that (Eccles. 7:16-18).

But it is possible that older Hebrew ideas have at this point been crystallized by the impact of Greek thought.

Then, as we have seen, for the Hebrew, life was not full and complete unless he was husband of a good wife and with her parent of several children; indeed, we should rather say, of many children, for one poet voices the common ideal thus:

Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord. ..
As arrows in the hand of a strong man,
so are the children of youth.
Happy is the man who hath his quiver
full of them (Ps. 127:3-5).

Of the quality of a good wife we are left in no doubt. She is sensible, industrious, thrifty, a good manager; and, not least, she rises early, apparently in order to let her husband sleep in! (Prov. 31:10 or 31). That she is also a good mother in much the sense that we understand is admitted.

As a final element in his happiness, one hoped for a long life. All this is nowhere more eloquently set forth than in the first speech of Eliphaz in the Book of Job:

He will deliver thee in six troubles,
yea, in seven there shall no evil come nigh thee. .
At destruction and dearth thou shalt
laugh;
neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. .
Thou sha!t know that thy tent is in peace; thou shalt visit thy fold and shalt miss
nothing. .
Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall
be great
and thine offspring as the grass of the
earth.
And thou shalt come to thy grave in a
full age,
as a shock of grain cometh in its season (Job 5:19-26).

But obviously the good life entailed as well rigid standards of ethics. We have several summaries of these, more or less partial. Those in Psalm is and in Job, chapter 31, are famous; the latter has been highly praised. A more brief statement will serve our present purpose:

Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor standeth in the way of sinners,
nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord
(Ps. 1:1-2).

An adequate statement of Hebrew ethics would take us far. Briefly, we may say that the good man was honest, industrious, generous, and kind. The question that has become so urgent for us, how far such generosity and kindness should extend, had varying answers. Israel shared the ingrown character and hostility toward strangers that largely characterizes primitive peoples. Yet notable voices were raised in protest, and as time went on there came a broadening of the people's sensitivity, even to the point of a universal consciousness. The Hebrew's negative virtues there is no need to catalogue. But we should recall, relative to his gracious qualities, that "the merciful man is merciful to his beast." The ideal was broadly conceived and applied ; and in this consideration for the dumb beasts that serve man so faithfully and well we have a note that unobtrusively yet significantly is sounded several times in Israel's literature. But it is

obvious that this summary, with whatever apologies for its compact char-

acter, fails so much as to suggest the distinctive feature of Hebrew ethics. The good man found his place as a member of a good society. For in Israel's thought, society, not less than the individual, had a character of its own and entailed thereby its reward or retribution. A person's welfare and happiness were thus bound up in the status of his group. His own merit or lack of it had relevance for the general character, as his activity had power to shape it. Yet it was society that determined his fate. Even outstanding personal character could not absolve him from society's doom or debar him from sharing in its welfare. We shall see presently how the individual gradually emerged to a relative independence, yet to the end Israel's ethical thought remained highly socialized.

Of the culture of the mind less is said. Yet we should err if we then concluded that Israel was indifferent to it. On the contrary, it is an ideal highly praised. We think of Solomon, intrinsic in whose greatness was the fact that the Lord gave him "largeness of heart as the sand that is upon the seashore." The prophets and other religious leaders were so engrossed in their campaign for reform that they say little of this quality which actually takes so large a place in their own lives and activities. But in the Wisdom Literature the appeal of learning and the life of the mind is clearly and forcefully presented. The outlines of this intellectual culture we have in part seen already, and more must be added presently. But we may summarize this secular aspect of the good life in a, perhaps, dangerously concise phrase, that Israel along this line thought of it as that of the cultured gentleman --- in much the sense that we give to these words in their better connotation: a man of easy circumstances, of good home life and unimpeachable integrity, gracious to his acquaintances, and possessing opportunity for satisfying intellectual pursuits.

Yet it is apparent that to leave the description with this would be a gross misrepresentation of Hebrew thought. For the good life was basically and supremely the religious life. All we have said takes its place in this larger whole. Again we may cite a famous summary; the ideal was for man "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God" (Mic. 6:8). It was the religious orientation that brought meaning and abiding satisfaction into life. The fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom --- of the finest values of life. In his faith in God the devout Hebrew found the final answer to life's enigma: a conviction that he was individually of worth in the eyes of God, hence might expect divine guidance and help, a faith which meant a rich experience of mystic relationship with the divine, a faith, too, in God's plans and purposes for the nation and for the world through which the individual participated in issues far transcending his transience and found meaning in an eternal cosmic process. Certainly we must not look for such a faith in every ancient Hebrew whose thoughts we can scan; the ignorant peasant out on the hills of Israel could scarcely be expected to shape his world view in such terms. But here we are concerned primarily with the best that Israel attained. And we shall see more of this cosmic outlook in a few moments.

Such was the good life. And denial of it in faith and conduct was sin. In turn, salvation, apart

from its national connotations, was the attainment of this life. The directness and simplicity of Israel's thought insured that for most of the Old Testament period conversion and salvation alike were matters of volition. If one were a sinner, then the rational thing was to change his conduct. "Cease to do evil; learn to do well," Isaiah had demanded (Isa. 1:16-17). "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; why will ye die?" was a later formulation of the same idea (Ezek. 33:11). Apparently it was as simple and easy as that. Yet Israel's thinkers realized well the constraining power of ingrained habit. It was as inescapable as the leopard's spots or the Ethiopian's skin (Jer. 13:23). Israel's doings would not permit her to return to the Lord (Hos. 5:4). "Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart" of man in some circumstances "was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The sin of the Judeans was written with a pen of iron upon the tablets of their heart (Jer. 17:1). Circumstance and heredity likewise exerted a conducive influence upon conduct. When Israel came into the land, their relations with the Canaanites became a powerful inducement to participation in the pagan cults: when they had eaten and were full, then it was more than possible they would forget the Lord their God (Deut. 6:11-12).

Hence it was that through the course of centuries Israel's thinkers were impelled to a more profound understanding of the problems of human conduct. More and more they realized that it rises from the deep springs of the personality, not out of some casual circumstance. The generous man does generous things, whereas the churl will be churlish (Isa. 32 :6-8). In Old Testament phrase it is a question of the human "heart." The classic expression of the problem is that by Paul in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: a sense of futile strife with one's self voiced at length in the despairing cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" But Paul's utterance, though evidently rooted in his own experience, was by no means novel. He was in this regard, as in so much else, the direct heir of his Jewish ancestry. For the thinkers of the long post-Exilic period turn, on various occasions in diverse times, to the glowing hope of a day when the Lord should change men's hearts and enable them to do the right.

> *I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and will put a new spirit in you. 1 will take away the stony heart out of your body and will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. Then you shall keep my ordinances and obey them* (Ezek. 36:25-27).

In this time, too, was voiced the ideal of the law written on the heart, than which there is no more profound understanding of the regeneration of human life.

> *I will put my law in their inward parts and will write it upon their heart. And I will be their God and they shall be my people. They shall no more teach each one*

> *his neighbor and his brother, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more* (Jer. 31:33-34).

There in notable formulation is Israel's doctrine of the grace of God. In earlier thought, the Lord had been a temperamental being whose sense of injured dignity might be too deep for mollification. Forgiveness was a conjectural matter. We are familiar with the threat that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon tile children to the third and fourth generation --- although in fairness we must remember that these were the recalcitrant, or, in biblical phraseology, "them that hate me." The prophets likewise speak of sins that will not be forgiven as long as their perpetrators may live (Isa. 22:14); or they regard divine forgiveness of the repentant as problematic: "It may be that the Lord, the God of Hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15). But with the maturing of Israel's thought the emphasis was upon the unbounded grace of God. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that love him, for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:13-14). Still more: not alone was lie ready to forgive the penitent, but he was himself the enabling power to vitalize human penitence; in just the sense that the words came to hold in a later time, he saved his people from their sins.

Along these several lines, then, we find Israel's concept of divine salvation. With a wide scope of detailed concepts, it was in essence to live in the grace of God. And this experience was of unmeasured possibilities.

The patriarchal stories preserve records very familiar to us of favored individuals who in some peculiar way walked with God and were accepted into an intimate relationship. Abraham even yet is reputed as "the friend of God." With him Moses also talked as a man talks with his friend. But it is notable that such experiences were confined to the legendary past. In the clear light of history we deal with a different experience. The spirit of God might "rush upon" some chosen and worthy individual and equip him for notable service. Such was the qualification of the national champions in the Book of Judges. A comparable experience is implied in stories of the tenth --- and ninth --- century prophets. They were "men of God," an appellation that in its Hebrew possibilities as well as in the episodes related of them carries evidence of their exceptional status.

It is worthy of note, however, that even these sources are not untouched with legendary embellishments. We come rather to Israel's true concept of the nature of a "walk with God" in the careers of the writing prophets. It is important to realize that the prophetic experience was essentially one of personal relationship with the divine. In the quiet of his inner life the prophet heard the words of the Lord; he lived under a sense of the divine choice and commission and of an intimate relation that brought him guidance, and support, and utterance, through the common days of his career. Illustrations are too familiar to require long delay. We think of Amos' experience of being "taken" from his peasant's work and sent to prophesy to Israel; of Micah's

being full of the spirit of the Lord; of the occasion when the Lord spoke to Isaiah "with strength of hand" (Isa. 8:11). But the career of Jeremiah is peculiarly rich in this regard. It is clear that the account of his call to his high office as recorded in chapter i of his book is to be under-stood in the light of what we know of the awakening of a thoughtful adolescent to the personal religious realities and tasks of life. And the famous passages of the book which reveal his inner doubts and struggles through his active years again are intimately related to present-day religious experiences.

Briefly, then, Hebrew thought at its best, we may say, understood that the individual can hear the voice of God deep in his own consciousness and may, through the unexplored mediums of the mystical experience, commune with him in silence. Such is clearly the view of the psalmists also; from a host of relevant passages we cite only the confession of the author of Psalm 73. He was deeply perplexed and troubled by the seeming injustice of God's rule of the world; the arrogant wicked lived in bounty, while the just were plagued all the day long and chastened every morning. Consideration of this was too painful for him, he says, "until I went into the sanctuary of God and considered their latter end" (vs. 17). And there satisfying answer came to him, not by audible voice, we are to observe, nor heaven-sent theophany, but in quiet meditation on the realities of religion arid of life. However, we must be on guard against reading our very modern conceptions into ancient religious attitudes. The ritual of the Temple cult was of an importance far beyond what is commonly realized. In God's house, the devout Hebrew felt he had come physically into the presence of God; through the public worship and the ministrations of the priests God spoke to him. Yet it is important to recognize that such was by no means the total of Israel's religious experience. As far back as the story of Moses

before the burning bush, there is evident a belief that the experience of God was not limited to routine channels. Alone, far from worshippers and religious symbols, the timid Moses was transformed into a hero of faith by a religious experience that bears familiar marks for the thought of the modern world. And this continues in succession through Samuel, Elijah, and most, if not all, of the canonical prophets, and onward into the quiet experience of simple saints briefly told in numbers of the Psalms.

With the passage of time, however, and under stress of social and national crisis which always fosters apocalyptic expectations, wishful thinking turned back to concepts not unlike those found in the patriarchal stories. It is no accident that the pseudepigraphic literature is fathered on the heroes of that remote time, for it seeks to revive the largely abandoned, supernatural concept of God's dealing with man. Once again we find favored individuals who stand in a special, almost superhuman relation to God; to them come angelic ministrants with messages direct from the heavenly throne and to them are given visions of the heavenly world arid glimpses of divine plans. This type of thinking, rather than the concepts of the great prophets, when carried over into later religious ideas, has continued until the present to make a peculiar appeal to minds which for lack of knowledge of the history of ideas, or for whatever other reason, are susceptible to cabalistic computations and imagery.

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The Old Testament, Keystone of Human Culture by William F. Irwin

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Chapter 4: God and Man

Basic to the issues we have been discussing is the reality of a knowledge of God; and basic likewise to the Old Testament is the assumption -- rather, the conviction -- that such had been attained. Entailed questions ramify afar, for revelation is the foundation of all religion as well as of its organization in theologies.

The problem is very old. Doubtless since man first became conscious of himself and of his mysterious environment, he has sought by whatever means seemed promising to know whether or not his world was friendly to him, and on what conditions. The devices employed in early religion are familiar to every student of the subject. Inferences from common events must have quickly entered into consideration, being so intimately a part of ordinary prudence; and with the personalist interpretation of environment, supposed action by that environment would have the same relevance as action by another person. In course of time, unusual events were studied as of special significance; and from this into portents of one sort or another the way was easy: earthquakes, ec1ipses, abnormal births, abnormal weather, celestial phenomena, and then ritualistic phenomena, such as the structure of a sacrificed animal, the spread of oil on water, and so on in manifold ramifications. But in addition it was widely believed that certain individuals possessed special powers of communication with the nonhuman world.

This sort of thought and practice persisted into Old Testament times. David's guidance by the wind in the trees (II Sam. 5:24) is a revealing incident. So common as to be almost standard through an early period was the use of Urim and Thummim, which are generally believed to have been a sort of sanctified dice by whose chance fall divine direction was determined. A bulk of comparable material could be deduced, but it would scarcely reward the labor. For the important matter is how Israel gradually transcended, and then sloughed oil such primitivism. It is not strictly historical to refer first to the stories in the Pentateuch; but at least they are relevant

as showing how a later time thought of the founding of Hebrew religion. There were certain great, privileged individuals, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, to whom God spoke in an immediate fashion in days of long ago. The Judges were only a little lower, for the spirit came powerfully upon them and they acted, so we are expected to believe, in certainty of their divine guidance. But it de- serves notice that a mysterious figure of "an angel (of the Lord)" is in some cases the means of communication with the unseen. And since the Old Testament word for angel, as that of the New Testament, means also messenger, it is a legitimate suspicion that these narratives preserve reminiscences of the growing significance of the prophetic movement, which comes into clear focus just a little later in First Samuel.

However that may be, the records are at this point moving over into a new conception of revelation. The legendary was slowly relegated to the remote past; belief in the validity of dreams and in portents continued for some time, and doubtless among certain classes permanently. But in the historic period the phenomena which were believed to provide revelation fall in the main into three classes; one is perhaps guilty of some measure of compulsion in so treating all the facts, but since no significant harm is done, we need not be too concerned. And in any case, as a going process revelation came through the priests, the prophets, and the wise men.

In the priesthood there was a growing tradition of religious precepts that were accepted as of divine origin and authority. But, when we push the matter back to the rise of these directives, we come face to face with the basic character of the priest as the personal attendant and minister of the god. He was precisely on a par with the servants and attendants of noblemen and royalty; in just the same way he ministered to the god. The fact that his lord was a presence at most visible in the image made no difference in the basic concepts. Like the cupbearers and other valets of the ancient world, his close association with his lord gave him opportunity to learn his character and his will. But it will be apparent that the valet had the advantage that his master could and did speak to him by an audible voice. Denied this direct revelation of the god's will, the priest depended on some ancient theory equivalent to our adage that actions speak louder than words. He learned from what the god did. Stories such as the sudden death of Uzzah when he touched the ark, or of the tragedy of Aaron's sons when they offered "strange fire," are eloquent of the growth of the priestly tradition. Briefly, the priest secured his revelation by the astute use of his normal wits!

The method has illuminating illustration in the procedure of the Babylonian augurs, who, it would appear, worked out an organization for reporting unusual occurrences to central priestly agencies, So that if even a fox jumped into a vineyard, the fact was solemnly recorded as data in accord with which, first, to relate important events and, later, to predict them. If we might concede the priests' theory that "coming events cast their shadows before" in signs and portents, then it would appear that the augur priest was an ancient scientist, carefully gathering his data, discovering their meaning by observation, and then proceeding to the conclusion that similar phenomena have always a similar result. This characterization is further enhanced by the

activity of the magician, illegitimate priest as he was, who is commonly recognized to have been in some way ancestor of the modern scientist.

Similar was the means of revelation through the wise men, as they themselves would have admitted. They were primarily students of the course of human life. Their observations were made by completely normal human faculties, and their conclusions were deduced by ordinary process of thought. But the prophet, as distinct from both priest and sage, received his revelation deep in his own consciousness by means that for him were genuinely supernatural. In a mystical experience, which commonly in earlier expressions of prophecy was of the extreme form loosely described as ecstasy, he was convinced that he bridged the gulf between the seen and the unseen. Indeed for him there was no such gulf for his experiences took on the vividness and realism of sense phenomena. It is apparent that prophecy was thus not a personal choice, but something to which one was called; only certain persons were psychologically capable of such trances. How prevalent the phenomenon was in early prophecy we have little means of knowing. It is clear, however, that physical stimuli were employed to induce the condition, and the nervous breakdown of King Saul implies that the experiences were so frequent as to become, in some cases, pathological. But in the great age of prophecy, the eighth to sixth centuries, physical rneans seem to have been abandoned, and the whole ecstatic phenomenon was sublimated toward quieter mystical experiences induced by deep meditation. The view once prevalent that every oracle of the canonical prophets was preceded by a trance is now generally abandoned. This raises the interesting question of the authority in the prophet's own mind for his utterances not so sanctioned. Not to labor the issue, we may conclude that he depended upon his proven character as spokesman for the Lord, and in his own mind distinguished between ideas on the ground of their compulsive power.

It is important to recognize that notwithstanding our easy castigation of certain ancient individuals as "false prophets," the distinguishing mark of all three classes of religious leaders was, in the main, their high sincerity. Prophet and priest fully believed himself the minister and spokesman of the Lord. Yet for our approach to the matter it is of scarcely less moment to observe that the three depended in the final analysis upon somewhat common, and not infrequently normal, phenomena of thought and feeling. The word of the Lord came through the common things of the common days. And the elevation of the religious leaders, their ethical and religious insights, are explicable in the end only on the basis of their own susceptibility to better impulses. Here they join hands; their differences are only in their mode of approach to reality. There is much more to be said on this point; we shall return to it presently. It is, however, relevant to comment that just as for most primitive men, environment spoke to Israel through its religious leaders. Yet comparison of the two serves as vivid illustration of the French proverb that the more things are the same, the more they differ. More to the point is the fact that the study of Israel's contemporary cultures provides numerous parallels to the conduct of the Hebrew priest, and several to aspects of prophecy. Still the uniqueness of Israel's religions insights only stands out the more clearly.

To seek to delineate the content of these insights would take us back over ground already covered -- all too hastily, let it be granted. The great convictions were of the reality and immediacy of a God of righteousness and love, and the unparalleled conceptions of the exalted nature of man and his duty under God -- or in terms more congenial to the modes of thought of the wise men, conduct that best fulfills and expresses his high being. In the latter area, that of ethics, parallels with the ancient world multiply. Efforts have been put forth to show that Israel's legal handling of similar situations was more humane. Perhaps; the important matter, however, is the principles to which right conduct was related -- a sort of ancient prolegomenon of ethics. Here the humane quality is clearly evident. It is striking in Deuteronomy; we have noted the frequent argument that "you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt," therefore you must show consideration for the indigent and underprivileged. Yet the thought is by no means limited to Deuteronomy, but permeates much of the legislation in general. The vitality of the ethics was a contribution of the prophets. It would be approximately accurate to claim that their principles of social justice had been known and legislated in the Orient for more than a thousand years before Amos. But the Hebrew prophets took these standards and kindled them with a fire that is not yet extinguished, nor shows signs of dying out. And for them the facts were obvious and inescapable; true to the people's genius, all rooted back in Israel's vision of God. Because he is holy and just and righteous, man must do justice and love mercy. The wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness. This burning passion, incarnate in living, earnest, determined men, constitutes one of the glories of the Bible.

With the passing of years all three groups of religious leaders accumulated bodies of teachings. They were preserved orally for varying periods, though one must be cautious of a current vogue of bringing the time of writing down to a late date. Eventually the various collections were assembled, edited into at least one unity -- the one we possess -- and then passed through a process of general and official acceptance which is known as canonization. The process, it is commonly recognized, was not complete until Christian times; but as it developed it transformed the concept of revelation. An attitude arose comparable with earlier thought about the patriarchal period. Genuine revelation was pushed into the past: it was recorded in the sacred writings; the contemporary religious leader and thinker could be no more than a commentator.

The situation was much like ours today. The tendency to relegate authoritative revelation to the past is an expression of the normal demand for what has established and proven itself. And the function of the commentator, or whatever we choose to call him, has continued to offer religious guidance in established doctrines. Jews make much of the place of reason as applied to the Scriptures in guidance of the community; and Christians speak of the presence of the Spirit in the church to "guide into all truth." The ideas are much the same; the authoritative word of God needs constant interpretation and application. Both religious groups would thus assent to the familiar saying that "God has yet more light and truth to break forth from his sacred word."

By these varying modes: by living word, by tradition, by accepted Scripture, the folk of Old

Testament times were satisfied they possessed a valid revelation of the character and will of God. And this was the rule of life for nation and individual; to depart from the accepted ways was sin. For our analytical thought, sin was of two sorts, ritual and ethical; but it is highly dubious that any such distinction existed in early times -- each was a transgression of the will of God. It was the prophetic movement that raised the issue; we hear of it first in a passage of uncertain date in Samuel's alleged denunciation of Saul (I Sam. 15:22-23), and it is the theme of the famous antiritual utterances of the eighth- and seventh-century prophets. The intensity with which infidelity was regarded we may realize not only in the stern measures of Nehemiah and Ezra, but also in a terrible passage in Deuteronomy, chapter 13, that decrees death by communal stoning for anyone who dares even suggest apostasy. All the horrors of subsequent religious persecution -- of the wicked theory that men's beliefs may and should be conformed by punitive action -- here finds support. But to understand though scarcely condone, we must realize the seriousness of the issue before the community in those times.

We must not suppose that all the Lord's people were saints. There is abundant evidence that there were rogues and scoundrels then as now. Yet social pressure was strong, and also the notion of group solidarity. The nation took on a character which we are to envisage as a very moderate expression of the high concepts put forth by the three accepted exponents of the way of the Lord; or perhaps it is better said that hee nation trailed far behind such ideals. Yet in the perspective of the on-going ages, those unattained standards were of incalculable importance; they were the high level toward which devout souls aspired, the standard by which contemporary life was ever judged, a ferment and stimulus provoking to better things.

For the recalcitrant, there was death at the hands of the community-commonly by the brutal method of stoning, that is, pelting with rocks until the poor wretch went down under them, and then was finally pounded to death. Less serious cases called only for "cutting off from the people," apparently a sort of ostracism. But the penitent sinner could find restoration through offerings and restitution. More engrossing of our thought is the question of what was going on in the mind of the penitent. Probably the great mass of worshippers through the entire period considered that something of moment was happening in the ritual, and that the expiatory sacrifice really was efficient in wiping away sin. It deserves note, however, that a few at least cut right across this procedure to a belief in the free forgiveness and grace of God. The repudiation of sacrifice in Ps. 51:16-17 is famous; in similar mood Ps. 32:5 relates:

I acknowledged my sin to thee
and my iniquity I did not hide
I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;
and thou didst forgive my sinful iniquity (Ps. 32:5).

But, by whatever means, the Hebrew believed that relations of grace and of confidence might

be re-established: that God was of great kindness and love. And this, for the devout, was, on its highest level, the experience of salvation: not deliverance or welfare or the like -- though these are comprised within the scope of the term -- but most of all an assurance of God's gracious attitude and concern toward the individual, not less than toward the nation. The expressions of this in the Psalms, the great treasury of devotion, in its individual prayers and thanksgivings, are many and famous. One may delay over just one which in quaint fashion reveals the engrossing piety of its author, some unknown saint of the long ago.

I wakened before dawn and shouted; I hoped in thy words;
my eyes were wakeful before the watches of the night, to meditate on thy sayings (Ps. 1 19:147-48).

A man of similar piety reminded his readers that "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," adding devoutly, "but the Lord saves him out of all of them." But did he? If so, how? One of the acute problems that engrossed biblical thought was what we call the problem of evil. How is it that suffering exists in a world created by a good and all-wise God? The Hebrew answer is familiar, for it is provided by the famous story of the fall of man. God put the first pair in the sacred garden, giving them wide privileges but strictly restraining them, "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden ye shall not eat, neither shall ye touch it lest ye die" (Gen. 3:3). And they went straightway and did just that! They were seduced by the wicked snake, it is true; but nonetheless they had the power to refuse: the snake merely persuaded them. There we have human freedom, pure and unalloyed. And out of it came all our ills, so the writer tells us. But something else came also, for this mysterious tree was "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

It is idle to seek to exhaust the depths of the concept here. But it is clear that this is the Hebrew form of a widespread myth of the theft of divine prerogatives and their appropriation by man. Most of us are familiar with the Creek form of the story. Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to man: for this he was chained to a rock in the Caucasus while an eagle ate incessantly at his living liver. But the idea certainly did not originate with the Greeks; it is oriental. Ea's befriending of man and the concept which developed in course of time of Osiris as the patron of civilization who suffered at the hands of Seth are treatments of the same problem. The East and, in particular, Israel's thinkers speculated on the mysterious quality that sets man apart in all creation. He possess gods -- or better, in Hebraic phrase, he has secured knowledge of good and evil. For this he suffers. Through this he sins. Yet otherwise he would be less than man.

To be human demands freedom; we must assert our will and purposes, if need be against all creation, saying only, "This is my way." What monstrous arrogance; ludicrous finitude claiming to direct its steps in a vast and mysterious universe! Who but God himself can know enough to decide his course of action? But it is just this that the Hebrew thinkers asserted of frail and finite man: he is made in the image of God. He is a free person, with all that such blending of finitude

and freedom entails in the way of error and iniquity and pain.

But indeed the great thinker who wrote the Dialogue of Job pushed the matter still further. The exegesis of this book is still beset with acute difficulty; there exists no consensus as to its main purport, and, not least, the figure of the intermediary between God and Job remains shrouded in uncertainty. But in any case it would appear that the author advanced the bold concept that God himself suffers. Pain and woe are in the deepest nature of things; though unpleasant, they are in essence good, for only through them can life attain its highest. To live is to suffer; and the more intensely one participates in life's highest, the more he is susceptible of pain.

Yet there could have been but a few choice intellects that penetrated to such understanding. For the rest, it was much that they recognized so clearly how large a part of the woe that has blackened human history is of human creation. Certain individuals through their wilful sin or by foolishness bring suffering on themselves, soon or late, and also on others. The sin of Adam left an entail for all his descendants; that of David brought plague on the people (II Sam. 24:15). The profound truth of vicarious suffering, so notably portrayed in the Servant Songs (Isa. 50:4-9; 53:2-9), was deeply interwoven into Israel's religious thought. Further, a disciplinary function of suffering was recognized: it was sent not in punishment, but for guidance. The author of the first speech of Elihu reveals deep understanding when he remarks of the sufferer:

He is chastened also with pain upon his bed
and continual strife in his bones. . .
If there be with him . . . an interpreter to show man what is right for him,
then God is gracious to him . (Job 33:19-24).

Yet it was characteristic that all this should have been set in a cosmic system responsive to the conscious decision of a personal God. When the nation sinned, God sent defeat and other disasters: such is the clearly enunciated teaching of the Book of Judges, and such, too, is the warning of the prophets. God apportions good or ill in accord with human conduct. But the realism of the Hebrew mind insured that such oversimplification should not finally suffice. Presently men came to see that the facts of life are far too complex for any such formulation. The considerable body of literature that deals with this problem is familiar to every reader of the Old Testament. Notably certain psalms sought a deeper explanation that would accord with experience. Some of these efforts do not impress us; they are little more than a reaffirmation of the dogma that retribution overtakes the wicked in this life; they concede only that the mills of the gods may grind slowly. The conviction of the author of Psalm 73 is:

Surely thou dost set them in slippery places. . .
How are they become a desolation in a moment (Ps 73:18-19).

But the effort to find a satisfying response to the troubles of the righteous was somewhat better. This same poet goes on:

Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou dost hold my right hand.
Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel
and afterward wilt receive me with honor {Ps. 73:23-24).

The classic treatment of the problem, as everyone knows, is in the Dialogue of the Book of Job. The author represents Job as moving on through despair and resentment to a dawning concept of the place of suffering in the world and to faith and hope, at length expressed in the notable words:

He knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10).

Israel did not evolve some logical formulation which might be considered a complete explanation of suffering. But with their conviction of the moral reality in the universe and their recognition of unseen but transcendent values in life, it was not strange that at the farthest outreach of their thought these thinkers should assert a solution in the direction of such values, even if they, as we also, could not formulate precisely the nature of that solution. More simply, Israel's answer was in her religious faith.

However, the problem of human freedom which has thus intruded itself upon our attention demands further examination. It was not simple for Hebrew thinkers; as it I not for us. We recall the experience of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, who doubtless would have released his Hebrew slaves, but always at the critical moment the Lord hardened his heart. And lest there be doubt of the divine interference, the Lord is represented as explaining, "In very deed for this cause have I made thee to stand to show thee my power and that my name may he declared throughout all the earth" (Exod. 9:16). The king was not free; his decisions were determined by God in the interests of ultimate divine plans. A writer in the Book of Proverbs, indeed, gathers up such speculation into a general statement:

The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord;
as watercourses he turneth it whithersoever he will (Prov. 21:1).

That goes far in a doctrine of determinism. Jeremiah's oracle in the potter's house, also, is famous for its similar interpretation. The Lord was the great potter, shaping the nations to his desire (Jeremiah, chap. 18). And the vision of Micaiah ben Imlah is likewise to be considered. He claimed to have witnessed a lying spirit going out from the presence of the Lord, which now, he charged, was misleading King Ahab's official prophets in order to seduce him to his death (I Kings, chap. 22). The philosophy of Ecclesiastes, too, will suggest itself at this point; his cosmic wheel of fate, by the revolutions of which all events come round in their proper sequence, is patently a theory of determinism. Yet all these, and the rest of similar sort that may be adduced, are subject to qualification. Certainly Ecclesiastes considered himself free to

choose when lie undertook his experiments relative to the worth of life. It is claimed, in fact, that his discussion throughout is aimed at asserting human freedom. But, however that may be, there can be no doubt that he regarded man as somehow standing outside the universal process and able to survey it critically in full intellectual freedom. He realized the compulsive force of circumstance, but in some way, for him, man was free to choose his course even though not able to achieve his ends. It is notable, too, in regard to the stories of the Pharaoh and of Ahab that the monarch's normal freedom is clearly implied. Why did the Lord go to all the trouble of sending a lying spirit if lie could instead merely have decreed that Ahab should think it right to go to Ramoth Gilead ? And the interference in the Pharaoh's decisions was obviously an abnormal, divine act. The situation seems to clarify itself thus: with their notable realism, the Hebrews regarded human freedom as obvious and axiomatic. Yet, having said that, they recognized that they had not exhausted the problem. For they held firmly to a divine purpose and process in history. And history is only human life in the large. Hence if God is shaping human ends, he must at times interfere in individual thought and will. For one phase of this there was a ready explanation; the prophets by profession sought to subordinate their minds to divine impulse. Hence God could through them intervene in human affairs. For the rest, no clear answer was given as to how God could direct history. The important matter, however, is that, although holding firmly to a belief in human freedom, Israel nonetheless realized that it was a complex and contentious problem.

But it will be recognized that about this point a more comprehensive issue was forcing itself on Hebrew thought. The question why the mind takes a certain course in given circumstances is the open door to the entire psychological problem which we have been prone to regard as a contribution of the Hellenic genius. Yet Israel's thinkers by and through their own intellectual habits turned their inquisitive eyes backward upon themselves to inquire how their minds behaved.

With their characteristically direct approach to reality, they never seriously doubted the validity of human mental processes or the power of the mind to apprehend truth. They were familiar with the fact of deception, both of the ordinary sort, where some malicious individual presents as truth what actually is false, and of the more insidious kind referred to just now that was attributed to the interference of an unfriendly spirit. This latter, it will be recognized was a subjective experience. And it is well to realize that in this they were dealing with experiences common to us as well. Our thinking, at times even our senses, can play most callous tricks on us, so that we are positive of having seen or heard things that in reality never occurred. For us, a solution may be sought in psychology ; the Hebrews found it in external spirits. The observation is the same; the explanation differs. To this extent, then, the Hebrew thinkers were ready to concede a dubious character to human processes of knowledge. But, in the ordinary, one might trust the evidence of his senses and the concepts which his mental processes deduced from sense experience. Knowledge was basically a matter of sense perception. But again Israel avoided oversimplification. The prophets speak much of a knowledge of God -- it is a phrase used often by Hosea in particular -- yet they had left far behind the simple faith that he was to

be experienced by ordinary sight and hearing. Nonetheless, the senses, along with the mental processes that compound experience into knowledge, provided for the Hebrew an indubitably valid understanding of reality -- up to the point of the limitations of these; for there were areas of truth that for one reason or another lay outside the normal knowing process.

The Hebrew psychological system is familiar, perhaps dangerously so, for it has been misinterpreted. The threefold division into body, soul, and spirit, apparent in the New Testament, seems to carry back into the Old as well, for one can easily assume that it is met with in the creation stories, to speak of no other. And beyond dispute Hebrew has different words corresponding to these assumed entities. Yet there is also through the Old Testament frequent reference to organs or parts of the body to which are ascribed special functions, or, in some cases, near- independence, in human consciousness and action. It is an idea that again points us to the New Testament, for it is suggestive of Paul's famous debate among the members of the body as to relative importance (I Cor. 12:12 -26). But actually the concept of personality was by no means as chaotic as this would suggest. There is no doubt that all members were subordinate to the central consciousness, whatever that was. Yet the function of the organs calls for some attention. A remarkable fact is that no mention is made anywhere of the brain. In those days when heads were somewhat commonly smashed, the Hebrews must have been familiar with the strange jellylike matter that fills the skull; but the odd fact is that they never ascribed any function to it or even considered it deserving of a name. Perhaps this was because it seems a thoroughly passive substance; in any case, as a modern commentator has facetiously remarked, the Hebrews had no brain ! But they speak frequently of the heart, which is sometimes clearly the organ we mean by that word but often is only vaguely one's insides. To this they attributed much of the function of the brain. But the liver also, the kidneys, and the bowels were for them important centers of human consciousness and volition. It is commonly held that some or all of these were associated with the emotions, and, although there is in this a measure of truth, yet the contrast of mouth and kidneys (Jer. 12:2) paralleled elsewhere with that of mouth and heart (Isa. 29:13; Ezek. 33:31) reveals the looseness of the concept. Further, we recall the familiar passage: "My kidneys also instruct me in the night season" (Ps. 16:7).

It becomes apparent that there was no clear division of organic functions. And although the difference of the emotional, rational, and volitional aspects of consciousness were to some degree recognized, there was no clear analysis, if even any admission of the desirability of such analysis. This deficiency, as it must seem to us, was in actuality related to Israel's major attainment in the understanding of personality. For it is evident on closer study that the threefold division of the personality is likewise more apparent than real. Although it is true that the Hebrew word translated "soul" commonly denotes the appetites, and in other cases the physical life, and although that rendered "spirit" can mean something approximating our idea of personality, actually such distinction is not consistent, if indeed it was ever consciously applied. At the most, the terms signify not different entities, but different aspects of the personality; and even so, they were in later times treated as practically synonymous. And thus man is of two, not three, aspects: the body, which is the organism in its physical being and functions, and the soul-

spirit that accounts for all the rest, comprising as it does whatever rises into consciousness-for the Hebrew had another explanation for what we are accustomed to speak of as the subconscious. But between these two there is no separation or antithesis; they are hut complementary aspects of a single whole. The human personality is a single, indivisible unit. It has been well said that, for the Hebrew, man is not an incarnate spirit -- that is, a Greek idea; he is an animated body. Israel admitted no dualism of mind and body with a sort of antithesis and rivalry between them; but man was one single unified organism and personality. As we have seen, these ancient thinkers were fully aware of the conflict that perpetually is joined within the human consciousness, our nobler impulses forever struggling against the selfish and bestial in our nature. In later times the biblical phrases *yetser tobh* and *yelser ra'* (the good will and the bad will) were much in use in discussions of man's contradictory instincts. But Israel's thinkers refused to solve the problem by the simple device of postulating a divine origin for the one and a material or diabolical for the other. For man was one; and his conduct, be it high or low, was his own to determine in accord with the dictates of his whole nature.

Important as was Israel's attainment in her conviction of the unity of the human personality, it must yet be freely recognized that her psychological interests did not carry into a study of the responses of the organism. Of the nervous system they knew nothing; to the complicated interrelation between body and mind they gave but elementary attention. It is to be admitted that Israel's genius was not scientific. For the science of the ancient East we must look to Egypt and Babylonia, from whom Israel took her concepts, modifying them profoundly, it is true, in their religious aspects, but making little change in their scientific content. The Hebrews' achievement in their own peculiar sphere was so notable that the most ardent Judeophile need not hesitate to concede the vast areas where Israel accepted a status of secondhand scholarship.

Yet, however this may be, there is an aspect of the Hebrews' knowledge of psychology that calls for no apology. That is their understanding of human motivation and its emergence in conduct. It is typical of the attitude of the Old Testament as a whole that the rampant wickedness of the time of the Flood is traced to "the whole imagination of the thoughts of the heart" of the people of the time. And it is to this quality that the narratives owe much of their contemporaneity, a psychological interest which, although admittedly less than that of modern story-tellers, is a worthy antecedent. The heroes of Hebrew story walk before us not as painted figures of imagined perfection; their biographers reveal with ruthless candor their foibles aud selfishness. Sometimes it is by a revealing incident, commonly, however, by a telling analysis of what the subject of the story "thought in his heart" -- but, by whatever means, the writers succeed in portraying the inmost nature of the men and women who under their hands move across the scene before us.

This sense of the centrality of character and the ability to sketch an(l develop the characters of their heroes is one aspect of the notable excellence of Hebrew narrative. A high place must be accorded the story of Joseph, who in a spirit of revenge, it might seem, dealt harshly with his brothers, but whose real magnanimity the evolution of the plot reveals. The writers tell us, too,

of Abraham, "the prince of God," who yet was so frightened in a crisis that he had his wife screen him with a lie -- or was it only half a lie ? And Moses, the paragon of meekness as well as of piety, lost his temper and so was debarred from entering the land. King Saul of the independent spirit that would not be servile to any priest-prophet however revered gradually deteriorates before our eyes through a mental breakdown. The vital David, hero of Israel, of whose shortcomings the less said the better; pompous Solomon; Rehoboam, whose dream was to make himself a despot; Elijah, the perpetually untamed Gileadite; imperious Jezebel, defiant to the last; the headlong Jehu, whose murderous impetuosity simmered down into mediocrity -- striking individuals as they all are, their records are not less noteworthy for the insights of the nameless men who penned them.

However with such psychic equipment as we have sketched, man, according to Hebrew thought, undertook the joys and tasks of life and confronted its problems. Knowledge, then, was a direct experience or, at most, a result of experience, that brought the individual into direct contact with objective reality. Epistemological dualism was unheard of; man could and did know reality by immediate contact. Yet the limitation of knowledge, that is, the limitation of the human potentiality of knowledge, was fully recognized. In considerable part, this was apparently nothing but a reflex of the imperfect science of the time. Man was surrounded by a vast and mysterious world that he possessed no method or means of investigating. There was no answer to the problems of the heavens above and the teeming phenomena of the world beneath but the leap of the mind into speculation which had already produced the multiform vagaries of polytheistic theology. But Israel grew noticeably weary of the uncharted areas of pure imagination, as much of this gradually came to be considered. Ecclesiastes, we have already pointed out, displayed a really scientific mood, even if his methods must be adjudged crude. Israel's contact with Babylonian astronomy likewise was mentioned above; hence Ecclesiastes' investigation must not by any means he thought of as a pioneer scientific venture. But it is close to that in its application of an empirical method, however imperfect, to the problems of psychology and philosophy.

His results were none too impressive; and certainly we may describe them as unhappy for himself, for they served only to corroborate his conviction that "all is vanity." But in how much worse position he was when he attempted the whole problem of man and the world! To his credit as a thinker, he claimed no success. On the contrary, he felt himself narrowly confined in an intellectual ghetto from which there was no egress: in simple terms, he was ignorant of the nature of things; lie knew it, yet saw no way of correcting it. His failure was so complete that he came to believe he suffered from some personal obstruction. It was God himself who, jealous of his prerogatives, was withstanding the free course of human investigation. It is a mood closely parallel to that of the Tower of Babel story, except only that Ecclesiastes is not inhibited by the piety of the other; he would push into the abode of the divine, restrained only by misgivings for his safety. He wants most of all to know and understand. It is to his credit that a considerable part of his pessimism is directly due to intellectual frustration. We shall doubtless feel somewhat qualified respect for his explanation of this situation; yet we may not be too severe in

our disdain, for, like most thinkers, he merely took over uncritically considerable of the thought of his time. Ben Sira expresses well a characteristic attitude, "Seek not out things that are too hard for thee . . . but what is commanded thee think thereon. . . for more things are showed thee than men understand" (Ecclus. 3:21-23). "The heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to God," another writer asserted, "but the earth has he given to the sons of men" (Ps. 115:16). To pry into the secrets of the divine was blasphemous impiety. The view was fostered by the conviction that knowledge is power; there were realms of truth reserved for divine exploitation, by virtue of which superhuman wonders were wrought; but for man to appropriate such was cosmic larceny! Out of this attitude grew Israel's conscience against traffic with magic-workers of whatever sort, a restraint that seems to carry a reminiscence of the primeval tragedy when our first parents took sinfully of the forbidden tree of knowledge.

The orthodox attitude, then, was that God had revealed to man as much of the ultimate nature of things as was good for him. Indeed, even the commonplace knowledge of practical things such as, for us, lies close to scientific discovery was, for the devout at least, also a matter of divine revelation. One writer, we saw, tells how the practice of the peasant in his tillage and care of his crops was taught to him by the Lord (Isa. 28:23-29). It is a view which, obviously, looks back to the primeval myth of the divine schooling of man in the ways of civilization, and forward to the whole basic theory of the wise men, a matter of such high importance for an understanding of Israel's concept of the relations of God and man that it must now be given some little examination.

The Orient had long concerned itself with the pursuit of "Wisdom," an entity which, at first highly utilitarian, presently came to comprise the total of the intellectual culture of the age. The wise man was the educated as well as sagacious man. The Hebrew sages were fully conscious of the activity and results of their colleagues; from quite early in the history of Israel's life in Palestine we begin to hear of the importance of the "wise" who must be regarded as in some way a bequest of the great Canaanite civilization. And there is a revealing passage in the account of Solomon's wisdom that compares him with famed sages of the non-Hebrew world:

Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman and Chalcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the lands round about (I Kings 4:30-31).

Yet Israel's wisdom movement traversed a history parallel to that in "the lands round about." From an early engrossment in practical ends it was compelled by force of circumstance to consider wider implications and values. Yet even the cultural interest from Solomon's time onward continued to be, so our too meager evidence would indicate, largely utilitarian. It was the Exile, that most profound experience of the Hebrew people, which, touching and transforming all aspects of Jewish life, compelled a new and deeper concept of wisdom. Highly revealing for us, then, is a lyric passage dating from somewhere in this late period:

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that gaineth understanding
For the gaining thereof is better than the gaining of silver
and the profit thereof than fine gold.
She is more precious than rubies
and all the things of desire are not comparable to her (Prov. 3:13-15).

The striking feature of this is the repudiation of precisely those good things which earlier sages had accepted as the ends of life: gold, silver, rubies, things of desire. Since the days of the Egyptian sage Ptahhotep these had been prized as the mark and content of life's worth. But here some Hebrew thinker -- rather, it appears, the entire late school of Hebrew sages -- asserts boldly that there is something else in life which far transcends them, or through which at most these can best be enjoyed. It is evident that, in rejection of tangible good, the writer speaks of the unseen, finer things of life, all the beauty and goodness and intellectual elevation which redeem us from our brute heritage. But in view of the oft-emphasized aphorism that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, it is certain that the author thinks of religious faith and conduct as holding also an honored, if not primary, place among such human treasure. We should greatly err if we were to claim that at ~is point the idea first dawned on human thought through the insight of this Hebrew poet. But it does mark clear gain to have it formulated and emphasized as here.

However, we move on to a striking development of the theme. All students of the Old Testament are familiar with the words

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way
before his works of old.
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning
before the earth was.
When there were no depths I was brought forth
when there were no fountains abounding with water. . . .

And so the writer runs on through a poetic survey of the wonders of creation, to the concluding thought:

When he established the heavens I was

there .
when he marked out the foundations of the earth:
then I was by him as a master-workman
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing always before him:

rejoicing in his habitable earth,
and my delight was with the sons of men (Prov. 8:22-31).

It is Wisdom that speaks: wisdom which just now we have seen to he the finest attainment of human aspiration. But this same Wisdom here declares herself as preexistent, associating with God in creation, so that without her "was not anything made that was made."

Much energy has been wasted in speculating whether the writer here conceives of an actual person associated with God before the world was and how such heresy could ever have been expressed by a devout Jew. But is it not as obvious as the nose on a face that in this poetic passage the writer is employing imagery to express an idea which he hoped others would have enough intelligence to grasp? This mysterious pre-existent personification is nothing but an aspect of the character of God; by virtue of his being this sort of a God he made the world. He took, we might say, this attribute and built it into the nature of things as they are, most of all into the being of man. Here is the answer to the baffling fact that the writer has used the same word for the human quality and for this supernal, pre-existent reality. They are, he undertakes to say with emphasis, one and the same thing. It is human because it was first divine and was so made a pervasive quality of God's whole creation. All our best achievements, all our highest hopes and aspirations, all that the mind and soul of man has attained or even dreamed, this ancient thinker asserts, is in accord with the deepest nature of things. For the ultimate reality in the physical world is the wisdom of God!

Now, it will be apparent that we have here a remarkable parallel to the notion of universal ideas that took so important a place in Plato's speculation as well as to the Stoic thought of the pervasive divine reason. But what does the similarity signify? For we have already pointed out that the biblical passage is late, and, though we cannot date it within a couple of centuries, it is probably not earlier than Plato and may easily be as late as Zeno. Once more, then, we confront the perplexing question of a possible Greek influence upon Israel in one of its most notable attainments. But the answer is even more clear than in our previous dilemma. If borrowing is to be asserted -- observe, if it is to be -- then the direction was clearly from East to West, not the reverse. For this concept is so firmly rooted in the thought of the ancient East, which had speculated for many centuries upon divine wisdom and the divine word, that there can be not a doubt that this notable exposition of the theme in the Book of Proverbs is Israel's own. The Hebrew thinkers have here, as so often, sublimated and transcended their oriental heritage, making it their own and making it a new thing in the process. But they needed no Greek, not even Plato, to teach them about the wisdom of God.

But we have not yet exhausted the concept. We turn again to the great poem in Proverbs:

Doth not wisdom cry
and understanding put forth her voice?
On the top of the high places by the way, where the paths meet, she standeth,

beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, she crieth aloud:
"Unto you, O men, I call,
and my voice is to the sons of men.
O ye simple understand prudence,
and ye fools be of an understanding heart. . .
Receive my instruction and not silver,
and knowledge rather than fine gold.
For wisdom is better than rubies,
and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared unto her" (Prov. 8:1-11).

Wisdom we first saw as a human attainment, then as a cosmic quality immanent in the world and in human life. Here we discover the nexus of the two. In poetic terminology, she stands in the busiest concourse of human affairs, wherever man may be, and there accosts all and sundry. Receive instruction; choose the better things of life; final satisfaction cannot be found in material things, but only in the uncharted region vaguely known as the spiritual realities of life. This pervasive, immanent quality of life and the world has been ever active in human life, individual and collective, in leading, persuading, and inducing men to higher and better things. Through this function of the divine wisdom immanent in man the whole long story has come about of our groping progress from our brute ancestry, our slow attainment of civilization, and our unceasing outreach for ever better things in thought and practice.

Here, then, is the ultimate nature of man. He was made in the image of God and but little lower than God; but also he is infused and impelled and fashioned by the wisdom of God himself. By nature man may be related to the brute, but vastly more significant is his kinship with God and participation in the wisdom of God. Here is that concept familiar in the words quoted by a later thinker: "In him we live and move and have our being." All the talk of certain modern schools of theology about the lost condition of man apart from God would have been to the Hebrew thinker just so much crackling of thorns under a pot. For him such a being never has existed. Always from the first to be human was to possess the divine wisdom. And the difference among men, the distinction of wise and fool, of righteous and sinner, has been in the measure with which the individual has heard and then given willing obedience to the appeals of wisdom.

And here is the notable supremacy of the Hebrew thought above its apparent parallel in Plato. His was a republic for philosophers; these only could enter into the accumulated heritage of finer racial treasures. But for the Hebrew thinker, the appeal of wisdom was to all men wherever and whatever they might be; in particular it called to the simple and foolish for whom Plato would have had only a place of menial service.

Yet there is still more for our purpose in this concept. It is apparent that here is the bondage between the human and divine; by this means God and man have come into relationship. All

that we have achieved as we have left behind our savage origins and have climbed higher and yet higher in civilized life has been through the leadings of the divine wisdom. And this, it is to be noted, came not through some heaven-rend mg voice or awful theophany, but within the individual consciousness, as our better nature, comprised of the in-dwelling divine wisdom, strove against our brute ancestry, ever warning. "Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than fine gold." The whole of history is thus gathered up for the Hebrew thinker in a single formula. And here is the doctrine of divine revelation. It has all come by this quiet, unspectacular, but effective means. Man is but little lower than God; and the divine in us has been slowly overcoming the bestial.

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The Old Testament, Keystone of Human Culture by William F. Irwin

William A. Irwin was Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at Southern Methodist University, formerly Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at the University of Chicago. He is the author of The Problem of Ezekiel, and The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, and many other books. This material was published by Abelard-Schuman, London and New York, 1959. Prepared for Religion-Online by Paul & Shirley Mobley.

Chapter 5: The Theory of Law

The concept of the wise men, that there is pervasive throughout the world and immanent in man a mysterious urge toward better things which they called the Wisdom of God, had a long sequel in the history of our thinking. It was taken up by the authors of the Books of Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon. The former identified the divine wisdom with the Torah. In this we are not to see an excess of legalism but, on the contrary, his high appraisal of wisdom: it contained all the best in human life; it was the revelation of God. But, since this latter function was fulfilled by the Torah, then the conclusion was inescapable that the two were one and the same.

The author of the Wisdom of Solomon gave the concept a different turn, not less significant for our purposes, although at first glance one is prone to dismiss him in disappointment, for he adds little to the thought of Proverbs, merely incorporating certain Stoic phraseology into his discussion. Yet the meaning of this will be recognized. The author, and perhaps Jewish thought in general at that time, recognized the intimate relationship of the age-old speculation of the Orient to that of Greece; both had come to express in differing terms but in essential unity the conviction that human life is infused with a pervasive entity which is more than human, finding its ultimate origin and nature in the being of the universe.

But, further, the thought in the Prologue of the Gospel of John is almost in its entirety a recapitulation of the description of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs. True, the latter does not emphasize the life-giving powers of wisdom, though this is not foreign to its thought, and some passages approximate such statement (3:18, 22; 4:-13, 22; 7:2 - 8:35). Likewise, Proverbs does not employ the symbolism of light; but how negligible is this difference becomes apparent in the fact that the writer's prime concern in the description of wisdom was with human enlightenment. And as the Christian writer advances to his doctrine of the incarnation, he goes beyond Proverbs, but still only in application of the principles contained therein. There is no need to seek in Greek speculation for the origins of the Prologue, for it is practically all contained in the writer's

Jewish heritage, whether or not his thinking was stimulated by the Greek ideas. But Christian indebtedness to the great Jewish philosopher in the Book of Proverbs does not stop here; his thought has penetrated the very center of Christian theology. When Paul speaks of Christ as the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24), when he presents him as the medium of creation (Col. 1 :16), when he mentions wisdom, understanding, and knowledge as divine gifts to the believers, and when he formulates his doctrine of the preexistent Christ who emptied himself to live among men (Phil. 2:6—8), it is clear that he is carrying over the thought of Proverbs into his concept of the person of Christ. And through him it has permeated subsequent Christology.

It is clear, however, that the idea of Ecclesiasticus confronts us with a new aspect of Hebrew thought. And a moment's consideration shows that the mood of the Wisdom of Solomon, also, and back of both the notable thought of Proverbs, carry the same implication. A pervasive quality in human life which everywhere sets before all men a standard of better conduct and ideals—here is clearly that concept which has played a very large part in the social and political life of the Western world under the name of natural law. It is commonly attributed to Greek speculation, and beyond a doubt it was given notable discussion by them. Yet the mere formulation of a definition shows that it was well recognized among the Hebrews; the course of our thought already has come upon it but now demands serious study of the matter.

Natural law has been described as "a supreme unifying, controlling power manifesting itself in the universe at large. In so far as men are men they possess common elements; and in their political and social life those elements inevitably emerge and are recognizable in custom and law . . . Such natural law represents the permanent portion of human law in general, and it is prior to and superior to positive legislation, which is only a supplement thereto." It will be observed that the idea, then, looks in two directions. It comprehends the universal elements in the laws of all peoples, in "positive law" according to the terms of the definition. But beyond and subsuming this is the invisible, unwritten law, the universal sense of right which has reality only in human thought and ideals, but expresses itself in a mood of judgment upon positive law as well as in just and right action that transcends legal requirements. It will be apparent, then, that Ecclesiasticus' identification of the divine wisdom with the Torah is a statement of the anterior relation of natural law. For him it has absorbed positive law: the social and religious legislation of Israel rests upon, rather is identical with, universal principles, universally recognized wherever men pay heed to the leadings of wisdom. But Proverbs 1—9, Ecciesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon are all late bodies of literature; even the first is certainly well within the period vaguely spoken of as post-Exilic. Yet it is important to keep in mind the situation already emphasized—that the speculation of Proverbs is rooted deep in the Orient: it is thoroughly Hebraic. And although the other two come from a time when Hellenism was admittedly making a profound impression upon Jewish life, marks of which are obvious in the Wisdom of Solomon, yet they likewise are of the Hebrew genius and stream of thought. The concept of natural law here expressed is Israel's own achievement; its relation to that of Greece must be sought in other directions than one of dependence. And evidence is abundant that Israel recognized and

discussed the matter in times when it lies beyond reasonable consideration to postulate influence from the West.

Israel was early impressed with the regularity of nature, as doubtless even primitive man likewise. The personal concept of the world and its phenomena then prevalent would seem to weaken this conviction, introducing an element of volitional caprice. But observed facts could not be evaded even on the grounds of religious presupposition; for whatever reason, nature was notably regular. In Israel's orthodox thought, this was an evidence of the grace of God: he chose so to order his world for the benefit of man. The promise was of divine grace that,

> While the earth remaineth,
> seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night,
> shall not cease [Gen. 8:22].

The same thought, qualified only by some doubt of the accuracy of our received text, is expressed in Job 10:22. Some unknown writer, commenting on the gloomy land of the dead, mentioned as one of its most terrifying aspects that it had no order. The implication is clear: by contrast, the regularity and system of the known world, making possible planning and purpose in human life instead of rendering it the bauble of caprice—briefly, the fact that this writer recognized the world to be an ordered cosmos made it for him a land of the living. Somewhat similar was the idea formulated by Jeremiah in his exhortation of his contemporaries:

> Let us now fear the Lord
> who giveth us the rain
> the early and the latter, in its
> season;
> who preserves for us
> the appointed weeks of harvest
> [Jer. 5:24].

Even the animals, it was believed, obey a law immanent in their being:

> The ox knoweth its owner
> and the ass its master's crib [Isa. 1:3].
> The stork in the heavens
> knoweth her appointed times;
> the turtledove and the swallow and the crane
> observe the time of their coming [Jer.
> 8:7].

Yet we do well to apply these utterances cautiously; for the two latter are used in rebuke of the speakers' contemporaries, who, it is alleged, follow no such immanent principle. And Jeremiah's

exhortation that ascribes the cycle of the seasons to divine activity is prefaced with the flat statement that his contemporaries pay no regard to this view. And, indeed, our knowledge of Israel's concept of the source of fertility shows that the belief in Yahweh as the giver and guardian of the increase of flock and field was hard won only through the struggle of a succession of prophets. From the time of the entry into the land, the people had accepted somewhat fully the Canaanite theology which credited Baal with this bounty. The theological framework of the Book of Judges would have us believe that prophetic opposition to such infidelity arose contemporaneously—and the claim is plausible—but the earliest actual incident on which we can depend is the conduct of Elijah through the drought and the culminating contest on Mount Carmel (I Kings 17—18). It is apparent that the theme of this story is the power of the Lord to withhold the rains and then to give them when the repentant people recognize the futility of faith in Baal.

However, a hundred years later, as attested by the utterances of Hosea, and still later, by those of Jeremiah, the faith in Baal as the source of fertility was still so prevalent as to amount practically to the popular religion of Israel. And this situation becomes meaningful for our present problem in the light of the well-known cultus of Baal. The annual cycle of rites commemorating the death, and then the resurrection, of the god, it is freely recognized, were magical. This stratum of Israelitish thinking was at the far extreme from the sense of an ordered regularity in nature expressed in passages of which those cited above are typical. For the popular belief was that the magical rites were essential to the alleged resurrection of the god, that is, to the regular cycle of the seasons. Far from believing in a fixed order of nature, the people conceived the only fixity and dependability to consist in a world of magic, for the operation of some part of which they possessed the secret. And, in this sense, they themselves were custodians of nature and its changes. Without their co-operation, neither magic nor the gods nor any other conceivable power would bring back the season of growth and reproduction.

This conclusion seems to carry us still farther from any sense of order in nature. Yet a moment's consideration dispels the illusion. Results in the form of fertility could and would come only as men voluntarily chose to perform the necessary magical rites, but the fact to be firmly grasped is that the world of magical powers stood constant, whether or not man invoked it. It would always react in one certain way to the performance of the proper rites. In that fact, as it was believed to be, lay the constancy and predictability so notably lacking from the capricious gods. Further, this power was probably thought of primarily in impersonal terms, although there was a steady tendency to identify it with one or another of the gods—in Israel, obviously, with Yahweh. It was greater than the gods, for the distinction of Thoth in Egypt and of Ea in Babylonia was that these each possessed powerful knowledge. The reply of Ea to Marduk's frequent consultation is familiar to every student of the ancient East:

"What I know, thou knowest also, my son. Go"—. and then there follow specific instructions for magic rituals. These gods knew how to invoke and vitalize this immense world of force that was not of themselves or of the other gods but could be employed by them for chosen purposes.

The prevalence of such concepts in Israel is apparent, then, in the vogue of the fertility rites. But it was by no means confined to the common popular level with which we associate this cult. It pervaded a wide area of Hebrew thought, even making its impress upon what we may call the orthodox religion. A notable illustration of this is the concept that the prophets were magicians. Such is clearly the implication of Elijah's conduct in the raising of the widow's son (I Kings 17:21), as of Elisha also in the parallel incident (II Kings 4:31—35). Their procedures were patently magical. Such, too, must have been the understanding of Jeremiah's famous symbol, where in the presence of dignitaries of the city who had been invited to witness the ceremony, he solemnly broke a pot and declared that in such manner the Lord would break Jerusalem (Jer. 19:10—Il). It is difficult to conceive of action which to his audience would more clearly declare itself as magical: this was no innocent speaker telling of things which he believed would come to pass. He was working in occult powers and, by his own volition through his ritual of smashing, was bringing about that smashing of the city, which he foretold. How far Jeremiah himself shared this view it is difficult to say. Much can be adduced on the negative side; but if he was not at least a little interested in posing as the wonder-worker, then he was notably inept in his choice of symbols.

And what, then, of the prophetic symbolic acts as a whole? A careful examination leads to the conviction that they were not the innocent illustrations they are commonly supposed to have been. Ezekiel's drama of the captured city (4:1—5:3; 24:1—lI) and his numerous similar performances, although regarded by the populace as merely good entertainment, had, for the prophet, as for several of the ancient commentators on his work (e.g., 4:4—6), some positive worth in accomplishing the ends he predicted. The prevalence of such belief among the populace is attested by the plea of the officer who went to bring in Micaiah ben Imlah at the request of King Ahab. He told how the court prophets had promised a happy outcome of the projected campaign against Ramoth Gilead and continued: "Let thy word, I pray, be like the word of one of them, and speak thou good" (I Kings 22:13). Now it is apparent that he had no thought of Micaiah's deceiving the king with pleasant assurances which could prove only delusive. On the contrary, he was clearly requesting that the prophet would speak the powerful word which would insure success for the project. For him, Micaiah was no mere predictor; as prophet he was in control of the mighty forces with which man's life is surrounded and could with a word direct them to chosen ends. In just such a role of wonder-worker Isaiah presented himself in his challenge to King Ahaz to ask a sign in the heavens above or deep as She'ol beneath (Isa. 7:11). The words of the offer indicate that even if the king should demand a repetition of Joshua's famous miracle at Ajalon (Josh. 10:12—14), Isaiah considered himself possessed of the power to perform it! Such, too, is the view of the later writer who relates the prophet's dealing with the sick Hezekiah: the shadow of the sundial went back (Isa. 38:8). In all such cases the intimate relation between the prophet and the Lord is apparent in the story, and undoubtedly this was the orthodoxy of thought as it developed. These wonders were the working of the

Lord through his representative. Yet this will not explain all the incidents. The stories of prophets of the ninth century and earlier reveal a basic concept of their office only by later

thought reduced to that of spokesmanship for the Lord. In the phraseology of this time the prophet was a "man of God"; and the Hebrew idiom is much richer than this English equivalent. It is harmonious with the significance of these stories that the prophet could in his own right perform wonders; he controlled superhuman forces.

The close relationship of this thinking with the pervasive faith in the power of the blessing and the curse is immediately evident. Once again these powerful formulas were commonly pronounced in the name of the Lord, yet their more remote sanction speaks through many passages. Doubtless it would be of little cogency to point out that in some cases there is no invocation of divine action; this could well have been implied. But equally, if one is to argue along this line, it is possible that such invocation, when employed, is secondary and represents only a later usage. However, blessings such as those of the patriarchs, which it is apparent "fulfilled" themselves in the course of Israel's history, leave the strong impression upon the reader that here was magic pure and simple. The old dignitary was pronouncing formulas which in and of themselves would work out, even across centuries, the destiny of the nation or of its separate tribes. Now, if this is correct, it is a matter of high importance to our quest, for, in addition to demonstration of the might and prevalence of magic in the being of the world, it shows that it was also to some undetermined extent the ruler of human destiny. This is almost equivalent to a concept of fate, save only that it may have been less inexorable in its control of man's life.

Intimately related to the blessing and curse in both genius and sanction was the oath of attestation. It too possessed potentialities of results in far distant times. From the wealth of illustration we cite only the dire result of the breach by King Saul of Joshua's oath to the Gibeonites (II Samuel, chap. 21), and the nation's faith that its possession of the land was in fulfilment of the oath sworn to the patriarchs centuries before. But this oath was sworn by the Lord! Here is an astonishing situation. Oaths and agreements between men were commonly attested in the name of the Lord—or such became the usage; he was invoked to watch over the spoken word and insure its faithful performance. On the surface, this appears to be a recognition of Yahweh as himself the source of justice and, at the same time, immanent in the pervasive sense of justice. Yet, even so, the act was patently not religious. There was in these cases no supplication, no securing of divine sanction, no waiting upon the will of God. Man spoke and God was obliged to fulfil. It is clear that such was magic, however it may have been cloaked with pious words. But in cases where the Lord himself swears, there is not even a semblance of evasion of the issue. Of course, the devout author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reasons that "since he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself"; but this is decidedly thin as historic exegesis. More convincing would be the claim that the divine oath was but an unthinking carry-over of human practice. Yet even this is not convincing; surely the biblical writers were not so consistently stupid as this would imply! There is no good reason to evade the conclusion that Israel conceived of God's oath as more binding than his promise, for precisely the same reason as in parallel human agreements: because there was a power watching to compel fulfilment! Obviously such power was not personal; that would be to create a hierarchy of the gods with Yahweh in a menial position. It was force. And Yahweh was subject thereto!

Astonishing as this conclusion may well be, there is related a strange incident which, to say the least, suggests some corroboration of the belief in a supradivine world of power. When the allied armies of Judah and Israel had ravaged the land of Moab, had shut up its king in his capital, and were pressing the siege, the king in despair "took his eldest son who was to reign in place of him, and offered him for a burnt offering on the wall; and great wrath came upon Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land" (II Kings 3:27). It is freely admitted that the meaning of the incident is obscure; but a process of elimination indicates an interpretation.

First, the account cannot mean that "there was great wrath in Israel" so that in disgust with the proceeding they went home. Such meaning would have demanded a different Hebrew preposition. Besides, it is inconceivable why they should go home as a result of "great wrath"; this would rather have roused them to vengeance. Then, this wrath that came upon Israel and compelled them to go home could not have emanated from the Moabite god, for he was broken and overwhelmed: he had been doing his best, apparently, in defense of his people, yet the Hebrew warriors continued victorious. Besides, these were operating in the name of Yahweh; he could well be depended upon to deal effectively with any bad temper on the part of defeated Chemosh. And it is out of consideration that it was Yahweh's wrath that sent his people home. Why should he have been stirred against his own armies by a pagan act of a pagan king? There is no apparent escape from the view that the "wrath" emanated from some source other than the gods concerned. Further, this source was so mighty that the devotees of Yahweh, operating under notable marks of his approval (vss. 9—20), abandoned their success at the moment when final victory was within reach, and went home. The sacrifice of the heir-apparent was a mighty magical rite, against which even Yahweh was impotent.

But, indeed, all this is less heretical from accepted "critical" views than may perhaps appear. For the concept of what we have come to call the taboo is just the thing we have been describing. There, too, a tendency existed to draw its operation into the realm of Yahweh's authority. The herem upon Jericho was pronounced in his name and was guarded by him (Josh. 6:17, 7:11—12). The temerity of Uzzah was punished by Yahweh himself (II Sam. 6:6—7). The sin of Nadab and Abihu brought consuming fire from him (Lev. 10:1—2). Yet it is but the orthodoxy of scholarly opinion that the realm of the holy was one of impersonal force that operated automatically and independent of divine volition. And the carry-over of such ideas into the priestly legislation, the natural custodian of concepts of, and dealings with, the occult, is well illustrated by such a ritual as that of the heifer whose neck was broken in an untilled valley where ran a perennial stream, every detail of which declares its magical character (Deut. 21:1—9). But, as is well known, magic persisted to find expressions in the Psalter likewise.

To recapitulate: there are various lines of evidence that Israel believed in the existence of a power supreme above gods and men, which could be employed in some undetermined measure by both, through rituals and formulas of the sort that we call magical. Although not primarily ethical, it possessed qualities that are of some such implication. Its dominant feature was

constancy. Over against the uncertainties of capricious deities, it was always the same. Those who knew how to employ it could always depend upon its effectiveness. One aspect of this approximates moral quality: it was guardian of the solemn agreement; this suggests the attribute of truth, but in reality it was probably no more than a manifestation of the constancy already mentioned.

Such as it may have been, then, here was Israel's simplest concept of natural law. It was a force operative upon gods and men which could enjoin truth and faithfulness to covenant. It did not compel, however; and, presumably, divine freedom was not impaired. One might freely ignore this world of force and shape his conduct indifferent to it. But, like a moral order in the universe, or like law in human society, it imposed inevitably the consequences of defiance, and through their unpleasantness induced conformity. Its remoteness from the orthodox faith and its intimate relation to earlier forms of belief declare themselves. Still it is to be noted that the divine oath, for example, was emphasized by the relatively late and highly developed Book of Deuteronomy. Further, manifestations of these beliefs are found in the prophets and in the ritual literature through various periods down to the close of the Old Testament. Thus it is clear that a certain dualism ran right through Israel's concept of the world. Side by side with a dominant and growing faith in the universal rule of Yahweh, there existed a belief in a realm of magic that lay outside his power. But, indeed, this is not remarkable, since the same situation persists to the present. Large numbers of more or less devout people, and even certain branches of the church, cling to beliefs and practices which are essentially magical and hence deny the supremacy of God. So while we recognize a contradiction in Israel's thinking, here we can only trace the expression of the concept of a moral order in the world without trying to resolve the problem of how completely it commanded the best Hebrew thought. But certainly a growing sense of moral government was intimately a part of the faith in the universality of Yahweh's rule as a God of righteousness.

What Israel's original concept of government may have been, it is difficult to say. The earliest rule by the elders of the community and the essentially democratic freedom inherited from nomad society would seem to imply a respect for inherited custom and some more or less crude sense of justice. Certainly the traditions that are presented in the Old Testament as the early history of the nation reveal a sense of law beyond and supreme above mere individual whim. But the validity of such representation is precisely our problem. It carries some plausibility. But, on the other hand, the older strata in the Book of Judges, which are among our earliest genuinely historic sources for Hebrew society, provide disturbing considerations. A later writer generalizes about the period that "there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25; cf. i8:i, 19:1), an explanation which, in its context, means nothing but social anarchy. And certainly the conduct of the Danites at Laish, their treatment of Micah, and the whole incident of the Levite's concubine and its sequel (Judges, chaps. 18—21) speak eloquently of a complete lack of moral restraint. The standard of conduct was desire, and the means to attain one's ends was physical, then political, power. The life of the strong was the happy life, since it was one of realized desire. The folk tale of Samson, whatever else it may originally have been intended to teach, certainly expresses an ideal of the time; he was such a

one as the writer wished he might have been: able to buffet and toss about his foes, to make sport of their retribution and plots, to take what he would, and to consort with harlots at his desire. Such was a real life for a man! And there clearly we have the "natural law" of the time of the Judges: it was the law of the jungle.

We may not suppose that these heroes themselves critically evaluated and, with ethical self-consciousness, chose such courses. But Israel’s thought on the problem certainly dates far back into an early period, for even in these stories, notably those of Samson and of Abimelech, judgment is passed upon their principals’ conduct. It was in a later age that thinkers set this sort of procedure over against principles of equity and voiced their condemnation. Yet we may with confidence assert that, for the time of the Judges, such law as existed in established usages like blood revenge, and in certain tribal and family customs, was not sufficient to supplant the belief that might constituted the supreme socially valid norm, qualified mainly by the restraining magical powers of the oath and curse. Possibly a more complete understanding of the beginnings of Israel’s religion would compel the postulation of better ideals even through this rough period. But certainly the stories themselves, our one best source for the time, lend potent support to the reiterated statement, already quoted, that every man did what seemed right to himself.

Nor can we trace the causes and the course of evolution a public sense of law, but only point out a few relevantf acts. Israel inherited the law of the Canaanites, and her life among their relatively cultured communities must have exerted a moderating influence upon primitive violence. The kingship, too, in spite of the obloquy it receives from certain biblical writers, clearly entailed a national law that all must recognize. Such is the implication of the comment on the period of the Judges just now quoted; such, too, is the impression we derive from glimpses of David’s judicial administration. It is significant, also, that in this period we find voiced a strong sense of the restraining power of social practice and norms:

"It is not so done in Israel" (II Sam. 13:12).

Yet it must be recognized that the supremacy of positive law was deeply imbedded in Israel’s concept of the monarchy. Since the kingship was historically a projection of the rule of the Judges, it was inevitable that an ideal of the finality of power should carry over into the conduct of the kings. Such is the summary of royal prerogatives attributed to Samuel when the people proposed a monarchy; he warned, "the king . . will take your sons and appoint them to himself for his chariots and to be his horsemen, and they shall run before his chariots.

> He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take your fields and your vineyards and your oliveyards, the best of them, and give them to his servants" (I Sam. 8:11—14).

The passage, it is recognized, is late, but its evidence for the character of the Hebrew monarchy is not less reliable, for this is how we see it actually working itself out. The oriental ideal of the

absolute monarch who "could do no wrong" invaded Israel's court in the days of David, if, indeed, it was not already manifest under Saul; it became supreme through Solomon's reign; it was the impelling principle in Rehoboam's folly at Shechem (I Kings 12: 14). And though it suffered a solemn check in the revolt of the northern tribes, yet even these devotees of freedom soon found themselves under a ruling class even more irresponsible than that in Jerusalem. We need here cite only the Naboth incident (I Kings, chap. 21) and recall the social oppression against which the prophets of the eighth century spoke to realize that Israel, north and south alike, gave itself officially to the theory that power is irresponsible, since it is the ultimate source of law. The political aspect of this and the struggle for responsible government we must postpone for a later section; our interest now is to see how completely positive law possessed the ruling classes in the two kingdoms.

Two incidents of the period of the kings are highly significant of thought in the time. They are the Bath-sheba and the Naboth episodes. In their highhanded indifference to human rights and in their bold arrogation of absolute royal authority, they are intimately related. But both are highly important also as steps in the rise of Israel's sense of a higher law, for in both a prophet intervened to rebuke the monarch in the name of the Lord. More simply, he denied the king's claim of final authority and announced instead the supremacy of the will of the Lord, a law that bound the reigning monarch not less than his humblest subject.

This is the background of the work of Amos, whose significance for this line of Israel's thought has already been suggested. We saw that his enlarged concept of the nature and authority of God evidently was rooted in a feeling of common human rights, pervasive beyond the political and religious boundaries of the time. This principle was for him embodied in the person of the God of Israel. But in at least one notable passage he implies the existence of such a force for good existing in and of itself. He says: "Do horses run on the rock, or does one plow the sea, that you should turn justice into gall and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood; you who rejoice in a thing of naught and say, 'Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?'" (6:12—13.) A certain propriety of conduct, he says, is freely recognized in common affairs, but in religious matters his contemporaries outrage the common sense of mankind with their moral and religious aberrations. Ordinary human good sense, he implies, ought to lead one to just conduct and right religious attitudes.

Israel's thought was in general so highly personalized, so fully drawn into the belief in a universal Person who pervaded all and was the moving force in all, that it is important, before we turn to examine the implications of this, to recognize fully the existence of a more humanistic concept of natural law, such as Amos entertained along with his deep faith in divine activity. Even more notable in this regard was the wrestle with the problem of theodicy, which, it is apparent, implies a standard independent of God and in some way beyond him—a standard to which his conduct is amenable just as that of man. It is scarcely necessary to mention that the Old Testament, particularly in its later expressions, was much concerned with this problem of the justice of God's rule of the world. Obviously it was paramount in the strange theology of

Ecclesiastes. His God was judged by human standards of right and was found wanting. He had guarded his privileges in a most selfish way; further, his major concern seemed to be his own enjoyment, while man, striving and seeking, was circumvented at every turn by this cosmic might, and was granted only minor concessions in order to keep him occupied. Man's chief concern in relations with him should be to guard his steps and be cautious of his words, for rash words may get one into untold trouble. Where Ecclesiastes found basis for his theory of ethics in such a philosophy is not stated, although it becomes apparent by careful study. True to the tradition of the Wisdom Movement, his thought was thoroughly humanistic, rooted in certain convictions as to the nature of the good life and the desirability of specific courses of conduct. He sought to know whether there was any good thing for man; and his conclusion was that the good thing was what would provide abiding satisfaction. So he gave himself to all sorts of conduct without let or hindrance from traditional scruples. Yet it is notable that through this experience, dominated as it seems to have been by a self-interest as crass as that which he ascribed to his God, he paid unconscious tribute to common social ideals of justice and humanity. He was concerned about the rampant injustice of his time, although he put the matter off with the reflection that nothing could be done, for the total of human misery was a constant quantity. He remarked on the selfish hierarchies of officials, each preying on the one below, and, finally, all on the poor peasant. He spoke with apparent censure of the ways of absolute monarchs, before whom subjects could only cringe and watch astutely for opportunity to serve themselves at their expense. By contrast he praised the poor but wise youth, fated to continue to the end in his lowly state, yet better than the powerful monarch whose self-serving would leave at his death not a single person to mourn his going. The wise man who delivered his city by his wisdom when military might had failed: there was something that Ecclesiastes could and did respect. He was a man of deep social feeling, which indeed was a fruitful source of his pessimism by reason of his despair of improving matters. Indeed, at this point he confronts the central problem of a theory of natural law, the existence of conflicting standards of conduct. These selfish rulers acted in accord with universal human impulses. But Ecciesiastes had no thought of commending them on this ground and condoning a return to conditions of the days of the Judges. For over against such norms of life there existed also an instinct for better things, a sense of justice rooted not less deeply in human nature. It would seem, then, that these concepts lie close to the basis of Ecclesiastes' whole system of thought. His norm was the common human feeling for justice, though only vaguely defined. By it God himself must submit to judgment.

But the treatment of this theme in the Book of Job is notable for its projection of the antithesis of might and right into the conduct of God himself. In varying expression this is found throughout the book. The speeches of Yahweh spend their eloquence in emphasis upon the irresponsible might of God. His power is such and the complexity of his working so far beyond human understanding that mere man may not question his ways. The inquiring spirit can in the end only confess his temerity:

> I have uttered that which I understood not,
> things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. . .

> Wherefore I abhor myself,
> and repent in dust and ashes [Job 42:
> 3, 6].

The Elihu speeches are not far from the same position:

> God "giveth not account of any of his matters" (33:13).

Still, these writers are not unconscious of the problem; they undertake to demonstrate that God will not do wickedness (34:10 if.) and are shocked that Job, presumably, claims his righteousness to be greater than God's (35:2). In this regard, the Elihu speeches reveal the familiarity with the Dialogue for which they are well known. For Job's moral independence outraged the traditional piety of the friends. He refused to bow in contrition before transcendence; on the contrary, he asked insistently: "Why should God do this ?" For him, it would not suffice that absolute might sat enthroned at the center of the universe; such power must itself answer to common standards of equity, not less than the lowliest man. On this basis Job sought a meeting with his great adversary where he might argue the justice of the issue:

> Behold now I have set my cause in order; I know that I am righteous [Job 13:18].
> Even more to the point is his querulous taunt of cosmic might, which he implied should be at least as just as man:

> Is it good to the that thou shouldst oppress,
> that thou shouldst despise the work of
> thy hands?
> Hast thou eyes of flesh,
> or seest thou as man seest?
>
> Are thy days as the days of man,
> or thy years as man's days,
> that thou inquirest after mine iniquity and searchest after my sin
> although thou knowest that I am not wicked?
> But there is none than can deliver out of thy hand [Job 10:3-7].

Such was Job's constant complaint: he had done no wrong, yet affliction came upon him. Little wonder that his bold spirit went the full length in condemnation of divine irresponsibility before at length he recoiled from his own excesses, realizing that his life was not all recorded in terms of misery:

> Thou hast granted me life and loving kindness;

> and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit [Job 10:12].

Yet at the depth of his black mood he exceeds even Ecclesiastes in denunciation of an unethical God:

> As for strength: he is mighty;
> as for lustice: who can call him to account?
> I am upright; I do not regard myself; I despise my own life.
> It is all one! Therefore I say
> upright and wicked alike he consumes [Job 9:19, 21-22].

But the great difference between Job and Ecclesiastes was that the former clung to his faith and worked through to a reasoned position where he could hold that the principles of right, which he honored as a man, rule correspondingly in the conduct of God.

Yet it will be apparent that, however attractive such views may have proved for the philosophic temper of the wise men, the great mass of Israel's thought, if we may judge by the prominence given it in the literature, was based on the conviction that the source of ethics was in the nature and will of God. And the nexus of the two seemingly contradictory views is revealed by the great thinker to whom we have already frequently turned—the author of chapter 8 of the Book of Proverbs. In his concept of wisdom as the vitalizing power in man's restless urge toward better things, which yet was with God before creation and by him was implanted in the nature of things, there is, we have noted, the clear implication that in such wisdom man gains his truest insight into the essential nature of God. The Hebrew philosopher would have agreed heartily with Socrates in an answer to the latter's famous question. Right was not right because God willed it; he willed it because it was right. For his nature was righteousness.

It is, then, along the line of the growing concept of the universality of the rule of Yahweh and the enlarging of ethical thinking within Israel's religion that we are to trace the advance of a sense of universal standards of right. And the triumph of this concept, apparent in the prophets' condemnation of injustice within Israel, is nowhere better manifested than in the revulsion they felt toward the irresponsibility of the aggressive empires. Isaiah held up to scorn the boast of the Assyrian:

> By the strength of my hands I have done it,
> and by my wisdom, for I have understanding.
> And I have removed the bounds of peoples

> and

> their treasures I have robbed;

and as a mighty one I have brought down those enthroned.
My hand has found, like a nest,
the wealth of the peoples;
and as one gathers eggs hidden away all the earth have I gathered. .

But

Does an ax boast against the hewer,
or a saw make itself greater than its user? .
Therefore will the Lord send
upon his fat ones leanness [Isa. 10:
13-16].

Not less effective is the brief note of Habakkuk in his account of the violent aggression of the Chaldean foe, the culmination of whose reprehensibility was that

from himself proceed his standards of right and dignity . .
that reprobate, whose own might is his god! [Hab. 1:7, Ii.]

It is important to realize that in these concepts Israel’s thought of natural law attained its characteristic form.

The notion of a universal directive force, perhaps impersonal, but in any case independent of the power of the Lord, was but incidental. Emphasis upon it has been necessary in order to insure it adequate attention as a genuine phase of the total of Hebrew thought and to show the measure of ultimate attainment; for the conviction that Israel regarded the world and all within it as dependent upon the will and activity of God has become axiomatic in our minds to the exclusion of other possibilities. Nor is this a serious error, for the outstanding aspect of Israel’s thinking about the world was its personalism; and not least in their thought of a universal law valid and operative in the lives of men did the Hebrew thinkers postulate the personal reality and activity of their God. The supremacy of this faith among the prophets is obvious. But likewise it was the view of the wise men. The "Wisdom of God," of which they made so much, was not a detached, impersonal entity; it had emanated from God: more simply, it was God himself at work among men.

This, indeed, is the distinctive contribution of Israel’s thinkers to the discussion of natural law. For them, it was not an irresponsible force that in some blind way, however benignly, influenced human impulses. It was God in his holiness and righteousness revealing to sinful man his will and their high destiny and only happiness in obedience thereto. From this there resulted all that is characteristic of Hebrew ethics: its white heat of urgency, but also its transcendentalism that set righteousness far beyond human attainment yet held it as a compelling ideal toward which one must strive and aspire.

The moral passion of the prophets has become axiomatic; they were concerned with human well-being, it is true, but no such urgency of appeal could have arisen from human considerations. The compelling force that took possession of them "with strength of hand" was the holiness of a personal God who was very near and who sat in judgment upon the unrighteousness of man. And this, for Israel, was natural law! It was something more than a "supreme unifying, controlling power manifesting itself in the universe at large." It was God himself in his supremacy and holiness saying, "This is the way; walk ye therein."

The role of this concept in shaping positive legislation as well as in criticism of existing laws will be immediately apparent. Nonetheless, it is a noteworthy fact that, until comparatively late times, ethical speculation and sanctions had no recourse to codified law. The ultimate source of right and justice reposed in unwritten codes:

more plainly, in the instincts and impulses that stir in the hearts of men. Doubtless the monarchs and other practical folk were ready in citation of the codified legislation of the land, but, for those who gave thought to the matter, the final rule of the hearts of men lay far deeper in a universal norm. The function of this in the legal history of Israel is evident in the work of the prophets. It stirred, too, as an uneasy conscience in the several reforms of the period of the monarchy, even if these were largely cultic. Also, the Book of Deuteronomy is, per se, eloquent testimony to the reality of the movement, for, though it purports to be a "second law," it was in reality a revision of the ancient social legislation that in considerable part Israel had taken over from the Canaanites. So we may safely conclude that an independent attitude of criticism toward the law of the land was widespread among thoughtful men. But, excellent as this is for our present purpose, a further issue forces itself upon the attention. Natural law can exist at all only if it is universal. The crux of the problem is how far Israel's thinkers applied their accepted standards to the laws of foreign nations, or believed that among those peoples there was a stirring such as manifested itself in Israel's own thought.

Investigation of the question is beset with the obvious difficulty that Israel's writers were primarily concerned with Israelite standards and conduct; to the life and thought of foreigners they gave but minor attention. But at least the first eleven chapters of Genesis promise material for our purpose. The heroes and other characters of this narrative may in some measure have been regarded as remote ancestors, but certainly they were not Israelites; and from the stories certain relevant facts stand out. The authors have not the least doubt that God was known among these non-Hebraic peoples, through revelation of a sort similar to or identical with that later given to Israel. His will was their ultimate law, upholding those standards later established in Hebrew society. Cain should not have killed Abel; the rampant "violence" of the time of the flood cried out to high heaven for retribution; the life and conduct of Noah was a standing rebuke to his contemporaries; the builders of the Tower of Babel were guilty of arrogance; and so forth. Further, the distribution of the peoples of the earth is represented as being in accord with divine purposes; even if not ethically determined, at least it was an expression of that impulse which the writers believed to be the ultimate authority in human life.

Comparable are the results that may be deduced from accounts of Israel's relations with foreign powers. The Egyptians should not have oppressed the Hebrews; the hard labor of the slaves raised a cry to heaven which in turn brought divine retribution in the plagues and the incidents of the exodus. The lawless oppressions of the Assyrians and Chaldeans were denounced; these peoples outraged all human standards—and made a virtue of it. And, for the smaller nations near Palestine, the threats contained in the first and second chapters of the Book of Amos took their rise in a reaction against unhuman conduct; these peoples had practiced barbarities against helpless neighbors, they had forgotten "the brotherly covenant," they had enslaved whole peoples, they had been implacable in their hatreds. On the other hand, the implications of the Servant Songs, and of passages that picture a great movement of Gentile peoples to Jerusalem for worship, as well as the claim in the Book of Malachi that from the rising of the sun to its going-down the Lord's name was great among the Gentiles, all alike indicate recognition of a common human bond among all peoples that rendered foreigners amenable to the same high appeals and impulses as native Hebrews. It will be recognized that we lack formal discussion by Israel's thinkers of the universality of basic ethical standards; to that extent we are doubtless justified in concluding that the problem was not fully realized. But at least it is clear that they assumed, even if uncritically, the world-wide rule of those standards of right which they themselves honored. The words of Paul again may be quoted as expressive of his people's traditional thinking: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men . . . because that which is known of God is manifest in them, for God manifested it unto them."

Yet the problem of natural law looks in still another direction, for within Palestine, through the centuries of Israel's occupation, there were notably two groups that provide test cases of Hebrew consistency; they were the foreign immigrants and the slaves. The underprivileged condition of both is apparent to every casual reader of the Old Testament. Of the former, however, it can be affirmed that progressive thought refused to leave them to the whims of popular bigotries and suspicions. The concern of the authors of Deuteronomy for the "sojourner" is a notable feature of the book. The prophets likewise urged consideration and fellow-feeling toward this noncitizen populace. But it was the Priestly document that took the final step of legislating equal rights and equal responsibilities for the gerim: "You shall have one law for the home-born and for the stranger who sojourns among you" (Exod. 12:49). The late date commonly ascribed to this legislation and its high authority in postExilic Judaism raise the prescription to a high significance.

The problem of the slave is not so easily handled; for the thinking of today, the widespread and legalized practice of slavery constitutes a very black stain on the social attainments of ancient Israel. And, to make the matter worse, no protest was raised against the institution per se, demanding the equal freedom of all men. Jeremiah, for example, was indignant because recently liberated slaves were illegally repossessed, but he says not a word to the effect that their ever having lost their freedom was a mark of the iniquity of his contemporaries (Jer. 34 8—22). Yet the facts are not so damning as all this may suggest. Slavery in the primitive days of Israel's

history had humane features. The foreign slave, who was generally a captive in war, owed his life to the institution; apart from it he would almost certainly have been slaughtered at the time of his people's defeat. The enslavement of Hebrews had an economic basis; one accepted slavery when he could no longer win a livelihood. The condition insured at least subsistence, and to this extent it may be considered, like the institution of blood revenge, a progressive social measure for its time.

The ethics of Old Testament slavery thus depended in large measure upon the character of the slave-owner; and there is abundant evidence to show that, in general, the slave enjoyed a status far above what the term suggests to us. Social distinctions are moderated in the simple, immediate relations of rural life. Master and slave, associated together as they were in tasks and adventures in the field, developed some sense of comradeship. A revealing incident, frequently cited in the study of Hebrew slavery, is that of Saul's consultation with his slave when the two had been for several days searching for lost asses; and it was the slave, not Saul, who had money in his possession to pay a fee to the "man of God." On the other hand, there were, as always, brutal masters who on occasion beat their slaves even to the point of death.

But the important matter is that Israel's conscience did not lie supine under these conditions. Legislation was enacted to protect the slave, and in the great legal revision represented by our Book of Deuteronomy these provisions received notable strengthening. But even more indicative of a Hebrew conscience toward this matter is the ground ascribed for such consideration: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out." "Keep the sabbath day that your male slave and your female slave may rest as well as you." It is to be observed that provision is not specifically for fellow-Hebrews, but for any slave.

And its raison d'être expresses clearly a sense of common human unity: briefly, a respect for fellow-humans as persons. Beyond this, Hebrew thought on slavery did not go. But it is to be recognized that in this attainment there lay the germ of all future advance. Although Israel's failure to repudiate slavery is freely admitted, yet three points should be kept in mind: Hebrew slavery was relatively humane; it was regulated and guarded with increasingly humanitarian legislation; and the slave was recognized as possessing certain inalienable rights on the grounds of his being human. The situation was such that we need not hesitate to include it as an aspect of Israel's thought of natural law.

In course of time that body of literature which we know as the Pentateuch assumed its final shape, and apparently by the fourth century B.C. it was "canonized," that is, it was accepted as of divine origin and authority. Through the various circumstances that determined its composition there were included certain social codes and much ritual direction, both of which had enjoyed a long history and operation. But now they were endowed with a halo of sanctity. For devout thought, all alike became *ipsissima uerba* of the will and revelation of God and, as such, of ultimate authority over human conduct. In this fact, then, we are to see the confluence of the two streams of Israel's law and the termination of the antithesis that marks this line of thinking.

Living under foreign rule as they did, subject also to the whims of fallible leaders of their own, the Jews never escaped, in actuality, the problem of positive law; but, for orthodox thought, in the Pentateuch natural law had absorbed and sublimated positive law.

Still, the concept of the unwritten law and its authority continued. It found notable expression in the oral tradition that eventually was codified in the Mishnah. Criticism may smile indulgently at the palpable deception in the claim that this was given to Moses at Sinai along with the Torah, but if we would read the meaning of figurative language, it is apparent that this was but an expression of the sense of a pervasive natural law: the religious impulse and revelation with which the name of Moses was associated was too great to embody itself in written form—not even the Torah was adequate; but it reposed ultimately in the divine impress upon the heart of man. Even in the Old Testament itself, and apparently from a period when the Torah had attained sanctity in Jewish thought, the supremacy of the unwritten law is notably expressed. There are several passages which voice the hope for the future that Israel should then be cleansed of its propensity to sin and transformed into a righteous nation. The following is especially deserving of attention:

> Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers . . . but this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my law in their inward parts and in their hearts I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and his brother saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me from the least unto the greatest of them [Jer. 31:31—34].

The law written on the heart, not an external law, should rule men’s lives. But it would be a gracious rule: not compulsion, not an infringement of man’s freedom, but its fulfilment. Men would do the right because they most wished so to do. They would recognize the beauty of goodness—would be won by its inherent attractiveness. Here is the culmination of Israel’s thought about natural law: a glorious day should dawn when man’s jungle impulses would atrophy, when right would triumph deep in human nature, and society would pursue its happy course in a state of "anarchy," of "no law," because everyone would do the high and noble thing through his love for it, in obedience to the unwritten law inscribed on his heart!

There remains yet one difficult problem of this line of thinking. When the Torah was canonized and the law of God thus became ostensibly the law of the land, there could be no clash between conscience and authority. Yet it is apparent that such a situation never became an actuality of Israel’s life. Even in the period when Jerusalem was under the high priests, the Jews were nonetheless subject to foreign rule; and even if we concede for the sake of argument what notably was not true, that all the officials of the theocracy were high-minded men, still the people were never remote from the problem of what to do in face of a bad law. And even more was this true of earlier ages. A devout answer is immediately at hand. In the words of the

apostles faced with some such dilemma, one "ought to obey God rather than man."

Yet the issue is not quite so simple. Paul formulated the crux of it in his seemingly antithetic saying that "the powers that be are ordained of God." Apparently the words of Jesus relative to payment of tribute bear a similar interpretation. "Render unto Caesar the things of Caesar." Both imply recognition that government performs an indispensable function. Without ordered society the bare essentials of civilized life are not possible. Even a bad government provides some measure of security and settled procedure. What then? Are we to weaken the pillars of society by a course of flagrant disobedience of laws that we consider wrong? Or shall we take the opposite course and outrage conscience by supporting a wicked government in the interests of stability? Is there a middle course, and what and where are its bounds?

The revolts instigated by the prophets, notably that of the northern tribes in the time of Rehoboam and of Jehu a century later, were frank acceptance of one horn of the dilemma: direct action for the overthrow of an evil ruler is in harmony with the will of God. But it is notable that subsequent thought repudiated this policy and sought reform within ordered society. The Maccabean revolt, commendable as it seems to us, was likewise given scant honor by the contemporary author of Daniel; it was only "a little help."

This comment may suggest the answer which Hebrew thought finally accepted. For it is apparent that, in repudiating the prowess of Judas and his outlaws, the writer looks rather for divine deliverance. And certainly this is in harmony with the entire apocalyptic movement and with most of the later political thought as it is expressed in the Old Testament. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to deliver his people; he showed mercy by inclining the hearts of the kings of Persia to the needs of the Jews in Judea. On the other hand, Daniel and his companions in the Babylonian court "purposed in their heart that they would not defile themselves"; the three who refused to worship the great image were thrown into the furnace. Daniel himself continued his daily devotions in the face of royal prohibition; and in every case deliverance and advancement came to the faithful by supernatural means.

The conclusion is fairly clear. Jewish thought favored an honest acceptance of government, whatever it might be, and loyal conformity to promulgated law, but only within the limits of Jewish conscience. Where law and religion clashed, then the Jew was to honor his religious duty at whatever cost, encouraged, it may be, by the belief that this course would prove in the end wisest even from the practical point of view. Yet such conformity to the rule of government did not mean indifference to public standards of right. But change of government, in that age when it could be brought about humanly only through violence, was regarded as properly in the hands of God. He set up kings and he removed kings in accord with his eternal purposes. One must endure evil days sustained by the conviction that it was the will of God. And, at the worst, oppression was but a transient affair, for soon the kingdom of the saints would be established.

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The Old Testament, Keystone of Human Culture by William F. Irwin

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Chapter 6: History and Nature

A notable feature of the Old Testament is its historical character. Approximately half its bulk is concerned with tracing the course of events from the far beginnings down into the well-known times of the latest writers; the sources employed were diverse, the methods of varying quality; but the important matter is that, for the authors, it was all history. In this the Hebrews were true heirs of the Orient. One of the great aspects of the ancient East was its consciousness of the flow of time and the significance of history. In this they far surpassed the Greeks, who were too recent and too brief in their national being to have been conditioned by the course of centuries and millenniums. Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius accomplished something of first-rank importance, but they lacked what the East possessed as its birthright, a sense of history. Two illustrations will suffice for the present, the first of the extreme sort. The Sumerians preserved records of the kings who lived before the flood and of those who lived after the Flood, and some of the former ruled for as long as thirty-six thousand years! Legends, it is evident; but what of that ? The revealing thing is the belief that human life had run on in regulated channels for thousands and thousands of years. Neither does the other illustration hear critical examination by the modern historian, but it is similarly eloquent of the Orient's deep-rooting in the far past. Nahonidus, last king of Semitic Babylonia, having dug down to the foundation of the temple in Sippar, discovered, he relates, the foundation tablet of "King Naram Sin who lived thirty-six hundred years before my time": an error of more than a thousand years, which, however, does not qualify the significance of the document. By contrast recall the incredible assertion of Thucydides in the beginning of his history that nothing of importance had happened before the Peloponnesian War.

To this rich heritage of insight the Hebrews added their unique facility in narrative and produced the first real history that the world knew. True, it is, in general, of much too narrow Scope, omitting whole large areas of social life which have become of paramount importance to

the modern historian; and even within its chosen limits, its record of national fortunes runs off, not uncommonly, into colorful personal episodes, to the neglect of major political developments. Some of it, as well, is deficient in that critical method which modern historiography regards as indispensable. The Hebrew writers never evolved a formal prolegomenon, setting forth the rules and methods governing the science of history; nonetheless, their history possesses amazing qualities of excellence, and at its best is one more of the seemingly miraculous achievements of this original people. Here we meet for the first time history on a world scope; the tenth chapter of Genesis, particularly against the background of the preceding narrative, though made up of lists of names, is yet an astonishing document, revealing the writer's knowledge of the world of his time, and even more remarkable, his recognition of the essential unity of the entire human process. And this was ages before the notion of universal history dawned on the West; and when it did arrive there, the best achievements of Western writers were a direct result of the work of the biblical historians. In the East, too, history became an art, the more excellent in that it was obviously unconscious; it was but the spontaneous expression of the writer's native genius. All the remarkable qualities of Hebrew narrative were invoked to present history with such compelling vividness and reality as to make the biblical story a model for good historical writing. A similar unconscious instinct led the greatest of these historians, the author of the account of David's reign, to a critical selection and sifting of his sources that created, half a millennium before Herodotus, a scientific history on a level with the best standards later set forth by the Greeks.

Yet one further astonishing quality of Hebrew historiography calls for emphasis. These writers were fully in accord with most recent thought in their repudiation of a theory of objective history. They wrote frankly and avowedly from an assumed point of view, which is but another way of saying that they believed that history has meaning. It is perhaps misleading, however, to describe this as an assumed viewpoint; it was not lightly won, but was part and parcel of their deepest convictions, achieved by all that had made them and their nation. It is obvious, then, that their history fulfilled that *sine qua non* of great historiography, that it must be written against a great background -- an epic theme, as it were. And for their history, that theme was of cosmic scope and scale -- nothing less, in fact, than man's being, in a world of incalculable power and mystery. To the already impressive catalogue of their primacy we must add that the Hebrews were also the first to develop a philosophy of history; and when at length this area of speculation was taken up seriously by Western thinkers, it was in direct succession to and dependence upon Biblical accomplishments. The Hebrew philosophers were convinced that history was not a cycle, not a chaos, nor yet a meaningless tableau where the world "stands at gaze like Joshua's moon in Ajalon." For them, history was a great process; it was going somewhere, but that progress was under the will and direction of the God of goodness whom Israel's faith envisaged: history, they believed, was moving toward the realization of his plans. God had created man for a definite purpose; and when that purpose was thwarted through man's rebellion, again he sent forth the race and established them according to their assigned places. Then presently Israel came into the course of events, and through her the divine purposes attained new relevance and fresh impetus toward their fulfilment.

The engrossment in history was intimately related to the total of their religion. Indeed it is commonly said that Israel's religion was unique in that it was a historical religion. Although this is an excellent comment, it must yet be accepted critically, else it will lead to foolish excess. For it is apparent that most, presumably all, other religions have likewise their historical aspect; they have their great moments and their great achievements which, not less than in Israel, enter into the total of faith. When the Assyrian conquerors boasted of the might of Ashur and Ishtar and the rest of their gods, who went before them in battle and gave them victory, where did they differ essentially from the grateful faith of the Hebrews looking back on the conquests of Joshua or of David? Hammurabi asserted that Ann and Bel raised him to the throne, that is, that they intervened in history; and Mesha recorded the triumphs of Chemosh against Yahweh and his people. But why multiply illustrations? It is apparent that the historical uniqueness of Israel's religion must have been something deeper, or else nothing at all.

It is generally recognized that Yahweh, in the earliest thought of him, was a nature~god in just the same sense as was Enlil or Re or Baal. The account of the great theopliany at the holy mountain is, *inter alia*, a veiled record of a volcanic eruption (Exod. 19:16-18); and Yahweh's intimate connection with storm and fire and earthquake is evident in subsequent later sources. Moreover, the nature-gods by their function were benefactors of their peoples and on occasion acted in notable fashion to save them, as, for example, Ea did for Ut-Napishtim when the Flood was in prospect. And surely the conduct of Adad was not one whit different from that of Yahweh related in I Sam. 7:10, where he sent thunder and storm to frighten the approaching Philistines and save his people. Moreover, if we are to accept the account of the deliverance at the Red Sea given by the J document, this central event of Israel's faith was the act of a nature-god who sent a wind and drove back the waters.

The distinction wears increasingly thin. Yet there is reality to it; the claim is sound that Israel's was a historical religion. In the final analysis, it is a matter of the attitude and qualities attributed to the god. The nature-god was a personification of forces of the environment; notwithstanding his occasional dramatic intervention in the course of human affairs, his common attitude and relationship was one of remoteness; if we think of the difference between our notions of natural force and religious faith, we shall grasp the matter approximately, although it must be understood that, for early thought, there was no natural force, but only personal or suprapersonal activity. When such a nature-god departed from his fixed and routine functions into the unpredictable conduct of personal relationship, when further he made this connection permanent, attaching himself to the fortunes of a people, then he became a god of history. Leaving behind the relatively fixed and routine functions of the nature-god, he attained the freedom of action and will of a person. It must be recognized that hosts of ancient gods were historic gods, and their cults historic religions; it is implicit in the idea of the national god, of which Israel's world provides numerous examples. The uniqueness of the Hebrew religion was that it carried this intimate relationship farther and higher than did the others; it was supremely *the* historic religion, and by virtue of this fact attained heights and depths impossible for the others. The great story of Israel's growing knowledge of God as *the* supreme personality, of her

intimacy with him, of her deepening acquaintance with his ways, that is, with pure and exalted ethics, was a direct result of the historic relation. He had chosen Israel, not because they were more in number than any other people, for they were the fewest of all peoples, but because he loved them; and they in turn were to love him. With a mighty arm he had delivered them from the house of bondage, hence they were never to forget the state of the foreigner and of the slaves among them, for they had been slaves in the land of Egypt. The mighty acts of God were both the unity and the apologetic of the nation's faith; he had gloriously manifested himself in a manner that might not be doubted.

In popular thinking, from the Conquest to the Exile, the difference was more apparent than we have made it. For the nation prided itself in the great historic events which were accepted as their God's intervention on their behalf; but Baal, of whom they learned from the Canaanites, was god of the fertility of the land. Here was the distinction drawn in hard lines; Yahweh was God of history, but Baal was a nature-god -- he controlled the weather; he gave rain and dew and lightning and storm; all the produce of the land, as well as the increase of flock and herd and of human homes, was his gift. Little wonder that in peaceful times the people "forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and Ashtoreths," as the Book of Judges dolefully reiterates; but in time of trouble they cried to the Lord. Both lines of conduct were obviously correct, granted the validity of their theology. Against this dualism better elements, notably the prophets, set themselves. Such is the significance of Elijah's great contest at Mount Carmel: to demonstrate that Yahweh was master of the weather. It was the emphasis also of Hosea, and later of Jeremiah. For orthodox thought, there could be no distinction between nature and history; both were under the control of the one God: Yahweh was god of history *and* of nature. This conviction so pervades the literature that it is astonishing how certain lines of recent thought overlook the facts and seek to set nature and history in antithesis.

From this point of view the religious history of the time was one of long-drawn struggle of Yahweh with Baal. That victory fell to Yahweh is apparent, though it was not complete until some time after the Exile. Yet the issue is not of such a simple sort; indeed what has already been said should make this clear. There is no clear-cut division between history and nature, for man lives within nature; its moods, its seasons, its variegated form and expression deeply conditioned his life. Think of the profound spiritual experience of the coming of spring in the north. And who does not feel the thrill and challenge of each new day as he sets out in the freshness of the morning to its unknown demands? "Arise each morning like a lion," as a recent writer has pointed out, are the opening words of the famous Jewish legal document, the *Shulhan Aruk*. What a strange pulsation there is to human life: as night comes on, active scenes are in a few hours deserted; not a soul is in sight except the occasional watchman or late reveller, and whole cities lie silent -- cities of the dead, it might well seem, except that with the turn of the earth and the dawn of new day they revive to another brief and hectic activity.

This is the terrain of the nature-religions, and here is the scope and role of the nature-gods. Their function is that of relating man to nature and nature to man. Yet there is a dualism that

cuts right through the relationship, whatever one may wish to say about it philosophically or theologically. Nature is arrayed against itself, in day and night, summer and winter, heat and cold, light and darkness, the desert and the sown, life and death, and a host of such antitheses. And it can well appear that these opposing entities are in constant struggle -- we would probably say, constant tension. Day lingeringly gives up before the advance of darkness, which then rules supreme until the sun in his might again assaults the eastern bastions of night and triumphs once more over his enemy. Similarly the season wanes, the sun's power and supremacy steadily declines until the great advent of the winter solstice, when the baneful process is halted and each succeeding day records the victory of the triumphant sun. Thus it was that the divine combat was integral to the nature-religions, and in this oscillation between day and night, between life and death, the profound truth was portrayed that tragedy is integral to man's being. Yet it was not unrelieved gloom, for tragedy was succeeded by new, vibrant life. And although the cynic might scoff that winter follows summer, just as truly as summer winter, yet, for ancient man, a strong note of optimism ran through the deep reality of his poignant tribulation. Doubtless this was in part merely human reluctance to accept the worst: or, better said, "Hope springs eternal in the human breast"; yet there was more concrete basis for the ancient faith in the victory of life. For did not man and the animals survive the long bleak period? Starvation was a reality for those stern days; many times the Bible mentions the famine that was in the land. Yet the race, and commonly the social group, came through to greet with joy the return of better days. And not these only, but plants and trees likewise had found a way to defy death; by retreating into themselves they also could await the time when again vibrant spring should call them to new activity. Life did triumph; the reign of death was transient, and though weeping might endure for a moment, yet joy came with the new morning. Life is perennially victorious; optimism is written into the nature of things, the invincible optimism which looks tragedy in the face and exults, O grave, where is your victory?

It is apparent, then, that the nature-religions were basically true, in the sense that they dealt with reality and offered answers to deep human needs. Their error was in their incompleteness and in the distortion which inevitably afflicted them. The struggle between Baal and Yahweh did not eventuate in an unqualified triumph and the eradication of all aspects of the nature-cult. When religions exist side by side syncretism always results. But the issue was even more complex, since Yahweh himself was originally a nature-god. In his cultus there were elements that paralleled those which we have discussed. It is revealing to recall that Israel's spring festival, as it came to established form, was of a dual character. The Passover is so intimately associated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread as to be commonly confused in popular thought. The former, with its ceremonial eating of the lamb, is obviously the spring festival of the shepherds, as Unleavened Bread is that of the peasants. In the desert, as truly as in Palestine, the coming of spring was a matter of prime importance. Thus in the long struggle through Israel's life in the land, Yahweh attained victory over Baal by various processes; in part, it was by the use of force and authority -- a summary statement which cloaks the political strife that continued until the Yahwists were able to overwhelm their opponents. Success was won also through accentuation of Yahweh's attributes as a nature-god, as well as by acceptance of the better aspects of the Baal

religion, whereby Yahwism became richer. We are steadily learning more and more of Israel's debt to the Canaanites.

The character of ancient thought entailed that the basic dualism of man's existence should express itself in mythology, and this, in turn, in cult. The divine combat and the death and resurrection of the god of the life-process were of the essence of the ritual of the nature-religions. Further, the dualism was seen to be so deeply based that ancient thought traced it back to the very beginning; it was creative. Through the primeval combat the world had come into being, a myth most familiar in the great Babylonian poem commonly called the Epic of Creation, which told how the supreme god had fought and overcome the monster of chaos. The cultic drama then took on cosmic setting; the account of creation -- really of the primeval triumph of the god -- was annually repeated in the great holy day of the nature-religions, the New Year festival. This was no mere historic reminiscence, but a vital religious act pregnant for the well-being of the incoming year. As the god had triumphed before creation, so now again in the cultus he was victorious, insuring that through the new year no foe could successfully defy him. Already in creation, and again in the annual drama of the ritual, he won victory for his people; and each new enemy, whoever he might be in any of the succeeding years, was but a new manifestation of the original cosmic foe overthrown at the beginning of things. Here is the tragedy-infused optimism of the ancient world, a realistic optimism that accepts fully the fact of evil, but awaits, confident, the eventual victory of right.

Drama demands actors. And ancient concepts of psychology and sociology indicated the head of the group -- normally the king -- as protagonist in this sociocosmic struggle. That the king in some way embodied the totality of his realm is widely recognized; he was a sacred personality, as indeed is declared in the biblical stories where David shows great deference for the "anointed of the Lord." In Egypt the pharaoh was a god, but in Hither Asia the king was commonly no more than the god's representative, who stood in a special relation to him.

From this point onward the matter becomes increasingly contentious. It is claimed that there was no uniformity in the concept or the cultus throughout the ancient East, that the rite was not accepted in Israel; and if one pushes further in defiance of this latter denial, identification of the thinking or practice in the literature of the Bible becomes a battleground of diverse views. There can be no denial, however, that this "fertility" cult was known in Israel. We are told specifically in the Book of Ezekiel of women seen in the Temple, in the very act of the ritual weeping for Tammuz, the Babylonian dying god (Ezek. 8:14). Also the Canaanite Baalism, which became prevalent through the times of the Judges and persisted to the end of the kingdoms, was primarily of this nature. But the question is how far such thinking and practice was accepted into what we may call with considerable vagueness the "orthodox" religion. For the note-worthy fact is that not a hint of it is preserved in the so-called historical books. The approach to the question has commonly been through postulating analogies to the established practice of all Hither Asia, a line of reasoning which, in view of the notable independence of Israel's thinking, is recognized to be highly dubious. Yet the case does not rest here; for it must be recognized

that the Psalms are historic documents in much the same sense as the prophetic oracles have long been known to be. They are poems out of the living religion as it flourished in Jerusalem for centuries. Still more, the liturgical character of many of them is obvious: they are hymns used in connection with some sort of enacted religious symbolism.

This point having been reached, the way lies wide open except for debated details with which we need not concern ourselves. Psalm 47 is clearly the liturgy of a rite in which God came into his Temple, and to the accompaniment of joyous shouting by his worshippers, took his seat on his throne as king of Israel and ruler of the nations. The poem does not make clear how this divine enthronement was enacted, but similarly indisputable allusions elsewhere show that his part was taken by the king during the time of the monarchy, though by whom in the succeeding centuries is not known. Nor is the occasion of this ritual declared. The nature of the thinking into which it fits indicates, however, that it must have been a festival of one of the solstices, and uniformly it is associated with that of autumn, the time of the great Feast of Tabernacles. Then nature paused between death and life. The old had passed away, the year's activities were at an end, the land lay parched and barren, waiting for the coming of the fertilizing rains which would call it once more to life and joy.

Yet we must beware an excessive "naturalizing" of the rite. Basic understanding of its character and motivations demands some such approach as we have followed. But at this point the distinctively Hebraic feature comes into evidence, for Yahweh was more than a nature-god. To such attributes, with their appropriate rites and myths, there was added, we have seen, the distinctive feature that Yahweh was most of all, in Israel's faith, God of history, and serving him was a historic religion. The Hebrew cultic drama, then, portrayed not alone the cosmic triumph, but also the "great works of the Lord" in Egypt and the wilderness and in Canaan. Is it not striking that the Passover, the spring festival, is one of reminiscence, in which tile devout Jew relives the wondrous experiences of that night when Israel's host went out from Egypt by the mighty hand and outstretched arm of the Lord? Certain of the Psalms also take on here special meaning and relevance; lengthy historical surveys such as Psalms 78, 105, and 106 and brief allusions as in Psalm 76 are evidently liturgies of some undeclared occasion when the victories of the Lord were celebrated. In the cultic drama as it was celebrated in Jerusalem we confront Israel's consciousness that theirs was a historic religion. The nature motifs of the great festival, as known through the contemporary pagan religions, were retained and in some regards sublimated; but to them was added the dramatic affirmation that Yahweh is supremely master of history. He is mighty in the realm of nature: he brings the cycle of the seasons, and the joy of springtime and of harvest; his goodness is to be perceived in the gentle rain from heaven. But most of all he has manifested himself in his choice of a people, in his great deeds on their behalf, and in his mastery of the entire course of history.

Obviously this is not the place to pursue the hosts of alluring questions which here confront one. The central matter stands out with clarity. In a great festival, evidently that of Sukkoth, the king ritually enacted the part of God's coming among his people and ceremonially taking his

seat upon his throne in the Temple. Something of the wonder and uplift of the occasion for the devout ancient worshipper we can readily sense to this day. The tabernacle of God was with men and he would dwell among them God had come to his own people, with all that his coming might imply of might, of triumph, of abundance, of inspiration. This was "the day of the Lord" for which the populace perennially waited, as Amos and Malachi and others reveal, though these prophets used it as an occasion of searching of soul, for "who can abide the day of his coming?"

So in Israel there was a continuing expectation of a "new day," a day when the people's fortunes would turn, when want and oppression would be done away with in a glorious dawn of plenty and peace and power. And all was to come about through divine actions; God had once again triumphed over all his foes, the pristine and perennial victory was again accomplished and for the future the way led forward into joy. This was the day which the Lord had made, the day to be realized through his King, his Anointed One, his Messiah.

The messianic hope was of diverse origins and various expression. In a sense, every nation has its messianic expectations, hopes of greatness and glory; and so too Israel. But all this was subsidiary to the central thought gathered about a supranormal event in which that great day would be inaugurated. There was a widespread expectation of the coming of a Wonder Child through whom the difficulties of the present would be erased. It has left numerous traces in the Bible. Isaiah's promise of the birth of Immanuel whose infancy would synchronize with political deliverance was somewhat clearly of this character (Isa. 7:14-17). It is related to the ancient legend of Sargon of Accad, an abandoned baby who, like Moses, was miraculously saved and became leader and ruler of his people. Of similar genius was the idea about the travailing mother of Bethlehem Ephrathah, whose son was to stand as deliverer of the people (Mic. 5:26). But here

we make contact with the prestige of David, for Bethlehem was his native city: the expectation took on aspects of the hope for David's return -- as great deliverer from the Philistine yoke, he could surely solve all the troubles of the future. In any case, the Davidic dynasty was intimately related to the continuing hope, although in the course of the centuries it manifested great variety, with attention turning to the tribe of Joseph or of Levi. Indeed it is revealing to recall that the supporters of the Herodian house also endowed these -- not unduly sublime men! -- with messianic qualities. Yet the standard form of the expectation was that the Messiah would be of the Davidic family. Thus it is apparent that our thinking has led us once more to the area of the supranormal qualities and powers associated with the kingship. The Messiah would be a king, and the king was a messiah. It was a projection of the present on the future, though a sublimated present, transfused and transformed with ritual symbolism and hopes.

The Exile, which for many Jews was indefinitely prolonged through dreary years of Diaspora, was a time when the messianic expectation was of special relevance. Here was an ideal situation for its functioning, and here an occasion to test it out in the actualities of history. The literature

of the period is permeated with ardent hopes; and indeed at one point they seemed on the point of realization, with all the incredible accompaniments that the most earnest might desire. For did not Cyrus, king of Persia, in the first year of his reign issue a decree permitting the exiles to return? The dreams of glory with which Second Isaiah heralded the approach of this day created some of the most beautiful as well as the most exalted poetry of the Bible. It is not strange that he invoked the times of Moses, for was this not a second Exodus? Many passages take on meaning when seen as references to the storied days when Israel went out of Egypt and journeyed safely through the great and terrible wilderness. Just so the Lord would now mock the might of Babylon and, overcoming all natural obstacles, would conduct his people home to Zion "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads."

The comparison demanded one thing further; for that ancient movement went forward under a great leader. And so, it has been cogently argued, the poet looked for a second Moses to be head of the new exodus. However, his usual term is "the servant" of the Lord; as it is used in a group of short lyrics (usually limited to Isa. 42:1-4; 49:16; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12), the epithet has been through the centuries, and continues to be, a battleground of exposition. Agreement seems now to be emerging that this mysterious figure who was despised, persecuted, attacked, killed, and buried was in some way related to the sufferer in the cultic drama. One must be cautious of the bold claim that these poems are nothing more than an adaptation of the myth, a sort of Jewish Tammuz liturgy. Yet equally the analogies are too close to be neglected. In the religious rite and in the hopes and convictions associated with it, the seer-poet of the Exile saw parallels to the plight of his people. They had endured their night of blackness; as a nation they had been done to death; but now the horizon was alight with promise of a new day, of a revival, a resurrection, brought about, as always, through the power of God. Current discussion as to whether the "servant" was the nation or an individual rests on a misconception; for it has been well said that he was both. The sufferer in the religious festival was always an individual, though a sort of corporate individual, gathering up into himself the fortunes of the group. The "Servant Songs" are fully within the limits of messianic prophecy, announcing a hope that was realized first in the deliverance from Babylon, then in succeeding fulfilments, always leading onward with deeper insight and hope.

The power and depth and persistence of the messianic hope can be understood only against this rich background. It was more than a political dream; it was not merely a sublimated fancy about a favorite ruling dynasty. It was a religious faith, rooted and nurtured in religious conceptions and evidenced in objective events that everyone knew and experienced. Further, it was annually revived and enforced in a festival of mystic power and sublime spiritual meaning.

The incredible optimism of the Jew through the centuries, dispersed, despised, abused, the victim of brutal mobs and of ignorant fanaticism even to our own day -- yet the Jew refusing to give up, maintaining a health of mind and courage and good cheer at which all may wonder! The secret quite obviously lies in religious faith, but, in particular, in the deep-rooted conviction that God had triumphed over all his foes at the beginning and that each succeeding year but

witnesses his renewed victory over the same old enemy in his myriad Hydra-headed form. What matters it whether Haman or Nebuchadnezzar or Antiochus or Hitler? They are all the one foe, and were long ago overcome. Victory belongs to God!

It is difficult for the non-Jew to grasp the depth and breadth of this hope and faith. But for those who can see religious rites in their anthropological as well as in their historical significance, we possess an elucidative parallel in the celebration of Easter. This too is a nature-rite -- it is the Christian spring festival -- transfused with historic meaning in its reminiscences of the passion and resurrection of Jesus, but most of all permeated with religious immediacy and exalted hope. The devout Christian who enters sincerely and profoundly into the sacramental significance of the Easter celebration, for whom also the accompanying symbolism of the springtime is not just casual ornamentation, but shares in some way the essence of the occasion -- such a one joins hands, whether consciously or not, with the sincere Jew in his messianic expectation.

The older concept of Yahweh as a nature-god, specifically his association, as at Sinai, with an active volcano, persisted to lend force and literary expression to many devout utterances; also it took on, with the course of time, a new relevance. The prophet Amos performed his mission about the time of the great earthquake in the middle of the eighth century. At about the same time-to be specific, on June 15, 763 B.C. -- there occurred an eclipse of the sun which through a broad band of the Near East was complete. What the people of the time thought of these terrifying phenomena is not our present concern. Amos employed them as symbols of the coming punishment which God would send upon Israel, and from him they passed into somewhat common prophetic imagery of the coming great day. Somewhere about this point volcanic imagery comes back into use, and we hear of the Lord coming down and the mountains flowing down at his presence. But it must be borne in mind that the great day was "the Day of the Lord," the day celebrated in the Temple "at the turn of the year." Thus apocalyptic imagery came to characterize increasingly the expectations, until at length the sun was supposed to be darkened and the moon turned to blood before the great and terrible Day of the Lord. Mountains would shake and remove from their place, the heavens would be rolled back: and then the Lord would come. The same line of thought, carried a little further, brought the author of the Book of Daniel to describe how thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days seated, with a fiery stream flowing out in front of him, while millions of ministrants stood in his presence or performed his bidding; then "there came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man, and there was given him dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples and nations should serve him" (Dan. 7:9-14).

Interpretation of this symbolism is a matter of very great caution and delicacy. There is now a prevalent vogue of eschatology in Biblical studies -- more definitely the view that the Biblical writers looked forward to a supernatural and catastrophic intervention of divine powers, by which the present world would in some way come to its end, and the new age would be inaugurated; there would be a new world inhabited by redeemed saints. The change from this age to the next would signalize a complete break in the natural order and a termination of

history as such. Doubtless the idea has some foundation. Supernatural intervention was much less a problem for ancient thinkers than it has become for us, with our conception of the orderly processes of nature; for the race, as for the individual, "heaven lies about us in our infancy." Moreover, the basic motif of the annual festival, which we have seen to enshrine the messianic hope, was a conviction of the immediate and mighty working of God in the affairs of his people. All this plays right into the hands of the eschatologists. But the situation works its own corrective. As the festival was enacted year after year, just what miraculous irruption of divine power was expected and, according to accepted faith, actually experienced? The cynic might answer, "Nothing at all." Certainly things went on as before. The order of nature was not interrupted, nor was the political status of the people changed. In crassly skeptical terms, no miracle had happened at all. The priests had put on a show, a number of folk had gotten themselves excited, but things were just as they had been! And this persisted right through the time when eschatological imagery was being freely voiced as the meaning and truth about the Day of the Lord. "The sun shall be turned into the darkness and the moon into blood before the great and terrible Day of the Lord comes" -- no one might detect so much as a flicker in the sun's shining, and yet the devout held firmly to the truth of these words, even in the very time when they were alleged to have their relevance!

If we retrace our steps and examine afresh the bases of this eschatological expectation, we shall be in a position to interpret it more soundly. It was the expression of living realities in the world of nature, as well as a reminiscence of epochal events in the nation's history, which were by various lines of thought accepted as symbols and figures of unseen entities of human life. At the annual feast great things happened, part of them in objective nature, part in the hearts of the worshippers, but both alike true in their portrayal of the deep realities of man's being and his place in a world of unplumbed depths of wonder and mystery. Then when the Day of the Lord had come and gone, the devout worshipper returned to his workaday tasks and busied himself in humdrum fashion, one might suppose, with his pots or his merchandise or his fields and flocks, and the world went on as before. Yet not quite as before, just as the devout worshipper in church or synagogue to this day returns, not quite the same as before, but with a quickened faith and conviction, to tasks that no longer are commonplace.

It is apparent what all this signifies. Eschatological imagery is just that: it is imagery. It is symbolic form employed to express the inexpressible. We do it a wrong, and we exaggerate the supernatural thought of its authors when we take it literally as precise formulation of ancient expectations. This conclusion is borne out by a further consideration. Almost without exception the "new age which the cosmic catastrophe was expected to inaugurate is presented as a mundane affair. Life continued on this earth; right here the drama of history played itself forward. Even one of the most supernatural of the pictures of the coming age, that in Daniel 7 to which we have referred, tells that after the awesome "Ancient of Days" had been enthroned, and the books were opened for sentence upon the beasts in anticipation of the coming of the "son of man," the terrible fourth beast was killed, but the others suffered only loss of their political power. Interpreting the symbolism, it indicates the writer's expectation that in the great moment,

when final victory was to come supernaturally to "the saints of the Most High," the three empires, Babylon, Media, and Persia, would continue, right into the new age, changed only in that their imperial rule was taken from them. And this, it must be realized, was to come about not through some deep transformation in which they would "become the kingdoms of our God"; instead they would live on as pagan and alien kingdoms. Surely the entire picture is no more than a highly figurative expression of the hope that in this world and within the processes of history the Jewish people, as custodians of the highest religion, would attain permanent national power, supreme throughout the world. The result, it is true, was to be realized through direct action of God. But then the entire Old Testament thought, we have pointed out, was based on a conviction of God's activity in history. There remains still to be reckoned with, some remnant of expectation of miraculous action: it was inescapable in that age; however, as we may note once again, ancient miracles were much simpler than their modern protagonists would have them, and much closer to natural processes. Besides, it was not an unusual expectation, for the miraculous permeated the natural with constant irruption of the wondrous: an insight of profound truth and relevance for even the modern world. Thus through a wealth of colorful imagery the Biblical writers were telling that processes such as have functioned in all ages will ultimately bring a wonderful day when right will be finally and permanently triumphant all the world around. Then, and in this sense, the kingdom of God will become a reality on earth.

Here we reach the climax of the Hebrew philosophy of history. We have noted their conviction that the supreme fact of history is God and his power and purposes. He is directing affairs in some mysterious way such that men and nations retain their freedom and boast only of their own designs, yet through the chaos of a world in flames as well as through the drab days of common times when vested wrong seems invincible, God is bringing to pass his purposes. Briefly, their conviction was that history has meaning and that it is a moral and spiritual meaning -- "spiritual" as related to the highest human values. So much is clear from the writings of the Hebrew historians and from the preaching of the prophets. And the outcome is implied: surely such a process of history moves on to a glorious culmination. Fortunately we are not left to deduction; what we surmise is presented unmistakably, although in colorful imagery, in the eschatological passages. Nature and history, though distinct, converge in the unified meaning that the life of man is moving on to better things.

Yet there remains still another unanswered question. Once history has reached such a culmination, will its linear process then give way to a static condition? Is there nothing more to hope or expect when the kingdom of God has come save only to sit and sing ourselves away to everlasting bliss -- a prospect not particularly attractive to the restless spirit of man? Conclusions here are more conjectural. Various Biblical writers entertained the hope that the Lord would take away the stony heart from his people and give them a heart of flesh, or in differing terms, that he would write his law on their hearts. This might be interpreted in the extreme form that the great eschatological event would completely transform mankind into perfect beings -- if anyone can say what such creatures would be. Then, obviously, when perfection is reached, there is nothing beyond; all one can hope is to maintain his position at

that high level. However, our conclusions in regard to the nature of the eschatological event cast very serious doubts upon this. There is ground to believe that the Hebrew thinkers, if we could cross-question them, would reply, "Well now, I never thought about that! But since you raise the question, why certainly there will be the same sort of progress in the new age as is apparent and necessary on this side of it."

The Biblical philosophy of history never envisaged the termination of history and some vague and mythical era or existence "beyond history." The notable wholesomeness and realism, so characteristic of the Hebrew mind, manifested itself here likewise. They conceived of human life as moving on and on to ever better things -- better things in terms of social ethics, and ethics, in turn, in a cosmic setting, as expressive of the deep nature of man and of the world: in their terms, of the will of God. When and how the progress would end and what then would happen, they simply did not trouble to speculate.

Suggested Readings:

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The Old Testament, Keystone of Human Culture by William F. Irwin

William A. Irwin was Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at Southern Methodist University, formerly Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at the University of Chicago. He is the author of The Problem of Ezekiel, and The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, and many other books. This material was published by Abelard-Schuman, London and New York, 1959. Prepared for Religion-Online by Paul & Shirley Mobley.

Chapter 7: Nation, Society, and Politics

The Israelites thought of themselves as a nation centered about a fusion of the ideas of their common ancestry and of the covenant with their God. Neither of these is as simple as it might appear. According to the tradition, God had called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, had led him to Palestine, and there had promised him a numerous offspring who should become a mighty nation and possess the land in which he was then a foreigner. The promise was renewed on various occasions, notably in the great experience at Sinai, and its character as a covenant with dual responsibilities became clear. In simplest terms, Israel was to be the people of Yahweh, and he was to be their God. Their allegiance implied rejection of all other gods and service of him alone in ritual and in national and social obedience. On the other hand, he, as their God, was responsible to fulfil the promise to give them the land, to make them a great people, and to bestow upon them material bounty, physical well being, and spiritual content.

But difficulty arises when one seeks to trace these ideas back into the nation's early history. Once more exploring the evidence of the old sources in the Book of Judges, to our astonishment we find neither of these supposedly basic notions of Israel's common life. Unquestionably there was some unifying bond among the clans and tribes of that time; equally it had resemblances to both these ideas; yet it was far short of either. Israel's sense of a common interest by which various groups united in face of danger was evidently a conviction of essential unity such as would imply, especially for that time and region, a common ancestry. But nowhere is it mentioned, even in vague terms. It may be that the omission is due to circumstances which rob it of significance, yet the fact that the older sources in Samuel manifest the same oversight and that one goes on as far as the prophetic histories and then to the writing prophets for indubitable evidence of belief in a common ancestry strengthens the suspicion that things were not what later writers would have us believe. Further, although the names "Israel" and "Jacob" are familiar designations for the nation and descent from Jacob is spoken of, mention of Abraham

outside the Pentateuch is astonishingly rare until a quite late time. Since the old narrative documents incorporated in the Pentateuch, commonly designated J and E, according to orthodox criticism were already in existence before the age of the prophets, it is strange that these writers should pass over the impressive account of Abraham's call and the promise to him. References to the nation's history commonly reach back to the oppression in Egypt and the Exodus, in some cases to the career of Jacob; but back of that all is blank. The meaning of this situation is difficult to appraise. One solution might be that the J-E stories of Abraham represent a little-known tradition which only through the growing prestige of the proto-Pentateuch won general acceptance about the time of the Exile, but familiarity with the story of Jacob was somewhat old.

However this may be, it is apparent that descent from Jacob could have been just as satisfactory as a basis of national coherence as an Abrahamic theory. Even accepting this presumably lesser view, complications are not yet at an end; for it was freely recognized by Hebrew writers that this theory was threadbare; we are told in no uncertain terms that the nation was not of common ancestry. A great mixed multitude went with the Hebrews out of Egypt and clearly amalgamated with them. In the conquest large numbers of Canaanites were not exterminated -- not even conquered; but the Canaanites dwelt with the various tribes to the day of the historian (Judg. 1:21 ff.). Eventually Solomon enslaved the last of them, but in the meantime the result of their living side by side was frequent intermarriage, as the laws make clear. Yet such mixing of the blood of Israel was not in defiance of public conscience; it was condoned and legalized. The story of Ruth the Moabitess is symbolic of a free intercourse which the ancient writer finds no basis for criticizing. The prohibition of admission of Ammonites and Moabites into the assembly of the Lord unto the tenth generation (Dent. 23:3) carries clear implication that they were acceptable after this long probation and that others came in more freely, as indeed is stated of Egyptians and Edomites in the sequel to this passage (vs. 8). Even the relatively late Priestly document provided that the sojourner who consented to be circumcised would be permitted to eat the Passover and would be accepted as of the status of the native-born. The doors were thus thrown wide open to proselytizing, and its prevalence in the centuries about the beginning of the Christian Era is well known.

The implication is apparent. The Israelites recognized, just as modern historians also, that as a nation they were highly composite; lineal descent from Abraham or from Jacob was a pleasant fiction to which some central reality was attached, but it was in no sense the test of membership in the commonwealth of Israel. This depended rather on personal faith and conduct. The foreigner who submitted to circumcision and who manifested loyalty to Israel's faith and institutions became a good Israelite; to employ a famous phrase of a later writer, he was grafted into the stock of Abraham. Paul was once again expounding the best thought of his people when he distinguished between Israel after the flesh and after the spirit. In final essence, membership in the nation Israel was a spiritual matter; it was a question of loyalty. A phrase in the Song of Deborah expresses the final essence of Israelite nationality: Israel was "the people of Yahweh."

The problem of the covenant is similar. It became so popular in later literature of the Old Testament that even critical scholars indorse the delusion that Israel from the first shaped its thought on the basis of a covenant with Yahweh. Yet the fact is that the idea is absent from early sources. The Song of Deborah speaks, at the most, in the phrase just now quoted, of "the people of Yahweh" (Judg. 5:11). The word *brith* ("covenant") occurs, it is true, in an unquestionably early source in the Book of Judges; but it is in the name, or title, of the Shechemite god, Baal Berith (Judg. 8:33; 9:4). Still this may not be invoked as collateral support of the idea of Israel's religious covenant, for the title may mean no more than that this god was patron and guardian of agreements. More to the point is the occurrence of the word in connection with Israel's sacred ark in the account of the capture of this by the Philistines (I Sam. 4:3-5) and of its transfer to Jerusalem in David's reign (II Sam. 6:17). It is, however, meager and questionable evidence for the theological idea commonly postulated. Specific mention of Israel's covenant with Yahweh occurs first in the Book of Hosea, two of which allusions are evidently genuine (Hos. 6:7; 8:1). The idea is absent from Isaiah and Micah but is referred to a number of times in the utterances of Jeremiah; then, as is well known, it becomes one of the great emphases of Deuteronomy. When we recall that Hosea lived not long after the ascribed dates of composition of the J and E documents, the situation becomes relatively clear. The notion of a covenant between God and Israel was introduced by these "prophetic histories"; it was indorsed by Hosea, adopted by Jeremiah, and in Deuteronomy became an essential element of Israel's theology.

But the objection obtrudes itself that specific mention is not the whole story, for the covenant is implicit in much of the early thought: in the rallying of the tribes in Yahweh's name in the time of the Judges, in their consciousness as "the people of Yahweh," and much else of the sort. To this one can but give hearty assent. Certainly the J and E writers and their successors who made so much of the idea did not create it out of pure imagination. The concept was implicit from a very early period. But such implication sets the whole notion on a very different basis from that usually ascribed. For it destroys the uniqueness of Israel's claim and makes the notion of divine covenant a normal feature of contemporary religious thought. The relation of Yahweh to the scattered tribes of the Judges' time was, so far as we can see, purely that of the national god. There is no reason to postulate any essential difference at this time between the attitude of Israel to her God and that of Moab or Ammon or Edom or any other nation to Chemosh, Milcom, or whatever other appropriate deity. The idea of a national god carried in it the concept of a covenant between the god and his people. It was Israel's uniqueness to develop this into the notable form and religious worth of her doctrine of the divine covenant. This became in turn a very powerful motivation; nonetheless, the covenant was secondary in Israel's religious and ethical evolution.

Somewhere along this line of development of the pagan national-god idea into the ethical doctrine of the covenant there entered the concept of the divine choice of Israel that was destined to become the distinctive feature of the nation's thought of itself. Again we are to see it as implicit ever since the origin of the simplest forms of the belief in a national god; but, like the covenant idea itself, it attained an exaltation such as to make of it a new thing. The simplest

statement, and perhaps the original, of the doctrine is the story of the divine call of Abraham (Genesis, chap. 12); but altogether its greatest formulation is in the Book of Deuteronomy, where it is presented as an act of God's free grace. Because of his love for Israel he chose them when they were few and were the smallest nation of the earth -- they possessed no merit, they had no claim upon God: of his free will he bestowed upon them his love and chose them as his own people (Dent. 7:6-8). It must be recognized that in this, not less than in the concept of the covenant, there was profound ethical content which religious leaders were not slow to apply for the vitalizing of the religion of nation and individual, several of them commenting on the astonishing fact that Israel was a peculiar treasure of God.

Here was the essence and being of Israel's sense of uniqueness. Her God had chosen her out of all the nations of the world and had entered into an intimate relation with her, such as no other people enjoyed. It was the reality of the historic faith, as distinct from a nature-faith, of which we have spoken. Such consciousness of peculiarity pervades the Old Testament. One cannot but be impressed with its clear expression in a document so relatively early as one of the Balaam oracles: "Lo it is a people that dwelleth alone and is not reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9). It voices precisely that sense of difference in which anti-Semitism through its whole long course has found its real origin and provocation and which to this day continues, among the ignorant or bigoted, to make the Jewish people an object of suspicion and persecution.

But all nations to some extent consider themselves unique. Some of the most notable expressions of this in all history have been manifest in the tragic events of recent times. But, too, these exaggerations have sufficed to reveal similar arrogance in our own thought. Israel's faith in herself was basically but a manifestation of this universal human trait. She, too, believed in a unique character and a glorious destiny; she clung to hopes of world leadership, if not actually political or military domination. Yet we understand the Hebrew doctrine of "the peculiar people" in terms not of its identity but of its distinctive feature, and this is not far to seek. The vital root, as well as the essence of the Hebrew sense of difference, was the uniqueness of Israel's God. One of the poets well expressed this, remarking of the hostile gentile nations: "For their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges" (Deut. 32:31). It was a profound insight. Whatever hypercriticism may say of the arrogance of the dogma of the divine choice and the peculiar people, it cannot be denied that at this point we touch solid reality. Israel's God was vastly different from the deities of all other nations, and Israel was, as a fact of history, the people of God. It was Israel's proper realization of this superiority and of her own uniqueness in her faith and worship of this God that constituted her separateness. No other course was possible but that Israel should "come out from among" the nations and be separate unless she would be recreant to her spiritual heritage and apostate from her best self.

Nevertheless, in spite of the interpretations offered by liberal thought, ancient or modern, the doctrine of divine choice did in actuality work out as a prolific source of national arrogance. How could it have done otherwise, the Hebrews being of a human fallibility such as our own?

Yet there were not lacking thinkers who pointed out the more profound meaning of their special relationship as a special responsibility. A writer in the Book of Amos has the Lord warn Israel:

You only have I known
of all the clans of the earth;
therefore will I visit upon you
all your iniquities (Amos 3:2).

The meaning of the divine choice of Israel as better minds came to understand it was revealed in the call of Isaiah. In his great initial experience as a prophet he heard the voice of the Lord, not in a personal call to himself, but in a general appeal: "Whom shall send and who will go for us?" And Isaiah's call lay in the fact that, having heard, he responded: "Here am I; send me." The Lord's work waited to be done; who was able and willing to undertake it? That was the essence of Isaiah's call -- and of the call of Israel as well. The divine election was not for privilege or arrogant separateness, but to service. The Lord's work waited to be done!

The greatness of the Servant Songs of Second Isaiah in this regard is so well known that exposition is unnecessary. Israel's divinely appointed destiny was that she should be "a light to the Gentiles." The same thought is vividly enforced in the story of the recalcitrant prophet Jonah. And numerous other passages cherish this vision of Israel's high call and responsibility. In her knowledge of God she had a treasure of such serene exaltation that she might not, at peril of her soul, retain it as hers alone. The greatness of her experience compelled that Israel share her best with all.

The place of foreign nations in Hebrew thought is the counterpart of the doctrine of the peculiar people. The bitter hatreds, the imprecations, the ruthless slaughters that are recorded in many a page of the Old Testament, call for no recapitulation but only understanding of the brutal world of which Israel was a part. Even the Psalter, the voice as it is of Israel's deepest spiritual experiences and aspirations, has many a passage less in intensity but of similar mood to the terrible curse:

O daughter of Babylon who art to be
destroyed .
happy shall he be that taketh and
dasheth
thy little ones against the rock (Ps.137:8, 9).

Yet better things are apparent even from the days of the conquest, when Joshua spared the Gibeonites. The kings readily and frequently entered into friendly relations with neighbor nations. However, the function which religion strangely has very often served of creating divisions and animosities was manifest as early as the time of Elijah, when the prophets denounced and threatened Ahab for leniency toward the defeated Ben-Hadad. But our interest is

in the attitudes of the religious group after doctrines of the covenant, the divine election, and the peculiar people had taken firm hold of their thought.

The separatism induced by the religion of even some of the best thinkers in the time of the kingdoms is apparent in the attitude of Isaiah, for example, who definitely feared contamination of the religion of Yahweh by close relations with foreign nations. The high emphasis given this warning by the Deuteronomic school is familiar to every student of the Old Testament. Still, a more liberal mood existed even in that time, as evidenced by Amos' famous pronouncement as to the equality of Philistines and Syrians with the Hebrews in the sight of God (Amos 9:7).

Both these attitudes found yet more pronounced expression in the later time. The separation of Judah was a prime policy of Nehemiah and Ezra and became an aspect of the thought of the following centuries. Yet a full understanding of the situation qualifies in a marked degree the obloquy which the modern temper has been prone to offer all these. Certainly Nehemiah and Ezra, and presumably the leaders of the ritual movement likewise, took their course through an apprehension as well based as that which had functioned in the days of the prophets. The paganism of the Jewish group at Elephantine, a fair index as it probably is of the religion of most Palestinian Jews of the fifth century B.C. -- and certainly we cannot postulate a better attainment of the neighboring Samaritans -- constitutes vivid commentary on the work of the Jewish reformers. It was against such conditions that they set up their stringent restraints. And, to be fair to them, what other course was practical? A genial affability would have resulted, beyond a doubt, in that contamination and dissipation of Jewish religion which they feared. And Judaism through the remaining pre-Christian centuries, even when the state became strong in Palestine, lived in immediate contact with self-confident heathenism. The reality and persistence of its problem are apparent to one who will read with insight the restrictions in the tractate, Aboda Zara. Yet, as symptomatic of the mood of Jewish religion when its very existence was not imperiled, it is to be noted that the Priestly document is in some regards the most liberal strand in the Pentateuch. Its provision for admission of loyal sojourners into Judaism has already been noted.

We have mentioned the universalism of Second Isaiah. Dreamer as this poet was, he could well picture glowing ideals which the practical men of affairs might struggle toward only as time and circumstance would permit. The truth of his vision and the greatness of his achievement are not disparaged when it is recognized that his dreams were impossible of realization in that time. They were the seed of the future, which in fact did produce bounteous harvest. But their time of fruitage was not in his day. Still, initiated by his utterances, there ensued, as Doctor Morgenstern of Hebrew Union College has pointed out, a notable mood of universalism in Jewish thought from which there are numerous passages of broad humanitarianism in the latter chapters of the Book of Isaiah and in the Minor Prophets. The length to which these thinkers went may well surprise us. They seem frankly to have abandoned all claims of Jewish privilege, holding only for a faithful loyalty to Israel's God. In every nation, they believed, there were those who served the Lord, and his name was honored throughout the world. The foreigner,

also, who joined himself to the Lord to minister to him and to love his name would come to the Temple in Jerusalem with all the rights of native-born Jews and there would rejoice in worship in the house that would be called a house of prayer for all peoples. This movement seems to have been most powerful in the sixth and fifth centuries. Then the success of the reform of Ezra changed the aspect of Jewish thought; but not its essence, for the ideals of this expansive period lived on to moderate the stringency of ritual particularism and to offer promise of wider vision when the destined moment should arrive.

Discussion of this topic would be incomplete without mention of the work of the wise men. They were characteristically international in their attitude. They were the scholars of the ancient world, and scholarship is always larger than nationalism. The theism of the Hebrew Wisdom Movement has already been described. Like the scholars of the Renaissance, these religious men saw no contradiction in being at the same time humanists. Their work in reinterpreting the dogmas of orthodoxy and in mitigating its rigidity will come to mind with the mere mention of Ecelesiasticus, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the work of Philo.

But while these questions were demanding solution, other aspects of Hebrew corporate life likewise posed acute issues. The nation, in its internal aspect, that is, as society, underwent profound changes which precipitated problems for the Hebrew thinkers.

We do not know the cultural background and ethnic origins of the tribes that took part in the movement which we know best as Joshua's conquest of Palestine, yet the influence of the Arabian Desert was strong upon them, if we may judge from such information as we possess of their social life in the immediately following period. And certainly nomadic influence continued a potent force in Israel's life, reinforced by the steady infiltration of desert wanderers who entered and lived much as Abraham had done many centuries before. The process has continued to the present; the black tents of the nomads pitched in convenient spots as far west as the shoulder of Carmel at the entrance to the Plain of Accho are, for those who can understand, among the revealing sights of modern Palestine.

Life in the desert, with its loneliness, its sparseness and transience resulting in insecurity, has through unnumbered centuries induced characteristic social forms. Life centers itself in the tribe and clan: outside, insecurity quickly attains the point of extinction. Survival is a matter of social strength. There result the characteristic features of nomadic life -- group solidarity, blood covenant, blood revenge, and hospitality. The persistence of these into Israel's life in Palestine is evidenced by many incidents and allusions of which it suffices to mention the national consequence of Achan's trespass and the execution of his entire family with him (Joshua, chap. 7); the hanging of the seven descendants of King Saul to relieve the drought that afflicted the land, so it was believed, because of the king's wrongdoing (II Sam. 21:1-11) ; also the numerous instances of blood feud (e.g., II Sam. 3:27-30; 14:5-7) or of blood guilt (e.g., I Sam. 25:33; I Kings 21:19). Notwithstanding the persistence of these attitudes, especially among certain groups, altered conditions of life in Palestine soon began their moderating influence. The

solidarity of the social group is not typical of peasant life. On the contrary, the tiller of the soil is by nature a stubborn individualist. Further, agricultural life, centering as it did in the country villages or, during times of danger, in walled towns, conduced rather to community than to communal life, with foreshadowing of even city organization. Still, the old patriarchal institutions were not completely unsuited to land tenure, and through these early centuries the idea of family possession took such firm hold as to be written into the laws and to provide the background for the colorful incident of Jezebel's theft of Naboth's ancestral property. The revolution in Hebrew society (for it was nothing less) which presently came about was inaugurated by King David. When he captured the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem and made it the capital of his united kingdom, he set in motion forces of which clearly he had no conception; and, although in his own person he soon succumbed to certain of them, he could not have anticipated the distance to which they were to carry Israelite society.

Briefly, the process was the urbanization of Hebrew life. The term is a deliberate overstatement, for, to the end, life in Palestine remained basically agricultural. Yet the change that began with David, confined as it was first to Jerusalem and then to other cities and royal residences, in course of time transformed Hebrew society, leaving only vestiges of the old institutions. The change began with the court. The king surrounded himself with a coterie of supporters and military officers, then presently with a considerable and growing harem which in turn attracted hangers-on -- in more respectful terms, courtiers -- who lived by the favor of the king and by their own shrewdness. But the court and camp were not insulated against the city. David and his men were hardy outlaws who knew the wild lands of the Negeb better than the graces of city life. But with their success they found themselves the "upper class" in an old city whose institutions and habits long antedated the coming of Israel into the land. The luxury and indulgence of city life soon softened the hardihood of the king, certainly, and, it is fair to conclude, of his followers also. But the city had its aristocracy also and its classes in descending order. And apart from the old military clique of the Jebusites, which evidently was wiped out or absorbed by the Hebrew captors of the city, it was a loose organization based on commerce, industry, and probably religion.

Under Solomon the influences of court and city flourished. Indeed, the fame of his days is to be understood largely in terms of the development of urban life. His immense building program laid the ground for a huge class of temple and palace officials and servants. Not less indicative of the changes taking place were his commercial ventures; royal monopolies they were, but still indicative of what was to continue in some form through the following centuries. The king's mining and smelting activity in Edom was likewise adapted to alter deeply the outlook and structure of his kingdom, a result that we dimly discern through the biblical historian's enthusiastic account of the wealth of the age. With this there went political changes that must be surveyed more systematically in a moment; for the present we are concerned primarily with the practical enslavement of hosts of Hebrew tribesmen. We are told that they were only Canaanites whom the king so employed, but elsewhere it is made clear that his own fellow-Hebrews were by no means exempt.

The outcome, as everyone knows, was the revolt under Rehoboam. The northern tribesmen demanded restoration of their ancient rights. On the king's refusal they set up a state which at first seems to have fulfilled their objective of freedom from city domination and from an oppressive court, but within half a century matters in the north were every whit as bad as in Judah. The same forces -- commercial and industrial development and the inescapable trends of city life -- operated in both. Samaria was as Jerusalem. North and south alike, the ancient social structure was breaking down, and life was conforming to its new facts. The culmination came in the eighth century. The immediately conducive forces were the hundred years' war with Syria and the ensuing tranquillity of the time of Jeroboam II. The social features of the time are familiar to every student of the prophecies of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. At one extreme was a selfish and indolent group of courtiers and idle rich living their parasite life of drunken revelry; at the other, the peasantry and poorer workers whose slavery was not merely that of an income below a living standard, but sank even to the unqualified legal sort. And between these upper and lower levels a numerous class of greedy business folk cheated and swindled one another and whoever else might fall within their power. Little wonder thoughtful persons of the age looked back to the good old days of simplicity. Israelite society had departed far from the rude equity of its times of patriarchal institutions.

The fatalism of the Orient and social despair such as that voiced by Ecclesiastes in a later age did not preclude efforts at reform. It would have been strange if there were not at that time some who as in every age advocated a solution by the simple process of turning back the clock. The good old days were those of rustic, or even nomadic, society; then away with the city and all its distortions! The Rechabite movement, although not founded in a mood of reform, clearly did mean, however, for the Rechabites themselves deliverance from current evils by the too easy course of denying civilization. "Remain Bedouin," Jonadab ben Rechab had commanded his descendants; and, faithful to patriarchal authority, they followed this plan for centuries. It is rather more surprising to discover that this attitude found acceptance even among the prophets. It was Elijah's temper; Hosea held up the ideal of a time when Israel should once again live in tents; and some writer whose words we have in the seventh chapter of the Book of Isaiah apparently believed that the land's reversion to wilderness and its inhabitants' return to hunting would solve the problems of his time. But civilization cannot be voluntarily thwarted, nor can its evils be escaped by evasion. Israel's thinkers were not all Gandhis. Some believed in direct political action; it is noteworthy, however, that after the revolt in the days of Rehoboam this method was tried again only once. But then, Jehu's conduct, though instigated by the prophets, was roundly denounced in the sequel.

Two other solutions were advanced by different groups. It was characteristic of Israelite life that the liberal-minded did not throw up their hands in despair, nor yet accept the situation with pseudopious resignation. They confronted it as a social situation that cried out for action. In this they were not without antecedent. Urukagina in Sumer had sought reform through legislation many centuries before, and six hundred years after his time Hammurabi of Babylon had renewed the effort. The musings of the Egyptian seer Ipuwer evidenced the same social stirring,

although in the end his prophecy dissipated itself largely in wishful thinking; but the author of the speeches of the Eloquent Peasant was of more vigorous mood. Nonetheless, the contribution of the Hebrew prophets toward social reform was such as to set them in a class apart. In their compelling earnestness, in their intensity of conviction, in their penetrating insights and ethical elevation, they were a crowning glory of the cultures of the ancient East; and they retain to this day a high place among the great of all ages. The prophets' solution of the social problem was simple, yet incisive. Social betterment is to be brought about by personal reform. Remake the selfish and dishonest, and you will have an ideal society: Jerusalem will be redeemed with righteousness and then become a faithful town.

Now it was no accident that the prophets threw the social problem back upon the individual's character. For by their genius they were individualists. And one of their great contributions to Israel's thinking was in this regard. While undertaking to combat the results of Israel's long development away from the nomadic social structure, they actually contributed the final element in making a return to the old thinking forever impossible. The individual had been emerging from his absorption in the group ever since the days of the first settlement in the land, but the prophetic experience provided new impetus for the developments. The essence of prophecy was its personal relation with God. The prophet received his messages, so he was convinced, not out of law or tradition, but through his own individual experience in which he heard the Lord speaking to himself. Accordingly, he stood before king, priest, and people and, on his own unsupported conviction that he as a person possessed invaluable truths denied to all others, hurled his denunciations and directions in opposition to accepted standards and conduct. The prophetic experience, not less than the prophet's words, became the basis of religion of the later age, in time absorbing into itself other expressions of piety. The personal quality of the Psalms which has made them to this day the great classic of inner religion is but the extension to every devout believer of the prophets' experience of the reality of God in individual life.

Such, then, is the meaning of the prophets' advocacy of reform through personal regeneration. Still, its real worth we grasp best, it may be, by reference to the hope voiced in a late time. For the doctrine of the law written on the heart (Jer. 31 :33) will be recognized as nothing less than the hope that this experience known first by the prophets should in time become the possession of every faithful soul.

The weakness of the prophetic program of reform was that, in modern phrase, it lacked teeth. The appeal to the thought and conscience of his audience -- ultimately the only means to the reform of thought or conduct and justified in the religious history of succeeding centuries -- was, for the time of the prophet himself, largely futile. It is always difficult to the point of impossibility to appraise correctly a contemporary who departs from accepted procedures. The prophets met with little success; the majority of their compatriots thought them misguided nuisances. Their reforms did not come about, save only after centuries and then imperfectly. But the legislator is a man of a different approach. He intends, and he takes steps to see to it, that his policies shall be put to practical use. Nonetheless, the reforms of Asa, Joash, and Hezekiah

accomplished nothing of social significance. Their objectives were cultic, not ethical, an illuminating fact in itself as showing that social ethics had not yet seized the conscience of the rulers. But not so the reformers to whom we are indebted for one of the truly great bodies of Israel's literature, the Book of Deuteronomy. This is, as the name happily indicates, a recapitulation -- better, a revision -- of the old social legislation of Israel. It is relevant to our present interest that the date commonly assigned to the basic core of the book is late in the eighth century or sometime in the first three quarters of the seventh; consequently, it was aimed at ameliorating contemporary conditions of the sort sketched above.

These legislators were profoundly conscious of the social problem. Their revision of the old laws in favor of the poor and underprivileged provides many interesting features. The recension of the Decalogue (Deut. 5 :6-21), although perhaps not properly a part of the original work, is drawn into its temper. In contrast to the familiar law of the Sabbath that enjoins observance because the Lord rested on the seventh day and hallowed it, the Deuteronomic law gives as the reason a recollection of the enslavement in Egypt and consideration for the manservant and maidservant so that they, as well as their master, may enjoy a Sabbath's rest. In the code proper the old agricultural prescription for a sabbatic year of fallow is transformed into a year of cancellation of debt, or it may be only a year of grace from its collection. The tithe of the third year is to be laid up in a city where the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow may come and partake freely. In the communal festivals of the religious seasons and the payment of tithes, these same classes of indigent, along with the male and female slaves, are to share in the rejoicing, apparently provided for by the bounty of their more fortunate neighbors. Notable, too, is the new regulation of slavery. For the first time the Hebrew woman slave is permitted to share in the manumission at the end of six years of service. Still more striking, liberated slaves are to be given generously of their masters' produce, a clear effort to meet the situation where formerly the slave, after his years of service, went out into society as poor as he had been six years before and hence liable soon to lose his freedom again. Significant is the fact that this generosity is not to be in niggardly spirit, for "thou shalt remember that thou wast a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."

How far these expedients were effective in relieving the suffering of the time it is not possible to calculate. At the worst they promise as much as our modern expedients of soup kitchens and bread lines in time of economic stress. The malady was too deep for superficial treatment, however. Poverty has origins and causes which it ought to be possible to isolate and perhaps remedy. It is not less than astonishing that these social thinkers of twenty-five centuries ago recognized this fact. In addition to the palliatives just now sketched, Deuteronomy goes to the heart of the matter with a frontal assault on the problem of poverty. The solution offered may seem nothing but a pietistic leap into supernaturalism: "There shall be no poor with thee. . . if only thou diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God to observe to do all this commandment which I command thee this day" (Deut. 15:4, 5). Yet the statement deserves further examination. In its context, "all this commandment" was a comprehensive program; it was nothing less than full social equity. There are probably few today who would deny that if all

would "diligently observe to do" such a command, poverty in a land of plenty would become a matter of relative bounty. The crux of the matter is how to implement such a principle. The writer hints at a partial method in his repeated exhortations to consideration for the underprivileged. But the conditions of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. did not obtrude upon the writer's attention the complement of this in a total social program.

It will be apparent that by this time the old social solidarity of the days of the conquest was extinct, save for some vestigial ideas. It is not at all surprising, then, that the concept of individual responsibility in religion was formulated in definitive statement, first briefly by Jeremiah, and then somewhat more fully by Ezekiel. It would seem that Ezekiel was in this, as in so much of his prophetic teaching, directly indebted to his older contemporary, his own contribution being merely that of expressing the idea in a form that seized upon general thought. The circumstances conducing to the enunciation of the doctrine at this time can be conjectured, if not certainly identified. The impelling consideration for both prophets seems to have been the disintegration of the nation, which obviously threw the individual out into relief. More specifically, the warnings and reproof of the succession of prophets through several centuries, often directed immediately toward personal conduct and always implying such application, had borne fruitage in a realization that the individual's righteousness depended, not on his membership in the nation, but on his response to the prophet's message. A group of immediate followers and friends of the prophets, their "disciples," to use Isaiah's word (Isa. 8 :16), successors to the older protomonastic organization of the "sons of the prophets," had embodied the thought in living form as a sort of "church" within the state. In this there was visibly existent precisely that individually centered society, in embryo, which the teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel indicated as the hope of survival beyond the imminent ruin of the nation. Their thought may well have been fertilized also with a realization of the unequal responsibility for this catastrophe, such as would compel consideration of corresponding recompense. But, finally, much depended on the personal characters of these two prophets. Jeremiah was a deeply sensitive man, who wrestled with a sense of personal injustice; and Ezekiel was moved by a feeling for the individuals for whose safety he was by his office responsible.

Notwithstanding its long antecedents, Ezekiel's formulation of the doctrine of individualism in religion was still sufficiently new to provoke the excesses that usually attend novelty. Certain commentators on his book have stereotyped it into essentially a mechanical procedure that automatically works retribution or reward in accord with the individual's conduct (Ezek. 18:5-32; 33:12-20). No regard is shown for the conditioning of heredity, habit, and circumstance, which other thinkers had considered; but the judgment is flat: if one does such and so, he is wicked; he shall die!

However, the concept of the primacy of the individual in religion worked out in a much more wholesome way than these passages might indicate. And the whole problem of the antithesis and interrelation of society and individual, which has so recently been an issue of the first importance in world-wide politics and must continue with us for many a day, was given very

sane treatment in the course of Jewish history. Enough of the traditional emphasis on the supremacy of society persisted, if only as an influence, to insure avoidance of the atomism which has cursed our society. Judaism was, and remained, a community, expressing its characteristic life and convictions in social institutions. But yet the individual was never submerged. The long list of brilliant names in every walk of life that embellish Jewish history to our own day are sufficient testimony to the vitality of individualism within Judaism. Yet they were rooted and nurtured in the Jewish community. They were its expression and outreach; and, in turn, it gave them a concrete loyalty, a vitalizing devotion, and a transcendent purpose.

The development of Israel's politics paralleled closely that of her social thought. In several cases the same documents or recorded incidents have relevance for both.

Here, too, the deficiency of our knowledge of the invading Habiru clansmen qualifies the approach to the question. The Amarna letters appear to mention certain chieftains of the invaders, but the means of their appointment and the nature of their office we do not know. One might invoke Bedouin rule as parallel, but the better course is to drop the problem for lack of evidence and go on to our earliest sources for Israel's life after the settlement in Palestine. These reveal clan and community organization under elders who apparently exercised judicial as well as executive functions. It was a primitive democracy, uncritical and unconscious, for there is no ground to suppose other than that every senior member of the group was admitted to the governing body purely on the basis of his age. The decisions of these were apparently reached through free discussion of a most informal sort. The operation of such a ruling group is pictured in the story of Boaz' negotiations for the redemption of Naomi's property (Ruth 4:1-12); the narrative is presumably from a comparatively late time, but the councils of elders persisted in the smaller communities right through Old Testament history, so there is ground for believing that the author relates practice with which he was familiar.

But the stress of circumstance compelled the coalescence of the smaller groups of clans and tribes into some approximation of a national unity. This is the story of the rise of successive "judges" and of their rule. Their election to leadership again exemplified primitive democracy. The basic fact was their ability to lead and to deal with the crises of the moment. This was variously manifest; at times through known repute, as in the case of J ephthah; again by spontaneous response to the situation which lifted the erstwhile peasant out of his mediocre role into an exhibition of power and decision that doubtless surprised him not less than his associates. Probably physical prowess was in some cases the desired qualification. The point that concerns us is that, by whatever means, the "judge" won the free consent and loyal following of the clans, so that they accepted his command and under him went against the foe.

It was inevitable that success such as is related of these champions would give them lifelong prestige, and so they "judged Israel" variously for ten, twenty, or forty years. But in only two cases is a tendency revealed to turn this advantage into hereditary rule. It was offered to Gideon, but he refused. Observe, it was *offered* to him: the initiative was with the people. The terms of

the refusal, too, are of interest. He replied: "I shall not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you." If we may beg the doubtful question of the genuineness of the passage, we may recognize in it again an expression of primitive democracy. The unifying bond as well as guiding principle of the tribes had been their loyalty to their God: neither monarch, priest, nor organization had held them together, but all responded when their God spoke through the one chosen by him to save his people. And Gideon, recognizing well that spiritual bonds are mightier than political regimentation, desired to leave matters as they were. However, his son Abimelech felt no such restraints. He was a typical self-seeking upstart of the sort that has made history -- and trouble -- through many a century, and his story runs true to the type as known in our own days. First he secured by specious argument a following in the city of Shechem and then broadened and supported his rule by violence -- until at length violence in turn happily removed him. But in the meantime his venture was symptomatic of the situation. So it is not at all surprising that presently another popularly chosen leader, after succeeding in the crisis that had called him forth, was frankly acclaimed as king, perhaps through the scheming of his friends; but also it is entirely possible that he was chosen by spontaneous action of the associated tribes who actually felt, as it recorded in a late account of the incident, that the exigencies of the disordered time required them to have a king, as did other nations. In any case, Saul was "the last of the judges and the first of the kings." Whether or not it was envisaged at the time of his choice, he came to believe that hereditary right lodged in his family. And, in point of fact, his son did succeed him.

Saul maintained simple state at his country capital. He was more a rustic squire than a nation's monarch. He was highhanded and arbitrary at times, yet not more so than many a father unfortunately has shown himself in his own family, and he manifested little inclination to enlarge the prerogatives of his office by encroachment on traditional rights of his people. He did, it is true, refuse to be a mere underling of the old "kingmaker," Samuel, for which he merits general respect. Somewhat more insidious, however, were his attempt to establish the ascendancy of the throne over the priests and his jealous concern for his family's succession as revealed in his rebuke of Jonathan's friendship for David. But, on the whole, his behavior was well within what we may with some exaggeration call the constitutional rights of the monarchy. In the light of developments we can see, as did some ancient writer (I Sam. 8:1-18), that in himself, ex officio, he embodied a stern threat to Israel's political institutions such as to constitute virtually a revolution. But of this Saul personally was largely innocent.

David began well. He likewise was a popular chieftain who by a combination of personal and national exigencies emerged into such importance that he also was offered, and accepted, the throne. The menace from the Philistines was acute. After the disaster at Mount Gilboa, they were in practically undisputed control of all western Palestine; the Israelites lived by their grace. A hardened outlaw loyal to his people, such as David had abundantly shown himself, was just the man for the time. The popular choice was wise, and events soon went far to justify it. His phenomenal success in reversing the ascendancy of the Philistines, in seizing the famous fortress of Jerusalem for his nation's capital, and in extending his sway and influence until he

was the mightiest monarch between the Euphrates and Egypt transformed the face not alone of the Hebrews' cultural status but of their politics also.

Yet David never escaped his origin -- as, who ever does? Something of the soil and of his hardy life clung to him through all his changed condition as a great monarch in an ancient capital. He had risen from the peasantry, and to the end he understood his people and was properly restrained by his knowledge of their stubborn love of freedom and by the nature of his own position as dependent upon them. The sinister forces that played upon the throne in Jerusalem are best seen in the perspective of the entire united monarchy, extending as it did only into a third reign.

An ominous feature, intelligible only in the light of later history, appeared when David abandoned the command of the army in the field, remaining behind in Jerusalem while Joab conducted the campaign. It will be recalled that this was the background of the nefarious Bath-sheba episode. Also it was at just the parallel point in their history that the obvious decay of the Ottoman dynasty set in. But even more pernicious was the influence of the harem -- that breeding-ground of seditions and knavery, as well as the source of the monarch's personal demoralization, in every oriental court through history -- which was firmly established by David and much enlarged by Solomon. It was a harem intrigue that determined the succession of Solomon. And Solomon's son, who at length wrecked the kingdom, was of the second generation of moral decline that this institution had fastened upon the Jerusalem court.

But other and less reprehensible influences were beating upon the king. Success tries the mettle of any man; and David had succeeded beyond fond dreams. Did he ever in self-consciousness recall his simple days as a shepherd boy near Bethlehem and wonder what his old father would think if now he could look in on the estate of his royal son? In any case, ease, luxury, and wealth that in Solomon's days attained a relatively fabulous level, public respect that became adulation, full opportunity to indulge his whims such as easily descends into self-indulgence, and not least the position of king per se all combined to set the king apart from the simple state of the nation's leaders of only a little before. The mystic concepts of the monarchy, to which we have referred, expressed in various forms in the Orient from the divine kingship of Egypt to the mighty monarch, the darling of the gods, as conceived in Mesopotamia, and further the interrelation of king and dying god: these were entailed in some relevant way when Israel set up one of her sons as king. To the concept of the king as a being, in his religious significance, apart from and above his people, we have numerous allusions: Jeremiah refers to public lamentations at the death of a king such as clearly relate them to the ritual of the fertility-god (Jer. 22:18). The seemingly innocent story of Abishag, who was to warm the aged David (I Kings 1:1-4), is suspiciously reminiscent of widespread practices in which the ebbing virility of the old monarch was put to the test, since in his person he embodied the vital forces of the nation. The prevalent school of interpretation of the Psalms would see much of this testing of the king in the plaintive cries of many of these devout poems. Clearly, too, the monarch was regarded in some mystic way as a person more than normal because of the fact that he was the anointed of the Lord. The

application of the holy oil transformed him into another man (I Sam. 10:6) so that he came to stand in an intimate relation with God almost of sonship (Ps. 2:7) and certainly of close association (Psalm 110).

It was, then, not merely from personal ambition, which doubtless functioned, nor because of an exaggerated self-importance induced through unaccustomed flattery, that these kings moved steadily in the direction of arrogation of absolute powers. The development was almost forced upon them; it was inherent in the oriental kingship.

Symptomatic of this was the accession of King Solomon. The earlier kings had been chosen by the people; even for the usurper Absalom the fiction of popular choice was maintained (II Sam. 16:18). But Solomon was appointed by his father, under pressure from the harem. The old king had in his forty years of rule moved so far from principles fully accepted at his accession that he either forgot or chose to ignore the rights of his subjects. The succession had become a prerogative of the royal family. Yet there were danger signals for any ruler not blinded with an exaggerated sense of his regal rights. When David was returning from his brief exile during the sedition of Absalom, there went up the ominous cry destined to be heard once more in a crisis of Israel's history: "We have no portion in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel!" (II Sam. 20:1.) The kingship, whatever the entourage in Jerusalem might think, sat light upon the free men of Israel; and David knew it. He realized the acuteness of the crisis; his prompt action throttled the separatist move and delayed its maturing for another generation. Rehoboam became heir of a problem that he was vastly less fitted to meet than his grandfather had been. Yet, even with full recognition of the folly he manifested, one cannot but feel some sympathy for him. He was a victim of circumstances. How could he, grandson of the harem and its nefarious political influences, have regarded the plea of the peasants as other than an infringement of his sacred rights? The dogma of the divine right of kings had grown apace through Solomon's reign. It is evident in his irresponsible treatment of affairs of state: his public corvee of Israel's free men; his extravagant court supported at the expense of the nation; his administrative division of the land in disregard of traditional tribal bounds; and his whole ingrown life in a court that defied the realities of Israel's basic peasant economy and spent its days in the grand style, with feasting, royal processions, and dilettante scholarship in a setting of magnificent architecture, erected by Israel's peasants, and with women enough for all and to spare.

But we are indebted to Rehoboam for his clear statement of the issue. He had consulted with the older counselors, who apparently retained some sense of political realities, if not actual memory of events in the reign of David; but he accepted the view of the young fellows of the court, his boon companions reared, like himself, in the diseased artificiality of the harem-infested court and doubtless for long anticipating the day when with his enthronement they should do as they pleased. The serious request of the people of the north who lived on the land, far from the blandishments of Jerusalem, was "Lighten now the severe service exacted by your father, and the heavy yoke which he put upon us; then we will serve you." Rehoboam replied: "My father

chastised you with whips; I will chastise you with scorpions." So there it was. Had the people rights? Or only the king? The revolt of the northern tribes was an assertion of the sovereign freedom of the common people. The king stood firmly for the divine right of the king to rule his subjects as he chose. He was above the law: he was the law, and they had no rights beyond. For many today, this claim is associated with the Stuart kings of England; but James I in his *New Law for Free Monarchic*, as were his descendants in their official acts, was dependent on the Old Testament. Whether he realized it or not, he was in the spiritual succession of Rehoboam. Yet if he had studied his Old Testament better, he might have found other matter more pertinent for his heirs, for one of these lost his head through his father's principles, and another, like Rehoboam, lost his kingdom.

Judah, then, by its loyalty to the House of David, was in the position of supporting despotism. And doubtless we are in a qualified way so to read Judean history, for the striking difference of its politics as over against Israel's was the stability of the dynasty. Yet this meant less than the bare fact might suggest. The depositions in the north were seldom the result of quasi-democratic agitation, the revolt of Jehu, inspired by the prophets, being a debatable exception. On the contrary, the accession of a new dynasty came about purely through personal ambition and commonly by violence. The initial impulse of liberty that rejected Rehoboam and set Jeroboam on the throne soon spent itself, and the north became even more the bauble of unprincipled and irresponsible rulers than was Judah. To the end, except for the doubtful case of J ehu's overthrow of the House of Ahab, it provided no further matter relevant to constitutional development. Likewise there is all too little on this subject on the surface of Judean history. The succession of son following father upon the throne, broken only for the interval of Athaliah's usurpation, is related in the colorless terms that he "ruled in his stead"; whatever may have been Judah's ritual counterpart of "The king is dead; long live the king," information is generally lacking. In just three cases, where the monarch had met a violent death, it is told that the people took his son and set him on the throne (II Kings 14:21; 21:24; 23:30). A comparable situation is related in regard to the accession of the boy king Josiah (II Kings 11:4-12). The relation of this to normal procedure of accession is quite uncertain; it lies wide open to guessing. But one matter at least is clear. The consciousness that final authority in the selection of the monarch lay with the people was never abandoned. At most, the right was merely held in abeyance, if indeed we may be certain that it was not exercised or symbolized in each case. That fact means much. After nearly four hundred years of the kingship the Judean people still refused to be regarded as pawns in the game of power politics; they had far-reaching rights -- even against their kings -- which they would not surrender. And those rights, it will be observed, implied the complete democratic position. If the people were the final arbiters of who should rule over them, then authority rested, in the last recourse, not in the king, but in the people, however submissive these might at times consent to show themselves toward the court.

A jealous concern for their traditional prerogatives was kept alive among the people by various agitators, notably the prophets. Nathan's rebuke of David, as Elijah's of Ahab, was a direct denial of the assumptions of divine right and a bold affirmation of the principle that the king

was amenable to the same standards of right, the same pervasive natural law as his humblest subject. Here, too, it is apparent, was the principle basic to the entire attitude of the prophets and other progressive thinkers toward the monarchy: the king ruled, not by divine right, but under divinely imposed responsibility. The radicalism of such thinking, sufficiently evident in the western history of the kingship, is even more astonishing against the background of the cultic concepts of royalty prevalent in Israel. Nonetheless, the king was only the servant of the Lord appointed to shepherd his people Israel. His task was to rule in accord with revealed standards of equity. Samuel's opposition to the kingship, like that of Gideon, on the ground that it was a denial of the Lord's rule of his people, is probably a fiction of a later time; but at least it is true to the undertone of Hebrew political thought throughout the nation's history. The theocracy of late times, in reality the hierocracy, was in its assumptions but a perpetuation of the very ancient thought that Israel was "the people of Yahweh"; they were to be governed by him through the man of his choosing who in his office accepted heavy responsibility for the well-being of the people.

This sense of responsibility -- of the high ethical demands devolving upon a ruler -- is strikingly voiced in the valedictory of Samuel. The old priest-prophet politician at the end of his career, standing before the convocation of the tribes, reported upon his discharge of duties in these words: "I am old and grayheaded . . . .and I have walked before you from my youth unto this day. Here I am: witness against me before the Lord and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes therewith? and I will make restitution." But the witness of the people was: "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man’s hand" (I Sam. 12:2-4). Briefly, Israel's best thought recognized the far-reaching principle, which stirred as a ferment in the nation's political life throughout its history, that authority, specifically governmental office, was not to be regarded as an opportunity for exploitation: it was a call to service. The ruler must use his office, not for personal advantage or profit, but for the benefit of the ruled. Here is the very finest tradition of public office known to this day. Its radical nature is evident on a moment's consideration of the revolution it would effect even in our boasted modern lands if wholeheartedly accepted by all who share in city, state, and national government. Yet its persistence in Israel, if only as a hope and ideal of those who were outside the ruling class, is attested by Jeremiah's condemnation of Jehoiakim near the end of the history of the kingdom:

"Did not thy father . . . do justice and righteousness? he judged the cause of the poor and needy . But thine eyes and thy heart are not but for thy covetousness and for shedding innocent blood and for doing violence" (Jer. 22:15-17). Ezekiel, also, uttered a similar opinion relative to the official class of his time: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who care for themselves! Should not the shepherds care for the sheep?" (Ezek. 34:2). The popularity of the theme is shown in the lengthy commentary that a succession of writers have attached to this oracle.

In this matter we come upon the very core of the uniqueness of Israel's government among the

nations of the Orient. It would be a distortion to claim that such ideals were unknown elsewhere, for both Egypt and Babylonia had voiced them, the one in literature, the other in legislation. But the striking fact about Israel's thought was its dissemination and its persistence in the nation, as well as the expression it came to attain in law and, for a brief time, in institutions.

Against the background of the struggles and protestations surveyed above, the progressive group in Judah, sometime apparently in the seventh century B.C, formulated their theory of government in a document which has come to us in whole or in part in our Book of Deuteronomy. Its social legislation must be held in mind as one goes on to study its regulation of the office of king -- that he should be chosen by the people from among themselves, and that certain restraints should be placed upon his conduct. Then the document continues:

It shall be when he sitteth on the throne of his kingdom that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites, and it shall be with him and he shall read therein all the days of his life that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes to do them; that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment to the right or to the left (Deut. 17:18-20).

In its historic setting and in its literary context this pronouncement is such as may without exaggeration be considered Israel's Magna Carta. The king was not to be exalted in self-importance above his subjects; he should be at pains to obey all the words of the Deuteronomic code with its rich social implications; and, further, the book was to be kept at hand as a sort of constitution of the kingdom that would guide and limit the monarch's rule. Here is the same defense of the common man against the arrogance of the monarchy and the same constitutional limitation of royal power as was voiced in the famous English document of some eighteen centuries later.

The Deuteronomic code was, in the reform of King Josiah in 621 B.C., made the law of the land; and it would appear that during the dozen years of reign which remained to him he accepted loyally its direction and limitation. After four centuries of struggle the liberal group had won. Their principles of human rights and their restraints upon royal misconduct had found embodiment in the nation's constitution. If once again one may be guilty of some measure of overmodernization in order to bring out the essential meaning, we may assert that the great achievement of the Hebrew people, practically unparalleled as it was in the ancient world, was the attainment of a limited monarchy.

But Josiah was succeeded by the despotic Jehoiakim, and he by Zedekiah, too weak a creature to have any influence on politics. And the end came so soon that no immediate sequel can be traced for the political principles affirmed in the reform. Still, in judging its historic significance, we must recall that after John, the unwilling agent of Magna Carta, came Henry III, whose arbitrariness and determination to nullify the charter were an unconscious

reincarnation of the conduct of Johoiakim. It was a long struggle, and at many a time uncertain of outcome except for the stubborn and independent character of the people concerned, before finally constitutional rights were fully established. Recollection of the ambitions of the Stuarts and the wilfulness of George III give us to realize how recent was the culmination of what began so notably at Runnymede on that June day in A.D. 1215. Until the damage of the government buildings by a Nazi bomb, members of the British House of Commons were proud to point to the dents on the door of their chamber made by the ring on the finger of the king's messenger sent to summon them to hear the speech from the throne; he might not enter, for this was the domain of the common Englishman; he could only stand at the door and humbly invite.

But Judah was afforded no such experience of national survival and constitutional maturing of the principle so boldly affirmed in the legislation of Josiah's reign. For the sequel we must look rather to the local councils of elders and the popular assemblies which not uncommonly some overenthusiastic writer in the Bible has exaggerated into "the whole congregation of all Israel." These two, it is clear from the frequency of the reference, constituted the real local government of ancient Israel. Indeed, it is claimed by a recent historian that the authority of the court was in large measure confined to the capital and a few of the more important cities and that the smaller communities, right through the period of the kings, continued to pay final loyalty to their own assemblies and elders, with little more interference from the central authority than occasional demands for military assistance and for payment of certain taxes. Our sources do not permit us, finally, to adjudicate this claim, but at least it is clear that local authority was a continuing reality in Israel's life and that the popular assembly was a potent facility for expression of the general will.

In this institution, then, persisting through the vicissitudes of national history from the earliest days of the settlement in Palestine, was nurtured that independence of spirit which marked Hebrew life throughout and could easily be fanned to violent action when age-old liberties were infringed. In this, too, lies justification of the claim that in ancient Israel there existed a genuine, if amorphous, political democracy. Such local assemblies became the expression of Jewish communal life after the destruction of the monarchy, both in Palestine and among that section of the people who went into exile. And the story of subsequent Jewish political development is to be traced, not primarily in the hierarchy of restored Palestinian Judaism and the arrogance of the House of Hasmon, but in the popular assembly with its ruling elders which continued, with local adaptations and variations, it is true, but in essential uniformity, right through the long centuries of the dispersion and into our own times. It was the schooling in local self-government and the institutions so developed back in the hills and valleys of ancient Palestine that gave the uprooted Jews immediately a social organism able to withstand the shock of exile and to support and adapt the community in its struggle to live in an alien environment. The Jews have always taken their politics seriously. The reason lies apparent in their age-old experience of individual participation in public affairs. This experience, crystallized into permanent form in the Old Testament, constitutes the most remarkable theory of government that came out of the ancient world and at the same time an ideal that rebukes and challenges the distressing imperfections of

our boasted modern democracy.

But the king was by no means the sole menace to common freedom. The breakdown of the Egyptian empire and the circumstances contributory to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, besides hosts of incidents from those days to the present, show that organized religion, strange as it appears, can be no less an obstacle to social and political advance than the reactionary policies of vested political or economic interests. The church carries an implicit threat to freedom quite as truly as the court.

An intimate relationship of church and state is traceable far back through human society. Early man's sense of dependence on the will of the gods and his belief in their immediate interference in human affairs gave high place in community counsel and action to the spiritual adviser who, by theory, could tell just what the gods wished. The transfer of this special prestige into the politics of the ancient East is a familiar story. The monarchs in general either kept conveniently available a group of spiritual advisers or else paid such respect to the views of the hierarchy as to elevate the chief priest virtually into an important minister of the state. In Israel the role of prophets as royal counselors is evident in many incidents already mentioned; notable were the existence of a body of four hundred prophets in the court of Ahab and the relations of Samuel and King Saul. Yet this situation in its logical working~out could mean little less than a subjection of the political rulers such that they might fairly be described as priest-ridden. Beyond a question, this was the ideal cherished by a considerable group in Israel -- such subservience for them was a mark of piety; it was obedience to the will of God. This is the meaning of certain comments on the monarchs found in our Books of Kings; it is in large part the viewpoint of the Chronicler; it is freely expressed in the chapters added to the prophecies of Ezekiel in which the function of "the prince" is little more than one of leadership in ritual under the priests. Further, it was built into actual political institutions in later Old Testament times; the rule of the high priests represented a complete triumph of the claim that church is supreme above state. Indeed, it was more extreme than certain modern expressions of the theory, for it did not leave the secular rulers as a sort of subdepartment under the princes of organized religion, but instead the hierarchy gathered into itself the functions of both. The church had swallowed the state.

What protests were voiced against this situation have left but few echoes in literature, which, we must recall, was transmitted by priestly, or pro-priestly, hands. Some of the Psalms are strangely nonritualistic for a collection that is freely recognized to have been "the hymn book of the Second Temple." In many, too, the temple appears as a house of prayer where worshipers go, independent of priestly propitiation. Yet all such expressions do not obscure the fact that the Psalter, in the large, is loyal to the ritual and the hierarchy. At times it reaches an extreme of glorification of the priestly system, as in Psalm 119. On the other hand, in the account of the reform of Ezra a passage of dubious translation is supposed to mention by name two individuals who withstood the proposed measures (Ezra 10:15). But the activity of Ezra was so mixed with power politics that one may not deduce too much from opposition, if actual. Similarly, the

inference commonly drawn from the Books of Ruth and Jonah may not be adduced as antihierarchical. Somewhat earlier the prophet known as Malachi protested vigorously against the misconduct of the priests and voiced a high ideal of their responsibility:

And now, 0 ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear and lay it to heart to give glory to my name, saith the Lord of Hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and will curse your blessings; yea I have cursed them already.

. . .My covenant was with him (Levi) of life and peace. . .

The law of truth was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and uprightness and turned many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts (Mal.2:1-7).

Yet none of this gives us quite what we seek.

In the days of the kingdoms the priesthood enjoyed secular power through its judicial functions. The legislation of the Book of Deuteronomy, in fact, elevates the priests into a supreme court of appeal, with but the possibility that a secular judge also was associated with them. Judges and officers were to be appointed in every locality, but

if there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment. . . then thou shalt arise and get thee up unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose, and thou shalt come unto the priests, the Levites, and unto the judge that shall he in those days .. . and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment . . . thou shalt not turn aside from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand or to the left. And the man that doeth presumptuously in not hearkening to the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy Cod, or unto the judge, even that man shall die; and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear and do no more presumptuously (Deut. 17:8-13).

The legislation had teeth in it: capital punishment for disobeying the priests! It was a provision that centuries later was doubtless congenial to Torquemada.

However, matters were by no means as bad as this would indicate. On the contrary, Saul's bold defiance of the priest-prophet Samuel has already been cited, and Zadok and Abiathar and their

sons seem to have been fully subject to David and Solomon. The leadership of Jehoiada in the overthrow of Athaliah and his rule for some years as regent may not be employed as evidence of the rise of the hierarchy to temporal power (II Kings 11:4-12:16). It was a popular movement of which the chief priest was head, evidently because of his forceful personality. Indeed, to the end, the supremacy of the monarchy appears to have been undisputed; even the law-abiding Josiah gave orders to the chief priest and was obeyed (II Kings 22:3-7, 12). The prophets, too, indorsed this situation. Except for a few utterances, mainly those of Hosea, which may well relate to temporary conditions rather than to the monarchy per se, the prophets accept the kings as legitimate officials supreme in their sphere. Their demand was only that their rule must accord with the will of God. But nowhere do they suggest or imply that the hierarchy possesses secular authority to rival the monarchy. On the contrary, their stern denunciations of priestly veniality and their deprecation of the ritual imply rather that, as between king and priest, they would prefer to dispense with the latter. Even the legislation in the Book of Deuteronomy, which a moment ago we found guilty of marked favoritism toward the priests, accepts the kingship as a valid institution. The king must obey the law of God; he is to accept as the constitution of the state a copy of the Deuteronomic law from that "which is before the priests." But beyond this he rules free of interference from the hierarchy.

And such is the limit of our evidence. Certainly Israel's thought was less clarified on this than on the issue of popular rights vis-a'-vis secular rulers. It appears that, subsequent to the popular protest and action which freed the government from domination by Samuel, the priesthood were never again a threat to secular power as long as the kingdoms stood. Consequently, the question of church and state did not become an issue to provoke thought such as Israel's intellectual leaders exercised elsewhere. It was the accident of history, the destruction of the monarchy and the state, and then later the unhappy events, whatever their detail may have been, which weakened the prestige and power of the Jewish governor in the days of Darius I that by consequence elevated the priests into *de facto* leadership and rule of the Palestinian community. The theocracy was a natural development from this. The situation was a remarkable anticipation of the events through which the Christian church centuries later assumed secular power in the city of Rome. Nonetheless, the Jewish theocracy, so called, was an aberration from the true national genius and tradition. Israel had been governed by secular rulers chosen, such was orthodox dogma, by the Lord himself and commissioned to "shepherd his people Israel." Of the supremacy of religious standards and restraints above the secular ruler there was no question in Israel's best thought; but until after the collapse of Zerubbabel's governorship the exercise of authority over the state by the priesthood was never a practical consideration. Israel, we may say, would have granted the supremacy of the invisible church, the custodian of the nation's best social achievements and highest idealism; but the visible church was too fallibly human to be trusted with so high a responsibility.

Suggested Reading:

BERTHOLFT, A.: *A History of Hebrew Civilization*. London, 1926.

MILLER, M. S. and I. L.: *Encyclopedia of Bible Life.* New York, 1944.

PEDERSEN, JOHS: *Israel: Its Life and Culture*. London, 1926, 1949.

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The Old Testament, Keystone of Human Culture by William F. Irwin

William A. Irwin was Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at Southern Methodist University, formerly Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at the University of Chicago. He is the author of The Problem of Ezekiel, and The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, and many other books. This material was published by Abelard-Schuman, London and New York, 1959. Prepared for Religion-Online by Paul & Shirley Mobley.

Chapter 8: The Hebrews and the Bible

Merely in terms of its creative influence upon human society, far and away the greatest of the great books is the Bible. And what better criterion of worth is there ? Opinions of critics, however high their repute, are only personal opinions. But the test of the ages is irrefutable. Only that which has proven its worth to countless hosts of succeeding generations can live on through the centuries; the weak and the Sectarian and the ill-founded fall by the way. Here is the sheer miracle of it: a literature that long antedated our glorious gains in science and the immense scope of modern knowledge, which moves in the quiet atmosphere of the ancient countryside, with camels and flocks and roadside wells and the joyous shout of the peasant at vintage or in harvest -- this literature, after all that has intervened, is still our great literature, published abroad as no other in the total of man's writing, translated into the world's great languages and many minor ones, and cherished and loved and studied so earnestly as to set it in a class apart.

Some there may be who will lightly scoff at such assurances. More than half the world ostensibly cares little for the Bible, and in that large section potent leadership is exerted by those who have known and repudiated it. Does it not appear that the great book of the present and, much more, of the future, is the work of a Jew, basically motivated by the great stirrings of social concern that moved the prophets, yet writing a work of far different portent? Is it not probable that the future will honor, not the Bible, but *Das Kapital?* Perhaps one is guilty of bias when he confesses a tendency to smile at the notion; it is so out of focus as to be amusing. However, more pertinent is the remark that *Mein Kampf* was likewise, only a few years ago, with its perverted morals and twisted thinking, the defiant inspiration of a whole great people -- or at least of those who had arrogated the right to speak for that people. The analogy is so close that to point the application would be tiresome.

Yet those who love the Bible commonly are oblivious of its historic uniqueness. In one of its own phrases, the Bible has been "wounded in the house of its friends"; for it has been so set apart as of distinct genius, as of divine origin and planning -- which there is no thought here to deny -- that few have recognized its greatness as a human document. Yet it stands head and shoulders above its nearest rival; its separateness inheres, not in theories of its origin and nature, but in the solid facts of its worth and of its impact upon human society in the way both of rebuke to the low and bestial and of exaltation of an impossible ideal, toward which, nonetheless, it has attracted and impelled.

How this has come about is clear upon a moment's reflection. Refined through the sifting process commonly called canonization but now realized to have been merely a growing recognition of what was of worth, cherished in crisis after crisis when individual and even national life was at stake, accepted by the nascent church, which presently added its own documents and formed the Christian Bible, then carried by both Jews and Christians in their far dispersion, the Bible became the supreme book of the Western world. Largely inspired and shaped by it were the great works of Augustine, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas, Dante's *Divine' Comedy*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and others which everyone recognizes to have had potent influence in the making of our Western mind. Yet the simple and almost unrecorded effects were of even greater significance: its quiet formative influence as Sabbath after Sabbath it was read and expounded in synagogue or church, or still more unostentatiously was studied for private interests or private devotions.

The leavening influence of Jewish communities, exerted upon the crude societies of medieval Europe, is becoming more clearly recognized. It has long been known that Spanish Jewry was brilliant, but the pervasive and creative influence of the Jews through northern Europe and in the New World is a matter that, when given its due, still excites attention as a novelty. And the Jews have been a "people of the Book." Christian missionaries carried the Book to our savage ancestors and by its precepts and example slowly tamed their rude cultures. It became the inspiration of the cathedrals, the theme of art, the plot of drama, the basis of epic and lyric, of essay and story; and constantly, our speculative thought, our wrestle with the enigma of being, has been permeated with the biblical convictions. Recognizing fully the complex nature of society, it can yet with little exaggeration be claimed that the culture of the Western world is a Bible culture. The claim is open to attack from two sides. There is occasion to scoff that our society with its monumental iniquities is biblically based. Likewise the erudite may smile at the complete ignoring of our debt to Greece, or even to Rome. Such considerations are all valid; still it remains that the Bible has been the vital, creative force operative through these Centuries, shaping our life far more deeply than all else. The native genius and character of the several peoples of the Western world; the profound significance of the Greek intellect still potent in the analytic mood of the present; the constructive, organizing genius of Rome: all these and much more have gone into the making of the modern dwelling of the human spirit. Nonetheless, the affirmation will not be evaded that the biblical influence has been, and is, of a more potent sort; for it strongly grips human emotions, the driving force in achievement, and sets them aflame

with a supreme ideal which by its very loftiness thrills and mocks us.

Nor is this but a matter of the past. It must be realized that notwithstanding the far-reaching — and commendable -- influences of the Renaissance, the Bible and biblical thought are the most vital elements in this modern, confused world. Three great issues confront us, the socioeconomic structure often simplified in terms of the stress of capital and labor, the crucial issue of peace and war, and the rivalry of "communism" and "democracy," which in part is but an aspect of the socioeconomic, but ramifies far beyond. All three are biblical issues, in the sense that biblical ideals are, consciously or otherwise, the potent motivation without which there might well be no struggle at all. The first is a projection of the preaching of Amos and Isaiah and their demands for society's equitable sharing of the assets of society; the second is the long outreach of the insights and hopes of biblical thinkers who, in an age of rampant power politics when war was the normal and perennial occupation of rulers, dreamed of a time when nation should not take up sword any more against nation, but in idyllic peace, as it were, the lion would lie down with the lamb. And the issue between imperialist communism and the West is basically the problem of the nature of man: does the individual have rights and transcendent possibilities, such as the Bible taught, or is he a mere cog in a heartless machine? It is by no means the first time in history that theological doctrines have been political facts of the first order. Nonetheless it is sobering to realize that biblical insights as an issue of current world stress are in imminent danger of being fought over, not with the arguments of scholars, but with all the horrible devices of modern war. Whatever the immediate outcome, of one thing we may rest assured: no question is settled until it is settled right -- again a biblical thought, though framed in secular terms.

The source of the Bible's power to stir men's minds and fire their imaginations is no secret, except as all things human are ultimately clothed in deepest mystery. The Bible is a creation of sheer beauty. True, there are tawdry passages from weaker writers, but here we speak of the characteristically biblical portions. The wonder of it has been obscured for most readers by the fact that it comes to them in their own language, hence is accepted, half unconsciously, almost as modern literature. And indeed this is the astonishing feature of it, that it can and does function as writing of the present day. But when we set it in its true historical context, compare it with the literature of its time, then we realize the sheer incredulity of its having arisen in such an age. Here we see unknown writers in the hills of ancient Judah, seated in simple homes that from the point of view of our present-day luxury might be regarded as little better than hovels, surrounded with furnishings more bare and austere than those of a medieval monastery, equipped with simple reed pens and rolls of papyrus, or perhaps with broken sherds of old pots, as they slowly indite in awkward, ancient Hebrew characters, words that have run like fire and are potent at this distant day.

The fact to be grasped firmly is that the writers of the Bible were literary artists of the first order. They were also the first that may be thus characterized, for the best that their world had produced was but inept and rude by comparison. This is not to disparage a tradition of poetry

which as far back as Sumerian times possessed form and power and in the hands of Israel's immediate predecessors produced models from which the Hebrew poets could work. Nor is it to overlook the royal records of imperial Assyria, or the human tales from a thousand years of Egypt's achievements. All these had merit; here and there they possess their "purple patches" that reveal a real sense of the meaning of literature. But their best, Israel far transcended. Here is the really significant primacy of the Bible as literature; it was first in quality! At their farthest outreach, the writers of the wider Orient but approached a region where the Hebrew authors moved with ease and surety as masters in their own home. In Israel we find first and in high expression that infallible mark of literature, a sense of "the power and beauty of words," as it has been called, "words for their own lovely and intrinsic sake" -- a feeling for the magic they possess when, put together in simple phrase, they create something new; rich overtones and nuances, flights of the spirit that break through formal expression and linger delicate as the breath of dawn. It is the realm of art: the effort to express by one's chosen medium the inexpressible, something of the wonder and mystery with which human life is suffused and sub merged. Here they excelled; with simple, commonplace words they wove together a texture of rich beauty and living imagination. They took any common bush by the roadside and set it afire with light and flame that is not of the workaday world. The astonishing feature is that out of utterly common themes and in simple phrasing they evoked pictures and dreams and hopes that have stirred countless hearts through the lengthening centuries. What a drab and repulsive topic that is, for example, a doting old fellow who stands with one foot in the grave, obsessed with foolish fears, his limbs trembling, his toothless mouth hanging open in the inanity of "second childhood": but see what the writer has done with it in the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, running on to a culmination that is of the pure essence of poetry!

Before the silver cord is loosed
and the golden bowl is broken
And the pitcher is smashed at the fountain
and the wheel broken at the well
And the dust returns to the earth as it was
and the spirit returns to God who
gave it:
Vanity of vanities, says Koheleth,
all is vanity (Eccles. 12:6-8).

Of comparable genius is that great sermon which makes up the hortatory chapters of the Book of Deuteronomy. The author quite clearly is carried away by the balance and beauty and rhythms of his words; he loves their cadences, he piles them up in synonyms, he heaps up phrases and clauses, rushing on with the compelling impetus of expression until at times he seems half-lost in the rich fabric of his weaving; yet all is subsumed to his serious didactic purpose, but so transformed by the magic of feeling that his prose breaks its bonds and is transmuted into poetry. Hear the resounding rhythms, the balanced periods, and altogether the charm of wording of this simple bit of homiletic warning:

> *And it shall be when the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land which he swore to thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, cisterns hewed out, which thou hewedst not, vineyards and olive groves which thou plantedst not, and thou shalt eat and be full -- then beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God who brought thee from the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Deut. 6:10-11).*

Or we may turn to a note of geographic description, where the Hebrew love of their wonderful little land is similarly touched with a light that is not on land or sea. Again we feel the beat of the rhythms, and the resounding repetitions that give a sense of form and balance such as is of the measured being of poetry. The imagery is of the simple peace of the countryside of long ago, but with power to awake idyllic pictures:

> *For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley and vines and figs and pomegranates; a land of olives, of oil and honey; a land in which thou shalt eat bread without want, thou shalt lack nothing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou canst dig copper (Deut. 8:7-9).*

The glory of Old Testament prose, however, is the superb narratives that make up the major hulk of the books from Genesis to Second Kings. It grows trite to repeat that they were a new achievement of the ancient world; the stories from other oriental lands of the time were crude and commonplace by comparison. But Israel created a narrative literature which has lived through intervening ages to the sophisticated present, still standing high in the catalogue of the story-teller's art. How the Hebrews came to do this, lifting literature from its drab earthy levels to the status of a fine art, can be answered only in terms of the mystery that enshrines all genius. Briefly, they were that sort of people. Doubtless their history contributed much -- their national heritage and the discipline which the centuries brought; other peoples had comparable advantages and comparable stern molding, but save for their names, they are lost in the following years. We are driven to conclude that Israel's genius was a birthright; it was a racial characteristic.

Nonetheless it is remarkable to find these ancient authors employing all the modern devices of the literary craftsman, surprise and suspense, rapidity and delay, humor and solemnity, vividness, realism, untempered callousness, dramatic shift of scene -- all permeated with their feeling for what is intrinsically interesting, what makes a good story. The compactness of the Hebrew tale is frequently amazing. The brutal tragedy of Jezebel's death is told, with harrowing details and unfeeling ruthlessness, in the compass of six short Biblical verses:

> *Jehu came to Jezreel, and Jezebel heard of it. She painted her eyes and dressed her head, and looked out a window. As Jehu came in through the gate, she said, Is all well, Zimri, murderer of his master? He looked up to the window, and said, Who is on my side? Who? There looked out at him two or three eunuchs, and he said, Throw her down. And they threw her down, and her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses. And he trod her under foot. Then he went in and ate and drank; and he said, See now about that cursed woman, and bury her, for she was a king's daughter. So they went out to bury her, but they found of her only the skull and the feet and the hands (II Kings 9:30-35).*

What a picture of cold horror, alleged to be just retribution upon this wicked old woman! He gave not a thought to her as she fell in her blood at his feet; he did not pause to kill her, but merely drove over her, went and ate a good dinner, then casually gave orders to throw her in a grave!

The unconscious art of the narrators is well manifested in the story of Abraham's servant going to find a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24). There is no delaying over the enticing adventures of the long journey from the Palestinian Negeb to upper Mesopotamia: "The servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, having all good things of his master in his hand, and departed. And he came to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor." Then a picture, caught with one hold sweep of the pen: "He made his camels lie down outside the city, by a well of water, at the time of evening, the time when women go forth to draw water." One can almost see the stately procession of those oriental women, dignified as queens, in the peace of the oriental evening coming down the slope from the little city, each with her graceful water-jar on her shoulder, while around the tree-sheltered well lie the ten great hulking beasts still saddled with their baggage and gaudy with the beads and trinkets that camel-drivers have always loved.

Action moves on; Rebecca comes to the well in exact answer to the old servant's prayer, and almost before he had finished speaking, fulfilling his petition to the letter, while he stood looking on amazed. But it was her turn to be astonished when he gave her a golden earring of half a shekel's weight and two bracelets of ten shekels of gold. With what excitement she ran home to tell her family! She had a brother, Laban,, who shared her astonishment at the gold: "And it came to pass when he saw the ring and the bracelets," that he ran out to the man where he was still standing by the well, and he said, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord" -- when he saw the ring and the bracelets!

So they made him comfortable with all the consideration of oriental hospitality; and they set food before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told my errand." How they must have stared in astonishment: this man with every mark of wealth and breeding has an errand for them! What can he possibly know about them? But he went on, "I am Abraham's servant" .

Abraham, that impractical relative obsessed with some silly dream, who had gone out into the unknown -- how many years ago was it? One almost forgot; anyhow the distance had swallowed up both him and his dream, and they had long since written him off as a total loss: probably killed by some of the wild folk out there: you can never trust those foreigners. And now like a bolt from the blue this man with his gold and his ten camels, and his dignity -- and an errand for them . . "I am Abraham's servant and the Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become rich: and he has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and menservants and maidservants, and camels and asses. And Sarah, my master's wife, bore him on in his old age . ."

Who has not been stirred by the vivid events of the collapse of Absalom's revolt, and the deep pathos of David's lament? With the rebels dispersed and the insurrection at an end, the first responsibility was to get news to the king, waiting anxiously through the day at the base camp in Mahanaim. The young priest Ahimaaz offered himself as a courier; but Joab refused, for the tidings of victory were confused with news of Absalom's death. He called an Ethiopian and told him to run with news of what he had seen. The impatient Ahimaaz still begged permission, and at length Joab relented, perhaps believing that the first courier would hold his lead and so make the report.

But Amimaaz chose a better route and outdistanced him. In course of tine he came in sight from the city; the watchman on the gate-tower spied him and announced, "I see a man running." The old king, broken not so much by his years as by the tragedy of recent weeks and the anxiety of the day, had sat for hours in the gateway, waiting word of the safety of his erring son. As his veteran troops had marched out to battle he had commissioned them, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." Now the long day was wearing to an end; at last news; he replied to the watchman, "If he is alone, he brings tidings." In a moment the Ethiopian also came in sight, but as the distance shortened the watchman recognized the first runner: "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok." Snatching at any ground of hope, the king replied, "He is a good man and brings good news."

At length within shouting distance, Ahimaaz called, "All is well," then, out of breath, launched on a formal announcement of victory. But the king brushed it aside, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Now Ahimaaz was confronted with the predicament which Joab foresaw, for he knew well that at that moment Absalom's still warm body lay beneath a great heap of stones where the victorious troops had killed, and in this fashion entombed him; he evaded the issue: "When Joab, the king's servant, sent me, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was." What a deadly chill the words struck to the heart of the anxious David; he commanded, "Stand aside." Then the Ethiopian came, blurting out his words through gasping breath, "Tidings for my lord, the king, for the Lord has avenged you of all them that rose up against you." But again the king cut in sharply, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" This courier is only a courier; he stands farther from the royal family and the restraints which such association imposed. In allusive fashion such as the Orient affects, he told the blunt truth: "The enemies of

my lord the king, and all who rise against you for evil, be as that young man is!" The tragic moment was too poignant for comment; the author relates simply, "The king was greatly moved; and he went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died for you! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

For its literary art, the greatest of all the biblical stories is that of Joseph. It has been the source and inspiration of great literature, down to classic presentation in our own time. But whether these later accounts attain the greatness of the original remains an open question. It possesses a unity, a delicate interweaving of the threads of its theme, that is in danger of being obscured by more voluminous treatment. For to all the other arts and skills of the Hebrew narrator the story of Joseph adds two qualities that lift it into the class of modern story-telling. It possesses magnificent character delineation: the great theme is the princely magnanimity of Joseph, envied by his lesser brothers, his life threatened, then at length spared only through the dubious device of selling him into slavery in Egypt; and there, his fortunes going from bad to worse, he was, for no fault of his own but indeed because of his integrity, hurled into an oriental prison to lie hopeless until some dubious chance should release him. Yet he maintained his good cheer. At length the process of years brought him power and opportunity. Then -- but that is the story.

The other notable feature is the writer's skill with his plot, for the intricacy of his story amounts to nothing less. The tangled thread of events slowly wove their destined pattern. Chance, it seemed, brought two important functionaries of the court into the prison with Joseph. He interpreted their dreams, and matters came out as he had foretold; but his long affliction was not yet ended, for the Pharaoh's butler, in the quaint phrase of the Hebrew writer, "did not remember Joseph, but forgot him." Then the Pharaoh himself dreamed, perplexing dreams that baffled all the wisdom of Egypt and held the court in day-long commotion until the butler remembered. In one of these sudden reversals of fortune which the Orient loves, Joseph was hurried from prison, almost to a throne. In gratitude for his brilliant interpretation of the dreams, the Pharaoh took off his signet ring and put it on Joseph's hand, and long inured though he was to prison garb, arrayed him in fine linen, made him ride in the second chariot and declared, "I am Pharaoh, and without you may no man lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

So the predicted years of plenty came in, and Joseph, in accord with his own plans, bought all the surplus of the land and stored it. Then at length the famine years arrived and Joseph opened the stores and sold to the Egyptians. But the famine was in all lands, even up in the land of Canaan. So one day there stood before this polished Egyptian vizier, as he went about his duties overseeing the sale of food, a group of unkempt Palestinian shepherds. Years had intervened, but there was no mistaking them; they were his brothers! Now was his chance. How would he employ it? He spoke roughly to them, "You are spies." But with loud expostulations, "No, no: we are honest men. We have come to buy grain. We are twelve brothers, all sons of one man; the youngest is with our father in the land of Canaan, and one has disappeared." Little did they realize that they were answering Joseph's gnawing question of all these years; his father, now an

old man, was still alive. He threw them in prison, then after three days, with mock religiosity he released them, explaining that he stood for justice; but one of their number must remain a hostage while the rest went home with food for their households. On their return they must bring Benjamin, else by the life of Pharaoh, surely they were spies. Safe behind the barrier of language, they reasoned among themselves that all this trouble had come on them because of that sin of twenty years ago when they showed no pity to their little brother: "Did I not say to you, Do not sin against the boy, but you would not listen? So his blood is now required of us." Little did they realize that the princely Egyptian who dealt with them through an interpreter had learned Hebrew at his mother's knee. And now to hear it again after all these years was more than he could bear; he went aside and wept, then returned to them.

They set off, all except Simeon imprisoned in Egypt, and plodded along through the day beside the slow-pacing donkeys. At evening, in the flimsy khan in the desert, they opened their sacks to give grain to the animals. And there was their money, neatly stowed in the top of each sack! They looked at each other in apprehension: some sinister design was reaching out to engulf them. And so they came to their father and told him of their adventures and in particular of the suspicions and demands of the inquisitive ruler. His decision was prompt and incisive:

"Benjamin will not go." Thus they delayed until food ran low, and their father reprimanded them for their tardiness. The answer was ready, "The man said we might not return without Benjamin; and you have refused to let Benjamin go." Life's complexity had gotten too much for the old man: querulously he complained, "Joseph is lost, and Simeon is lost, and now you would take away

Benjamin also. All these things lie upon me. Why did you have to tell the man that you had a brother?" But now if it must be, they were to take a little gift, some nuts and almonds, a little honey and spicery and balm and myrrh. What pathetic realism: the rustic's tribute -- how trivial as gifts for the lord of all the land of Egypt! But would they be to this one? And note the depth of anxiety in the troubled old man's parting blessing, "God Almighty give you favor with the man that he may release your other brother and Benjamin also. And I -- when I am bereaved, still more bereavement comes on me."

The brothers were taken to Joseph's house in deepening fears. Perplexed, they reasoned among themselves, "The man is going to make some attack upon us so that he may enslave us and take our donkeys"! We can see the author smiling behind his pen at the countryman’s foibles: the exquisite vizier of all Egypt casting envious eyes on those mangy, ragged creatures, worn with three grueling journeys through the desert! The men sought to ingratiate themselves with the steward of the house; they explained about the money found in their sacks: they had brought it all back, besides more money for their further purchase. They were less than half satisfied by his easy reassurance, "All is well. Your God, the God of your father, gave you treasure." But at least it was good to have Simeon released to join them. They made ready their rustic gift for Joseph. When he came his first words were of "that old man your father, is he well? Is he still

living?" He saw Benjamin, his one full brother of that polygamous household; carrying his part in the self-assigned drama, he enquired; "Is this the younger brother of whom you spoke?" He succeeded in saying, "God be good to you, my son," before he had to hurry into his private room to gain control of himself.

Next morning the well-instructed steward had the men's sacks filled, but with more than grain, and sent them off. What a relief! How they must have congratulated themselves, that, after all, their fears had been groundless. But they were scarcely out of the city when overtaken by the steward and his retinue, noisily hurling charges of some mysterious crime. Presently through the hubbub his meaning became clear: one of them had stolen a silver cup belonging to his master. It was preposterous; why certainly they hadn't! They tried reasoning, they tried expostulation; the scene became noisy and confused, then one brother, in confident innocence, challenged, "Look through our stuff. If you find it, then the man who has it is to be killed, and the rest of us will be your slaves." But no; he objects that would not be just; he'll accept the offer on the understanding that only the guilty one will become his master's slave. So the bags of grain were unloaded off the patient donkeys. He knew well he would find the cup just where he had put it, but playing his part he started at the eldest. He opened and examined Reuben's sack; it wasn't there. Nor was it in Simeon's; nor in Judah's The brothers looked their growing satisfaction. But what is this? He had come at last to Benjamin's -- and there it was! Triumphantly he drew it out, while the brothers looked on crestfallen and alarmed. Doubtless they glared at Benjamin and growled under the breath, "The young scamp! Why couldn't he have kept his bands off the man's silverware? Now see the mess we re in."

Joseph was awaiting them, strolling casually about his home. He commented, "You men shouldn't have done this. I knew all the time what you were about; you see I have second sight. You can't get away with such conduct with me. But it is agreed that only the guilty man remains as my slave. The rest of you are free. You may take your provisions and your donkeys, and go home."

The drama has reached its crisis. This is the point toward which events have been carefully directed by Joseph -- that is, by the author. It was necessary for him to play his assigned part of the harsh, callous Egyptian governor; he had to be brusque, even harsh with the brothers; only so could he find the answer to his question. And now once again after the lapse of twenty years circumstances permit them to serve their own interests at the expense of a younger brother. What will they do? Have the years taught them anything? It is Judah who speaks. And one searches far to find in any literature a more moving passage than his plea to the wronged brother whom he does not recognize. He tells of their first visit, when in answer to Joseph's questioning they had spoken of their old father and the son of his old age in whom his life seemed bound up; how it was only under duress of circumstance that at length he had most reluctantly agreed to Benjamin's coming on this second visit; he had reminded them of his long-dead favorite wife, whose other son had gone away and was supposedly killed by a wild beast, but in any case he was never seen again; and now if any harm should come to Benjamin, it

would bring down his hoar head with sorrow to the grave. Judah himself had gone surety with his father for his young brother’s safety. "So now," he pleaded, "let the boy go home to his father. I'll remain and be your slave all my life, hut only let the boy go. If we come back without him, even before we arrive, when my father sees that the boy is not with us, he will die. I ask only that I may serve you in his place, so that he may go home."

What further was needed? Joseph could not control himself, but commanded that all should leave him: "And there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers." Still wondering what would be the result of Judah's plea, they waited in fear. Then, in perfect Hebrew they heard him . . what is this? "I am Joseph"? Surely not! It was impossible; this grand Egyptian their long-lost brother whom they had wronged? But indeed he had said, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" The golden thread that had run through the story . . exiled in a far land, his father growing older with each passing year, was it possible that he might yet see him before it was too late? Here we catch the meaning of his studiously casual questioning of the brothers each time they came, "That old man of whom you spoke, your father, is he still alive? Is he well?" And so, now while the truth slowly dawns on the brothers, all the floodgates of years of repressed longing were loosed. They talked together of the old home and the loved ones of years gone; they wept together until the whole palace heard the sound of it, and it was noised about, "Joseph's brothers have come to him." But his obsessing concern reasserted itself, "Go up and tell my father, The Lord has made me master of all the land of Egypt." The deep insight of the Hebrew authors! All life's little triumphs lack something of their fulness until one can go up and tell his father, The Lord has made me master of all the land of Egypt.

What need to pursue it further: the wagons sent up to bring Jacob down to the son he had long given up for lost; his incredulity, then sudden devout realization that life had been far better to him than he dared hope; the arrival in Egypt; Joseph's proud introduction of his old peasant father to the majestic Pharaoh; then the years of peaceful joy before at length Jacob was gathered to his fathers, and Joseph likewise, and his brothers and all that generation went the way of all flesh.

Hebrew poetry manifests the same basic qualities as the prose. It is Hebrew literature: it is marked by all that is distinctively Hebraic, simplicity with depth, clarity, familiar imagery, a sense of the pictorial; yet beyond or through this is the distinctive quality of poetry, its transcendence of forms and words in the presentation of thoughts, feelings, impressions, vague hopes and intimations which slip through mere form and escape, to be captured tenuously only in the splendrous world of the emotions. Biblical poetry possesses a sensuous charm that soars beyond thought and matter, carrying one away into realms of pure beauty. By no accident, but by its intrinsic nature it has become the vehicle of expression of the deepest hopes and yearnings of the heart of man.

All the arts are earth-bound; they must grapple with form and matter in their outreach toward expression. Poetry has rules and methods. Yet Hebrew poetry was diverse from our standard

verse. Its meter was not concerned with the regular succession of long and short or of stressed and unstressed syllables, but with an established number of major vocal stresses in each line. Commonly it worked out to an approximate equality of syllables, but this was incidental. It will at once be apparent that this type is not unknown in English, though it is unusual. Instead of rhyme, which provides some expression of balance, so essential to poetic expression, Hebrew employed what is called parallelism, a system of balancing statements, normally within a single line. Thus the caesura is more marked in the Hebrew line than in Western poetry; and the genius of parallelism is that the second member of the line and the third, if there is one, repeats the first in a sort of echoing or balancing expression. Sometimes the parallel member adds a marked element to the thought, but normally it amounts to very little more than repetition in differing words. So described, the device would appear awkward and stodgy; in reality it is highly effective, providing all that rhyme does for later poetry, and probably much more. Considerable study has been given to the types of parallelism, but for the present purpose it suffices to mention that in addition to the forms already mentioned, not infrequently it takes the form of denial or disparagement of the opposite of the first statement; thus,

A wise son makes a glad father;
but a foolish son is a sorrow
to his mother (Prov 10:1)

The line is the basic element of Hebrew poetry. It is composed generally of two, but not infrequently of three separate elements, commonly called stichs; the line is thus distich or tristich. Scansion is a matter of these stichs; the most common meter is that of three major vocal beats in a stich. If this structure is repeated in the balancing stich, the meter is spoken of as 3:3; or if a tristich line, then 3:3:3. Sometimes a line of six beats has two caesuras, hence is 2:2:2. A famous measure features an unequal balance, normally three beats balanced by two, that is, 3:2. It is sometimes called the dirge measure, since it is the meter, for example, of the Book of Lamentations; but this is too restrictive; in reality it is widely invoked in more emotional poems, and occurs often merely as a release from a uniform 3:3 measure. It may also be found as 2:3, and even 2:2. A more rare meter is the 4:4, with its variations 4:3 and 3:4; though it is frequently highly possible that these 4's should really each be broken down into 2:2. The Hebrew poets maintained a high degree of freedom. A chosen measure is not slavishly followed, but artistic release is sought by means of frequent variation, sometimes in accordance with the varying mood of the advancing thought, but not infrequently, it would appear, for no reason other than change.

In some poetry, structural analysis carries no farther; then the lines follow one another with no observable sense of total form. But in general, added charm is provided by groupings of the lines in larger units, which sometimes are marked off by refrains, yet more commonly are to be detected only by logical separation. The couplet is most frequent, two lines bound together as a unit in the advancing thought, from which the author moves on to its development in the next couplet. More rare, but still frequent, is the triad, a similar unit of three lines. Then elementary

mathematics suggests correctly that there ought to be a quatrain. Frequently such units are in reality nothing but the combination of two couplets; yet genuine quatrains occur, where no such division is permissible. That ends the simple forms, -- the strophes, they are called. And most biblical poetry is so brief that no further structure is possible. But poems such as in the Book of Job, sometimes continuing to the length of two or three chapters, offer opportunity to study the matter further. It is found that the couplets and triads sometimes group themselves in larger units, which may be called stanzas, moreover that the pattern is intimately related to the changing mood and advancing thought in such a way that occasionally structure provides an important exegetical resource.

Along with a notable repertoire of minor, but rich, devices -- assonances, alliteration, punning, chiasmus, various figures of speech -- these were the tools with which the Hebrew poet worked. It is the finished product, however, toward which our expectation is steadily directed. And the result is not disappointing. The extant literature is all more or less immediately of religious relevance, yet there was considerable secular writing that has disappeared, the quality of which we can estimate from what we know. But in itself biblical poetry is of a wide scope, amounting at one extreme to secular writing, though by its editing and orientation given relevance to Israel's dominant faith. It is, then, not an exaggerated claim to speak first of Israel's nature poetry. For such there was, anachronistic though it may seem. There was here a feeling for nature such as was manifest among no other ancient people. True it found expression, not as in modern times, in mere expressions of the wonder and charm of the world about them, but in terms of religious faith and devotion. This was inescapable in view of Israel's concept of the intimate relationship between God and nature; but at the same time it imparted to their understanding of the inanimate world, and to their poetic expression of it, a beauty and elevation, and withal a majesty such as, one may venture the judgment, to rank them with the best poets of any age. The Hebrew, too, felt.

A presence that disturbs . . . with the
joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting
suns,
And the round ocean and the living air, And the blue sky, and in the mind of
man: . .

Indeed, it was only by virtue of his profound debt to the long Hebrew tradition in our Western culture that Wordsworth was able to rise to such concepts. Israel's sense of the wonder of nature as interfused with a presence is well illustrated in a passage that portrays the might and majesty of the sea, that enemy on which the Hebrew characteristically looked with suspicion and fear, but which is here sublimated into an expression of the power of God:

They that go down to the sea in ships,
that do business in great waters:
these see the works of the Lord
and his wonders in the deep.
For he commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind
which lifteth up the waves thereof.
They mount up to the heavens;
they go down again to the depths:
their soul melteth away because of
trouble.
They reel to and fro and stagger like a
drunken man
and are at their wits' end.
Then they cry unto the Lord in their
trouble
and he bringeth them out of their distresses.
He maketh the storm a calm
so that the waves thereof are still.
Then they are glad because they are quiet.
So he bringeth them unto their desired haven (Ps. 107:23-30).

Similar is the mood of the striking description in Psalm 65, which, if we may illustrate the greater by the less, has been the inspiration of our fine hymn, "For Those in Peril on the Sea":

By terrible things thou wilt answer us
in righteousness
O God of our salvation,
Thou that art the confidence of all the
ends of the earth
and of them that are afar off upon
the sea:
Who by his strength setteth fast the
mountains,
being girded about with might;
Who stilleth the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves
and the tumult of the peoples.
They also that dwell in the uttermost
parts
are afraid at thy tokens:
thou makest the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice (Ps. 65:5-8).

It is a passage which in its wording, its imagery, and its exalted feeling comes close to the essence of pure poetry.

Can one find more effective expression of the awesome majesty of the mountains than in the simple couplet of some unknown Hebrew poet:

> *In his hand are the deep places of the*
> *earth;*
> *The strength of the hills is his also (Ps.95:4).*

For quieter mood, for the charm of the peaceful landscape beneath the favor of a bounteous heaven, drinking in rest and refreshment from the quiet autumn rain, we turn once more to Psalm 65; it runs on:

> *Thou visitest the earth and waterest it,*
> *thou greatly enrichest it . . .*
> *Thou waterest its furrows abundantly,*
> *thou settlest the ridges thereof,*
> *thou makest it soft with showers,*
> *thou blesseth the springing thereof.*
> *Thou crownest the year with thy goodness*
> *and thy paths drop fatness (Ps 65:9-11)*

Intimately related in Hebrew thought is that tonic which for us has become commonplace. For the Hebrews, weather and landscape were intermingled as in actuality they are, and both were transfused with a sense of the sublime. Here is a brief scrap that says much more than merely that rain falls in Palestine:

> *The land where you arc going over to take possession is a land of hills and valleys, and drinks water from the rain of the heavens, a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from the beginning to the end of the year (Deut. 11:11-12).*

Famous, too, is Psalm 29, now recognized to have derived much from Canaanite mythology; it is one more example of how Hebrew thought transcended its foreign originals. Under the accepted figure of the "voice of the Lord" it relates the course of a thunderstorm crashing across the mountains and reverberating into the distances of the wilderness. Of far different sort, suggesting rather the charm of a spring morning, is this idyllic bit, expressive of the Hebrew's

sense of personal relation with his physical environment,

You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace.
The mountains and the hills
shall break forth before you
into singing
and all the trees of the field
shall clap their hands (Isa. 55:12).

It is reminiscent of that justly famous couplet in the Book of Job:

When the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for
joy (Job 38:7).

But Israel created as well great love poetry; we have the remains of it now in the Song of Songs. That it was unique, practically without parallel in the world of its time, every student of the ancient Orient knows. One goes far to find anything with which to compare it; its quality is distinctive. From the first words of this collection of lyrics one finds himself in a world of romance, transfused with all the beauty and lure of the Orient. The poems possess a sensuous charm, mingled with the beauties of nature and the wonder and mystic experience of the springtime, when nature awakes to new life and joy and activity.

I was asleep, but my heart was awake:
hark! my lover is knocking, saying,
Open to me, my sister, my love,
for my head is filled with dew
and my locks with the mists of the night. . .
I rose to open to my lover,
and my hands dripped myrrh,
and my fingers flowing myrrh
upon the bolts of the lock (Song of Sol. 5:2-5).
And again:
The voice of my lover!
See, he comes,
leaping over the mountains,

skipping over the hills! .
My lover answered, he said to me,
Rise, my love,
my beautiful one, and come;

for, see, the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone,
the flowers appear on the earth,
the time for song has come
and the voice of the turtle dove
is heard in our land. . .
O my love, in the clefts of the rock,
in the covert of the steep place,
Let me see your beauty,
let me hear your voice (Song of Sol.2:8-14).

The passage is suggestive of that other in which the majesty of Hermon looks down upon the springtime beauty of the northern plain:

Come from Lebanon, my bride;
my sister come from Hermon!
Come down from the top of Amana,
from the top of Senir, of Hermon,
from the lions' dens
from the leopards' mountains.
You have ravished my heart, my sister,
my bride,
you have ravished my heart
with one glance of your eyes,
with one ringlet from your neck (Song of Sol. 4:8-9).

But the Hebrew poets' consciousness of animate beauty was of wide scope. it is a far cry from the idyllic charm of the Song of Songs to the grace and power of the war horse, described in a passage of which it has been written that "there is nothing more sublime in any literature":

The glory of his snorting is terrible!
He paweth in the valley and rejoiceth
in his strength.
He goeth out to meet the armed men.
He mocketh at fear and is not dismayed, neither turneth he back from the sword.
The quiver rattleth against him,
the flashing spear and the javelin.
He swalloweth the ground with fierceness
and rage.
He will not turn aside at the blast of the trumpet;

but as often as he heareth the trumpet
he saith, Aha!
He smelleth the battle afar off,
the thunder of the captains and the
shouting (Job. 39:20-25).

Deserving of mention also is the couplet which by a negation tells much of a pervasive zest of life and delight in physical well-being such as is frequently ascribed to the Greek temper:

Not in the strength of the horse does
(the Lord) delight,
nor with the legs of a man is he
pleased (Ps. 147:10).

Hebrew laments are marked by deep feeling and the power to transmit their mood of woe. The Book of Lamentations plunges one at once into the tragedy which had overtaken the Jewish people, and without momentary release moves forward through poem after poem descriptive of the blackness of days when

. . .grief is poured out on the ground
for the ruin of the daughter of my
people,
because babe and suckling swoon
in the city streets.
To their mothers they say,
Give me food and drink;
Swooning as though deadly wounded
in the city' streets,
their lives ebbing away
on their mothers' breasts (Lam. 2:11-12).

Well meriting its wide repute is the exquisite little elegy in which David is reputed to have bewailed the tragedy of Mount Gilboa. It is a poem of great charm and delicacy of expression.

You mountains of Gilboa:
on you be neither dew nor rain,
you fields of death!
For there was the shield of the mighty befouled,
the shield of Saul as unanointed with oil.

Saul and Jonathan,
beloved and beautiful while alive,
in death not divided;
Swifter than eagles,
stronger than lions!. . .
I am in distress for you,
my brother Jonathan;
you were very dear to me (II Sam. 1:21-26).

Yet the greatness of Hebrew poetry is realized only in its true relevance and context, where it is concerned with themes uniquely of the Hebraic genius. And those are the themes of which we have spoken, the mystery of the all-pervading Personality, the mystery of man's beig, his destiny and his duty. Indeed one may welll comment that lacking such depth, their literature would have been negligible. Even the amazing modernity of its skill, its wealth of artistic embellishment, would not suffice to make it great literature, if it had nothing to say. Such, indeed, is the damnation of the ephemeral writing of our own time; in fact, of much of our entire artistic expression in whatever medium. Art, which should be concerned with the deepst, the inexpressible things of life, boasts instead that its motivation is merely the amusement of the artist. Fortunately the actuality is better than this; real art is being produced today; but to the extent that this concept holds, we are an age that has lost its way and, like Ecclesiastes, is merely busying itself with trivialities in order, as he said, to keep from thinking -- one wonders if the real objective is to hide an inability to think. But precisely at this point is the clue to the perennial freshness and vitality of the Bible; its concern is with the deepest issues of human life, issues which persist age after age and are new with each new generation.

The Book of Psalms is a treasury of such writing. It has been called the classic of the inner life. It covers the entire range of man's experience of unseen reality. One might take as a symbol of the whole the majestic words of the poem on the mystery of man's being and circumstance:

Lord, thou hast searched me and known
me. . .
thou dost discern my thought from
afar. . .
Behind and before thou hast confined me
and hast set thy hand upon me.. . .
Where shall I go from thy spirit?
Where shall I flee from thy presence? .. .
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell far beyond the sea,
even there thy hand will guide me
and thy right hand hold me.
I will praise thee
for thou art wonderful in awe;

wonderful are thy works.
My bones were not hidden from thee
when I was made in secret
My form thy eyes did see;
in thy book all was written (Ps. 139:1-16).

Comparable in its depth is the great Penitential, probably the most poignant expression ever written of man's sense of his unworthiness in presence of the eternal realities in which he exists:

Have mercy upon me, 0 God;
in the greatness of thy compassion
blot out my transgressions!
Wash me completely from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against thee, thee alone,
have I done what is evil in thy sight,
so that thou art right when thou speakest,
and just when thou dost condemn (Ps.51:1-4).

We may not go on to survey the variety of moods of the Psalter, the idyllic confidence and peace of Psalm 23, "the shepherd Psalm," the boasting assurance of Psalm 27, the wistful longing of Psalms 42 and 43, the exhilarating joy of the pilgrims in the "Songs of the Ascents,"

Psalms 120-134, the grateful faith of Psalm 103. Among such wealth of treasures we delay over one only, which with its characteristic thought and phrasing serves as an effectual conclusion to our brief study:

> *The Lord is good to all*
> *and his compassion is over all his*
> *works.*
> *All thy works shall give thanks to thee,*
> *0 Lord,*
> *and thy saints shall bless thee. . .*
> *Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom*
> *and thy dominion is for all generations.*
> *The Lord upholds all who fall*
> *and supports all who are bowed down.*
> *The eyes of all look to thee*
> *and thou givest them their food in its time.*
> *Thou openest thy hand*
> *and satisfiest the desire of every living*
> *thing.*
> *The Lord is righteous in all his ways,*
> *and gracious in all his works (Ps. 145:9-17).*

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