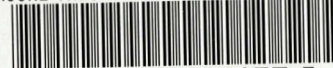


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# PROGRESSIVE REVELATION:

Its Bearing on Old Testament Morality.

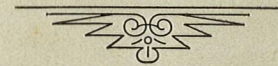
BY

FRANK W. CHALLIS, M.A.,

WITH INTRODUCTION BY THE

REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

*(Principal of Wycliffe College, Toronto.)*



THE BIBLE LEAGUE: 31, JOHN STREET, BEDFORD ROW,  
LONDON, W.C.

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## The Bible League.

31, JOHN STREET, BEDFORD ROW, LONDON, W.C.

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## PROGRESSIVE REVELATION:

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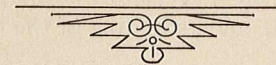
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## INTRODUCTION.

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IT is with confidence and pleasure that I commend my friend Mr. Challis' Address to the attention of all who love the Bible. The great principle of Progressive Revelation, which he states so admirably, is of primary importance to students of the Word of God. Mr. Challis enunciates the true position with clearness and cogency, and in particular his contention that development of doctrine does not involve rejection of the earlier revelation is most valuable and timely. It is essential to realize that repeal in the New Testament does not mean repudiation of Old Testament teaching; that the acceptance of noonday light does not imply a denial of the dawn. Our Lord came "not to destroy but to fulfil," *i.e.*, to *fill full*. Mr. Challis' candour in recognizing the fact of Bible difficulties and the impossibility of solving them all is equally forceful and valuable. Although God has spoken "in these last days by His Son," yet He *did* speak to "our fathers in time past," and what He then said was an authentic revelation of His will for those ages, whether or not they and we have understood it. Mr. Challis' paper will be found a helpful contribution to a proper understanding of the Old Testament.

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS.

WYCLIFFE COLLEGE,  
TORONTO.

## The Progress of Revelation in Scripture : and its bearing on alleged Defective Morality in the Old Testament.

*Being an Address given at the Annual Meetings of the Bible  
League, London, on May 23rd, 1912, by Mr. Frank W.  
Challis, M.A.*

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IT is not uncommonly represented that we who hold what is generally called the orthodox view of the Bible are the real enemies of the Bible. People say that by persisting in advocating what they deem antiquated views we are making it impossible for intelligent people in these days to accept Bible truth, while, on the other hand, we are nullifying the results of the hard labours of scholars and inquirers who have succeeded in clearing away many of the difficulties that really hang about Scripture, and in making the Bible much more easy to be believed. I wonder whether you follow that first of all. The argument is that the modern view of the Bible really explains things in such a way that the Bible is vindicated in the *forum* of modern thought, and that by this modern view all kinds of difficulties that otherwise hang about the question are resolved. For instance, I find in the March number of *Nash's Magazine* an article written by a clergyman of the Church of England, who is very well known in Westminster Abbey. It is entitled, "Westminster Abbey Thunders a Warning to Christendom." In it he makes statements which would probably cause some of my hearers to shudder. Here is one section I copied down: "Low conceptions of God and low views about morality are discovered in the Bible, but the discovery does not in the least degree trouble us, because it



is just what we should expect to find, for the Bible is the historic record of a progressive morality, starting with very imperfect rules and gradually leading up to the higher law. In a word, the Bible is the schoolmaster which leads us to Christ. The morality of Moses was infinitely below the morality of the prophets, and the morality of the prophets was below that of Jesus Christ"; and (I almost apologize for even quoting this sentence): "See how we are passing to-day from a faith in a wrathful, jealous, mutable, vindictive God, as depicted by the Jews, to a faith in the God of Jesus." That is to say, somehow or other the moral difficulties that hang about the Old Testament are supposed to be cleared up on some idea of "progress" or "development" having taken place. Now imagine a young man, for instance, who has been brought up to believe the Bible. As he looks again intelligently into his Old Testament he begins to find moral difficulties, and in his perplexity he seeks a solution. Suppose then that he reads this article, or something like it. What is the natural impression he receives? The effect of such an article on his mind must be to cast a kind of blur over the whole question. He will imagine that *somehow or other* the matter is cleared up: he does not quite know how. "It is true," he is told, "that if we look into the Old Testament we shall find things that shock us, but as a matter of fact we must not suppose the Old Testament will bear looking into, because it has a morality of a past age. But after all, what does it matter what Abraham believed, or what Moses and the prophets taught? We have come to days when we possess a higher knowledge, and can afford to disregard that which has gone by."

It is because I believe that to be a totally fantastic view of progress altogether, and especially because I believe it distorts utterly the real truth concerning progressive revelation, that I have chosen this title of "The Progress of Revelation in Scripture: and its bearing on alleged Defective Morality in the Old Testament." For there are two results from the kind of thing of which I have been speaking. The FIRST is this: that it breeds within us a kind of distrust of the Old Testament. We were taught to believe that the Word had the stamp of Divine authority and perfection upon

it in every part. Now we learn that is not so. We can no longer quote it as we used to; and as for the use the New Testament writers make of the Old, it is altogether extravagant. As a matter of fact, the modern view involves the idea that we have not got in the Old Testament a perfect revelation from God at all, but that what we have is a number of what I might call "*gropings*" and *moral guesses* by men who were living in the midst of corruption but were in advance of their age. Or, SECONDLY, supposing that we admit that the Old Testament is not merely a natural evolution, but that it embodies a supernatural revelation and is actually inspired of God, then without a doubt these views which I have described cast discredit upon the character of God. For on the hypothesis that the Old Testament has come from God as a revelation, God is the Teacher of His people in Old Testament days; and, however we may understand a teacher descending to the level of his pupils in a certain sense, still we do not expect a wise, good, and perfect teacher to make mistakes in his own utterances, *and we certainly do not expect him to teach things which his pupils will afterwards have to unlearn.*

# I.

Very well; now we arrive at my first point, which is this, that the modern view of the Old Testament—and when I sum it up in that way you will understand that I am speaking in a kind of "shorthand": I am not unacquainted with the literature of the subject, but this is not the occasion for numbers of quotations—this modern view suggests to our minds a principle which is utterly foreign to holy Scripture from beginning to end, viz., THE PRINCIPLE OF REPUDIATION. That is to say, that revelation at certain stages repudiates the doctrines and the moralities sanctioned by the Scriptures in previous ages.

Take a New Testament instance for a moment. People tell us, in a certain modern way of handling and analysing the New Testament, that the Apostle Paul in his early ministry taught certain doctrines concerning the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ which he afterwards



abandoned, and which a reading of his epistles leads us to suppose he repudiated. Those who follow carefully the course of doctrine in the New Testament, and especially the majestic scheme of Scripture prophecy, know that this is untrue, and that there is no repudiation at all. But that is what is being said; and, similarly, it is here suggested that the New Testament repudiates the morality of the Old Testament and the prophets repudiated the morality of Moses, and so on. On the contrary, I believe the truth to be that, whilst the prophets, speaking in the name of God at certain ages, correct misapprehensions which may have arisen as to the meaning of the words which had previously been given to men, and repudiate interpretations which have frustrated the meaning intended, they never in any way or in any sense repudiate the previous writings or cast the slightest discredit on their Divine origin and authority, or on their validity.

Let me take up that quotation again. This clergyman says: "The morality of Moses was infinitely below the morality of the prophets, and the morality of the prophets below that of Jesus Christ." Now what was, as a matter of fact, the attitude of the prophets towards Moses? Did the prophets ever repudiate the morality of Moses? Is it not perfectly plain that one large element in their prophetic ministry was to recall to allegiance to this very law a people who had got far away in heart from submission to it; to rebuke disloyalty; to use that law of Moses, as it was intended to be used, as a sharp sword, to bring the nation on to its face before God? The twofold prophetic office seems to have been *to apply the law* in that way to the present life of a people who sorely needed the application, and, for the benefit of the faithfully disposed remnant who magnified the law in their midst, *to amplify the promises* of the new covenant. And what is the attitude of the New Testament towards the morality of Moses, which on the showing of this extract would be utterly repudiated by the teaching of Christ? We see the imprimatur of the Lord when He says: "I came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil." (I remember that Canon Bernard, in his justly famous Bampton Lectures of 1864, says: "In the Sermon on the Mount we

hear the voice of the Original Divine Lawgiver expounding His law, clearing up His own intentions and disallowing the perversions of men." I beg of you to weigh those words.) And then when a rabbi put to the Lord Jesus the question as to which was the greatest commandment in the law, the answer was: "To love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all Thy mind. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets, *and there is no greater (i.e., higher) commandment than these.*" Here then is the summit of ethical codes! So far from repudiating the morality of Moses, the Divine stamp of honour is put upon it by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And, indeed, can anyone suggest a higher morality than this?

The matter may appear in more clear and vivid colours, I think, if I apply the principle to the ritual law. My point, remember, is: that the principle of repudiation is foreign to Scripture. Take the ritual law, for instance: how did the prophets deal with the ritual law of Moses? A friend of mine who has one of the Crusaders' Bible Classes in the South of London, asked one of his elder members to read the Scripture Union portion for the day (which happened to be from Leviticus), and to comment on it. Imagine his feelings when the youth explained to the boys that 'of course the Jews offered animal sacrifices in those days *because they did not know any better*'! As a matter of fact, that kind of thing is actually what is being said everywhere to-day. I know a very eminent Nonconformist minister who has been elected recently to a very prominent position in Free Church life. He preached a sermon in which he said the prophets repudiated altogether the ritual law of Moses. "Listen," he said, "to the language of the prophets, 'What doth the Lord thy God require of thee?' Does He require all these sacrifices? No! all that He requires is that you should deal justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God"—leaving, mark you, on the minds of his congregation the impression that we are utterly wrong in believing that the ritual law of Moses had a Divine origin or was sanctioned by God, or could have been pleasing to Him. But, as a matter of fact, you have only to



read the Prophets intelligently and endeavour to catch the meaning, and you will see they teach nothing of this sort. The point is that they repudiate dead ceremonialism and superstitious ritualism, realizing, as God's true people have ever realized, that whatever value those sacrifices had was derived from the promise of Christ and the faith of the worshippers; but that, when offered in a superstitious way by a people whose heart was far from God ("This people draw nigh to Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me"), then they are not merely ineffectual but positively distasteful to God. "Do I need the cattle? They are Mine on a thousand hills. Do I need money of the men whose hearts are far from Me? The silver and the gold are Mine." God has no pleasure in superstition, and certainly none in hypocrisy. But the believing people who in faith humbly offered those sacrifices, which were the Divinely ordained symbol of the faith in which they lived and the faith in which they died, had witness, like Abel, that they pleased God.

I was once walking with a college friend, who is now a prominent Congregationalist minister, reasoning with him about these things. He held a rather extreme modern view of the Bible. He turned to me and said: "You are always speaking of the Epistle to the Hebrews. To my mind that Epistle is an ingenious, but hardly successful, attempt to prove a Divine origin for Leviticus." Those of you who have spent years in the patient and reverent study of this Epistle will hardly know whether to laugh or cry at such a statement. The Apostle in Hebrews (as in Galatians) not only assents to, but argues for, the subsidiary character of the law, as a fragmentary and temporary element in the scheme of revelation, its office in many respects ceasing with Christ. But does that mean that it is repudiated? No. For in those very letters where the fact is brought into prominence that the law was only for a time, temporary and parenthetical, and *that the Mosaic Covenant* was to pass away—in those very letters the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle, is very careful to guard and to vindicate the Divine origin and authority of that law. We are reminded that it was given by the administration of angels: and who *could* rise from reading Hebrews without feeling that the seal of Divine authority is

put upon the Levitical law? and that in Leviticus we are not groping amid the dim light of semi-pagan traditions, but in the blaze of a Divine revelation?

"There is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof." Does that mean a repudiation? The very word "disannulling" implies the opposite. If a law is disannulled it is *repealed*, but it is *not repudiated*. Suppose a labour emergency, during which a certain notice is published bearing the face value of being an emergency Act of Parliament to deal with the situation. After the strike is over there is a discussion in the House of Commons about the question, and the special emergency Act is repealed. Someone might come to me and say, "That law has been repealed." Do you think, I would understand by his words that Parliament had *repudiated* that law? But if on the other hand a law were imposed upon the people that Parliament had really never had anything to do with, and questions were asked on the floor of the House, and steps were taken to repudiate it, the position would be very different. That God has been pleased to *repeal* certain commandments, such as the Aaronic priesthood, because we now enjoy a priesthood after the order of Melchisedek, surely shows that while there is a disannulling of the first commandment, that commandment was nevertheless given by Divine authority. *For only the authority that issued an edict has power to disannul or repeal it.*

Just to illustrate again what I mean before I leave this first point (that no suggestion of repudiation is recognized in Scripture), look at the divisions of our Bible—"Law," "Prophets," "Psalms"; Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation. ON THE THRESHOLD OF EVERY SECTION THE PREVIOUS SECTIONS ARE RATIFIED. Moses is dead, the writings of Moses are completed, and into the hands of the man of God, Joshua, is put the law. It is not to depart from his heart or from his mouth. He is to govern his life by it and lead the people by it. Next when you come to the "Hagiographa," that third section of the Canon of Old Testament Scripture, which opens with the Hebrew Psalter, the first Psalm celebrates the place of reverence and submission that is to be accorded to the law of the Lord (i.e., the existing Revelation) in the life of a man



who walks uprightly and pleases God. Then in the very first public utterance of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, He sets His imprimatur on the Revelation that has gone before. You turn on to the Acts and you find the writer beginning by a reference to a "former treatise"; while this backward look of faith to the sacred record which has preceded is seen through the Epistles. In the Romans that introduces them you find that the roots of the Epistle are stated to lie in the manifestation of Christ in flesh (Gospels) and in the apostolic commission (Acts). When you come to the Revelation you find that the messages are addressed to people who had "the Word" of Christ, who inherited the apostolic faith and the testimony of the Scriptures; and, finally, when you close the sacred Apocalypse you find the solemn warning given that nothing is to be taken away from that Book or added to it. The prophetic word throughout is a word upon which the seal of the witness of the Spirit of God is set. *The principle of Confirmation is habitually visible in the sacred oracles from Moses to the Patmos visions. The principle of repudiation is foreign to Scripture:* and I am convinced that nothing but *confusion* has resulted from that modern view of evolutionary progress which has been introduced as a supposed "explanation" of Old Testament moral difficulties.

## II.

Now I come to a second point. It is important "to distinguish things that differ." A great deal of confusion has crept into this subject by a failure to make perfectly plain what is really a very elementary distinction indeed. I mean the distinction between Revelation and Faith. Revelation is the speech of God from heaven to men: faith is the believing submission of the human heart to the speech of God. You grasp at once the difference between God revealing and man believing, between revelation and faith, between precept and obedience, between doctrine and knowledge. But that distinction has not, as a matter of fact, been kept carefully in view, and I think I am therefore justified in calling attention to it—to "clear the ground," so to speak. The technical

terms employed to mark the distinction are the terms "objective" and "subjective." Sometimes people speak of faith, and they mean the body of Christian doctrines which we call *the Faith*. At another time they may speak of "faith" and mean the faith we exercise when we receive it. Faith receives the faith. The one is objective and the other subjective.

*When we speak of the progress of revelation we mean the progress of the coming of the objective revelation from God to man,* and there is all the difference in the world between the stages that have marked the progress of the coming of this revelation to men, and, on the other hand, the stages that have marked the progress of man's profiting by the revelation; and this fact has an important influence on what I am dealing with. For instance, in the Hebrews the Apostle says that the people at Kadesh Barnea, when they came to the edge of the promised land, had the Word of Gospel preached to them, but it did not profit them, "not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Who would think, if he were a witness of these people wandering up and down the wilderness for thirty-eight years, that hard by them was a land which had been given to them by title deed? Who would believe that they carried about that title deed of promise and those Divine pledges of assistance for thirty-eight years and did not enter the land? If you did not know about the promise, but had to judge by what you saw, you would say there was no promise. But the fact is they entered not in because of unbelief. It seems to me that the Kadesh Barneas of Israel's history are the factors that have been responsible for more misreadings of the Old Testament than anything else. Natural theology and natural religious evolution have no place in their scheme for a Kadesh Barnea. Men get hold of some degradation or other in Israel's history, and they jump to the conclusion that because Israel was not celebrating certain spiritual truths and living in the light of them, Israel had not got them. It does not prove that for one moment, any more than the wanderings in the wilderness prove that God had not already spoken to them of the promised land, or that they had not already been on its threshold.

These two things I want to keep clear, the progress of the



revelation and the progress of the profiting by the revelation. The progress of the revelation in the Old Testament is very wonderful. It is marked by orderly stages. God spoke to men at certain times, and there were intervals when He was silent. Whenever "the word of the Lord came" it was a perfect word. Every word of God is perfect, just as every work of God is perfect. The words were perfect as to their morality and freedom from error, and they were perfect also in the sense of being "timed" in their coming by Divine wisdom. They were "imperfect" only in quite a different sense of the word. They were imperfect only in the sense that the utterances of God were not completed. If you like to think of it under the figure of a building rising: each stage was perfect, but the *building* was "not yet perfect," inasmuch as the corner-stone had not been added; and not till God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners had spoken by the prophets, in the last days spoke by His Son, not till the final revelation of the Son of God in the flesh and His utterances to His Church in the Spirit, was the great structure of Revelation perfect. But you can understand the thing being perfect *in nature* as it proceeded, and yet not being perfect *in development* in the sense of being complete. Take as an illustration the promise of Christ. In the presence of the sin in the Garden of Eden through the woman being "deceived," God spoke of Christ as the coming *seed of the woman*. When He called a man out of Ur of the Chaldeans to be the father of a nation, He revealed further that the seed should be of *this elect pilgrim*—later that it should be through Isaac (not Ishmael) and Jacob (not Esau); and when Jacob lay dying and blessed his sons it was revealed prophetically through his lips that Judah should be the one in whom the promise was to be fulfilled. When a *throne* was erected in Israel, and a son of Judah sat upon it, the appropriate or "perfect" time was come to reveal that the promised seed was to come of David's royal house and sit on David's throne. Pass right on and you come to the days of Daniel, when great *empires* were rising and falling, and "*times*" were passing over them; then to Daniel came an amplification of the prophecy of Christ, hinting of the *time* Messiah and His *Kingdom* should appear. When the second *temple* was

founded it was revealed that in the days of that temple *He* should come Who should build the true *temple* of God and bear the glory of a Kingly-priesthood. Now, mark, it was *perfectly true* that Christ was to be the woman's seed. In that sense the Word was perfect. But the promise was *not* perfect, in the sense that it was yet to be amplified and enlarged. It was perfectly true that the seed was to be of the tribe of Judah: perfectly true He was to be David's heir: perfectly true that it was to be in the days of the second temple, and so on. Each stage was perfect in so far as it went. That is the history of *revelation*. Revelation never recants and never needs to be repudiated, because *Revelation never errs*.

But when you come to the subjective side of things—the religious history of the people to whom the revelation came—*then* we come across a principle which I want to emphasize—THE PRINCIPLE OF DETERIORATION. I mean the principle that a man may have a thing set before him, may order his life by it, and then may fall away from it, and his latter days may be worse than his beginning. There are great set-backs. *There are no set-backs in the revelation made to Israel, but there are many set-backs in the religious history of Israel.* The prodigal son may well have carried with him into the foreign country an impression of his father's character and precepts received in early days, and you would not judge the father, nor would you gauge the extent of the precepts he had delivered, by the conduct of the son in the far country. And Israel undoubtedly did carry in her heart in days of wandering and apostasy and unbelief many haunting words that had been uttered to her in the dawning of her day. There is no doubt about it.

In the days of Hosea, for instance, when the people had sunk to an awful state of apostasy, do you think they had no remembrance or record of the words that had been spoken to them in the days of Abraham and the days of Moses? A type of historical criticism to-day is saying that because in the days of Hosea you find the prophet addressing a people whom he describes as being sunk in idolatry (almost polytheism!) while he puts before them something higher, therefore we must reasonably suppose that the primitive state of Israel was one of barbarism and polytheism, and that then



there came Hosea and those prophets who followed him, and they preached a monotheistic faith, setting before Israel the great truth of the unity of God, and then Israel gradually rose to it. But, you say (in reply), we read Genesis and we find it saturated with monotheism. We find Moses setting his seal upon that great truth which was pressed home to the heart of Israel from Sinai. Yes (says our historical critic) but that makes it evident that the Book of Genesis, as we have it, is of composite origin, not written by the patriarchs or Moses at all, but compounded by the philosophy of religion which grew up in a later age. And we are practically told to read the books backwards, and must talk not of "Law and Prophets," but of "the Prophets and the Law." We have rightly learned (they allow) to trust and admire and reverence these books, but the characters of the patriarchs are idealized creations of a later age, and the conceptions attributed to them are of much later origin, and in a *dramatic* way *projected back* into the past.

That of course altogether upsets our traditional ideas of the Old Testament. But I want to emphasize now the important fact that it is also directly contrary to all the principles of religious life as we know it. For instance, nothing is more common in our experience than to have moments of faith followed by moments of doubt and blindness. You take the Book of Judges and you see Israel in an awful state of spiritual apostasy and moral degradation. But the approval of God is not upon the things that were done by Israel in those days. There were some events that He overruled by His providence for His people's good, but we must not speak of those indiscriminately as if the seeming ideals of a carnal and divided and unfaithful people in the days of the Judges were ideals that had been *sanctioned* by God. You might as well judge the teaching of Christ by the doings of Rome in the days of mediæval papacy! It is a caricature upon it. The critic's Bible would piece together for us an alleged religious history which has grown by stages upward, with never a set-back; but that is contrary to all the probabilities of experience. For the principle of *DETERIORATION* has been at work in all ages in the spheres of religion and morality.

Our reverend friend tells us that "we find low conceptions of God and low ideas of morality in the Old Testament"—implying some horror and repudiation of Old Testament moral doctrine. But *where* do we find these "low ideas"? not in the utterances of prophets and saints who walked with God—at least not in words purporting to have been framed by the mouth of God; but in the lives of those who departed in heart from the faith revealed and departed in practice from the precepts enjoined. These two plainly different strata of fact must be clearly kept in mind: and the fact that phases of *deterioration* and unfaithfulness appear in the religious and moral history of Israel (and the Bible would not be a faithful nor useful witness if it obscured them) must not lead us to assent blindly to the loose statement that Old Testament morality is defective and inferior.

### III.

But now some of you of course are saying: have you not so far ignored the real moral difficulties of the Old Testament? I understand and appreciate your anxiety. My answer is—I have not ignored them, but have been content to leave them aside up to this point. For there *are* hard problems. But it is better honestly to admit (if need arise) that you are faced with some problems which you cannot solve than to cloud your mind by false principles by which you imagine you have solved them—principles which will not bear the test of clear thinking and which (if admitted) create bigger difficulties than they remove. For the principles which are in these days summoned to the "elucidation" of the Old Testament seem many of them to be completely subversive of the supernatural basis of the Christian system—and few of us I hope are prepared to go to the length of abjuring our faith without the most complete logical necessity. My object therefore, up to this point, has been to plead for clearness of statement so that the issues may not be obscured by vain words. I firmly believe that it is *not* useful (but on the contrary perilous) to "excuse" alleged defective Old Testament morality on the ground that "the Bible is the historic record of a progressive morality starting with very



imperfect rules," and that "the discovery of low doctrine and morality need not trouble us because it is just what we should expect to find." It is not what I should expect to find in the oracles of God: and this "progressive morality" idea does not appear to me to be either required by or consistent with the true facts of progressive revelation.

Probably you wish to ask me: *Does not the Old Testament present features and record incidents which are inconsistent and irreconcilable with such a view as you advocate, viz., that the Scripture is "perfect" throughout, in the sense of being free from moral defect*, and that the words of Moses and the prophets which purport to come from "the Lord" were at every stage Divinely given? You say your trouble is about things which Bible people did apparently with Divine sanction and under Divine command. (Those which they did in disobedience and error you can differentiate.) For instance: you have read books suggesting difficulties concerning the command to sacrifice Isaac; concerning certain elements of the Mosaic code, such as its sanction of slavery and the capital punishment of witches; and, further, concerning the command to exterminate the Canaanites,—or that common difficulty, the imprecatory Psalms. These are phenomena which really perplex you: and you are doubtful perhaps whether they can be satisfactorily explained—without abandoning the traditional view of the Hebrew Scriptures.

I am not sure if I can help you. We have varying "casts" of mind and temperament, and an argument which appeals to one may not satisfy another. That is why I have reserved my few words on this subject to the close—believing that some present at this Conference, whose experience of life and reflection on these problems must be far maturer than my own, may be able to contribute help at this point. I confine myself mainly to principles.

May I therefore preface to any detailed discussions which may arise this frank statement: I do not expect to be able to explain all the difficulties (moral or otherwise) which I find in the Bible. I would remind you of the great argument of Butler, which, though addressed to 18th Century Deists, does not fail with age. He says in effect (throughout the *Analogy*), "I look into nature and Providence and I find

certain things hard to be understood; things which can only be explained on the assumption that there are, in the entire scheme of God's universe, vast issues and circumstances that are beyond my knowledge altogether, and I have to accept the things as they stand and wait for their solution. Now supposing for a moment that the Author of the constitution of nature has become the Author of a written revelation, shall I not expect to find in that written revelation some difficulties analogous to those which I find in the constitution of nature itself?" And, as a matter of fact, God's people, while finding the Bible yield advancing meaning to their maturing study, have ever found difficulties of a kind they can never clear up. And I ask—*Why should this not be so?* Is it not to be expected? I heard a man in Hyde Park say: "They come out and talk to you about 'the soul' in this twentieth century. They cannot tell you what the soul is, and no man has a right to talk about things that he cannot define." One could ask him, "What is Life?" and he could not define it. Yet he had been talking about it a great deal. The science of biology is not discredited because "mystery" is written across its leading facts.

Now in the moral sphere there are problems of God's providential dealings in Old Testament days which *are* very hard to understand, and they seem to overwhelm you as you look into them. There is no reason why we should not admit it frankly. It is our wisdom to do so. But when you think of the great disaster to the *Titanic*, for instance, or of earthquake catastrophes and the like, you reflect that the dealings of God with men are full of unaccountable mysteries—many of them *moral* mysteries. I can understand people finding difficulties in the Old Testament, and I am not content to get up and say, as some say to-day, "We now have an explanation of things, and if you only view the Bible in a rational way the moral difficulties disappear." There are a great many difficulties which do *not* disappear. It is humbling to confess this: but it may be part of a wise Divine scheme of government which designs our *discipline* and deals with us as under *probation*.

But now, if I may add a few words of detail: the question of



the sacrifice of Isaac has not been to me personally a difficulty. It *would* be a problem to me on the critics' view of things; for they would tell me that Abraham was mistaken, and that it never could be pleasing to God to offer up his son. That suggests the difficulty that the Bible tells me it was an act of faith. It is admitted that the command God gave to Abraham to offer up his son was unique. Such a command was never given by God before and was not repeated. It was given to a unique man, who had been uniquely prepared under unique circumstances, and when he was called upon to make the sacrifice his soul rose to such a height of faith that he went to do it *believing that God was able to raise that son from the dead* (Hebrews xi. 19). Historical critics say Abraham was just emerging from barbarism, and it was a relic of the pagan days and God just allowed it. There is no such suggestion. Personally I see no reason why God, seeing into the heart of the man, knowing what his faith would stand, and knowing that He Himself was about to refuse the offering and to teach His people for all time a wonderful lesson by it, and to give to His Church an eternal type of the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, should not have given such a commandment at such a time. It seems to me that it certainly was not—what people are telling us nowadays it was—that Abraham was feeling his way toward the light, and that he did it through ignorance. It cannot be that; because then it would not be of faith, and it is definitely said that it was an act of faith performed by Divine command.

As to the Mosaic law: such a thing as the sanction of slavery, we are told, was a mark of imperfection and low morality. Now I see nothing of the kind. The law came into a social system honeycombed with slavery. Yet, as a matter of fact, to steal a man and sell him was an act made punishable by death under the Mosaic law (Exodus xxi. 16). What would 18th Century "Christian" governments have said to that? If a master were cruel to a servant in his house and knocked out a tooth even, the servant at once had perfect freedom on account of that injury (Exodus xxi. 27). There were no such humane commandments found (so far as we know) in any other codes of law at the time; and if a slave fled from his master and sought refuge with a Hebrew he was to be protected and

given an asylum under the command of the law of Moses (Deuteronomy xxiii. 15, 16). The "slavery" *tolerated* (remember, not instituted!) by the law of Moses was evidently a far different kind of system from the "slavery" which defaced the British Empire in Wilberforce's day. Always bear in mind, too, in reading this part of the Mosaic law, that it is a judicial and penal code—in many instances for the guidance of magistrates and for the assessing of penalties in the courts; not a private devotional treatise!

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Ah! people say, it is not long since the Church shamefully supported the burning of witches under the influence of this barbarous command. See what harm has come from believing that the Mosaic law was Divinely given! Now, as a matter of fact, a little historical perspective would sometimes do a lot of good. Think a moment of the general attitude of the Old Testament towards witchcraft and divination and soothsaying. Remember the dark warnings which Scripture everywhere raises against these things. I am not sure that we shall not come to days when this question will be reconsidered in the light of ugly facts that will be forced upon our notice. *Tampering with the occult is such a solemn and momentous thing* that possibly we are not listening to the last word of wisdom when we hear the "morality" of Moses impugned. A law which made it a capital offence to introduce occultism into society may have had a great Divine mercy in it. Would that Israel had submitted to that law! The command was not a barbarous licence to murder! The law was a safeguard of public wellbeing; and at critical points required to make its sanction capital. *The whole question at issue here is as to the comparative evil of occultism: and we may well believe that in the things of the unseen world Divine revelation is a safer guide than unaided human wisdom.*

This leads me to suggest that the command to exterminate the Canaanites appeals to me in the light of a surgical operation—enjoined under painful necessity in the far-seeing care of God for the human race. It is a delicate subject. Sir Robert Anderson says that prior to knowledge gained at Scotland Yard the command to destroy the Canaanites root and branch was a great difficulty to him, but that it is a



difficulty no longer. I do not think his words can be very enigmatical to you. I do not say that I have no difficulties over the awful fact of the sentence passed on the Canaanites ; but I will say that it is not inconceivable to me that the sentence did come from God : and that failure to execute it displeased Him. For plainly there are certain kinds of unnameable crimes which may become a festering sore in the corporal system of the human race. And if to the moral vices of the Amorites (over whom a merciful Divine patience had lingered for generations) we add the fostering of a religious system saturated with occultism (with its unknown perils to society)—we may find our wisdom in silent assent to a Divine act which we dare not repudiate, lest we quarrel with our own mercy and become fools.

Someone has asked me : Was it not a terrible thing that the law of Moses commanded men to "love their neighbour and *hate their enemies*" ? Of course the law of Moses did no such thing. It was sadly misinterpreted by some to mean this. But to those who cherished such doctrine the spiritual judgment of any true Israelite must have been "Ye do err, *not knowing the Scriptures*" ("not knowing" them, mind—there is no possibility of erring through over-trusting the Scriptures) ; for the law spoke far differently. Read Exodus xxiii. 4 and 5, or (even more striking) the humane commands as to the cutting down of trees *in time of war*, in Deut. xx., and you will catch my meaning.

Then as to the Imprecatory Psalms : I do not see how it is possible to accept the New Testament without recognizing the *prophetic* quality in the Psalms ("David, being a prophet," &c.) And if this clue be accepted, a large part of the apparent moral difficulty disappears. If you read some of the Psalms as *private* utterances steeped in a kind of malicious thirst for revenge—I had almost said "spite"—then of course a child can see that they are alien to the Spirit of Christ. But what if the New Testament be true, and the Spirit of Christ *in* these writers is the effective Psalmist ? Parts of certain Psalms are quoted in that way ; and it seems to me clear that the so-called "imprecations" are expressive of actual Divine pronouncements of doom to come on the inveterate enemies of His Kingdom. Behind

temporary doers of evil the Psalmist (in the Spirit) sees the dark forces of ungodliness ranging themselves against the Lord and His Christ : and he speaks accordingly. This power of vision into *ultimate issues* is a characteristic of the prophetic spirit. The imprecatory Psalms are to be read, I judge, as inspired oracles. Nor are imprecations confined to the Old Testament. What would you say of the Apostle of Christ who (in Galatians) invokes a curse on the head of any preacher (though an angel from heaven) who should announce "any other gospel" than his ? It is simply unintelligible unless the apostle is speaking in the Spirit as the inspired mouthpiece of God "the Judge of all." If we regard the Apostle Paul's Gospel as a private system of theology of his own : if we fall into the current habit of talking about "the Pauline gospel" and "the Johannine gospel" and "the Petrine gospel," and so on—then we are driven to regard this "anathema" I have cited as a mere piece of spiteful rhetoric in a theological controversy, *quite unworthy of an apostle of Christ*. But who would say that ? Am I not right when I read in those words a statement of solemn import—that a brand of irrevocable shame (a curse) will attach to anyone (be he man or angel) who sets himself to oppose the honour of Christ and His eternal kingdom of truth and grace ? May I earnestly commend to the young Christians here present that they seek to *read the Psalms in the light of the great prophetic spirit with which they are saturated*. It will not only clear away much of the moral mist that perhaps obscures their character for the present, but it will bring into your heart many rays of the glory of Him Whom your souls love. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

## CONCLUSION.

But now I must close. It was not part of my original intention to go into these detailed questions—though, through speaking *extempore* and without notes, I have been led to trespass somewhat. Nor do I claim to have indicated adequately a constructive theory of the doctrine of progress in revelation. My intention rather was to show that the facts are such as can be in no way explained by the type of



modern views (all too prevalent) which I cited at the commencement.

Think of it: "See how we are passing from a faith in a wrathful, jealous, mutable, vindictive God, as described by the Jews, to a faith in the God of Jesus." Even leaving aside (if I could) the awful blasphemy of this—I am compelled to ask whether anyone could pen such a statement if he had in the least imbibed the spirit of the Old Testament books? I see in those ancient oracles a revelation of the name of God—a God of mercy: a God of truth. I see the pages in which it is enshrined steeped in mercy, though solemnly shaded by judgment. "I will sing of mercy and judgment." This has been the song of the prophets since the world began, and there is harmony all through—above the discord of human sin and folly. The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: nor does His character *anywhere* in the Bible correspond with the awful description I have just quoted.

In regard to the Old Testament I suggest two words of guiding principle: "The Law of the Lord is perfect" (that is its quality). "The Law made nothing perfect" (that is its achievement—in its office as a preparatory discipline to "school" souls for Christ). These two statements can be written across the sacred Record. A perfect revelation—imperfect faith. Perfect ethical requirement—imperfect obedience. And when the fulness of time is come we turn to the New Testament and read there the great statute of emancipation from the law through faith in Christ. We learn how those who have looked believingly and submissively into the perfect law are by it led to the feet of the Son of God. There (at His feet) they grow up from childhood to sonship. Under the Old Testament God was dealing with children. Under the New Testament He deals with sons. We seem to discern a few sons among the children in the days while the Old was still standing—for they lived in the faith of the New that was promised. *But the first principle of the kingdom of God is this*—to take our place as children in order that we may be disciplined for sonship. With sonship will come an increase of knowledge. But progress in spiritual knowledge—increase of understanding in Divine mysteries—is barred to the man

who treats the beginnings of the doctrine of Christ with anything but humility and submission. Our wisdom is not to *repudiate* any Scriptures—affecting to pass moral judgment on things which we little understand and affecting superiority to records which may well judge *us*; but to seek to increase our own stature by stooping, and to hope that, as we grow up to the measure of the sonship to which we are called, the Father will "make known His ways" to us in a degree unsuited to our childhood days. We read His acts—and in our littleness we miss much of their meaning. "He made known His *ways* unto Moses—His *acts* unto the children of Israel." The children who only saw the acts murmured against a "son" who discerned the ways. If difficulties cling to the revelation of God for me, I do well to see in this a measure of my limitations; not to follow the sin that ruined others—repudiating Moses—but to exercise the humble faith that receives God's prophets in the name of prophets. By and by we shall see no longer through a glass darkly; but face to face.

"Blind unbelief is *sure* to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter  
And He will make it plain."



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