

1919

The development of the doctrine of forgiveness in the Old Testament

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"THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT".

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
MAY 18, 1919.
DEPT. OF OLD TESTAMENT.

A THESIS
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

In tracing the development of the doctrine of forgiveness in the Old Testament it will be necessary for us to understand just what was the conception of sin therein held. and since "one conception of sin is in large part a reflection both of one's conception of God and one's conception of man"; it is well for us to begin this study with a brief survey of the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man as they are found in the Old Testament.

The question of the divine existence is not raised in the Old Testament. It is assumed as a fact and as a universal element in the thought of men. If there were men who denied it, it simply meant that they took no account of the divine existence; they lived as though there were no God. The fool who said in his heart "there is no God" (Ps.14:1) was not making a philosophical or speculative denial of God's existence. He was simply saying that so far as he was concerned God was not present and did not interfere in life. It reflects the fact that God was often forgotten and not reckoned with in life. It

never occurred to any Old Testament writer to argue or to prove the existence of God. That was assumed.

So also of the possibility of knowing God. It was tacitly assumed throughout the Old Testament that God was not only accessible but that he is actually known by men. The very nature of man, the events of history, prophecy, miracles all served as avenues of this knowledge. God has made himself known. Man himself has not attained to this knowledge but God has revealed himself to men. God speaks, man listens. God brings himself near unto men. He enters into covenant relations with them and lays commands on them. Moses and the prophets are not represented as reflecting on the Unseen and Eternal and thus arriving at conceptions of God. God manifests himself to them and they recognize him. The form of manifestation may change but the reality remains unchanged. The medium may be the burning bush or an angelic messenger, or even a spiritual intuition of the mind of the prophet. The form matters not; God reveals himself and moreover he takes the initiative in this revelation.

But this revelation was limited. God did not reveal His inmost nature. Even Moses was not permitted

to see His face (Ex.33:20-23). An exhaustive revelation of God could not be made because man could not fully comprehend it. Nevertheless the Old Testament does not picture God away off in some transcendental background into which man cannot penetrate. God is a Person with ethical attributes and is known to men.

The conception of the personality of God is evidenced in many ways. From the earliest mention of God in the Old Testament He is regarded as a Person; His very name is personal and His moral being receives fuller and richer expression as the Old Testament progresses. The God of Israel is distinct from and superior to all other deities. He has an individuality and character of His own.

Besides the use of this personal name for Israel's God is the use of anthropomorphisms. Many of these seem to imply limitations on the power and greatness of God. They seem to conflict with other representations of God found in the Old Testament also. But man has always used some anthropomorphisms in referring to God. Indeed we cannot escape their use altogether and we need not seek to escape them. It is quite possible and even probable that God's personality was so vividly realized by some that

other true conceptions of Him were obscured or repressed. But this is not peculiar to the Old Testament. When some inspired prophet has God "make bare His holy arm" (Is. 52:10) or lifts up a signal to the nations (Is. 49:22), he is equally justified with the modern crusader who puts God on the side of the armies of Democracy or who puts Jesus Christ in the muddy trenches of Flanders. These are but vivid conceptions of God's being and activity and power. The human is transferred to God's personality by a poetic and devoted people. The language only testifies to the warmth and intensity of the religious devotion.

The relation of God to the world which He had created gives further evidence of His personality. Freedom and self-direction were ascribed to Him instinctively. It was His world, He made it and controlled it. The heavens and the earth were the work of His hands. "He spake and the ordered universe began to be".

So too this freedom was manifested in God's relation to history. He had a purpose and plan and an ultimate end to be attained. And this end meant progress. If the present order came to an end it would be succeeded by another of a higher order. This idea

of freedom is especially true in connection with the thought of miracle. For the Old Testament writers God stood ready to perform a miracle at any time the occasion demanded it. This conception of God gave definiteness and distinctness to the thought of His personality. He is no blind force, vague and abstract but a living personal Being.

As the thought of the Old Testament progresses fuller and more formal expression is given to the attributes of God. This is a natural deduction from the idea of God's transcendent moral personality. Thus the thought of the unity of God is implied in the thought of Him as a Person. This conception goes back to the beginning of Israel's history. No stress was laid on it. The fact was simply taken for granted as a constituent element of His personality. Later, special emphasis was laid because conditions under which the Hebrews settled in Canaan demanded its emphasis.

Alongside of this emphasis on the essential unity of God the Old Testament vigorously taught that there is but one God, and here is one of its greatest contributions to the world's thought and faith. This sole rule of Yahweh was a truth that was

only gradually attained. From the time of Moses down to Elijah and on to the time of the eighth-century prophets there is a distinct development in this important idea. Later prophets seized upon this monotheistic teaching and emphasized it again and again.

What is true of the unity of God is true also of the spirituality of God. As the exalted idea of His supreme personality grew so the highly spiritual conception of His being grew. It is here that the essential nature of God is to be found. The Old Testament nowhere says that "God is a spirit" yet everywhere this lofty conception is affirmed.

Likewise the attributes of holiness and righteousness and power might be tabulated and discussed and in each case the same significant truth would be evident, that as the conception of a transcendent moral personality developed, the attributes of goodness, love, righteousness, power etc. were assumed. All of these exalted conceptions came only after a long period of development. It was these ethical qualities that gave Yahweh His distinct and unparalleled value. Other gods there might be, but they were not really gods because they were not morally perfect.

Turning now from the doctrine of God as developed in the Old Testament to the conception of man we find, as always, a close inter-relation between these two fundamental ideas. The thought of God will determine in large measure the thought of man, and the value of a religion may be gauged in large measure by its teaching on these two points. The Old Testament writers had no distinctive psychology and no distinctive physiology. They simply accept and reflect the ideas current among the people of their own day. Their language is not the language of scientists. No clearly defined doctrine of man existed for them. Hence we have a reflection of popular speech and popular belief of the day.

In the first place the Old Testament recognizes that man is something more than mere physical. This conception is very ancient. From the beginning man knew that there was a fundamental difference between a living and a dead body. Just what this difference was is the cause of a number of more or less interesting theories. When death came life vanished. Many questions arose: "What is life?" "Whence goes it?" "How and whence does it come?"

The seat of life was most naturally placed in the breath. When death came the breath ceased and life disappeared. Hence the breath was most readily thought of as being the basis of life. Another conception that was deeply rooted put the seat of life in the blood. Express statements to this effect do not occur until a development^{later} in Hebrew thought but prohibitions against eating of blood existed very early. This conception rested doubtless on the practical observation that life diminished as blood flowed.

The question of the origin of this breath of life assumed great importance for the early Hebrew mind. The Old Testament answers this query according to the conception of God which it held and made Him the author of life. Genesis 2:7 says that "Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul". That is, the breath of life emanates directly from an inbreathing of that of God. This life ceases at a man's death when God calls back His spirit of life to Himself.

Now this distinction between soul and body was far less marked with the Hebrews than with us. Life

was viewed as a unity. The soul might originate in connection with the body and disappear with it yet it was a different substance or entity. This close connection of soul and body did not interfere with an essentially spiritual conception of the soul's functions. The soul was regarded as the seat of the conscious and personal life; but it was not the exclusive seat of this higher life. Such functions were attributed to the flesh as well and the term "basar" or flesh, was used to designate the totality of life. Soul and body did not constitute a dualism for the Hebrew mind. These terms were correlative rather than antithetic.

Besides the Hebrew word for soul "nephesh" and the word "basar" or flesh, there appears often the word "ruach" or spirit. Just what the relation between these terms is, is not clear. Many attempts have been made to bring about an adjustment between them but the problem too often has been made more difficult rather than clarified. The two terms "nephesh" and "ruach" were not synonymous yet many times they are used interchangeably. A distinctive use of the term ruach or spirit however, was in reference to God. "Ruach was characteristic of deity and in

this sense stood in a certain antithesis to flesh" *
This higher association of the term inevitably affected the conception of the human spirit and led to a higher and finer thought of man's destiny.

Another word was used by the Hebrews to designate the inner life of man namely, "leb" or "lebab", meaning heart. No special significance attaches to the different uses of the terms heart and soul. They are often used synonymously with each other and with "spirit"; to denote the total personal life of man. "Heart" with the Hebrews referred more specifically to the ruling intellectual element in man's nature rather than to the emotional nature, as modern usage designates. No such sharp distinction between the head and heart existed for Hebrew writers as exists for modern thinkers. All inward elements of whatsoever sort may be included under the "heart" in the Old Testament thought.

We can readily see then that the Old Testament conception of man is anti-materialistic in the sense that material life is not reduced to a merely physical basis . There is that higher spiritual factor of soul life. Man was made for participation

*"The Rel. Teaching of the O.T." -Knudson p230.

in the higher personal or spiritual life of God. As a spiritual being he finds in God his chief good. An essential affinity existed between God and man.

With this lofty conception of man naturally belongs the thought of responsibility and human freedom. Two distinct sets of facts are traceable in the Old Testament, in which the demands of the ethical nature for freedom is recognized ~~is recog-~~
~~nized~~ and again in which the demand for divine control is asserted. The Hebrew mind found no contradiction between these two apparently conflicting ideas of divine causality and human freedom. The two were simply opposite sides of the same fact. It is nowhere said in the Old Testament that man is free, yet everywhere man is treated as morally responsible. The necessity of choosing between human freedom and divine sovereignty did not exist for the Old Testament writers. Both stood side by side.

Before we leave the discussion of the doctrine of man in the Old Testament a word about human destiny as conceived therein ought to be said. The eschatology of the individual received scant attention in the Old Testament. Eschatology is concerned

mostly with the nation. Not until almost the close of the Old Testament period do we find a belief in personal immortality. Uncertainty and scepticism prevail. a gloomy view of the future life is common throughout the entire Old Testament. Its writers devoted little attention to what took place after death. The fate of the individual was wrapped up in the fate of the nation. The expectation of the speedy coming of the Kingdom of God tended to turn attention away from the thought of death and the future life of the individual. He was interested in the coming of the Kingdom for the nation; he would share in the benefits as a member of the nation.

In the early chapters of Genesis there is an interesting reflection of a current conception. Man's original state according to the divine will, was one of undisturbed fellowship with God. God's dwelling place was within the sphere of man's home. But disobedience came, from the root-sin of pride and the fruits of this disobedience are, the loss of intimate divine fellowship, expulsion from His presence, a life of endless toil and trouble, and

at last, death in place of endless life that was formerly open to man.

With the development of Old Testament religion it was inevitable that the future of the individual should have serious consideration, a positive attitude must be assumed. And that future life must have moral worth. The early conception of Sheol, or the assembling place of the dead, was crude and uninviting. The lot of those who went there was indeed a miserable one. Almost any kind of earthly existence was to be preferred to life in Sheol. It was a land of forgetfulness (Ps. 88:11-12) and destruction. There was no return from it (Job 7:9); the dead had no consciousness of themselves nor of others. (Eccl.9:10) Life there was a blank nothingness.

The reason for this early attitude is seen in the current conception of God. He was a Being who manifested Himself here and now in men's affairs. He was so truly a God of history that the affairs of dead men were foreign to His interests. Life in Sheol was the very reverse of all that Yahweh stood for and represented. The future life was not denied nor contradicted; it was overshadowed by the living

actual presence of God Himself.

But this earlier conception had to be replaced, as the religious life of the Hebrews advanced, with a more positive thought. The fact of the future life had to be met and so we find positive ideas concerning it taking root. The Messianic hope of Israel down to the exile made provision for the longings of the individual for a larger and fuller life. But it did not promise him immortality and it could not be permanently satisfactory. The individual demanded something more than was promised in the Messianic hope. And so we read in Isaiah 65:20-22, that there is promised a miraculous prolongation of human life. This did not satisfy the hopes of devout Hebrew hearts however, and we read in a still better word (Is. 25:8) that death itself is to be "swallowed up" in the new Kingdom.

Then there grew up the idea of retribution. This principle was not justly applied in this life. The innocent suffered with the guilty and the wicked prospered. But this condition would be rectified in the future life. Justice would be done. Thus Job turned to the future for his reward. In the life after death he would be vindicated.

But the growing hunger for fellowship with God demanded a personal future life. Life's value according to later Old Testament expression, was in the consciousness of the presence of God, and the removal of His presence made death a special object of dread. If communion with God be the supreme good then death must not terminate this communion but must make it endless. There must be deliverance from death. Life with God must go on forever.

This conception was the climax of a long development. "Not until the advent of Christianity did this higher hope become a living and burning faith. Stripped of its national limitations, it now became a universal hope, the hope of every man as man. It was also, when linked up with the resurrection of Christ and the thought of eternal fellowship with Him, carried with it a certainty of conviction and a richness of content that were altogether new. In a very real sense Christ brought life and immortality to light; so that it was possible for the believer to say that 'while it is not yet made manifest what we shall be we know that, when he shall be manifested we shall be like him; for we shall see

him even as he is'(I John 3:2)" *

After this short survey of the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man as the Old Testament reveals them we are ready to turn more specifically to the conception of sin and its nature. Naturally the attitude toward sin changes with the changing thought of God and man. AS God becomes ethical and spiritual sin becomes a moral evil. AS man knows and experiences the abiding presence of God sin becomes a very serious matter because it interferes with this relationship. "The fundamental Old Testament conception of sin is not against other men or against a man's self but sin against God"**.

In the earlier Hebrew thought the idea of sin did not involve personal guilt. He who kept the law was blameless. The breach of any law was sin. It was not necessary to violate what later centuries called the principle of right, to commit sin. The violation of established religious rites was sin, regardless of any moral associations. The moral law was identified so closely with custom that it was difficult to distinguish between them. Morality was regarded simply as compliance with custom. Sin meant

*"The Rel. Teachings of the O.T." A.C.Knudson p408

** "Dictionary of the Bible"-Hastings Vol.IV p 528.

neglect, conscious or unconscious, of ceremonial regulations, rather than moral transgression.

When we enter the pre-Mosaic period seeking a definite doctrine of sin we search in vain. There seems to be no such thing as a conscious moral principle; custom determined right or wrong. Morality, properly so-called, did not exist. Dr Kautzsch in an extensive article in Hastings "Dictionary of the Bible" (Extra Vol. p624) says, "fear to violate custom, fear of the consequences of such violation-in particular, dread of ceremonial uncleanness,- all this is deeply ingrained; but of 'sin' in the moral sense attached by us to the term, it is impossible to speak." This mighty influence of custom "allowed a married man freest intercourse with concubines and female slaves, but it guards most strictly the honor of a virgin and the married woman; - - - custom requires honesty and uprightness towards ones fellow-tribesmen but has no scruple about allowing deceit and cheating to be practised on a stranger."

Nevertheless, at the dawn of the Mosaic period the germ of a conscious morality must have been sown for without such a germinating power Israel's recognized religious and moral superiority would be

inexplicable.

Regarding the work of Moses in this respect there are varied accounts in the different sources of the Pentateuch. Certain things however, are firmly established therein by tradition, namely, that Moses of the tribe of Levi, was the first to proclaim Yahweh as the God of the whole people of Israel and as their deliverer from bondage in Egypt; that at Sinai he brought about the establishment of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel; that he laid the foundation of the judicial and ceremonial ordinances in Israel.

When the literary prophets appear we find with them as with earlier leaders of Israel's life, Jahweh is primarily the God of Israel. Their principle duty as they conceived it, was to preach repentance to the people, to hold up to them their ingratitude to the Creator of their nation and their Deliverer from bondage and their constant Benefactor for many centuries. But Yahweh is not only the God of Israel in the old sense of the national God. On the contrary, there is a mighty effort on the part of almost all of the literary prophets to break the barriers of thought that confined Yahweh to Israel. His

power and His rule extend to all people and He is supreme over all other gods.

With this enlarged and deeply spiritualized conception of God came a much broader conception of sin and responsibility. We find an almost complete moralization of the idea of sin. Man's relation to his neighbor and to his God took on a far richer and fuller significance. Infractions of mere ceremonial law were so subordinated that they were practically eliminated from the category of sins. The classic passage in Hosea 6:6 declares: "I desire goodness and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings". Amos 5:21-24 also vehemently declares that ceremonious acts of worship offered as a substitute for righteousness are simply an abomination in the sight of Jehovah.

The relations between man and man, the offences against justice and humanity are clarified and given fuller meaning. Hosea and Amos and all the prophets enlarged and deepened the conception of sin by making men realize the moral character of God. Sins done to one's neighbor became sins against God. And the colossal sins of oppression, injustice and deceit

were surely bringing doom upon the nation. They were offences against Yahweh Himself. Yahweh is the God of right, humanity's God. Sin thus becomes more than a breach of custom or mere ceremonial law; it is an offence against God.

The development of individualism by Jeremiah and Ezekiel and others is an important step in the development of the doctrine of sin. Hitherto the prominent thought in this regard seemed to be that of sin's effect on the nation through the individual. A.B. Davidson says in a note on Exek. 18, "the individual man is not involved in the sins and fate of his people or his forefathers". However these prophets did not entirely dissolve the predominant Old Testament thought of the solidarity of Israel in respect of sin. It remained for the lofty Christian conception of the New Testament to do that. The obscurity and comparative unimportance of the Hebrew conception of the future life influenced their thought of individual responsibility. When that was clarified and made alive, the importance of the individual came also.

It was Jeremiah who first emphasized the subjective character of moral evil. He represented the

root of sin as being in the stubbornness of the heart (Jer. 7:24). With him "the soul was the seat of moral values". God demands the purifying of the heart above all; sacrifice and ritual is worthless unless the heart be right. The demands of the prophets are of a deeply religious and moral nature. The determining motive of conduct must be the revealed will of the God of Israel. The first great commandment is a demand for the veneration of the name of Yahweh. Idolatry is strongly denounced because it is a reflection on the majesty and greatness of Yahweh.

AS we come into the later prophets and writings of the exile and post-exilic period we discover a tendency towards a less ethical and a narrower conception of sin. The teachings of the earlier prophets is continued but there is the rise of legalism and the influence of the wise men. The people of Israel could not fully grasp the deep ethical content of the prophetic teachings. Those lofty spiritual truths were beyond the reach of the average man. The Priestly Code and that of Deuteronomy were attempts to reduce this teaching to a form that would be intelligible to all. The priests sought to bring over the sacred institutions and ceremonies into a system which would

convey the high spiritual truths of the prophetic teaching to the mass of the people. Hence the long list of specific rules for daily conduct.

It came about in due time that, despite the fine spiritual element in the ceremonial observance, emphasis was laid upon the ritual. Offences thus tended to become ritualistic rather than moral. This led inevitably to the externalizing of the conception of sin. The spiritual significance of the ritual was lost sight of and the ritual itself became the thing of chief importance. Sin tended to become an impersonal and objective, though a serious thing.

With the rise of the "wise men" as a separate professional class alongside of the priests and prophets there came another tendency to deviate from the prophetic conception of sin. Practical wisdom becomes righteousness and ignorance is sin; wickedness is merely a lack of understanding. One who possesses wisdom has all he may need to master life's problems. Righteousness thus becomes mere prudence. Wisdom is personified and made a creation of God to be sought and cherished. The wise men laid particular stress upon the effects of sin and righteousness and urged a knowledge of these effects. Sin was

thus an outward thing rather than inward and ethical in its bearings.

The idea of sin as reflected in some of the Psalms and in Job and other post-exilic literature however, maintains the exalted and moralized conception which the prophets taught. Sin is represented as rooted deep in human nature and as a serious matter to mankind. Many of the psalms take an serious view of sin from the standpoint of the sinner; they confess sin, individual and national. The psalmist loves God, but sin hides Jehovah's face and breaks the intimate relations of kinship. The high point of this profound personal consciousness of sin is reached in the fifty-first psalm:

"Have mercy upon me O God according to thy loving-kindness:

According to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity

and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions

and my sin is ever before me

Against thee, thee only have I sinned

And done that which is evil in thy sight.

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"Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me
Cast me not away from thy presence;
And take not thy holy spirit from me".

The Book of Job represents perhaps the furthest advance in the doctrine of sin, prior to the New Testament. The sins which are discussed here are purely ethical; none are ritual. Sin is inherent in human nature and includes sins of thought and desire. In the thirty-first chapter the author reveals his deep and penetrating conception of sin. For ethical content it approaches the Sermon on the Mount.

One of the most serious aspects of sin as represented in the Old Testament is its well-nigh universality. Only conspicuous exceptions stand out to this rule. The spread of sin is definitely acknowledged in many places as world-wide, and this fact makes increasingly difficult the problem of its origin. The Old Testament has not solved this problem; nor indeed has religious scholarship since solved it. Hebrew writers simply accept the fact which observation and introspection make unmistakably clear, that

there is in man a native inclination to evil.

Closely connected with the doctrine ^{of sin} in the Old Testament is the problem of suffering. In early times suffering was almost universally looked upon as a penalty for sin. This was especially true among the Israelites. They regarded pain and misfortune as the result of human transgression. This transgression was not necessarily committed by the victim of the suffering, nor need it be intentional. In most cases the punishment came as retributive punishment however. As there was no clearly defined conception of sin in early times so there were no clear grounds of responsibility. The idea was firmly held however that evil would be punished. Not all misfortune was a penalty for sin. There were outstanding exceptions to this, especially in the case of Abner (II Sam.3:33) and the sons of Gideon (Judges 9:5), and others.

As the thought of God became more and more spiritualized and as man came to have a higher moral relationship to his Creator a change in the attitude toward suffering and misfortune was inevitable. The eighth-century prophets insisted that the evils that had befallen the nation were not merely punishment for neglected ceremony in religion but they were due

to violation of ethical law. Finally there came as an established doctrine the idea of a morally governed world.

With the bitter experience of the exile and the gradual disintegration of the nation there came an awakened mind and conscience in Israel. The individual had to be reckoned with. His problems had to be met. Many causes could be assigned for the misfortune to the nation because its life was more complex. But in the case of individuals the problem became acute. "To every unprejudiced observer it was clear that the innocent did at times suffer while the wicked prospered." Hence the rise of serious questionings and protests in the life of individuals.

Habakkuk is one of the first books to speculate on the apparent inconsistency of Jehovah's goodness and Israel's unfortunate condition. This creates a severe moral difficulty for the prophet and he speculates on the problem in his own mind. His age was one of peculiar perplexity and trial to the faithful servants of Jehovah, and the prophet seeks a solution for the serious problems which arise. He does not answer all the questions which come up but it is an-

enough if he can mitigate the difficulty by recalling the truth of God's providence, the ultimate doom of the oppressing tyrant and the moral security of the righteous.

While Habakuk raised the question as to the justice of God's dealing with the nation, his contemporary, Jeremiah, related the problem of suffering to the individual. His own emotional nature made him question the justice in the prosperity of the wicked. He experienced persecution and suffering and was reproached as a prophet. At times he gives expression to his feelings over this apparent unjust treatment and resents it. But this attitude is not permanent. At heart Jeremiah realizes God's goodness and presents the thought that fellowship with God is the highest good of life. Compared with this the sufferings of life are not worthy our consideration. This attitude of mind does not solve the mystery but it strengthens the course and stimulates faith.

It remained for Deutero-Isaiah, a generation or two later, to be the first, and in fact the only one, to present the most sublime and noble thought about suffering to be found anywhere in the Old Testament namely, that of its vicarious and redemptive nature.

Jerusalem had fallen, its temple was in ruins, its people were in exile. Suffering and calamity were the sad experiences of Israel. These sufferings were due in part only, to her sins. Otherwise they were the sufferings of a martyr. Her exile meant that the knowledge of the true God should be carried to the idolatrous heathen. The sufferings of Israel ought to have befallen the heathen but God's chosen people were bearing the transgressions of a wicked and idolatrous nation. These in turn by the very sufferings of Israel, were led to repentance and confession of the supremacy of Israel's God. Such an end justified any affliction and any sacrifice.

A discussion of the relation ^{of suffering} to sin in the Old Testament would be incomplete without a reference to the classic book in this connection, the Book of Job. It was written a century or two after Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Ezekiel had discussed the problem of sin and suffering and had simply denied the facts of life by saying that the wicked did not prosper nor the righteous suffer. Hence all suffering was an evidence of sin. The author of Job takes up the problem here. He takes issue with this traditional view and asserts

the fact that the righteous do suffer and the wicked do prosper. Yet there is a God and God is good.

Having asserted these facts it is incumbent on the writer of Job to show how these things can be. Job's attitude is that of a man who is trying to understand God, not deny Him. He has suffered affliction unspeakable, yet he is a righteous man. His friends assert the traditional theory that only the wicked suffer, and that in proportion to their wickedness. Job strenuously and passionately denies this in his own case. Indeed the hypothesis of the book declares Job a righteous man. Why then the suffering? One answer comes, - that it was to test his righteousness to test his loyalty and devotion to God. Another answer suggests that it was for discipline and refinement.

Job does not succeed in settling the point at issue. However his conviction that God is righteous and rules righteously remains unshaken. He has wrestled with the great problem and is determined to hold fast even though he cannot see the way. He is confident that he will be vindicated sooner or later, if not in this life in the life hereafter.

No formal solution of the problem of suffering is presented here but something better is presented namely, an attitude of soul by means of which the problem is transcended. It approaches the lofty Christian conception to which Professor Bowne gives expression:

"It is indeed a God of mystery with whom we have to do. Clouds and darkness are indeed about him. What questions throng upon us concerning our own lives and lot, concerning the order of human life and history in general, concerning the multitudes who seem never to have had a chance, the great dumb uncivilized world also with its accumulated horrors and woes, the state of the dead, and the future of the wicked. And how insoluble these questions are. But while it is a God of mystery with whom we have to do, it is equally a God of goodness. It is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the God who so loved the world that He gave his Son to be our Redeemer. We are in his hands and we are safe; and all good things are safe. We need not trouble ourselves to justify him. When he wishes to be justified he will justify himself. We leave all the inquiries that oppress us with him in the full faith that he knows

and wills what is best. We trust him. We trust him with our lives, with humanity, with the living and with the dead, with heaven and hell. Meanwhile our immediate duty is to obey him, to set our own lives in the order of righteousness. and the life thus bent on doing the will of God and bringing in his Kingdom is never left in practical uncertainty concerning the wisdom and goodness of God. He that doeth the will of God it is who knoweth of the doctrine; and only his judgment is just in these matters who doeth not his own will but the will of the Father in Heaven". *

We have seen that the Old Testament writers took a serious view of sin. As the conception of God became more and more ethical and spiritual so the seriousness of alienation from him, because of sin, became realized. And this alienation was actual. It manifested itself in the manifold evils that crowded life. These were an evidence of divine displeasure and they could be removed only by winning back the divine favor. It became therefore a matter of special personal interest to secure the divine forgiveness. The deeper the consciousness of sin the more important became everything that had to do with forgive-

* "The Essence of Religion"- B.P.Bowne P 67f.

ness in the religious life of men. Atonement and forgiveness thus become ideas of central and vital importance not only in the Old Testament, but in a far more significant way, throughout the New Testament.

The close connection which early Israel supposed to exist between suffering and sin naturally led to the conception that forgiveness manifested itself in the improved physical or material condition. This was true of the individual and of the nation. The separation of sin and suffering in the Old Testament was never fully accomplished; in fact it is not fully accomplished in the thinking of our day. To many simple and devout souls there is still a vital, even if unknown, connection between them.

A more independent and ethical conception was only very gradually attained. The emphasis of the prophets on "heart religion" and the inner life of the soul, tended to exalt the thought of forgiveness. Salvation did not consist simply in deliverance from the consequences of sin but from sin itself. The growing individualism had a strong influence on the thought of forgiveness. Regeneration of soul was a good to be sought for its own sake. The Messianic

hope, one of the most sublime and characteristic features of the religion of Israel, was another factor in breaking down the traditional connection of suffering and sin. The outward condition of Israel was no certain test of God's favor or disfavor. The nation or the individual might be forgiven and still be in adversity. If suffering be vicarious or a test of righteousness, as taught by Deutero-Isaiah and Job, then its removal is not necessary to the consciousness of forgiveness. The suffering servant can wait in perfect obedience, submitting to the trial, conscious of God's blessing and benediction. This patient obedience and scrupulous observance of the law was worth while because of the hope of a wonderful deliverance and triumph.

Of course this sublime conception of salvation was largely national. But it meant more than a mere political deliverance. The people were not to dwell in freedom and prosperity alone but in truth and righteousness. "Ethical and spiritual conditions are prominent characteristics of the Messianic era. The coming King shall be a just judge as well as a tender shepherd. . . . Perhaps the most striking expression of the moral character of the promised

salvation is found in Jeremiah's oracle of the New Covenant where we are told that the law of that happy era is to be the inner law of free obedience: 'I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it; and I will be their God and they shall be my people'(Jer.31;33)"* Thus it is evident that the salvation of the nation and real moral righteousness go hand in hand.

Turning to the consideration of individual salvation we discover that the growing individualism, which followed the break-up of the nation, was accompanied by a stronger sense of personal responsibility. Ezekiel makes Jahweh say, "Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth it shall die."^{**} Thus Ezekiel enforces the truth of individual responsibility to God and individualizes salvation. Each man will personally and directly know Jahweh and he will forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more (Jer. 31:34). It is a personal salvation from sin that is emphasized by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah and others. There is a distinct approximation to the Christian doctrine which conceives of salvation as

*"The Christian Doctrine of Salvation"-G.B.Stevens

** Ezek. 18:4

being primarily salvation from sin.

The ground of forgiveness is to be found in the grace of God. Divine mercy is the expression of divine nature. The prophets represent God as saving men "for His name's sake"(Jer.14:7, Is.43:25), that is, by reason of His nature, because of what He is. Even the law, including the sacrificial system was based on the principle of divine mercy. It is out of His mercy that God ordained the law and prescribes and accepts the sacrifices. The whole system is built on the assumption that God is inherently merciful. The thought that Yahweh was rendered more merciful or made more willing to forgive by sacrifices, is unwarranted in Old Testament teaching. This merciful attitude of Yahweh did not lessen the severity of His attitude toward sin. In fact these two characteristics are often associated in such a way as to suggest that they are two aspects of the same nature.

Another condition of forgiveness which the prophets prescribe is repentance, obedience and faith. Stress is laid on these conditions as the only rational and ethical conditions of forgiveness. Deuteronomic legislation, Isaiah, Ezekiel and others are equally emphatic in teaching that repentance and

renunciation of sin are indispensable conditions of securing divine blessing. Forgiveness is according to the nature of God and repentance comes as the necessary correlative. Only a complete change of life will suffice. Repentance must not be partial. "There must be a radical change of character, an earnest whole-hearted seeking after God" *

Obedience is made the counterpart of repentance and a consequence of faith. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams". (1Sam. 15:22) The most grievous sins will be forgiven to those who amend their ways and obey the voice of the Lord (Jer. 26:13). One who turns from Sin must turn to the life of obedience to God. Just what obedience includes will be determined by the religious conception of the individual. True obedience is conceived by one of the prophets thus; "to do justly to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God". (Micah 6:8)

Faith is the more positive side of repentance. As repentance is sorrow for sin so faith is the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance with God. While there is not a formal statement of the great New

* "The Rel. Teaching of the O.T." A.C.Knudson p299

Testament doctrine of justification by faith we have its essential elements in the teaching that God's chief requirements; that men should put their trust in Him and turn to Him in hope and confidence. The prophets teach emphatically that the life of righteousness is not a matter of mere human striving and achievement. They express the conviction that God must renew the heart and cleanse it if true heart-purity is to be attained.

another very significant factor of prophetic relative to forgiveness is that of vicarious suffering as a motive of forgiveness. The classical illustration of this idea is the picture of the Suffering Servant, of the fiftythird chapter of Isaiah. The faithful and true were suffering the consequences of others' sins. National disaster had come upon Israel. The faithful recognized the exile as a calamity and punishment upon the nation. But Yahweh must have a purpose in this. He must be seeking to purify and save the nation as a whole. Then when the nation is redeemed, the heathen also, whose sins they are bearing, will be moved to repentance and confession.

Here is a new and distinct advance in the thought of forgiveness. This vicariousness is ethical. The

blood of the offering is not ceremonial but actual. We see the experience of the righteous bearing the sin of the unrighteous in Israel adapted to suggest the thought of a divine vicarious suffering in which a greater than human love should take the woes and burdens of a sinful world upon itself.

One other question remains in our discussion of the development of the doctrine of forgiveness in the Old Testament and that is the place of sacrifices as a means of atonement. The origin of sacrifice is unknown; it is a custom that goes back into prehistoric antiquity. No generally accepted view as to what was the original idea back of sacrifice, has yet been attained. Several theories have been presented. The "gift-theory" has been espoused by many able scholars. This theory holds that sacrifices were originally gifts to the gods to win their favor. Then there is the theory that regards sacrifices as acts of homage to the Deity. another theory is that which holds that sacrifices were common meals in which the Deity and men took part. Still again, there is the substitutionary or penal satisfaction theory of sacrifice according to which that animal is thought

of as taking the place of the sinner and suffering death in his stead.

Doubtless there is truth in each of these theories. The origin and motives of sacrifice are not so simple that any one theory would cover them. Religion is a complex thing and has had a long development. However, we are not concerned so much with the origin of sacrifice as we are with its relation to the idea of forgiveness. Taking the Old Testament as a whole, the prevailing conception of sacrifice seems to be that of a gift or present to Yahweh. It is the general Old Testament rule that no one might appear before God without a gift (Ex.23:15). By this means one could secure divine favor or appease divine anger if it had been aroused. It was in this sense that sacrifices atoned for sins. It was assumed that a penitent attitude accompanied the offering of sacrifices, but this was not always true. Sacrifices were then nothing more than bribes. It was this condition that called forth the vigorous and frequent denunciations of the pre-exilic prophets.

In the early life of Israel, before the establishment of a ritual, any ordinary sacrifice might serve the purpose of making atonement. But with the

rise of later legalism and ritual certain definite sacrifices appear. There were the burnt-offering, the peace-offering, the sin-offering and the trespass-offering and others. These served as a means of atonement simply for "unwitting sins". Sins committed "with a high hand" were unpardonable. Many serious evils were included in the list for which atonement might be made, so that "unwitting sins" seems to have been very broadly interpreted.

The peace-offering was prompted by any joyful event and was the occasion of rejoicing over a successful campaign, cessation of famine or pestilence, accession of a king, the dedication of the temple or other lesser events. In general it served to keep alive the sense of dependence on God for protection and the natural blessings of life, while it also had the social value of promoting the solidarity of the nation in its component parts. The religious efficacy of the sacrifice was of course, differently interpreted according to the degree of spiritual enlightenment. The popular idea doubtless was that God somehow participated in the sacrifices and thus He was well disposed towards the worshippers. The offering would then be considered efficacious in bringing

a response which was acceptable. The later and more ethical conception of sacrifice excluded the thought of God as a fellow-guest at the sacrificial meal.

The burnt-offering was prompted, on the other hand, by a predominant feeling of grief apprehension and awe. There may be occasions when a combination of joy and solemnity, of hope and fear-called forth the burnt-offering. But on occasions of extraordinary solemnity the burnt-offering stood alone. At the beginning of a war when the danger and dubiousness of the result are felt most keenly it sought divine aid. In times of extremity or peril it was the appropriate rite to secure the help of Yahweh. The intention in most cases was to propitiate God and thus change His attitude from hostility to clemency. Just how this would influence God is not explained but in some way God took part in the sacrifices and was thus gratified and propitiated.

The two special propitiatory sacrifices were, the sin-offering and the trespass-offering. Atoning value however, was not confined to these two. They were both limited in their range. They served as a means of atonement simply for "unwitting sins". Sin-offerings and trespass-offerings were in many in-

stances simply purifying agencies and had no connection with remission of sins. Their purpose was in these cases, simply to render unclean things and persons clean.

The efficacious element in atoning sacrifice was in the blood and it was so because the blood was regarded as the seat of life. Just how the sacrifice of blood should atone is not explained. A certain mystical sanctity was in ancient times attributed to the blood and this gave it a purifying influence and made it a fit symbol of the sinner's sorrow and desire for pardon. There is no suggestion, according to Dr. Albert C. Knudson, that the life of the victim was looked upon as a substitute for that of the sinner. However, the idea of penal substitution is not wholly foreign to the Old Testament idea of sacrifice. The sublime conception of the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah is a true atonement, vicarious and redemptive, suffering voluntarily borne. "It was this conception far more than the temple sacrifices that influenced the thought of Jesus and gave vital content to the early Christian teaching relative to His death. The sin whose forgiveness was affected by sacrificial atonement was not sin in the Christian

sense of the term. It was largely submoral or non-moral. The sin however, for which atonement was made by the Suffering Servant and Jesus, was something inward, a state of the soul. It was a spiritual condition, which could be forgiven only by being removed. The atonement made for it was consequently necessarily a redemptive as well as a vicarious act making the unrighteous righteous". *

We have traced the development of the idea of forgiveness in the Old Testament and we have seen that as the conception of God became more ethical and spiritual the thought of sin became more serious and moral also. When we come to the New Testament we find that "the revelation of the divine will and of the ideal of human life and character, the power of the whole revelation made in Christ, has immeasurably facilitated the individual's opportunity of conscious enjoyment of the divine forgiveness, and stimulated his readiness to bestow forgiveness in his measure upon others" **

Jesus extends the duty of forgiveness to human relationships and makes it a fundamental principle in godly relations among men. But He makes it evident

*"The Rel. Teaching of the O.T."-Knudson p 314f.

** Hastings "Dictionary of the Bible" Vol.2 p 56.

also, especially in the Lord's Prayer, that human forgiveness and divine forgiveness are strictly analogous. Repentance and confession are fundamental conditions of forgiveness.

Forgiveness carries with it responsibilities and the Christian who has come into fellowship with God will recognize the truth of these splendid words of George Adam Smith: "As it was Christ who brought God's pardon to us, let us remember that God's great trust, so manifest in it, is continued to us so far as we hold to Christ and abide in Him. Apart from the grace that is so richly everyman's in Christ, God cannot trust us nor could we presume on the assurance of our forgiveness nor prove ourselves worthy of it. Therefore, in this most liberating of all ethical experiences do not let a man ever feel himself independent. But as day by day, the goodness of God comes upon him; as he awakens every morning into the wonder of God's patience with his unworthy soul; as the great occasions of life come upon him, work, influence, friendship, love; as knowledge and progress and a stable character become sure to him - let him remember that these are not given to him for his own sake, but for Christ's. Let him say to himself: I am with them all, by God,

and assured of them all, only in so far as I live in;
Christ and by the grace which He bestows" *

*"The Forgiveness of Sins" p 24f.

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