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The Old Testament conception of life after death

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THE OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPTION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

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A GRADUATION THESIS

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DEPARTMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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O U T L I N E

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I. Introduction

1. Universality of a Belief in the Future.

2. Difficulties in determining Beliefs for any Age.

II. Probable Pre-Exilic Thougnt of the Future.

1. Sheol, a Land of Negative Spirit-Existence.

a. Entrance Conditions, Non-Moral.

2. Considerations in Determining Pre-Exilic Jewish Thot.

3. Contemporary Thought of other Peoples & its Bearing.

III. Forces Compelling an Advance from Pre-Exilic Thought.

1. Exilic Influences.

a. Objective or External Influences.

b. Subjective or Internal Influences.

(1) Fate of the "Chosen People" and their Enemies.

(2) Exile and Future of Community.

2. Unsolved Enigmas of Life.

3. Jewish Conception of Man and God.

a. Man's Fellowship with God, Precursor of Immortality.

b. God is a Personal Being, Just and Righteous.

4. Thought of Future not from Lit., but Life-Experience.

IV. Later or Post-Exilic Thought of the Future in Old Test.

1. Manner of Future Life.

   a. Extinction or Annihilation.

   b. Transmigration of Souls.

   c. Resurrection Beliefs.

2. Retribution in the Future Life.

   a. In Messages of Later Prophets.

   b. Different Conclusions of Job and Koheleth.

   c. As Presented in the Psalter.

V. Progress Slow, but Content is Earnest of the Best in the New Testament.

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THE OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPTION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

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Some thought of life after death seems to have been from the earliest abidingly universal in the human family. These conceptions have been almost as diverse as human nature, but while there has been diversity as to the character of the existence, there has been uniformity as to the essential fact. No tribe of savages so degraded has been found to entirely lack it and where it seems to be wanting closer acquaintance usually reveals it. Salmonds tells of a two years' residence with the Ahts on Van Couver's Island before their belief in a future had been discovered.* So elusive is it that Kant could find among the ancient Jews no belief in a future existence and so was unwilling to give to their faith the name of a religion. However, we would expect to find among a people who were so richly endowed in spiritual insight and religious capacities that they were the chosen people to reveal God's message to the race not only some thought of a post-mortem life, but one devel-

* *Salmond's Christian Doctrine of Immortality.*

oped beyond the average of their time.

In the attempt to determine what this belief at any one time may have been some difficulty will be experienced, since there is no definite literature on the subject, such as the Egyptians have in the so-called "Book of the Dead". Materials are only occasional, are fragmentary, and when found may not represent the prevalent thought. The presence of other agreeing materials or the want of any that disagree may warrant such an inference, though the *argumentum de silentio* is frequently untrustworthy. However because of the consummate portrayal of the religious life of the Israelites in general given by the Old Testament we may be allowed to believe that a correspondingly adequate account is given of their conception of the future.

During the most of the pre-exilic period the Jewish thought of the future took form in what must have been for some time an extremely slowly developing idea of an existence in Sheol, a vast subterranean land of darkness and dust, a dreary, barren waste. It is a land of silence (Ps. 115:17) from whose inhabitants Jehovah can receive neither the praise nor the service which they were created to give Him; a land of oblivion (Ps.88:4) where men neither remember nor are remembered; a land in which all existence is

either entirely passive or negative. In such a region, peopled by bloodless and nerveless ghosts, life was but a faded copy of their former existence, the anti-type of the world of the living. It was literally a "land of silence, gloom, cessation, destruction, disorder, unvisited by God's wonders, wrapped in a sleep lasting as the enduring heavens"* (Ps.88:12). These shades can be recognized, but are not able to recognize each other, not even God (Isa 38:11). Death was looked upon as the withdrawal of divine favor from man and in sending him to Sheol it removed both the incentive and the ability on the part of man for his praising God as intended (Ps 6:5).

The shadowy denizens of this place of joyless rest can do neither good nor harm, there they can find no best, no worst, no love, no hatred, no conflict, but all a perfect sleep (Jer 51:39) from which there is no escape (Ps 143:3). Their land, like Browning's Kephan, is peopled by a "feeble flaccid folk"° from whose life all joy, zest, and vigor has fled. Completely out of touch with the world, denied the fellowship of God (Job 7:9), dragging out an existence neither wretched nor comfortable in what was neither hell nor paradise, it is little wonder that the Hebrew of that ancient day put in contrast with this gloomy en-

*Salmond's Doctrine of Christian Immortality, p. 162.
° Ibid, p. 164.

trance into the nether world the cheerful ways of earthly men.*

In Jewish thought Sheol was located below the sea and was referred to as the pit, "the lowest pit" (Ps 88:6), "the nether parts of the earth", etc. Not a place of torment, it was to be the post-mortem home of all men, kings and subjects, masters and slaves, the just and the unjust (Ps 88:48). Into Sheol the moral element did not enter; it was a place for all without regard to conduct.° "Deepest Sheol" or "uttermost parts" were words for those improperly buried and had no moral bearing. Rewards and punishemnts were believed in for the righteous and the wicked, but they were a part of this world's life. Rewards for faithfulness were received in temporal favors (Ex 23:25-26). Riches, family, and long life as evidences of God's favor were witnesses of the righteous life (Prov 3:16 and 21:21). However retribution is sure to overtake the wicked (Ps 77), and it comes in some form, they thought, during earthly life. With no conception of either a heaven or a hell there was nothing to either hope for or fear in the future. Whether righteous or wicked the end was the same and neither could escape it. So far as the future was concerned it was of little moment whether life was virtuous or immoral. In the present

*Kirkpatrick, The Psalms. °Wade, Old Testament History.

the Israelite looked for the full vindication of Jehovah's moral law.

The composition of the Old Testament by welding together several different documents each from a different period or time furnish us our problem when we attempt to determine the belief dominant at any particular time. The evidence as to whether they make any attempt to present the conceptions of the period described or whether merely portray those of the time in which the description of the past is written is slight with regard to the Jewish thought of the future. Many of the above references and conceptions to which references might have been given are exilic or post-exilic in statement, but so prevalent are they throughout the Old Testament that they must represent an old stock possession of Israel's pre-exilic days. Because it is possible for one to read the historical books without being aware of any reaches toward the future life many think them religiously crude. The silences of the Pentateuch on the subject do not mean necessarily that the thought is so familiar that it is everywhere assumed nor either that it is unknown. In both it is at least implied. The expression, "gave up the ghost", began with the thought that the ghost-like part of man that exists in Sheol leaves his body at

death. The interpretation of these words must be given considerable latitude for they are used in the New Testament by Christian writers who have long since rejected their original content but still use them as vehicles of expression for later meanings. But this shade-like, unmoral, negative Sheol existence was hardly regarded as anything future. For a long time the future thought about in Israel was not that of the individual, the Israelite, but that of the nation, Israel. Hosea's hopes (6:1-12 and 13:14) were national. Not the people separately, but the community as a whole was to be restored.

We can hardly help but wonder if the above characterization of the negative, unmoral existence in Sheol inhabited by the vaporous ghosts of the departed is an adequate representation of their belief. Were they behind or in advance of contemporary thought? The Hindus during Old Testament times, says Salmonds, believed in a retributive future with happiness on one hand and abysmal darkness on the other, mutually conditioned by ceremonial rather than moral considerations. As early as 1530 B.C. the Egyptians had a belief in a system of rewards and penalties in the future life, though the food and drink found with the mummies reveal crudities of material thinking into which the Israel-

ites never fell. The Persians had a religion of hope, a belief in a judgment, though on a sort of merit system and may perhaps have possessed a suggestion of the doctrine of the resurrection, but they, too, present us lofty conceptions imbedded in crassest absurdities. The Greeks and Babylonians agreed with the Israelites in holding that death was not the end of all, but that life beyond the present was lived in a "dark and cheerless tract where dust is the food of unhappy shades" who flit about like fantastic shadows "witless, heartless, and bloodless"* - specters but half existent. With rewards and penalties meted out on earth and not in Hades the result was greater interest in the present life. In some respects others may seem to have advanced nearer the Christian thought of the future life than the Israelite and while with others the latter may be obliged to share the glory of establishing a lofty code of ethics apart from the hope of future life or fear of God's judgment, he stands unique in keeping himself free from the trammeling accessories and monstrous absurdities which composed the framework of all other contemporary beliefs and in providing a dynamic force for righteousness that secured for the Hebrew germ conception of the future conditions for its development to a fruition impossible to any other in

* *Salmonds, Christian Doctrine of Immortality, p.66.*

the world's history.

That the above conception of life after death should develop was inevitable. It did not measure up to the best the Hebrew people felt; it did not harmonize with their thought of God; it left unsolved too many problems, and in other ways was too unsatisfactory for Jewish thought to rest in it. If, as Salmonds says, Israelitic hopes for the future became more vivid as the circumstances of the time appeared more hopeless, we would expect them to be more luminous than ever at what must have seemed to many the great denouement, the fall of Jerusalem and the carrying away of the flower of Israel's life into exile.

Accordingly among the forces that helped to brighten and also to change old hopes exilic influences will be first considered. The extent of the objective element, the influence of external peoples is a matter of speculation, somewhat unprofitable because unnecessary to account for Jewish thought. A comparative study of the Israelitic and Babylonian views of the future life presents striking similarities, but the former is "for once and for all" freed from the latter's material notion of the spirit existence. With others its influence, if anything at all, was only negative for surrounding polytheism by its contrast seemed only to

give to the Israelites a clearer vision of the monotheism to which they so persistently clung. Because of her early advanced thought of life after death some would credit Egypt with molding many of the Jewish ideas on that subject. Renouf, however, states that the Israelites left Egypt without even the Egyptian measurement of time. Since a disembodied existence after death never occurred to the Egyptians, and the theory of annihilation after death, so prominent with them, Salmonds thinks to be foreign to the Old Testament, though it seems to be found in Ps. 39:13 and Job 7:8,21, it seems they little affected the Jewish people. Immortality in the minds of the Jews must have received a great impetus from Persian influence which according to one writer "opened the religious consciousness of the Jewish race to this great truth". As to any borrowed elements there can be no certainty. Why could not the thought of Satan as a personal being be as much the logical outcome of Jewish thought of a personal God as of the Persian spirit or apparition of evil? Angels are as intelligible to us as a part of the "hosts" of Jehovah as when said to be suggested by the Persian spirits of good. The Jewish conception of immortality can be explained as the logical outcome of its antecedents and while it is unlikely that it absorbed /

elements from the outside save as it transformed them into its own life, just as likely is it to have had its growth thus stimulated. It can not be known that anything was outrightly borrowed, but these external forces undoubtedly hastened the speed of development.

Then the exile wrought a subjective change in the Israelites that was not inconsiderable in its effect upon their future hopes. Just as long life, honor, wealth, and children were evidences of the righteous life in the individual, so prestige, prosperity, and continued victory over enemies were tokens of a nation's acceptance with God. This belief must have been violently disturbed by the fall of Jerusalem and the consequent fate of the Jewish people. The Jews had regarded themselves as the chosen people and how could they harmonize their captivity with their theory which would make their enemies, who were God's foes, as they thought, suffer the penalty which now was theirs. They came to think of "secret" or unknown sins (Ps 19:12; 90:8) as responsible for their ill-fortune, but near by were wicked and perverse nations going "scot free", seemingly, from all punishment for their ways. The picture of the earth as the court with Jehovah as the Judge condemning His enemies did not actualize. The nation so long foretold as ultimate victor

was conquered. The temple so long regarded as inviolate was in ruins. There they had ever found Jehovah; now He seemed far away. In it they had worshipped as a nation; now with neither temple or nation and on a soil unhallowed by memories of God's presence, changes became necessary, and, as Kent states,* this was doubtless a period of rapid progress. The sacrifices with their local associations of the temple gave way to fasting which could be observed anywhere. The observation that rewards and penalties were not always equitable here must have struggled for an explanation further on and beliefs at this point advanced. The quiet and depression of the exile led the captives to think either of the glory of the past or to invest the future with the brightest hopes their old idealism could give them. They could see how blind their rulers had been to religious truth, and how as a people they had "missed the mark". With sufficient time for meditation that they should evolve a conception of the future with a more equitable solution of earth's problems seems inevitable. With some the future was yet that of the nation. Ezekiel's resurrection in chapter 37 is that of a people. Before the final fall of Jerusalem and again when the sacred city was in ruins he announced that Jehovah would gather his scattered people to-

* *History of the Jewish People.*

gether though it would be not about the palace, but the temple.* As a people they came to see that political bonds were not necessary for their integrity as a race. Their common faith was a stronger tie and with the nation gone, the national hope shattered, the individual torn from the old customs and surroundings he had formed in Zion, and so becoming more and more his own priest, the old beliefs and hopes that had clustered about the future of the community or state began to slowly disintegrate and gradually to relate themselves to a belief in the immortality of the individual life.

Then, in the second place, the unsolved problems of life forbade the thought of the future stopping with the negative Sheolic existence. These enigmas have been ever present in greater or less degree. They belong to no one period and cannot be entirely unravelled. During Israel's pre-exilic days riches must have come to the wicked. Sore troubles and unusual sorrows overtook the upright. Man was meant to live according to the Old Testament, and could continue to live in his children, but childlessness must have come without regard to moral life, and the unreceived rewards of the righteous could in such cases not be meted out to posterity. With no moral or religious element entering

* *Kent, History of the Jewish People, p. 53.*

into the future, and no readjustment of rewards and penalties there, how could the enigmas of life, then existent, receive any solution? Job observed that the wicked do not always suffer and he saw the wrong of imputing to all who suffer a sinful life, for the innocent have their burdens and troubles. This problem has no solution apart from immortality and in 14:14 and 19:25-27 he catches what seems a glimpse of this doctrine, at least he surmises that there may be something beyond Sheol. With other men almost universally his heart revolted at the thought that death is the end of all and that righteousness has no rewards save those of earth. Job 16:18ff reveals his belief that his innocence may be vindicated hereafter. What he fails to find in his friends and in this life he finds in God and his hope in the future.* Ewald believed that Job taught the doctrine of immortality, for it alone could explain human suffering and the justice of God.° It is his desire, his momentary faith, but does it not seem like the air into which the fish leaps from the water - not quite his home? Were it otherwise it would be natural for him to place more stress upon it. Man must then have been impressed by a sense of the incompleteness of this life and nothing less than the doctrine of immortality could give him the satis-

*Salmonds, Doctrine of Christian Immortality.
° History of Israel, IV, p. 213.

faction he demands.

"Where there is no belief in a God, disbelief in life beyond the grave is natural"*, so, thirdly, we will notice how the Jewish conception of creature and Creator colored their speculations, meditations and beliefs about man's future. The animal world had sprung into being by command," Let us make" was said of man alone and he alone was made "in the image of God". Man is a work not of nature, but of God. In a few places in the Old Testament he is treated like a brute; in many others he is likened to God. Man was made for communion with God, and a different origin implies a different end from that which would come to birds and beasts. Israel doubtless believed it, despite the questioning by the writer of Ecclesiastes, for the quite definite Jewish thought of God necessitated it. He was the Creator of everything, immanent but transcendent, a righteous being, personal and holy in all his ways. Before there is any certainty as to any life beyond the unmoral and negative existence in Sheol, they came to feel that their highest good rested in intimate fellowship with God. In Psalm 16 some find a reference to life after death, that the Psalmist believes God will be with him even in Sheol. Some think he had in mind a long life and so naturally thought of safety

* *Salmonds, Doctrine of Christian Immortality, p. 136.*

for a long time to come. Others see here only a promise of the perpetuity of the life of the nation.* Kirkpatrick interprets it as declaring that God's joys alone are eternal while earth's fade and that the antithesis here is not between life here and hereafter, but that between the life with or without God in association with whom is man's highest good.° Salmonds holds that in this Psalm there is no distinct belief in a blessed immortality, far less in a resurrection, but that there is present a strong hope and a sense of security that dispels all fear in the fellowship with God.+ What form it would take was unknown to the Jew, but in his relation to Jehovah is the pledge of his deliverance. In Psalm 77 that God will reward and punish is never questioned, so he believes there must be a way out of the seeming unjust rewards and penalties, the unravelled enigmas of this life, for his is a just God. Accordingly Jehovah becomes a "God of Deliverance" (Ps 68:20). Hosea (2:6 and 14) bases his hope for the restoration of Israel on the love of God for his chosen people. In Psalms 73 and 92 only the dull and foolish fail to see that if the wicked prosper they are later to be overwhelmingly and eternally punished, but the only reward specified for the upright (73:23-26) is the presence and favor of God, and the friend

*Knudson. ° *The Psalms.* + *History of the Jewish People.*

of God could not end his life in the ghost-like existence of Sheol. If God is his portion he must have Him forever.* His thought of God led him straight into immortality, for he felt that "men who have lived in covenant and fellowship with God cannot dissolve into a handful of dust and cease to be."° He would see God's face and be satisfied (Ps 17:15 and Job 19:26). His fellowship with Jehovah could hardly be limited to this life, but would go on forever (Ps 73:23-26). The doctrine of immortality may not have been consciously or prevailingly held, for if it had been, the tenor of much of the Old Testament would have been changed. At least implied in the Jewish thought of God is all that leads to a thorough-going belief in immortality. The worst thing about Sheol was the loss of God (Ps 88:10-12). Jeremiah, abandoned by the world, found his highest satisfaction in God. When He seemed to have fallen the prophets preached Him as the supreme ruler of the universe. Theirs was a rare quality of trust and belief in Jehovah and His justice which not only laid the foundation, but built the framework, and those who had eyes to see could soon begin to see and understand. Truly a faith that had triumphed over the world of sense and appearance, and had worked its way through to the absolute conviction that in friendship and

*Davidson, Psalms, in Hastings' Bible Dictionary.
°Strachan's Hebrew Ideals, p. 199.

harmony with God is man's highest good and truest happiness, is not only a harbinger of immortality, but, as Kirkpatrick writes, is a knowledge that is itself eternal life.*

Finally in the fourth place the religion of the Old Testament is not primarily a book-religion, but a religion of life and the fact that the thought of life after death is the result of neither logic nor literature, but of the experience of life is one fraught with great importance for its later development. Mere logic could be overcome, but heart experiences can never be refuted, especially so far as the possessor is concerned. Literature tends to codify and circumscribe truth, but the truth of life breaks over such limits and because of the life within it yields ever richer interpretations than those originally in the mind of the writer. From the fact that Jehovah was to be his portion in "the land of the living" (Ps 142:5) and that he was not always sure of that after death, the psalmist believed that "God was not the God of the dead, but of the living".° And as no conception of Him, so no putting of the thought of life after death could ever be final, as it lived, it became increasingly more clear and certain "not by reasoning, but by experience; not by the application of logic to the problems of existence, but by reflection on what the heart

* *The Psalms.* ° *Matthew.*

felt and possessed; not by the chill and doubtful way of speculation, but by the impassioned and assured way of personal acquaintance with God".* Life alone grows and grow it must, so that even if exilic influences, external or objective and internal or subjective, the unsolved problems and enigmas of life, and the Jewish thoughts of man and God had not carried the thought of the future life far beyond the negative shadow-land existence of Sheol as a place for all, good and evil alike, it would have been advanced perhaps more slowly, but none the less surely by the fact that it was a living life-product.

Just what happened after death is little discussed in the Old Testament. Both the psalmist and Koheleth raise the question as to the how of it, but the former does not attempt an explanation and the latter only discounts it. In that day the supreme question was the fact and not its explanation, so the Biblical data here is scant. Salmonds believes the theory of extinction or annihilation to be foreign to the Old Testament though it is suggested in Ps 39: 13, Job 7:21, and Eccles 3: 19-20. These passages are said to "reflect moods of feeling, sinkings and fluctuations of hope which may come at times on any mind in the dark and painful things of life".+ Had this spirit prevailed all pro-

*Salmonds, Christian Doctrine of Immortality, p. 154.
+Ibid, p. 135.

phetic references to a resurrection would have been stifled. Some have thought that the souls of the wicked were destroyed, but that those of the righteous could return to earth. Such a belief in the transmigration of souls seems to have been current in the time of Herod who thought Jesus was the Baptist again come to life and both were thought to be risen prophets. Whatever of the conception existed was doubtless due to Greek or Egyptian influence, for little or no support can be found for it in the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes 12:7 seems to say that the body will be dissolved and the soul absorbed by God, but the theme of the passage is rather the transiency of life. "Absorption is the end where emanation is the beginning",* but that obliterates personality after death and to that the Old Testament nowhere agrees.

However with one phase of the "how" of life after death post-exilic thought concerned itself and there gradually emerged a belief in some sort of a resurrection of the dead, though very vague and indefinite it was. Along with the hope of immortality the origin of the thought of resurrection is thought by some to be Persian, and by others to be Egyptian or Hellenic, but, as Salmonds says, the Jewish religion is not so indebted to ethnic faiths and all agree-

*Salmond, *Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, p. 150.

ments or similarities between them are matters not of dependence of one upon the other, but of coincidence. The Old Testament conception of God as a living and eternal personality has wrapped within it, at least in germinal form, all that we find there with regard to the everlasting life. The thought of resurrection began with the revival of the state. Hosea preached it (6:1-2) and it was woven into Ezekiel's allegory of the dry bones (Chap 36) as the reawakening of a people. Ezekiel 37 describes a dead national life made to live, and portrays a resurrection of the people. In Isa 26 the prophecy of the resurrected life is not only more certain, but it has progressed and not only the community as such, but the persons composing it were to be resurrected. Non-Israelites shall die, but Israel's dead shall live (v.19) which Wade thinks probably meant only the righteous dead. The dead as lifeless ghosts living on the dust of Sheol seem to present the impossible so far as resurrection is concerned, but God will do it, he feels. Daniel depicts the resurrection as including both the wicked and the righteous, but of the Israelites only. Some shall awake to "everlasting life" and some to "everlasting contempt" (12:1-2).

Salmonds declares that this passage goes beyond any

other in the canon of the Old Testament - the most definite and literal and the largest in its vision and expression of the hope of a resurrection with distinct moral issues. It presupposes a judgment and reaches out to the Messianic hope. The author of the book of Ecclesiastes did not believe in the doctrine of the resurrection. Who knows what becomes of the spirit of man, he asks (3:19-21). He believes that the same event and goal is the end of all (2:15-16 and 6:3-6). Kirkpatrick asserts that nowhere in the Psalter is there the hope of a resurrection. In Psalm 88 it is thought to be inconceivable. However in the Psalms the hope of the New Testament is found in germ. The picture here presented of God's love and wrath marks out the path to be taken by all the speculations and hopes of the future. Through the rifts in the clouds there occasionally stole upon that dark day a ray from the coming sunrise of eternal Christian beliefs.

There is no more marked example of progress in Jewish thought, it would seem, than in their conception of a future as it grew to be retributive. This idea emerged somewhat in advance of that of the resurrection. The Socinians thought the Old Testament ignorant of any system of awards and as well of eternal life. Even De Wette thought the

Jews suffered when their idea of retribution was contrasted with that of the Greeks.* The very core of Mosaic legislation was the spirit of retribution, in Jewish thought, however, to be meted out on earth. We have seen the dissatisfaction that arose from the discord between their thoughts of Jehovah as a just God and the evident injustice of rewards and penalties of the present life and observed that that compelled a changing view of the future. Then "we should also naturally anticipate that as moral life rises, and a people's ideas of virtue and goodness become more and more distinctly ethical, the conception of the future life will become in like manner ethical, and the idea of a retributive future assert itself".°

One of the earliest stated beliefs in a Divine judgment is given by Isaiah 2-4 and is doubtless pre-exilic. McFadyen thinks it about 735 B.C.+ How it will come he does not say. Deutero-Isaian writes in exilic times, probably, of the restoration of the community that is to be by means of an inner religious change. In Isaiah 9:2-7 and 32:1-8 of rather doubtful date we find the hope of a glorious Messianic age expressed. Again and again the thought appears in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Joel 1:15, Zephaniah 1:15, and Amos 5:18. Malachi, written Driver thinks sometime shortly af-

*Salmonds, Christian Doctrine of Immortality. °Ibid, p. 16.
+ Introduction to the Old Testament.

ter the return from the captivity is sure of a last judgment (4:5).* Here, Ewald says, the bright hope of immortality is developed as never before and further - what almost seems an overstatement - "that it had long been established in Israel, but never until now so firmly that it could never disappear. This hope enabled them to endure victoriously all earthly sufferings and to reach the blessings beyond, "the only sword of salvation on whose edge the most fatal terrors would strike in vain".°

The theory of proportionate rewards either here on earth or after death the writer of Ecclesiastes would not accept. He saw the good man and the evil man living, and while he possessed a sense of the worth of the present he became cynical as to any future. He urged the fearing of God and the living of a temperate life, but because we are sure of the present alone, we should enjoy its pleasures to the full. The perplexity into which he fell is good evidence that man was not made to fit into such an animal existence and end. Job felt the same injustice in the distribution of rewards and penalties, but he came to a different conclusion. Though surrounded by what seemed evidences of God's wrath he holds to God's love and justice and feels he will not permit the same fate to the upright

* *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament.*
° *History of Israel, V., pp. 305-6.*

life that befalls the wicked. His wish in 19:23-27 that there might be another life reaches practical certainty and this passage Salmonds terms the loftiest in the book. He knows there is a Redeemer. He may die, but in Him he will be safe. He may never see it and he does not ask how it will be, but he believes that justice is sure to come some time. Here then stands an undeveloped thought of the future "without the distinctness, precision, and permanence of later faith".*

The book of Daniel with its Persian words, three of Greek origin, and a section written in Palestinian Aramaic, is undoubtedly very late, and the message conveyed is that every experience, good or ill, of man is not an accident, but a part of God's plan for the world and its people, that right will ultimately triumph and good faithful service be rewarded.°

Of the four so-called "Psalms of Immortality", 16, 17, 49, and 73, 16 may refer only to God's presence in Sheol, to the value of communion with Him, or it may be a community psalm with no reference to individual immortality. As a whole the Psalms are quite uncertain, at least indefinite as to whether judgment is to be meted out in the present or future and if in the latter whether all men are judged.

*Salmonds, *Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, p. 205.
° *Kent, History of the Jewish People.*

Psalm 17, if regarded as community, may contain a prophecy of the Messianic age, and if individual it presents even in verse 15 a hope of immortality rather clouded and hardly more than implicit. Psalm 49 which seems to be strictly individual copes with the problem of the prosperity of the wicked. What avails their riches? Verses 6-12 reveal the futility of either the wealth of the rich or the thoughts of the wise to redeem them from Sheol. After they are gone their abundance is quickly scattered and they themselves will be driven to Sheol like animals to be shepherded by death and ruled over by the righteous who the Psalmist feels were not meant for Sheol.* Verse 14b and c implies what could be considered the germ principle of the resurrection. The righteous, assured of the protection and the fellowship of God - of far greater value than earthly wrath - is to be ransomed (v.15) from the ghost-like existence of the nether world, but while the psalmist here suggests the immortality of the righteous he makes no attempt to define it. Wade interprets this verse as describing a deliverance not from the grave or Sheol either, but from a premature destruction. He adds, however, that in the belief that God will not fail man whose *summum bonum* is fellowship with the Divine there exists at least a "potential immortality".° As in the book

* *Kirkpatrick, The Psalms, p.199.*
° *Wade, Old Testament History, p.511.*

of Job and Psalm 37, so in Psalm 73 the same question is dwelt upon as in Psalm 49 save that the former represents a later stage of thought. It was a serious problem to ancient Israel and especially to those who thought only of this world as the scene of God's dealing with men.* The Psalmist sees the instability of this world's rewards as contrasted with that resulting from fellowship with God and reaches the conclusion that if the wicked seem to triumph it is for a short time only. Neither death nor an existence in Sheol can end all. Here is a gleam of things eternal in the thought, as Kirkpatrick expresses it, that this life is but one stage, one act in the drama of a life that may be eternal, at least everlasting.° The misguided multitude feeling that it is ever the worse for its devotion to its religion can not see that God is really controlling things and wonders what the real use of obedience to Him may be. Delitzsch thinks the retribution here referred to is of this life, but when we read (verse 27) that the wicked "shall perish" and that the righteous (verses 24-26) with God as their "portion forever" are "afterward" to be received into glory, what other conclusion can we reach than that there is to be an ultimate judgment with destruction for the evil and everlasting life for the upright? Though the Septuagint with

* *Kirkpatrick, The Psalms.* ° *Ibid.*

its reading, "with glory didst thou receive me",* sees here no reference to the future, as we have the text, it must refer to life after death. If this hope were clear and definite, Kirkpatrick's question as to why more stress was not put upon it as the solution of the troubles of the Jewish people° is pertinent. Might it not have been one of those flashes of revealed truth from the Infinite which this lofty spirit with a marvelous spiritual reach was able to catch and hold but for a moment and which like an unreached and somewhat elusive ideal was to serve as a beacon light, "marshalling" them the way they should go?

Beliefs, especially the religious, change slowly. They so closely intertwine about and interweave their tendrils with the human heart that they are uprooted, if at all, by a surgery both slow and severe. The old conception of a nether Sheol peopled by bloodless, ghost-like denizens who entered there at death regardless of moral conduct during their earthly life, and justice with its rewards for the righteous and penalties for the wicked administered by the Celestial Being, Jehovah, but with the awards and sentences always pronounced in the terrestrial court of earthly life, were probably cherished somewhat tenaciously by the Jewish people and made way but slowly for the progressive revela-

* *Kirkpatrick, The Psalms.* °*Ibid.*

tions made to spiritual leaders. In the Old Testament are declarations of individual immortality, suggestions of a resurrection for both the evil and the upright, and a half-belief that the future will be retributive. Though these concepts lacked real assurance, they held, as the acorn the oak tree, in embryo the fulness of present Christian hopes. Because it was devoid of this assurance we must not think, says Davidson, that the Jewish religion was a low or feeble type. The wonder is that without such assurance of the future there could exist such a vigorous and tenacious faith as theirs. The wonder is that when they knew so little they believed so much.* Delitzsch remarks that such unreserved trust in God in the midst of the unsolved enigmas of life and of the gloom that enveloped the future, bears witness to the heroic character of the Old Testament faith. The lack of clearness and certainty about the future resulted, and happily so, in less emphasis on heavenly hopes and more on earthly conduct, in less interest in the otherworldly and more in the present life. Herein after all lies the secret of everlasting life, and the Hebrew with his hope alone in Jehovah, trusting to Him all his future earthly days was quite content to commit to Him his fate beyond the Styx.°

* *Davidson, The Psalms, Hastings Bible Dictionary.*
° *Marti, The Religion of the Old Testament.*

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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