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THE PRESENT ILLS OF OLD TESTAMENT THEOL- OGY AND THEIR REMEDY

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IN QUITE recent and widely prevailing books, which have appeared under the title "Biblical Theology of the Old Testament" (The books referred to are those of Stade, 1895, and Kautzsch, 1911), there is presented in substance the following portrayal of Old Testament Religious History:

1. First of all, these books no longer permit *Abraham to be the founder of a new period in religious history*, in spite of the express affirmation of all the earliest sources (Gen. 12:1, *seq.*; Jos. 24:2, *seq.*; etc.). In opposition to all Biblical evidence they will no longer allow the Patriarchal religion to be the first step in Biblical religion; but they put the Patriarchs in a class (*Stufe*) of general Semitic religion, or make them even *Fetish worshipers*—worshippers of "sacred" stars, fountains, trees, etc. Furthermore, they make the Deity of earlier Israel a limited *local deity*, although the oldest scriptural sources already characterize the God of the Patriarchs as the Creator of the world and the "Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25). They delight also to call Him the "Thunder God of Sinai" (Stade, par. 20), whom Israel had worshiped in his "Bedouin religion"; and only after Israel's immigration into Canaan would they make Him the Ceres ("*Ackerbaugott*") of the present "Peasant religion."

Therefore, they simply pass by entirely the fact that in the earliest sources the field is already mentioned which the "Lord (Jahwe) has blessed" (27:27), and that already Isaac and Jacob had been engaged, according to the original evidence (*Quellenzeugnis*), in agricultural pursuits (26:12; 37:7). Consequently, they call Israel's earlier religion "PRE-PROPHETIC" (in spite of 20:7; Deut. 18:15; etc.), and argue that the Prophetic religion

* Translated by the Rev. J. Sander, L.H.D.

did not exist until the eighth century, even though Amos and his class (*Reihe*) claim to be only Reformers. A very important feature in this modern portrayal of Israel's religious history is, furthermore, the assertion that the God of Israel in the "pre-prophetic" religious history had been a "being of incalculable power" (*unberechenbares Machtwesen*) (Stade), who like an Oriental despot chooses his favorites as he pleases (Meinhold). Hence they stamp, as it is expressly said, the God of earlier Israel as an *inferior* ethical being (*untersittlichen Wesen*). What a perversion (*Zerstampfung*) of the sources! Then already, according to the very earliest (sources), the blood of Abel cries to God in heaven for vengeance (4:10) and Moses is seated on the throne of judgment in the name of God (Ex. 18:13 *seq.*), etc.

2. Another leading feature of the new deductions of the religious history of the Old Testament is that which at present is accustomed frequently to be dished up (*vorzutragen*) as the "*National Religion* of Israel" This is true especially, when one considers also the practices which in the Old Testament are everywhere forbidden (soothsaying, witchcraft, idolatry, the worship of images, etc.). In spite of the prohibition the new appellation (*Benennung*) attempts to make the *false impression*, first, that this kind of conduct was practiced only by the common people, and yet many kings (Solomon, Jeroboam I, and others) favored idolatry and image worship. Secondly, *not a word is said* of the Old Testament condemnation of these practices, according to which they are disobedience (Ex. 19:5 *seq.*), rebellion (Isa. 1:2), etc. Thirdly, by this modern appellation the characteristic feature of this "national religion" is *entirely omitted*. The new appellation completely ignores the fact that such practices are based on *thanklessness* and *distrust* toward the old God of deliverance. But with this they are not yet satisfied. The latest is that they have even created a new kind of this so-called "national religion of Israel." It is manufactured from passages of the Old Testament, which are *not condemned* in it. This is done, *e. g.*, with the saying of Jephthah (Judges 11:24), where the god of

the Ammonites is treated as existing, and the God of the Old Testament is thus made simply a national god. But verse 27 is *entirely ignored* (e. g., Kittel), in which the Old Testament God is mentioned as *the* one who is to be the Judge, who will decide the claims of the Ammonites, to say nothing of the hundred other passages, in which the God of the Old Testament religion is designated as the Preserver and Ruler of the world.

Nay, of late no effort has been spared to give to this "*national religion*" of Israel a precedence and superiority (*in ihrem Range zu erheben*). The following words may be given as an example. "It is self-evident, that Manassah also recognized the national (*Reichs*) religion, and offered to the principal Assyrian gods divine honors" (*kultische Verehrung*) (Meinhold). Thus according to the above words, *the old fundamental law*, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," is *completely discarded* to make place for the national religion. Idolatry, the main feature of the "national religion," is declared to be permissible. *Disloyalty* to the God of the patriarchal religion is said to be "*self-evident*." The sublimity of the prophetic religion with its monotheism, the spirituality of its worship (*Kultus*), the holiness of its God, etc., is all cast to the winds; while on the other hand, for example, Zoroaster is highly glorified for the founding of his religion. It is, therefore, maintained as "*self-evident*" (*selbstverständlich*) that a Christian under a heathen government may *sever his allegiance* to his God. To this state has come the misrepresentation of religious history!

3. And *how* has the attempt to overthrow the Old Testament historical religion been brought about? To this question the following reply may in short be given. It was started, first of all, from the gradual prevalence of a fundamental *philosophical principle* (*Grundanschauung*). It is the philosophy of Hegel (d. in Berlin, 1831), which asserts that *all* history is interpreted by a constant interchange of contradictions, as Wellenborg and Wellental declare, and that only by taking history in its entirety (*den ganzen Geschichtsverlauf*), and not in any part thereof, does perfection appear. This is exactly what the

Hegelian, David Frederick Strauss, bluntly (*mit dürren Worten*) says in his *Life of Jesus* (1835), namely, that it is not in accord with the association of ideas to disclose all fullness in a single example (Vol. II, p. 734). *For this reason* he first of all *reduced the authority* of Jesus. This historical comprehension of the Hegelian Philosophy was later developed into a fundamental view by materialism and Darwinism, namely, that all historical—even Biblical—incidents must be interpreted *only according to physical (diesseitigen) causes*, and are entirely developed *from below up*.

In the same year in which Strauss' "Life of Jesus" appeared, the Hegelian Vatke wrote his first volume of *Biblical Theology*, "*The Old Testament Religion*." And of Vatke Wellhausen had expressly said, that from him "he had learned most and the best." A large number of Old Testament history critics have since followed in the footsteps of Wellhausen, especially those mentioned above. Kautzsch also makes the Patriarchs Fetish worshippers (p. 14), and does not refer with a single word (p. 1-40) to the religion of the Patriarchs with which the declaration of God is connected according to the information of the sources: "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham," etc. (Ex. 3:6, *seq.*). Thus Biblical information is completely ignored also by Kautzsch. And this is also too often the case in the whole camp of modern representatives (*Darstellern*) of Old Testament religious history. What the original sources say *is ignored*, and in their places they *construct* theories according to their own fancy.

It was therefore no great surprise to find the last upshot, attempting to pervert Old Testament religious history, in the work of Frederick Delitzsch, *The Great Deception (Die Grosse Täuschung)*. In this book he expressly refers to Wellhausen, as his predecessor (p. 7). After the Prophets had gradually been deprived of their greater authority, and no one in that camp raised his voice, as did Isaiah in his proclamation of woes (5:20, *seq.*) against the perversion and self-deception, the natural consequence was, that there finally arose one who

attempted to make the Old Testament religion an offspring of *diabolical delusion*. Even Herostratus must have his imitator.

4. Under these circumstances, it is certainly not out of place to speak of an illness of Old Testament Theology. And now what do the symptoms observed in the present conditions teach concerning means to be employed for the healing? First of all, the time has come, when Old Testament Theology must be *based upon its sources*. In doing this, critical judgment shall certainly also be applied. But it shall decide according to the positive (*sichern*) principles of linguistic proofs, the laws of which are unfolded in my *Introduction* (p. 36), and from the actual facts. And those words of the Critic Lessing shall be especially observed, which in his *Duplik* are in substance as follows: "If Livius and Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Tacitus in their report of an incident differ from each other to the extent that the circumstances as given by one are expressly contradicted by the others, the *incident itself* has in all times been *rejected*." For example, it is a fact that Livius and Polybius are not agreed as to the particular pass, through which Hannibal crossed the Alps; but *the fact that the great Carthaginian led his army across the Alps and caused Rome to tremble before him is conceded by all in spite of the disagreement*. Thus, above all, the *general contents* of the source at least must be recognized as a sure foundation of the tradition (*Ueberlieferung*). This is the chief and positive means by which the above mentioned present conditions of Old Testament Theology must be improved. But there are still other, negative means, as noted below.

The time has come when a new presentation of Old Testament Theology must be provided, because in the last decades a large number of *new questions* have been added to the old ones and these demand a *critical answer*. For, though the newer statements of Old Testament Theology are pitched to essentially the same tune, they contradict each other especially in minor points; and with an enviable consciousness of infallibility these men are accus-

tomed to ignore the critics who do not belong to their particular school. But how large a number of new questions there are which require a *critical reply*, each reader can determine for himself from what has been pointed out above in regard to these modern deductions (*Aufstellungen*). But besides these dozens of new themes, which have arisen in consequence of the Babylon discoveries, and which require a critical examination, might be added, since in many quarters the *inclination at present prevails to Babylonize everything of an Old Testament character*.

The following may also be noted, namely, that the more recent works on Old Testament Theology (with the only relative exception of Knudsen's book) offer only the history of the Israelitish religion. They do *not give a systematic* presentation of the facts and ideas, which have so vividly been shown in the history of Salvation before Christ. This gap, which has been sorely lamented also by J. Hänel (Greifswald) in the *Theologisches Literaturblatt*, 1921, column (sp.) 70, indicates a third weakness in the present treatment of Old Testament Theology; and the filling up of this gap belongs furthermore to the operations by which the soundness of this science is to be brought about.

In conclusion, the solution of all these problems in a new presentation of Old Testament Theology has been set forth as a higher (*höheres*) ideal in my *Theologie des Alten Testaments Kritisch und Vergleichend Dargestellt* (just published by Chr. Balser in Stuttgart). If this book will now strive by the impartial consideration of co-workers of *all tendencies*, by revisions and literal translations of the Hebrew authorities and by the addition of proper tables and indexes, toward a higher standard of scientific knowledge and practical usefulness, it may go forth in the hope that it will be ignored by no one, but will be welcomed by a large circle of Bible friends. The book furthermore contains exact references to the citations made above, so that they can be read more fully.