

# The Old Testament

Worthy of Study  
in the Twentieth Century



Opening Address

of

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# Introductory

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At the request of members of my classes in Biblical Introduction I have decided to republish in pamphlet form the opening address delivered more than a quarter of a century ago before the Seminary by Dr. Basil Manly, Jr., so well known as one of the original professors of the Southern Baptist Seminary. The request was occasioned by my use of the address in my lectures on "Jesus and the Old Testament". It will be noted that many a year has passed since the address was delivered and that quite a revolution and great progress in Old Testament studies have taken place since that day, yet in all essential particulars the positions taken hold good to this day. The address will well repay reading and rereading.

A notion has prevailed to some extent from Marcion's day down to the present time that Jesus dethroned Moses and "abolished the Old Testament". An occasional Christian even now may be found entertaining some such view in spite of Jesus' positive disclaimer: "I am not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them", that he derived the proofs of his Messiahship and much of his teaching from the Old Testament and in various ways recognized and honored it as inspired and authoritative. The attitude which the congregation at Jerusalem assumed certainly proves that Jesus had not given them directions to disregard the law (Acts 15:10f). The prophets speak in God's name, by his Spirit, announcing his will, yet they make distinctions, designating some things of the law as essentials and others as secondary; or when they even disregard certain requirements and set them aside, it is avowedly done and accepted as God's verdict as to the real import of the law. Does not this fact give us the beginning of a solution of the problem of Jesus' way of dealing with parts of the Old Testament? Certainly they that heard Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and in kindred teaching found evident satisfaction in the thought that hitherto the law had not been rightly or adequately understood. Neither the inspired prophet before

him, nor Jesus himself, was sensible of any conflict between the law and what he taught—each was assured that God directly authorized him to say what he did say. Hence, Christ's explanations and applications of the law are accepted by most Christians as true and final; even when not in agreement with the letter of the law, they are accepted by Christians the world over as the law's real meaning. Jesus, of course, was conscious of being not only a prophet but also the unique Son of God, and this consciousness it was which moved and warranted him to say: "It was said to them of old time \* \* \* but I say unto you." "He spake as one **having** authority, and not as the scribes", but he spoke no word calculated to cast dishonor upon the Old Testament, or which when rightly interpreted and received will depreciate or loosen the hold of the Old Testament upon the mind and conscience of the twentieth century Christian.

GEO. B. EAGER,

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## THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

Basil Manly, Jr., D. D., LL. D.

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What use has the nineteenth century for the Old Testament? Will not the twentieth century find it completely antiquated, out of date and abolished? What profit is there for advancing theologians of today in its study? What advantage is there in clinging to this relic of the past? We answer, much every way, chiefly because we find in it the oracles of God. Although this is an age of progress, still it would be well to bear in mind that this advance, as far as it is real, is based upon the discoveries of the past and that in many things there has been no advance, but only repetition or even retrogression. Let us not undervalue the respective advantages of the old and the

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new. Some old things are worthy of admiration and even of reverence. The first prints of a fine engraving, the original paintings of the old masters, cannot be improved by emendations.

Let us neither disdain the enterprise and impatient thirst for new achievements which belong to the present generation, nor ignore or depise the attainments of past centuries, whose permanence and worth have been tested by time and endorsed by experience, especially, if in anything we can ascend to the very fountainhead, to the true source of all light and knowledge, to God himself, let us gladly hail this sacred privilege and cherish it forever. There is a book, a part of the oldest literature in the world and at the same time the newest, which claims our regard and reverence by every principle that can affect an intelligent mind. Of this book the Old Testament forms the earliest and the largest portion. The earnest commendation of the New Testament writers and of our Lord Jesus himself, bear witness to the inspiration and to the profit to be derived from a thorough and reverent acquaintance with it. In how strong a contrast are the practical neglect and the practical antagonism or contempt of which so many are guilty!

Unfortunately, this is true not only of infidels and rationalists, of whom it might be reasonably expected, but also of a large number of professing Christians, whose exclusiveness of attention to the New Testament amounts to a practical ignoring of the Old.

Reason, Scripture and experience all teach that the careful and reverent study of the Old Testament is the appropriate introduction to God's later and clearer revelation and that disrespect shown to the Old Testament will inevitably blind those who are guilty of it to the true meaning and uses of both the Old and New Testaments. It is the testimony of one of the most eminent and reverent German writers on theology (Oehler) that a special need of this age is a fuller recognition of the Old Testament for religious knowledge and life and that the treasures of this book, so little known, especially to so-called persons of culture, should be more fully laid open to the body of the church.

The first and all-sufficient reason we shall urge for this careful and reverent study of the Old Testament is that it is

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divinely inspired. This simple fact is enough. The miracles of the earlier times, the ever fulfilling prophecies, the seal and sanction of the Redeemer himself, all serve to authenticate it. Whatever of sanctity God's authority can give a book is given to this. Till the God who bestowed it on us changes, till the nature of the race of beings to whom it was given is fundamentally altered, till the truths it contains have become superannuated, the history uninteresting and profitless and the prophecies no longer exhibit their accurate pictures of present things; in short, till the end of time and of the human race, the Old Testament will continue to have its claims on attention as God's earliest Word to man.

Then the devotional uses of this part of the Bible have lost none of their interest or meaning. The deep experience of inward religion which belonged to our fathers was closely connected with the constant study of the Old Testament. The source from which they derived their inspiration is free to us—shall we not avail ourselves of it? Bishop Horne, in his commentary on the psalms, bears affectionate testimony to the calm and holy joy in the Lord that may be nurtured amid those ancient pages. The old Scotch divines were full of such utterances. Spurgeon expresses himself in much the same cordial way.

Again, the prophecies contained in the Old Testament have still various uses. The fulfilled predictions obviously serve as evidences of the New Testament and prepare for it. But they are not all fulfilled. Thus God has placed the burden of coming events upon the open pages of this book, to keep them open and to compel us to read; and while some of the prophecies were given mainly as witnesses to testify by their fulfillment to the divinity of the volume, others were given to warn and instruct those who might live before their fulfillment. The blessing to the reader of prophecy is not reserved till the prediction is accomplished. "Blessed is he", not that seeth the fulfillment and is convinced thereby, but "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand."

Many duties enjoined in the Old Testament are just as binding as they ever were. The moral commands of the Most

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High have not been abated. Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill, that is, to complete it.

The revelations of essential truth which the Old Testament contained are unchanged in their accuracy, in their interest and importance.

It contains something not otherwise known, as, for example, creation, providence, the fall of man, the Sabbath or day of rest and worship, the primitive doctrine of sacrifice which connects itself directly with the fact of Christianity and the atonement of our Lord Jesus. The doctrines of the unity and spirituality and other attributes of God, though everywhere recognized in the New Testament, are not so specially insisted on there because already brought into prominence in the Old.

Furthermore, it teaches some things in a manner specially adapted for impression and permanence. The gradual, the symbolical, the reiterative plans and forms of instruction are abundantly exemplified in it. It exhibits God's method of bringing a debased and corrupt people into a capability of receiving and apprehending his will. The missionary and Sunday school teacher may learn from this ancient book to apply principles of object teaching and of frequent reviews and pictorial or symbolic illustrations which are the boast of our modern system of pedagogics. Moses used them three thousand years ago. So, too, was the gradual or progressive method of education fully exemplified.

There are numbers of things in the Old Testament which must be known in order to have any correct understanding of other things in the New. To begin at once with the most important thing, the great theme of the New Testament, is that the great promise of the Old is fulfilled. The long predicted Messiah has come. But who is he? Why did he come? What are the evidences and what the effects of his coming? Can any man answer these questions, I will not say correctly or thoroughly, but can he answer them at all intelligibly without a knowledge of the Old Testament? It has been well said: "The New Testament without the Old is as imperfect a revelation as the Old without the New."

Misapprehensions of the Old Testament lead to perversions of the New. One of the most striking illustrations is connected with our denominational peculiarities. Who can fail to see that the doctrine of infant church membership and the

practice of infant baptism have their root in the interpretation which those who hold it give to the Old Testament? Practically the New Testament has to be given up by the pedo-Baptists as having nothing to say about it. Multitudes of candid, learned, pious men thus embrace and sustain a doctrine of which the New Testament is utterly empty, and to which the Old Testament, rightly understood, lends no sanction; and that man who will calmly, clearly, lovingly expound and invincibly demonstrate the true connection and harmony between the old and new dispensations will do more to settle the main point of the baptismal controversy and to remove the barriers which separate from us the millions of pious and thoughtful pedo-baptists than scores of fiery polemics or hundreds of denunciatory volumes. Prelacy and its twin sisters, ritualism and sacramentalism, make the Old Testament the bulwark of their defense. We claim that the Christian church is a new and independent institution, owing its origin and tracing its laws to Christ and the apostles; and that its worship is free as to form, spiritual as to its nature and admits of no rightful control, except by the Spirit and Word of the living God.

Is there any reason to suppose that the twentieth century will find the Old Testament less valuable, less divine, than the centuries past have done? Thirty-three hundred years have elapsed since it began its mission, and a thousand generations of men have risen and fallen, while it has gone on its beneficent way. It is more than two thousand three hundred years since its latest writer dropped his pen. During that period the fiercest blasts of opposition and hatred have beaten upon it. Human ingenuity and diabolic malice have exhausted their energies in assailing it. Is there any reason to suppose the next ten, or twenty, or hundred years will accomplish what all the past has failed to do? At present what is termed the higher criticism is busying itself specially with minute discussions as to its authorship, antiquity and history. Let the inquiry proceed.

This book is in no danger. None of the proved results of criticism have diminished in the slightest degree the just claim of this book to the confidence and reverence of mankind. Hundreds of thousands of students, a few with suspicion and dislike, many with eager love, have examined it from end to

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end with microscopic minuteness and unvarying diligence; they have explored every field of kindred study that was likely to yield either confirmation or contradiction, and out of all the book has come, not only unscathed, but more firmly established than ever.

Old objections and difficulties have been removed by advancing light. Witnesses have arisen from the tombs of ancient Egypt, the mined cities of Babylon, the buried palaces of Assyria, to uphold its veracity. The very rocks of Palestine have been quickened into life and utterance to attest its truth and illustrate its meaning. Heathen nations in recent years have felt in its teachings and in the New Covenant inseparably associated with it, the same mighty power of the Spirit of Jehovah that wrought in ancient days and its elevating influence has been tested and recognized in India and China and the islands of the sea and by every people among whom it has been disseminated. Eighteen hundred years ago a Jewish fisherman spoke of "the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever". A century or more ago, the famous and cultured Voltaire said: "In a hundred years the Bible will be a forgotten book." Which prediction has come true? The number of Bibles in the world when Voltaire spoke has been multiplied a thousandfold. The Bible has been translated into every known language. Its circulation is more than that of any other book the world ever saw. It has penetrated every part of the globe. All the other religions of the world are paling before its dawning and spreading light.

There is every indication, then, that in the twentieth century it will still have more readers and more diligent students than ever, that it will be better understood and more generally obeyed, and consequently that its blessed fruits will be more conspicuously apparent in the welfare of man and the glory of God. May we be honored by having some humble share in this joyous consummation?

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Who among Christians today, whether minister or not, will withhold a hearty amen to this devout wish and prayer of the venerable man of God, now gone home to glory?      G. B. E.



# HYMN.

Composed by DR. BASIL MANLY in 1850.

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L. M.

In doubt's dim twilight here I stray,  
Upon me shines no cheering ray;  
My Saviour, drive away my fear,  
Abide with me, for night is near.

Dwell thou within my heart ; O come  
Not as a stranger, but at home ;  
Here reign supreme, it is thy right ;  
Abide with me both day and night.

And when my day of toil is done,  
When weak and weary age comes on,  
Uphold me, Saviour, as I die ;  
Abide with me, when night is nigh.

Soon shall a voice my slumbers wake,  
A glorious, endless morning break :  
When night and grief forever flee,  
May I in heaven abide with thee.