

1896

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THESIS.

THE DOCTRINE OF IMMORTALITY AS IMPLICIT
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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1.

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It is not the purpose of this paper to attempt the demonstration of any proposition to the effect that the doctrine of immortality is an integral part of Old Testament teaching.

Nor is it intended to develop any kindred proposition by dependence upon direct proof. Our thesis is simply that a belief in immortality is an implicit corollary of many fundamental Old Testament doctrines considered severally and the essential complement of such doctrines taken collectively.

In this line of argument, we have no contention ^{to make} as to the validity of Old Testament miracles, or to the power of prophecy, nor yet as to the historicity of the Scriptures under discussion. We are concerned only with the implications that may be fairly based upon what these writings honestly teach. For justification of the method of discussion to be pursued, we appeal to Christ's interpretation of the Old Testament touching the question in hand. Thus Christ himself rebuked the Sadducees who were making sport of the idea of a resurrection, by charging them with ignorance of the Scriptures. And he not only rebuked, but silenced them by showing that as early a writer

as Moses indirectly taught the doctrine of a life after physical death. He said to them, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Hence God's words to Moses in Exodus III. 8, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" are to be understood as teaching that these patriarchs are still alive.

With such precedent in Old Testament exegesis based upon minute passages, we surely need not hesitate to point out the implications to the same effect based upon the fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures in question. These doctrines, for the sake of convenience, we here enumerate in part. They are the doctrine of God's immortality, that of the existence of angels and demons, that of necromancy, that of man's creation including that of his fall and anticipated restoration, that of the quality of man's nature, that of heaven, that of sheol and that of God's moral government considered as a whole. Surely it will not be denied that the ancient Hebrews taught the immortality of God when it is possible to refer to such passages as Exodus III, 14, where God calls himself, "I shall be what I am", or to the Psalmist's words, "Lord thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations," or to Isaiah LVII 15: "Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity."

But the bearing of such teaching upon the probability of an assumed belief among the ancient Jews, in a future life, is demanded. This lies in the recognized nearness of the relation in nature between God and man. Thus man was created, in both the likeness and image of God. On the other hand, the Hebrew Scriptures may be said to be full of anthropomorphisms. Moreover, when true to his Godlike nature, man was in certain instances taken at once to be the companion of God. Such was the case with Enoch. It will not do to say here, as some do, that Enoch merely died. For, if the writer means anything by the change in phrase from "he died" to "God took him" he intends to indicate Enoch's reward for "walking with God" to which thought reference is made twice. While on the other hand, if the writer uses the two phrases as equivalent expressions he represents God as killing Enoch, or as cutting his days short five hundred years, and that evidently as the reward for a life of righteousness.

But again, the Jews' Immortal God is repeatedly recognized as sustaining the affectional relation of a Father to men. And since God's dwelling-place was recognized as being in heaven, would anything be more natural than a belief that God would finally take his children home, his Hebrew

children at least?

But perchance the above reasoning has no power of appeal to some. If so, we would here ask: What possible escape can be had from the clear Old Testament doctrine of angels in its implications as to a non-earthly state of existence, including all that a belief in such a state, in turn, naturally implies? Angels are mentioned more than one hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. They are represented as the personal and spiritual agents of Jehovah. Their abode is in heaven. They descended from and ascended up into heaven on Jacob's ladder. They went up in the sacrificial flame and smoke of Manoah's offering. They became visible and invisible at pleasure. Thus was the future state of the spirits said, "To return to God" naturally and repeatedly suggested to the Hebrew mind. Indeed, so closely is the belief in a future life correlated with a belief in the existence of angels that, as has often been pointed out, the Sadducees, to be consistent in their rejection of a resurrection of the dead, denied also the existence of both angels and spirit, while the Pharisees believed consistently in both. How vividly, then, must the many accounts of angels' visits have suggested another than an earthly life and another than an earthly home, a heavenly paradise, a new

Jerusalem where dwelt the blessed of Jehovah.

Here we are led directly to the Old Testament doctrine of heaven and its probable bearing on an implicit belief in immortality. However crude or materialistic the Jewish conception of heaven may have been, it is evident from the teachings of many passages that the Hebrews believed in the existence not merely of an open firmament, but also in heaven as the palatial residence of God, far above and separate from the earth. In Exodus XIX. 20, Jehovah is represented as coming down upon the top of Mount Sinai. The writer of Deut. 26, 15 instructs the Israelites to utter to God the prayer: "Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people." Again, the Psalmist says: "The Lord's throne is in heaven." And Isaiah (66, 1) puts into the mouth of God himself an affirmation of the Psalmist's statement; while the prophet Amos (9,6) speaks of God as "He that buildeth his chambers in the heaven."

Such references might be indefinitely multiplied. But not alone Jehovah, angels also were represented as having their home in heaven. Moreover, it may be shown, without exegetical straining, that Elijah as well as Enoch was understood to have been translated to the celestial abode of Elohim.

But of what worth, it is asked, is evidence of a belief

in the existence of a heavenly dwelling-place for God and angels and of the translation to that heavenly home of a very few righteous men, as testimony to the tacit belief in general immortality on the part of the writers of the records in question? We answer, that belief in the first furnishes a basis at least for belief in the last if indeed it does not form the heart of assurance itself as to a future life, at least for those who call themselves the children of God. With such a foundation for hope is it strange that the Psalmist (16; 10) should plead with confidence for deliverance from sheol: that he should declare the the very death of the righteous to be precious in the sight of God: that he should look for fulness of joy at God's right hand and pleasures there forevermore or should believe that after following obediently the counsels of Jehovah in this world, his heavenly Father would receive him to glory?

Is it objected that the hope here (Psalm 73: 24) expressed has no reference to the glory of heaven? After what, then, does the Psalmist expect to be received to glory? Why, furthermore, is the statement of this hope immediately followed in by the question, "Whom have I, heaven but thee?" But the Psalmists are not alone in this expression of confidence in a future life. The writer of Proverbs (14: 32) declares

that the righteous man has hope in his death. The prophets Isaiah and Daniel might also be brought in as witnesses to the simple confidence in final victory over sheol. Even the historical books of the Old Testament betray a confidence to the same effect in such simple incidents as the embalming of Jacob. Here we ask: Can it be that no assumed belief in immortality lay back of this practical care for the body, or back of such confidence in final victory over death, nor yet back of so firm a faith in the existence of heaven as the celestial home of immortals?

But the ancient Hebrews not only believed in a heavenly dwelling-place, but also in its opposite, in sheol, the common abode for departed souls. More definitely, sheol was represented as the intermediate station for the souls of the righteous, but the dark, eternal prison house of the wicked. Only the righteous were ever to be delivered from it. The wicked were to lie in silent woe in sheol. That the term does not refer to the grave is evident from a number of considerations. Not sheol, but keber is the Hebrew word for grave. And, though translated grave thirty-one times in the Authorized Version, sheol is never used in connection with any burial ceremony or in the description of interment. On the contrary, whether translated hell, pit, or grave, the term is used to refer to

a punitive realm for the wicked or to the dead considered as an assembled company, or congregation. Isaiah says in effect that because of prevalent debauchery Sheol hath enlarged herself without measure that she may swallow up the licentious multitudes; while the Psalmist declares that whole nations that forget God shall be cast into Sheol. That Sheol was considered as the congregating place of Israel's dead is seen in the oft repeated phrase: "gathered to his people." Abraham was declared to have been gathered to his people, though it is stated immediately afterward and evidently as a separate event that he (i.e., his body) was buried in the cave of Machpelah hundreds of miles from the graves of his kindred. Jacob says (Gen. 37:35) that he will go down to Sheol unto his son, Joseph, though Joseph's body was supposed by Jacob to have been devoured by wild beasts. Furthermore, it is said that Jacob was gathered to his people at the hour of death, though he was not buried for more than eleven weeks after yielding up the ghost. (Gen. 49:33ff.).

Again, Sheol was regarded as exceedingly deep. The writer of Deut. 32:22, speaks of God's wrath burning to the lowest Sheol. The Psalmist (86:13) expresses the assurance that God will deliver his soul from the lowest Sheol.

At the least a depth greater than that of the grave is indicated by such passages:

Are we asked now to point out the bearing of this division of Old Testament teaching on the question in hand? We answer by asking, in turn, Is it necessary to do more than call attention to the fact that at the heart of such a doctrine of Sheol as the above, lies the tacit assumption that the soul continues to exist somewhere after its departure from the body?

But still stronger evidence of the presence among the ancient Hebrews of a tacit belief in immortality, lies in the Old Testament doctrine of communing with the dead, or the doctrine of necromancy. It is true that according to the Mosaic law (Ex.22:18), witchery was to be punished by death and that the person who had a familiar spirit (Lev.20:27) should be stoned; furthermore, that the Israelites were commanded to avoid those having familiar spirits. But on the other hand it is not denied that communication with the dead is possible or that familiar spirits actually exist. On the contrary, the commands to avoid such sorceries affirm both the existence of familiar spirits and the power of witchery. The above is reinforced in Saul's experience with the witch of Endor. Saul had killed or driven out all witches from

his kingdom. Yet when hard pressed by his enemies, Saul himself sought out a woman that had a familiar spirit and had her call from the dead the prophet Samuel that he might be consulted. In all such records of communication with spirits, whether permitted or prohibited, the continued existence of disembodied personalities is, at least, plainly recognized.

Strong additional evidence to the same effect lies in the recognized duality of man's nature. This duality is universally assumed in the use of different terms to distinguish the lower from the higher nature of man. Again, man was created a double being. His body was formed from dust. His soul consisted of the breath of God. Thus also in Ecc. 12:7, it is said respecting a man at death: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Moreover, it is the soul that is said to go into Sheol and the soul alone for which release from Sheol is asked. Finally, flesh and spirit are frequently placed in sharp contrast as in Isaiah 31:3 where the horses of the Egyptians are declared to be flesh, not spirit. Thus, however much the Old Testament teaching as to the distinction between soul and body is developed, such development only serves to heighten the contrast between the two natures of man, on the one hand, and on the

other to display the nearness of the relation between the ^spsychical nature of man and that of immortal spirits.

But in addition to all the foregoing, it is evident to a careful student, that the Jews had a further foundation for belief in immortality in the first part of Genesis. Thus, man was created "to live forever." He was not merely made in the likeness and image of the immortal Elohim, he was placed also, in the garden of Eden where grew the tree of life. Now, the fruit of this tree was such that if a man partook of it, he, like God, would "live forever." Man was bidden to freely eat of that fruit. Evidently, according to the writer, the immortality of man had been in God's plan from the first. Only after the disgraceful disobedience of the first pair did God drive them from the life-giving tree, and station the cherubin and flaming sword to keep Adam and his wife from the tree of life. The danger was that they should eat of the fruit and so live right on in disobedience forever. At first this driving of Adam and Eve from the tree of life may seem to indicate that in the writer's thought, all hope of human immortality was cut off. But when God's declaration that the woman's offspring should crush the serpent's head is interpreted in the light of the passage in which Eve names her first-born, ground for

the hope of human immortality is again found. Eve says, "I have obtained (literally) a man, the Jehovah." No such word as "of" or "from" is found in the Hebrew of this passage in connection with the name Jehovah. But more to the point still, the name Jehovah, according to ^{Isesinius} Genesis, signifies "the eternal the immutable." Hence the text warrants us in stating that the writer represents Eve as saying in effect: "I have now obtained the immortal man who shall bruise the serpent's head, that shall undo the serpent's fatal work and open again the way to the tree of life. Such passages, to say the least, must have furnished to the Jews ground for the presumption that at some time the boon of immortality would be won back again.

But we come now to the significance of the whole struggle in the theocratic government as developed among the Hebrews. Its morality was based upon perfect obedience to Jehovah. Hence it was directly opposed to the conduct which drove Adam and Eve from the tree of life. Its evident purpose was the development of a holy generation that might be worthy to enter into the possession of a new paradise.

It was as G. A. Gordon has pointed out--a struggle for the conditions which make immortality possible. Its ultimate goal, moreover, was the perfect reconciliation of men to Jehovah. But since ~~then~~ the oldest patriarchs of Israel

struggled earnestly to bring about such a réconciliation, would it not be strange indeed if they did not expect to share in the rewards of the restored paradise? Such expectation has been pointed out in connection with the several doctrines discussed. But it still remains for us to observe that without the inspiration of a hope in immortality, the Jewish theocracy would fall in significance below the religions of heathen nations--down to the level of mere social and civil economy; that the great doctrinal teachings of the Old Testament would have no combining element, but would fall into the condition of unrelated precepts. On the other hand, if the power which springs from hope in an endless life^{be} but recognized in the zealous and persistent faith of the Israelites, the deep moral and religious significance which is so strongly demanded is restored at once to their history, and a meaning worthy of the lives of the Jewish prophets and patriarchs is given to their all-consuming struggles toward righteousness.

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