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Inspiration
and
Authority
of the
Bible

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A. S. Peake Memorial Lecture No. 1

THE INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

by

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A. S. Peake Memorial Lecture

ARTHUR SAMUEL PEAKE (1865-1929) was for forty years a leading figure in the realm of biblical scholarship. He was a member of the tutorial staffs of Hartley Primitive Methodist College, Victoria Park United Methodist College, and Lancashire Independent College, all being Theological Colleges situated in Manchester; in 1904 he became the first John Rylands Professor of Biblical Exegesis in the University of Manchester, and the first Dean of the Faculty of Theology.

Remembered as the initiator and editor of *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, as well as the author of many other works, he opened the treasures of the Scriptures to ministers and laymen alike, and became a trusted leader in biblical interpretation.

Following the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, and in order to commemorate his life-work and maintain the tradition of scriptural interpretation for which he stood, the *A. S. Peake Memorial Lecture* was founded in 1956, to be delivered, it is hoped annually, at the Conference of the Methodist Church.

Preface

I MUST first express my appreciation of the honour the Committee have done me in inviting me to deliver the first Peake Memorial Lecture. Arthur Samuel Peake was a great biblical scholar; there was no greater scholar in his generation. He combined a rare judgement in matters of scholarship with a deep and sincere piety, and it was this combination which enabled him to do a very great work in helping many people to appreciate the methods and the results of modern biblical scholarship. No man could doubt his sincerity and his devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, with the result that many were prepared to trust him where they could not understand. Primitive Methodism in particular, and Methodism and the whole Church in general, owe him a debt that no one can estimate and none can ever repay.

Because of Dr Peake's great work in popularizing the modern study and knowledge of the Bible, I have chosen as my subject 'The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible'. No subject was dearer to his heart, and no subject can more fittingly pay tribute to his memory. Two of his books dealt with this subject—*The Bible: Its Origin, Its Significance and Its Abiding Worth* and *The Nature of Scripture*. The former volume is the more important, the latter being a reprint of lectures delivered at various places and times. Both ran to many editions, and both are still valuable, for both are mentioned in the *Scripture Bibliography* which has been issued in recent years by the Society for Old Testament Study, of which he was an honoured President.

The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible

1. The Bible is not a Book, but a collection of books

THE Bible is not a Book, but a collection of writings of diverse origins and dates. The various constituent parts were written in places as far apart as Babylonia and Rome, and at dates as varied as those comprised in perhaps as much as one and a half milleniums. There can scarcely be extant anywhere a corpus of writings embracing such varying civilizations and cultures. When this fact is realized, it will be no surprise that primitive and advanced concepts are found side by side. In passing from one writing to another, and on occasion even in the same writing, we are transported suddenly, as if on some magic carpet, from the barren and thirsty desert to the sophisticated town, from the shepherd in his rough skin coat to the elegant courtier in his silks and jewels. In the New Testament, we have the Macedonian physician, Luke, with some pretence to elegance in his literary style and with a care in the sifting of evidence that is always to be reckoned with; we have Saul of Tarsus, an educated man of two busy cities, Tarsus and Jerusalem, with a wide knowledge, but with a zeal and fervour which seem always to be outstripping his syntax and his vocabulary; and we have a writer like the author of Revelation, whose Greek, to say the least of it, leaves something to be desired. In the Old Testament, we find national pride of the most extreme type side by side with a generosity to other nationals which is by no means equalled everywhere in this twentieth century; we have relics of barbarism, more than suggestions of animism, ancestor-worship, and ancient magic—all cheek by jowl with ideas of the uniqueness and majesty of an Only God which will remain as long as the earth endures.

There is no single homogeneous doctrine, no one thread that is obvious, no single scheme or pattern, not even a consistent

idea of the Nature and character of God. There are many doctrines, many threads—threads that are broken and left hanging loosely, threads that are tied together into a stronger cord, threads that are woven together into a pattern whose dominant *motif* changes from age to age. There is, indeed, such a conglomeration of patterns and tendencies that many strange cults and sects can 'prove' their tenets by looking where they will and only where they will. The Bible is in fact the collected literature of two peoples: one, the Hebrews 'whose goings forth are from of old', the other, the Christians, the new People of God 'created in Christ Jesus'.

The first part of this collection of writings is the Old Testament, accepted as Scripture (that is, inspired and authoritative) by both Jews and Christians. The second part is the New Testament, accepted as Scripture by all Christians. The Roman Church adds a third selection of writings—namely, the Apocrypha, but excluding 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasses. The Established Church of England occupies a middle position, neither Protestant nor Catholic; it reads the Apocrypha 'for example of life and instruction of manners, but not to establish doctrine'. In this lecture I deal with the Old Testament and the New Testament, since Methodism conforms to the Protestant tradition, which recognizes only those as Scripture.

2. *The first attack on 'the infallible Book'*

For many centuries the Bible was regarded as sacred, infallible and authoritative. This attitude persisted down to 'the Roman Catholic Europe of the Middle Ages; it still persists in some circles to this day. In classical times, and down even to comparatively modern times, men used Homer and Vergil as a guide for ascertaining present and future happenings; they opened their scroll or volume and took the first sentence on which their eyes rested as a definitive word from the gods. The Bible was also used in this way as *sortes biblicae*, and John Wesley in the eighteenth century more than once resorted to

this ancient custom. It is, I think, more than likely that Marjorie Bowen exaggerates Wesley's predilection for this type of guidance, but beyond doubt the early Methodists occasionally followed this practice, not—be it noticed—being in this respect unique and superstitious fanatics, but in company with many devout souls who earnestly desired to be guided in small details as well as in great affairs by the God to whom they owed everything.

It is popularly thought, especially by fundamentalist sects, that the first departure from the acceptance of the whole of Scripture as inerrant and everywhere equally inspired by God is to be dated in the last half of the nineteenth century. It is believed also that it is the Higher Criticism that is at fault, especially the work of Graf, Wellhausen, and their successors—in short, the whole group referred to as 'modernists'. This belief is wholly mistaken. The change was coincident with the birth of Protestantism, and it is high time all these left-wing Protestant sects realized it. The first assault is to be found in the disputations of Martin Luther.

Martin Luther began by accepting the commonly received opinion that the Bible everywhere, in both Old and New Testaments, has the same meaning. If the Holy Spirit was the source of what was in the Bible, then the meaning everywhere must be clear and consistent; if the meaning of any particular passage seemed to be obscure, then that passage was to be interpreted in the light of passages elsewhere that were clear. When Luther found himself in conflict with the Church in the matter of indulgences, he sought to prove his position by Scripture and was driven to set his own considered judgement against the declarations of the Church. It is of the utmost importance to realize here that he did not advocate the right of the individual to interpret Scripture, and thus set up himself, or any other individual, against the authority of the Church. On the contrary, he continued to assume that Scripture was everywhere consistent, and he applied this principle by interpreting disputed passages in the light of other passages where there could be no dispute. Luther's bulwark,

certainly at this stage, was not the right of the individual to interpret Scripture in the light of any spiritual insight he might imagine that he had; his bulwark was the consistency of Scripture as the product of the work of the Holy Spirit. Further, he was always confident, from beginning to end, that the main doctrine of Salvation was declared plainly enough for any man to read it there if he permitted himself earnestly and prayerfully to study the Bible.

In the course of time Luther came practically to set up a canon of Scripture within the Canon. Probably most Bible students actually do this in practice to varying degrees. Luther's virtual canon consisted of three Pauline epistles as forming the central core: Romans, Galatians and Ephesians. To these he added John, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Acts. The least valuable book in the New Testament was Revelation, and he found little more value in Hebrews, James, and Jude. What governed his choice was that he regarded as supreme the great doctrine of Justification by Faith. This, he held, is the essence of the Gospel, and by it all the rest must be interpreted. It was this that caused him to place the three Synoptic Gospels on a lower level. It was not that he thought less than anyone else of the importance of Christ's own words, His life, death, and resurrection—nobody could read the epistles without realizing the immense importance to Paul of, at least, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It was because the Gospels do not clearly and evidently deal with the central doctrine of Justification by Faith, and this was for Luther, the touchstone by which the golden Truth is disclosed.

Luther thus uses the phrase 'the Word of God' in a double sense. The whole Bible is the Word of God in the sense that it portrays 'the great fire of God's love for us', this boundless love that is manifested in Christ. The Bible tells the story of God's continued 'mighty works', shown (for Luther at least) most clearly in the Old Testament in Genesis, in the Messianic prophecies and in the Psalms. But in addition to this, and also as its guarantee, there is also the Word of God *in* the Bible, and this Word is the paramount doctrine of Justification by

Faith. In connexion with this, it has to be remembered that, in contrast with others of the Reformers who thought in terms primarily of a Community, Luther was always concerned first and foremost with the salvation of the individual and of that individual's certainty of it. The modern Methodist counterpart of this is the Doctrine of Assurance. When we Methodists say that a man can be in a state of grace and can be sure of it, can know this here and now, we are in the direct succession of Luther's primary concern.

Martin Luther, then, based his belief in the authority of Scripture on the plain meaning of Scripture in passages where that plain meaning was plainest, and it was this, combined with his own religious experience, that led him to his theme of the Word of God *in* the Bible.

It is chiefly to Calvin that we owe the doctrine of the Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*) as the basis of the authority of Scripture. The importance of this inner Witness of the Spirit as the key factor in the acceptance of the authority of Scripture is declared in the Westminster Confession, where, after enumerating the evidence abundant in Holy Scripture itself, it concludes with the following: 'Yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.' Calvin also had another criterion. Just as the doctrine of Justification by Faith appealed most to Luther, so the idea of the Majesty and Glory of God appealed most to Calvin. For Luther, God's chief aim was the salvation of every individual man; for Calvin, God's chief aim was the manifestation of His Majesty and Glory. This difference is the basis of the variations between Arminianism and Calvinism.

The story of the various cross-currents in the discussions as to the authority of the Bible can be studied in such books as C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (3rd edn, 1952); C. M. Dugmore (editor), *The Interpretation of the Bible* (1944), and in particular the essay therein by T. W. Manson, entitled 'The

failure of Liberalism to interpret the Bible as the Word of God'; H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of the Bible* (1941); Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (tr. by G. T. Thomson, 1936); and especially the recent E. G. Kraeßing, *The Old Testament since the Reformation* (1955), in the notes of which are to be found copious references to most of the relevant literature. There is also an excellent popular little book written from the Jewish point of view—*The Bible: a Modern Jewish Approach* (1955), by B. J. Bamberger, the Rabbi of the West End Synagogue of New York City.

3. *The modern attack*

Whereas, as we have seen, the first attack on the old rigid, infallible, everywhere-consistent authority of the Bible was by the Reformers on doctrinal grounds in their fight against the authority of the Roman Church, the modern attack has been from altogether another quarter. It has arisen from the wide knowledge which has come to us in recent times. The study of anthropology has shown us that the Hebrews had a very great deal in common with other races, and that racially they are by no means as distinct and different as many have believed. Far from being isolated in Canaan as though kept close as a polished arrow in the quiver of the Lord, they were thrust into a corridor of the nations, into a narrow stretch of land which was for centuries the highway between the two great centres of civilization, that of Mesopotamia and that of Egypt. The study of comparative religion has taught us that there has been much more truth and light in the so-called darkness of heathendom than was formerly realized. Archaeology has opened up to us the ancient Near East, so that now we can see how much the Hebrews owed to their predecessors and how much of the biblical material has non-Hebrew origins. Possibly archaeology has proved to some extent that 'the Bible is true', but at the same time it has shown that this particular kind of truth was by no means exclusively the heritage of Hebrews. The 'truth' which archaeology has proved is a truth which

belonged to all the ancient Near East. What other truth indeed could archaeology possibly prove, since archaeology is largely the study of the remains from the whole of this area?

The net result of all these studies has necessarily involved us in new attempts to re-estimate the uniqueness of the Bible. In what precisely does this consist? Since, for instance, the first chapter of Genesis has undoubted early roots in Babylonian lore, the second chapter has foundations in an ancient Iranian myth, the story of Noah's Flood has its counterpart in Mesopotamian traditions—and so on—where is the uniqueness and what is the authority which Jews and Christians have claimed?

(a) *The uniqueness is not in literary style*

The discovery of the ancient city of Ugarit (on the Syrian coast, in the same latitude as the northern tip of Cyprus) in 1927 and the subsequent deciphering of the cuneiform script of Ugarit has made abundantly clear a fact which was already evident from the literary remains of the Mesopotamian valley. Much of the Ugarit material, and in particular that which consists of religious texts, is in poetical form. It is plain to see that the structure of Hebrew poetry is directly descended from this Syrian-Canaanite poetry, already flourishing long before Joshua led the Joseph tribes across Jordan—indeed, already developed before Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldees. Even a cursory examination of the texts translated by Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature* (1949), discloses the features familiar to us in the Psalms and in much of the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve). We have the same parallelism, whereby the thought of the first line of the couplet is expressed in parallel words in the second; we have the same regular rhythm; and we have two other special features which are occasionally found in the Old Testament. One of these features is a special type of 'mounting parallelism' which is to be seen most clearly in Judges 5³⁰, but is fairly common in the Song of Deborah, and can be seen frequently in

what are plainly the earliest examples of Hebrew lyric poetry. The verse mentioned in Judges is (the hyphenated words represent one word in the Hebrew):

To-Sisera a-spoil-of divers-colours,
 a-spoil-of divers-colours-of embroidery,
 divers-colours-of embroidery
 on-the-necks-of the-spoil.

Here the first word in each successive line is dropped and another word is added at the end. Compare *The Birth of the Gods*, lines 49f:

The-two-wives, wives-of Il,
 wives-of Il, and-his for ever.
 He-bends, he-kisses their-lips,
 their-lips are-sweet,
 sweet as-grapes.

Further, the repetitions of 'the pransings' (verse 22) and 'bowed, fell' in verse 27, are a common feature of these Ugaritic poems. The parallelism which is a feature of Hebrew poetry is most marked in Ugarit poetry, and the only difference is that from the literary point of view, Hebrew poetry is clearly a developed form of the other. It is more free, more elegant, less stilted and mechanical.

The second feature is the literary device of using successive numbers—see Amos 1³ etc. ('for three transgressions, yea for four'), similar constructions in Proverbs 30, and the use of seven and eight in Ecclesiastes 11², and Micah 5⁵. This device is common in Ugaritic poetry. There are five instances in the 'legend of Krt', of which two are:

Who had seven brothers,
 Eight sons of one mother (lines 8, 9)

and

Three months that he is sick,
 Four that Krt is ill (lines 83, 84).

It is impossible to read the Ugaritic poems without realizing that here we have the origin of the pattern of Hebrew poetry. The Song of Deborah in particular, which bears marked features common to both literatures, cannot be far removed from the Ugarit poems either in distance or in time.

(b) *The uniqueness is not in the myths and legends*

It has been recognized for many years that there are traces in the Bible of ancient myths and legends. We have the myth of the Garden of God, with its central tree, its jewelled trees, the river of God which splits into four and plunges underground ('Where Alph the sacred river ran . . .'), the mountain on which it is situated and the impenetrable wood which surrounds it (Genesis 2 and 3, Ezekiel 28, 31, and 47, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*). Here is an old Iranian myth, which in Genesis 2 and 3 has passed through a desert medium. We have the great Creation myth, the story of the fight against the primeval Sea, the war against Rahab the dragon, the serpent that is in the depths of the sea, the Beast that arises out of the Sea (Genesis 1, Isaiah 51⁹, Amos 9⁹, Revelation 13¹, etc.; see my *Studies in the Psalter* (1934), pp. 94-109). All this has its ancient Babylonian parallels, and there is an even closer parallel in the Ugaritic poem of Baal's fight against the Sea.

(c) *The uniqueness is not in the early laws*

There was a time when the earliest Hebrew Code of Laws, the Code of the Covenant (Exodus 20²²-23¹⁹), was emphasized as evidence of divine guidance to the Hebrews in social laws and administration. The first breach in this bulwark of uniqueness came with the discovery of the Code of Hammurabi (possibly a contemporary of Abraham: Hammurabi died *c.* 1686 B.C.) at Susa in 1901. The bas-relief on this six-foot stele of black diorite shows Hammurabi receiving the Code from the enthroned sun-god, Shamash. There are undoubted affinities between the Code of Hammurabi and the Code of the Covenant, and the Hebrew Code is not always the more advanced

from the humanitarian point of view. Since 1901 further ancient codes have been found. We have now the Sumerian laws of Lipit-Ishtar of Isin, which must be earlier than Hammurabi, and the still earlier laws of Eshnunna, which, on any counting, must be at least five centuries earlier than the Code of the Covenant. Further, the style of the laws and their mode of expression everywhere betray a common origin.

The common literary style is to be seen most clearly in the Moabite Stone, found in 1868 on the site of the ancient capital of Moab, the city of Dibon. This is Mesha of Moab's own account of his successful revolt against Israel at the death of Ahab (2 Kings 3^{4t}). The remarkable thing is the way in which the literary style is similar to that in the Books of Samuel and Kings where we have the contemporary sources such as the Annals of the Kings of Judah and Israel. The names of the Moabite stone are, of course, Moabite names—the place-names and the names of the gods. But if these were replaced by Hebrew names, the whole inscription might easily come from the Hebrew books, Samuel and Kings. The Hebrews of that period evidently talked about their victories and about their God in precisely the same fashion as their ninth-century neighbours talked about their victories and their gods.

Modern archaeology, whatever it has done in confirming some biblical dates and events, has nevertheless destroyed the uniqueness of the Bible so far as language, literary style, and myths and legends are concerned. From what we may call the literary and the cultural side, the writers of the Old Testament have nothing to say to us that is not said equally well in the literary remains of their contemporaries. In art and sculpture, the Hebrews were far behind. All the Hebrew remains that we have found—carvings, rings, decorations—are in general mediocre; at their best they are good copies of foreign styles. The Hebrews themselves have nothing to give us along these lines. Solomon had to import Phoenician architects and artisans to build his Temple, and any Hebrew art that existed was borrowed art.

(d) The testimony of comparative religion

The study of primitive and comparative religion has destroyed the old authority of the Bible. In the Old Testament there is necromancy, the casting of lots in order to find out the will of God, the use of idols in worship, and many a trace of animism—and sometimes, in the earlier writings, these things are not condemned. There is evidence that at one time the sacrifice of the first-born was regarded as legitimate, and even as the highest and costliest of all sacrifices (Micah 6^{or}). The comparative study of religion has shown us that much of what is in the Bible, in both Testaments but particularly in the Old Testament, can be paralleled in other religions; and these parallels are not always confined to what are considered to be the 'less advanced' parts of the Bible.

(e) Modern historical study

Our increased knowledge of history has shown us that the Bible writers were not infallible in such matters. The author of the Book of Daniel thought that it was 'Darius the Mede' who took the kingdom from Belshazzar, last king of Babylon, and that this Darius was succeeded by Cyrus; but we know that this was not so. It is true that Belshazzar was virtually ruler of Babylon, acting as regent for his father Nabu-nahid the archaeologist, but it was Cyrus who conquered Babylon and was the first Persian king. It was only at the death of Cyrus's son, Cambyses, that Darius Hystaspis seized the throne. There was no such person as 'Darius the Mede'; he is a conflation of Cyrus and Darius Hystaspis, and apparently the author of Daniel has confused the capture of Babylon by Cyrus's general Gobyras with Darius's occupation of the capital. Whatever claims the Bible may have to being history, these claims are not to be based on any superior accuracy; the Bible is no more accurate than other ancient documents. It is, however, not less accurate than they are, and this fact also needs to be borne in mind. Hostile critics of the Bible forget that the passion for exact dates and scientific accuracy

of statement is a modern feature. It is unreasonable to expect from any ancient documents the accuracy which is demanded in modern documents. The actual state of affairs is that in every 'secular' way the Bible is everywhere contemporary. The writings are true to their period in style, secular matter, modes of thought, legal enactments generally, in fact in every respect save one—and to this we shall return later.

4. *Has the Bible one common theme?*

We said at the beginning that the Bible is not a Book, but a collection of writings. It is time to examine that statement. A book, as distinct from an anthology, is a series of chapters held together by a common theme, written by the same author in such a way that whilst the reader may not be able always to see where he is ultimately going, he can at any time look back and see plainly the path by which he has travelled. Indeed, in all books—except novels and 'thrillers'—he is a wise author who tells his readers in the preface what the theme of his book is. The reader then knows what to look for, and how to read in order to understand what the author has to say. He can co-operate with the author in the way that Anthony Trollope thought was good and necessary even in the creation of a novel. Is the Bible a book in the sense that it has one central theme? Does it say the same thing everywhere, as Martin Luther had been brought up to believe? When Martin Luther wrote of the Word of God in the Bible, defined it as the doctrine of Justification by Faith, and saw it in (say) Genesis and the Psalms, was he finding what was already there or was he 'reading in' his own ideas?

If we are to define the word 'book' as a writing held together by a common theme, then we have to say that there are many books in the Bible. This book and that book in the Bible is written from its own point of view, and the points of view vary markedly. All histories must indeed be written from some point of view, and if the authors are different the

points of view are likely to be different also. Compare Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* with Thomas Carlyle's *Oliver Cromwell*. Or compare histories of the United States of America: the *motif* can be 'Go West, young man' and the book can tell of a reaching out, a restlessness, a yearning always to see what is over the next divide; or the *motif* can be the fight of the Federal Government against the great financial trusts. The history of this country and of any country can be written in many ways. Each way will be true, but the books will be very different; different material will be selected, different morals pointed out, and different settings given even to the same incidents. The truth of a story consists not only in the telling of the actual happening; it consists also in the way in which the details are related and in what details are related, sometimes even in the tone of voice in which the story is told.

First, the Old Testament. The Old Testament is a book of many revisions, and in general the effect of each revision is to convey a new and a different lesson from history. The *motif* becomes changed. This can be seen, for example, very clearly in the Book of Judges. We have as the basis of the book a series of stories of heroes belonging to the time of the Settlement in Canaan. We read of Ehud, the left-handed Benjamite who assassinated Eglon king of Moab and raised the standard of revolt (Ch. 3) to free Israel from a Moabite oppression. We have Deborah, who incited Barak to rebel against Jabin and Sisera in the far north (Chs. 4 and 5). We have a whole succession of other heroes who rebelled against Canaanite and other oppressions—Gideon, Jephthah, Samson—together with the story of the first attempt to set up a kingdom (Abimelech at Shechem), and short notices of the 'minor judges' such as Othniel, Tola and Jair. At the end of the book we find the story of Micah and his Levite, and the ugly story which ends with the Rape of Shiloh. These are ancient stories of early heroes, stories of their prowess and their victories, or, as in the last five chapters, strange tales of the early semi-lawless days when 'there was no king in Israel'. But it is evident even in the English Versions of Judges, from

the lay-out of the book and even from the style of the English, that these stories have been embodied in a scheme. The beginning (1¹-2¹⁰) stands apart from the scheme, and is a short extract from (probably) the Jehovist story of the Conquest of Canaan. The last five chapters are also different; they tell a story, allow it to explain, for example, how the image came to be set up at Dan in the far north, or how the problem resulting from the excommunication of Benjamin was solved, and leave it at that. But from 2¹¹ to 16³¹ the ancient stories of the judges have been edited in order to illustrate the author's view of history. His theory of history is set out in 2¹¹-2³. The period of the judges to him was the story of repeated apostasy on the part of the children of Israel. They turned aside from worshipping Jehovah to worship other gods. The result was disaster. Then 'the anger of the LORD was kindled against' them, and 'he delivered them into the hands of the spoilers'. In their distress, God sent them a deliverer, and as long as this deliverer was alive, the people were faithful to God and all was well. But as soon as the deliverer died, once more there came a period of apostasy, and the cycle was enacted again. All the stories of the judges are placed in this setting, and the moral is regularly and unfailingly pointed out (4¹, 6¹, 10⁶, etc.). The story of Samson begins with the same formula as the rest (13¹), but the type of the story changes also, because Samson is the 'Trickster' of Hebrew lore. The result of this is that the Samson stories form a transition bridge to the two stories at the end of the book which are wholly outside the scheme. The stories themselves have scarcely been retouched at all by the editor; he has left them in the form in which he found them. It is the introductions and the 'morals' which are his, and his literary style is most plainly marked out. Stories which originally are 'just stories' of the early days have been made into a book, strung together against a common background and used to illustrate a common theme.

A similar situation is to be found in the Books of the Kings. The twin books of Kings are based mainly on the Annals of

the kings of north and south. The editor tells us what his main sources are, and repeatedly refers us to the source where, doubtless, in his time the reader who desired to know more about that particular king could find the information he wanted (e.g. 1 Kings 15²³, etc.). There is a collection of northern stories (perhaps originally three separate collections) which tell of three great northern figures, Elijah, Elisha and Ahab. These seem to have been inserted in the original book at some date after the first (possibly after the second?) editing, but the scheme of the author is plain. It is set forth in his 'preface' (1 Kings 3¹³): 'If thou wilt walk in my ways to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.' The original editor of the Books of the Kings was a firm and convinced Deuteronomist. He was a firm, almost fanatical, devotee of King Josiah, the king who instituted the Deuteronomic reforms after the finding of the scroll of the Law in the Jerusalem Temple in 621 B.C. He probably wrote at the height of Josiah's success, not long before the dreadful disaster of 608 B.C. when Josiah lost his life at Megiddo, and the first edition probably concluded with the word 'Moses' in 2 Kings 23²⁵. Every king of North and South is judged according to the Deuteronomic pattern: Did he worship only at Jerusalem? Did he countenance any worship at any of the provincial shrines (the 'high places')? Did he clear out the necromancers? If he did all these things then he is highly commended, and he is commended in the degree that he did these things. The attitude of the editor is most clear in the case of Jehu. Jehu was actually a most fervent worshipper of Jehovah and did everything he could to stamp Baal worship out of Israel. But he continued the worship at the northern shrines and did not come or bring his people to worship at Jerusalem; therefore we read (2 Kings 10³¹): 'But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, wherewith he made Israel to sin.' The attitude of the editor can also be seen in the amount of space he devotes to the reigns of Omri and Ahab. Omri was

such a powerful king that in the Assyrian records Israel is referred to as Omri's country long after he was dead, and Mesha of Moab refers to Omri in the same way on the Moabite stone. Yet the story of his whole reign is dismissed with thirteen verses (1 Kings 16¹⁶⁻²⁸) and most of these are concerned with the civil war through which he fought his way to the throne. Similarly, Ahab was a powerful leader, but if it had not been for the later insertion from the Ahab-narrative, we should have learned very little from the Bible of his prowess as a general, and of his remarkable victory against the Syrians when he used 'paratroop' tactics for the first time in history (1 Kings 20).

Another *motif* is apparent in the work of the Chronicler, the post-exilic writer who was responsible for Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah. His major source was the earlier history which we have in the Old Testament and which reaches from Genesis to 2 Kings, but he selected his material. His theme is the rise and establishment of post-exilic Judaism. He gives a rapid resumé of the early times down to the time of David, composed almost wholly of genealogies and of short summaries of the territories of the tribes. He is especially interested in the lists of names of the men who came back from the Babylonian captivity, and in their descendants. This is because he agreed with the returned exiles that they, the people of the captivity, were the true People of God, as against those who had never been out of Palestine. It was therefore important for him to know and to record the names of those who could provide the necessary true descent. He is interested in the Temple, and in David (rather than Solomon) as the man who was responsible for the plans of the Temple and its ritual. He is interested in the rights of the priests and the Levites, and even in the rights of the Levites as against the priests. He selects all the nobler elements in the life of David, and by omitting the things that are less worthy, so idealizes his character that he is plainly a man after God's own heart. He takes the minimum of notice of the northern Kingdom of Israel and her kings. He estimates the reforms of Hezekiah as more important than the reforms of

Josiah. He emphasizes the work of Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and Ezra, and goes into great detail as he comes nearer to the actual establishment of post-exilic Judaism with its separatist policy.

A *motif* is even apparent in the Old Testament considered as a single entity, for the whole of it has been given this Judaistic setting, from the first chapter of Genesis to the last three books of the Hebrew Bible—Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. The books of Moses were re-edited in the early post-exilic period by writers of the Priestly School. They did not alter what they found, but they placed it in the setting of their time and theories, just as the editor of Judges took the stories he found and put them in his Deuteronomic setting. The priestly editor prefaced the story of Creation which he found in Genesis 2 and 3 with his own account. Genesis 1 is Creation by *Habdalah* (Separation), the technical word for that Separation which is the essence of Judaism, separation between clean and unclean, between holy and profane, between Sabbath and other days, between Jew and Gentile, always separation—*Habdalah*. God created the world by *habdalah*; He *divided* (lit. 'caused a separation') between this and that. He divided (the root is *badal*, which is the root from which the word *Habdalah* is derived) between the light and the darkness (verse 4); He made the firmament so that it could be a means of separation (verses 6 and 7) between the waters; and so on, with everything separated and divided, and all creatures in their separated species. E. G. Kraeling (op. cit., p. 14) is right when he says that 'the old Testament interpreted alone—without regard to the Gospel—has a natural drift in another direction.' This drift is toward *Habdalah* (Separation), the setting up of what St Paul calls 'the middle wall of partition' (Ephesians 2¹⁴) between Judaism and the Gentile world. The final editing of the Old Testament was not merely Judaeian; it was Judaistic. This is not to deny that there are other elements and other trends; but *Habdalah*, with all the regulations of the Priestly Code, is the final setting and the aim of the final editing of the Law. The last books to be added

complete the emphasis. If this is so, then in what way is the Old Testament to be regarded as a Christian Book? Is it of any value at all to the Christian, for whom the great fact is that Christ 'brake down the middle wall of partition'?

But even the New Testament itself is not homogeneous. It is not a book in the sense that it has one plain and obvious theme. In a general over-all way it is more homogeneous than the Old Testament, and this is partly because the period which it covers is much more limited in literary style, in matter, and in time. It consists of the four Gospels, the story of the beginnings of the Christian Church and its advance into the Gentile world, together with such letters and epistles as were formative of early Christian opinion and doctrine. But within this corpus there are variations. The four Gospels are four accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus as received in the four great centres of first-second generation Christianity. We have the Gospel according to St Matthew—the Antioch Gospel—the Gospel of the Messiah. We have the Gospel according to St Mark—the Rome Gospel—the Gospel of the Son of God. We have the Gospel according to St Luke—the Greece Gospel—the Gospel of the Saviour of all the world. We have the Gospel according to St John—the Ephesus Gospel—the Gospel of the Christ who is the giver of eternal life. All these combine to provide the picture we have of Jesus of Nazareth, but each portrayal has its own characteristic. The differences in the presentation are most marked, as we can see when we think of how much we owe to Luke of our picture of the Lord Jesus as the warm-hearted Saviour of the poor and needy and all who have no helper. If it had not been for Luke, we might never have known the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, or the story of Zacchaeus. The New Testament as a whole is dominated by Luke and Paul; by Luke because his second history (Acts) develops into the story of Paul's missionary journeys as he travelled to preach to the Gentiles, and by Paul because he more than any other was the apostle to the Gentiles. The other writings, notably Hebrews, 2 Peter, Revelation and James, belong to a different tradition.

Luther and his followers maintained that the meaning of the New Testament, its prime purpose and its theme are to be found in the Pauline epistles, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and they went on to maintain that the New Testament must be judged and understood on that basis; the same criterion, they held, is to be applied also to the Old Testament.

5. *The use of allegory in order to maintain the One Theme*

We have seen that at first Luther accepted the theory of his own and earlier times that the Old Testament and the New Testament had everywhere the same meaning. If the meaning was not clear in any particular case, then the passage was to be explained by other passages where the meaning was clear. In his disputation with Eck, he applied this principle to passages concerning the meaning of which there was dispute; these were to be explained by passages concerning which there was no dispute.

Luther does not seem to have favoured the allegorical method of interpretation. This method had a long history behind it. The Stoics had used it in the interpretation of Homer. Rabbi Aqiba in the second century A.D. had used it in order to save the Song of Songs for the Old Testament Canon of Scripture; he made this poem an allegory of Jehovah the bridegroom and Israel the bride, a scheme which Bernard of Clairvaux imitated many centuries later. The allegorical method of interpreting the Old Testament so as to make it speak of Christ is plain in 1 Corinthians 10⁴, where Paul declares that 'the rock was Christ', referring to the Rock of Rephidim which, according to Rabbinic tradition, followed the children of Israel through the desert till they came to Jordan. Clement of Rome made the scarlet thread which Rahab the harlot of Jericho showed at her window prefigure the redemptive death of Christ; Origen roundly declared that Joshua was a type of Christ; and there is a tradition of allegorical interpretation running all down the years, followed

by such men as Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine, through whom the method was bequeathed to the Middle Ages. In modern times there has been a revival of this type of exegesis in the work of A. G. Hebert (*The Throne of David*, 1941). In the main, however, this type of allegorical or 'mystical' exegesis goes hand in hand with the theory of verbal inspiration, and indeed that theory could scarcely persist at all without it. It may well be that this allegorical method of interpreting the Bible generally, and the Old Testament in particular, had its place in a pre-scientific world, just as Paul's Rabbinic subtleties had their place. (Paul is in general markedly free from the Rabbinic type of exegesis, but there is an outstanding example of it in Galatians 3¹⁶, where he insists on the fact that the Hebrew Text has 'seed' and not 'seeds', in spite of the fact that Hebrew would never have the plural in such a context.) The fact remains that it was by this method of allegorical exegesis that the Old Testament was retained as Scripture in an age when anything approaching a literal and plain exposition would have led the Church to follow Marcion in rejecting it. But the day for such a type of exposition has gone, and if the whole Bible is to be retained as Scripture, then a new approach must be firmly established, and it must be an approach which does not do violence to the reasonable, intelligent thought of today. This does not mean that we must cease to delight in such lines as

Saviour, if of Zion's city
I, through grace, a member am . . .

or that we must no longer find in the whole desert journey of rescued Israel a description of the Christian's journey through this world ('Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah'). Such ideas and the hymns which embody them have their devotional value, and by analogy bring forcibly to our minds the treasures of Scripture. But it does mean that we must seek to establish a more excellent way of dealing with Scripture.

There is one respect, however, in which the allegorical

method of interpreting Scripture is not wholly wide of the mark. If it is true that the Bible is in any sense the Word of God, there may be more in it than the speaker of the Word realized. There will be much of time in it, because the speaker—Moses, Elijah, Amos, the Chronicler—will be speaking in his own time, to men of his own time, and in the circumstances and idiom of his own time. This is the plain meaning of Scripture; it is the expression of the Word of God for a particular time and in a particular set of circumstances. Scripture is not the Word of God in the narrower sense (similar to Luther's Word of God in the Bible), but the expression of it, the application of it to a given set of circumstances. It is therefore the business of him who would know the veritable Word of God to distinguish between the Word itself, enduring for all time, and the particular expression of it for a particular time. He may then proceed, with all reverence and prayer, to apply this 'general' Word of God to his own time, to clothe it in the idiom and circumstances of his day. This approach is somewhat similar to Luther's, when he claimed that God spoke to David and that that Word was for David alone. We must consider, he said, whether any word in Scripture is the Word of God 'to me', or the Word of God 'to another'; if it is the Word of God 'to another' then it does not concern us. Luther is here seeking to deal with statements which obviously belong to other days, and not to his day or to our day. This distinction can be made more satisfactorily by allowing that all thoughts must be clothed with words if they are to be expressed, and that although the words pass and change with the years, the thoughts exist apart from the words. Here, however, we must press the analogy farther back. Even the thought of the prophet is conditioned by environment and temperament. But behind the thought of the prophet, there is the Thought of God. This is what we must seek to express, every generation of us afresh through our own thoughts and our own words. And this is the Word of God expressed in the Bible, sometimes clouded over by the sinful ways of man, always apt to be distorted by personal ambitions

and by the wrong sort of nationalism, and strangely enough most obscured when men pride themselves on having by their own abilities made all things clear.

6. *What is the Golden Thread of Scripture?*

The phrase 'Golden Thread' is a relic of boyhood's days, when after an escapade which was more blameworthy than most, the writer was given a book which already belonged to a generation that was past. It was Dr Norman McLeod's *The Golden Thread*. This little volume is an allegory somewhat on the lines of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It is the story of a boy who had to find his way to his father's home, and this through all sorts of perils and dangers. But he had a guide, and this guide was a golden thread; if he kept this golden thread in his hand, it would be sure to guide him safely home. What is the Golden Thread of Scripture which will guide us safely to Christ?

We have pointed out the separatist policy of post-exilic Judaism, and we have shown that this was the setting which was finally given to the Bible. But these late editors had one great merit; they did not always rewrite their sources as the Chronicler did. Mostly they retained the actual words of the documents and traditions which came down to them. The result is that other tendencies than the one the editor favoured are faithfully preserved. This is what makes the whole of the Bible so valuable. The value of the Bible is not, as our fathers thought long ago and as some of our brethren still think, in its rigid consistency, but in its variation. Isaiah 63⁶ declares, 'I trod down the peoples in my anger, and made them drunk in my fury, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth', but Isaiah 65¹ says: 'I am inquired of by them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.' As against the separation policy of Judaism which Nehemiah and Ezra established, consider Isaiah 56³⁻⁸. As against Nehemiah 13¹, consider the genealogy at the end of

Ruth. The very fact that the Old Testament has more than one tendency and in some cases embraces opposite tendencies is the very source of its greatness. This apparent oppositeness may sometimes be due to mistaken judgement and untoward zeal on the part of the writer, but there are instances when both are right. For instance, if Ezra and Nehemiah had not established the *Habdalah* policy and built 'the middle wall of partition' around Judaism, it is quite plain from what we know of subsequent history that Judaism would have been lost in the confusion of races and tongues. The Jews could never have stood firm against Hellenism without the rigid standards of Judaism; indeed, it is plain that the Greek-loving Seleucid kings—even Antiochus IV, against whose levies Judas Maccabaeus fought—had as many supporters among the Jews as Judas had. And yet it is plain that it was the same rigidity which nailed Jesus to the Cross. Paul saw this, and this is at the root of his violent and bitter fight against the Judaizing Christians of his day.

The many tendencies which are to be seen in the Bible enable us to seek 'a more excellent way'. The Christian holds that Judaism took the wrong path, with the result that when the true Messiah came, the Jews did not recognize Him, but rejected Him and had Him done to death. What was the point at which Judaism took the wrong turning? It was when the wall which had been built to protect, to stop alien influences from getting in, became a wall to stop God's salvation from getting out. It was when holiness came to mean 'separated *from*' the Gentiles instead of 'separated *to*' God. It was when Israel came to think that the first part of Isaiah 53 with its self-surrender belonged wholly to the past, and that only the second part with its triumph and sharing the spoil belonged to the present and the future.

The Jews were right when they realized that the Golden Thread in Scripture is the action of God the Saviour. The work of God the Saviour runs through the whole; the Bible is all concerned with what God has done. The People of God is

the people whom God has 'purchased', the people whom He chose to make His own. This is to be seen in the New Testament. The name Jesus is given to the Holy Child, because 'it is he that shall save his people from their sins' (Matthew 1²¹), and the New Testament is the story of His mighty saving Power breaking down all barriers and taking His 'salvation unto the end of the earth', its last book containing the vision of the limited number under the Old Covenant and the countless hosts of the Gentiles under the New Covenant crowding into the Heavenly Temple to stand before the throne and the Lamb on the Great Sabbath at the End of Days—all the ransomed People of God (Revelation 7). The proof of the rightness of the choice of the theme 'The Work of the Saviour God' is to be found in the Witness of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, in the Church, and in the experience of the Individual. But it is through the last that the conviction of the truth comes to a man. I, Norman Snaith, know and declare: the Witness of the Holy Spirit in my life and experience is that God is the Saviour of the World, that He was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and that His Spirit bears witness with my spirit to this effect. I maintain that in this belief I am not alone and that it is not the product of my own invention, because I find that other Christians hold to the same belief, and that it is the steady witness of the People of God for nineteen hundred years. I believe that this is the plain teaching of Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament; and I hold, following Martin Luther, that where the theme is not clear or where the exposition is disputed, the Bible is to be interpreted by the many passages where the theme is abundantly clear and where it is indisputable. This theme includes Luther's Justification by Faith, and it includes the concern of other Reformers about the Community of Christian People, that body in which there takes place the process of Sanctification, whereby 'we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Ephesians 4¹³). I believe also that 'by grace

have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2⁸).

The master-key by which the secret of the Old Testament can be unlocked is to be found by beginning with Exodus 1¹-15¹⁸ (see the article entitled 'The People of God', *The Preacher's Quarterly*, I.1, December 1954, pp. 15ff). These chapters contain the Passover Legend—that is, the words which must be read in order to explain the meaning to the Jews of the Passover rites. The passage opens with the list of the sons of Israel (Jacob) who went down to Egypt, seventy in all, Joseph being already in Egypt. Verse 7 says that after the death of Joseph and all his generation, the descendants of Israel multiplied amazingly and were very prosperous. With verse 8, the picture changes. There is a new king in Egypt, possibly Ahmose I of the eighteenth dynasty, the new Pharaoh of native Egyptian descent who drove the foreign Semitic Hyksos kings out of Egypt. The Israelites found themselves slaves, and their slavery grew progressively harder and more severe. The second chapter opens with the birth of Moses, who is to be God's instrument in the delivery of the people from their harsh slavery. This chapter ends with the statement that the people in their distress appealed to God, and God 'remembered' his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the Old Testament, when God 'remembers', He acts; the one necessarily involves the other (see especially Genesis 30²² and 1 Samuel 1¹⁹). The succeeding chapters tell the story of the call of Moses, the convincing of Moses, and then all the mighty signs and portents which preceded the march out of Egypt. The section concludes with the Song of the Sea (the traditional Jewish name for Exodus 15¹⁻¹⁹), which Moses and the children of Israel sang on the farther shore of the Red Sea, miraculously saved when at the last moment everything seemed to be lost.

In order that it may be shown in what way the Bible has the same meaning everywhere, Revelation 15²⁻⁴ must be quoted. In these verses, those that are saved stand by the glassy sea and sing a song of deliverance; it is the Song of Moses the

servant of God—the Old Testament Song of salvation—reinforced by the New Testament Song of salvation, the Song of the Lamb. Although there is no watery sea in heaven (Revelation 21¹), because the sea is the symbol of that which is at enmity with God, there must nevertheless be some sort of sea on the shores of which a true song of salvation can be sung. At the beginning of the Bible we have the river of the earthly paradise, the paradise at the beginning of time; at the other end we have the river of the heavenly paradise, the paradise at the end of time.

The importance of the rescue from Egypt and the House of Bondage cannot be overestimated. It is not generally realized that there is a preface to the Ten Commandments; it is usually omitted when they are painted on the walls of churches or used in the Office of Holy Communion. The preface is: 'I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage' (Exodus 20²). The effect of this preface is to give the reason that Israel must keep the Ten Commandments. The reason is not their excellence as a moral code, not any benefit that may accrue from obeying them, not even that it is the will of God that they shall do so; the reason is that the God who speaks all these words is their Saviour from Egypt.

The same characteristic is to be seen in the so-called Code of Holiness (Leviticus 17-26). These chapters consist of a long series of laws concerning all manner of matters. Chapter 18 begins with a general warning against adopting Canaanite practices, and continues with commands against various types of sexual misbehaviour; Chapter 19 has first a command concerning the keeping of the sabbath, and then continues with farming regulations of varying types, warnings against mourning customs, against the consulting of necromancers, against false weights and measures; and so on, throughout these chapters. But whatever the regulation or the prohibition, the conclusion of the section is usually in one of three forms—'I am the Lord' (19¹²), 'I am the Lord your God' (19⁴), or 'I am the Lord your God which brought you forth

out of the land of Egypt' (25³⁸). In the sections which deal more specifically with holiness, the conclusion is 'I am the Lord which sanctify them' (22⁹).

Possibly this phrase at the end of each section is a liturgical response after the recitation of the law, and the full form is that of 25³⁸: 'I am the Lord your God which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt.' This means that once more the reason for the observance of the law is not its excellence as a law or as a sanitary restriction, but the fact that the God who declares the law is the God who rescued them from Egypt.

When the Hebrews came into Canaan they found three harvest festivals, Unleavened Bread, Weeks (later Pentecost), and Ingathering. These festivals are all essentially Canaanite; they belong to an agricultural community and not to the sort of community which Israel was before the entry into Canaan. But when the Hebrews entered the land they already observed the Passover. Passover was originally a seasonal apotropaic festival, and the sprinkling of every tent with blood is a well-attested protective rite amongst the Arabs against the power of evil spirits, established firmly as being from ancient days by details of the time of the battle of Badr (A.D. 624), at which period it was obviously already an ancient custom. It is evident that before the entry into Canaan the Hebrews had associated this rite with the rescue from Egypt. Other peoples, they said, sprinkle the blood of the victim *whose life is still in it* in order to ward off the demons; but we sprinkle the blood of the Passover lamb on our door-posts because by it the Angel of Death was warned off our homes long ago in Egypt, at the time when the Lord our God brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. For the Hebrews, the Passover became the sign of the Lord's deliverance of Israel from the bondage of old. This association was never lost, until in the last years of the Temple the Passover became the Feast of the new deliverance which the Lord God was to accomplish, the time when Messiah would come to set up the kingdom of God (see the Septuagint of Jeremiah 31⁸, where

instead of 'with them the blind and the lame', the Greek Version has 'at the festival of Passover').

What the Hebrews had already done with Passover, they proceeded to do with the three harvest festivals of Canaan. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was the barley harvest, when the first of the corn of the new year was available. The custom was to eat cakes without leaven—a wide-spread practice, which was due to the desire to make a new start by casting out the old leaven which had fermented long enough. The Hebrews did as the other peoples did, and ate unleavened cakes at this harvest festival; but they had their own reason for doing so. They said: It all dates back to the time when our fathers were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He summoned us and brought us out so quickly, and the Egyptians were so eager to get rid of us because of the mighty acts of the Lord, that we had to pick up the dough before it was leavened, and wrap up our kneading troughs in our clothes on our shoulders (Exodus 13^a, 12^{33t}).

The Hebrews had most difficulty in adapting the Feast of Weeks (later Pentecost), the wheat harvest festival. That was because this Feast was never wholly separated from Unleavened Bread. It was fixed by counting fifty days from 'the morrow of the sabbath' when the first sheaf was waved before the Lord. This meant seven full weeks, and is the origin of the name. The Feast of Weeks was thus an *'atsereh*, a closing ceremony, and therefore never wholly achieved an identity of its own. Nevertheless, it was regarded as the day for the harvest of first-fruits (Exodus 33²², 23¹⁶). The first-fruits declaration (Deuteronomy 26⁶) runs thus: 'A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there . . . and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm . . .'; for, as it says in Deuteronomy 16¹², at first-fruits the Hebrew had to remember that he was once a bondman in Egypt.

The Hebrews did the same kind of thing in connexion with the Feast of Ingathering. After the exile in Babylonia, this

feast became broken up into three separate observances—the New Year Festival, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles). It is this last name which indicates the way in which the Hebrew changed the meaning of the significant rite. It was a general custom to live in arbours of interwoven boughs (*sukkah*) during the time of the vintage. The Hebrews did the same, but they said: You peoples observe this custom for this reason or for that, but we observe this custom because 'I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt' (Leviticus 23⁴³). The Hebrew word translated 'booths' is the same as that translated 'tabernacles' in other passages dealing with this Feast).

The Sabbath came to be intimately connected with the rescue from Egypt through the two Songs of Moses. These two songs, Deuteronomy 32¹⁻⁴³ and Exodus 15¹⁻¹⁸, have been Sabbath canticles among the Jews from ancient times. According to the Talmuds (b.R.H. 31*a* and j.Meg. iii), they recited the Deuteronomic Song of Moses at the additional Sabbath service, 'and the sections were divided for singing in the Temple as they were divided in the Synagogue'; this division made six sections, one for each of six successive sabbaths. At the Sabbath Afternoon Service they recited Exodus 15¹⁻¹⁹, in two sections, and Numbers 21^{17f}: this accounted for three Sabbaths, and so these sections were sung twice while the Deuteronomic sections were sung once. The common element in the two songs is that both are songs of salvation; they both rehearse the mighty acts of the Lord in finding Israel and bringing him out of distress and tribulation. The Deuteronomic song belongs to the strand of tradition which represents God as finding Israel in the desert (Ezekiel 16, Hosea 2), but Exodus 15 is straight out of the story of that miraculous deliverance. It was in this way that the Sabbath was brought directly into the story of God's saving acts on behalf of Israel.

There is another way in which the Hebrews made the work of God the Saviour the central theme of their sacred writings.

This is in their use and adaptation of the great Mesopotamian Creation myth which they knew in common with their neighbours (see p. 17). The myth in its seventh-century Babylonian form is preserved on the so-called Seven Tablets of Creation, translated into English by L. W. King in 1902. Long ago, before the world was created, there was a great battle between the three gods of heaven, Ea, Bel and Anu, on the one side, and the three deities of the Underworld, Apsu, Mummu and the female Tiamat, on the other. Ea defeated Apsu and Mummu, but Tiamat remained unsubdued. She found a new consort in the god Kingu, and from them there were born eleven different kinds of monsters, the 'helpers of Tiamat'. Tiamat and her brood now raise the standard of revolt against the gods of heaven. The old gods are growing old, and Marduk, the god of the rising sun, tutelary god of Babylon, is made their champion. He attacks Tiamat and her brood. The helpers flee and Tiamat is left alone to face the angry god. He entangles her in his net, blows a hurricane into her distended jaws, and pierces her through and through with his arrows. According to one variant, he splits Tiamat into two parts like a fish; of one half he makes the earth, and of the other half he makes the sky. According to another variant, he ties her round the inverted bowl of the sky in order to prevent the vault of heaven falling in on the earth. And according to yet a third variant, he fastens her down in the depths of the sea and fixes a limit over which she shall not pass. He then proceeds to the creation and regulation of the heavens and the constellations, and finally of his own blood and bone makes Man.

There is abundant evidence that the Hebrews knew this ancient myth. The name Tiamat survives in Hebrew only as the name (usually personal and without the definite article) of the primeval Deep, under the form *tehom*. This is the word used in Genesis 1², where the reference is not to the ocean with which we are familiar, but to the primeval Deep of chaos; for Tiamat in the Babylonian myth is the goddess of the primeval Chaos, who had to be controlled and imprisoned

before ever there could be an ordered world. Usually in Hebrew the name of the monster is Rahab, and she has her helpers who stoop under the onset of God (Job 9¹³). She is the serpent that is fastened in the depths of the sea (Amos 9³); she is Behemoth who inhabits the reeds of the Nile (Job 40¹⁵⁻²⁴); she is Leviathan who is 'king over all the sons of pride' (Job 41³⁴). (In a later writing, II (IV) Esdras 6⁴⁹⁻⁵², Behemoth is the husband of Leviathan.) God fixed a limit to the waters (Job 26⁷⁻¹⁴), and has set a watch over the sea and the sea-monster (Job 7¹²). The battle is mentioned in Job 41⁸ and there are other references in Psalms 14¹²⁻¹⁷ and 104²⁶.

Here is plain evidence of a common origin for the Creation myths of Babylonia and of the Hebrews; and further evidence of the widespread nature of this creation-myth has come to light in recent years in the Ugarit tablets, with their story of the fight of Baal against the sea. But the Hebrews treated this myth in a unique way. They interwove it with their history and made it tell the story of God's mighty salvation. The Dragon of the Deep, Tiamat, Rahab, whatever her name, is the enemy of God, the power of darkness and chaos and evil. God fought her and overthrew her before the foundation of the world. He fights her continuously and will so do till the last great fight of all, when Evil and her helpers will be finally overthrown. More than this, the Hebrew identified Rahab with the enemies of Israel, those who fought against and oppressed the People of God. Egypt is 'Rahab that is stilled' (Isaiah 30⁷: this is the probable reading); Pharaoh is the sea-monster who crouches in the midst of the reeds of the Nile (Ezekiel 29³⁻⁶, 32²⁻⁸); and the identification with Egypt is found again in Psalm 68³⁰. In Jeremiah 51^{34, 44} Nebuchadrezzar is the Dragon who has swallowed Israel, and these verses would seem to settle the problem of the Book of Jonah, especially since Jonah 2 is not only the prayer of Jonah in the belly of the great fish, but is also the prayer of exiled Israel (verses 3-5). The identification with Babylon is found again in Isaiah 51⁹⁻¹¹; and here it is quite plain that the fight

with Rahab the Dragon of the Deep, the rescue from Egypt through the waters of the sea, and the drying-up of the great Deep (Tehom!) are all interwoven with the coming deliverance from Babylon. Indeed, even in Exodus 15, which is said to refer to the crossing through the Red Sea, we have unmistakable references also to the conquering of the primeval Deep, Tiamat-Tehom (verses 5, 8). According to Edmond Fleg (*Moses*, p. 67), the Rabbis said: 'Only one escaped (i.e. from the Red Sea disaster), Pharaoh; he became king of Nineveh; he became king of Babylon; he was called Antiochus; he was called Titus; he was called Justinian. Until the end of the world he will bear a thousand names.'

This identification of the Dragon of the Deep with the Enemy of God is found in Revelation, in the great Beast which rises out of the sea (Revelation 13¹); and here also we have another beast coming up out of the earth, but he speaks 'like a dragon' (13¹¹).

But there are indications that, following the Canaanite pattern of Ugarit, the actual sea itself was used by the Hebrews to remind themselves of the Victory of God (see Exodus 15⁷, Nahum 1⁴, Habakkuk 3⁸, Psalm 46, 77¹⁶, 93). And there are instances where the waves of the sea and the billows of the sea are figures for the heathen, the Gentiles (Psalm 144⁷, Psalm 65⁷, Isaiah 17^{12f}).

It is on all this evidence that the claim is based that the central *motif* of the Old Testament is the mighty work of God the Saviour. That this is the theme of the New Testament also is so completely obvious that the statement has only to be made in order to receive assent.

7. *How is this Salvation to be accomplished, and what are the conditions which men must fulfil?*

Here, two facts must be borne in mind. The first is that Christianity is primarily a matter of personal relationship, the relation of a personal God to a human being; it is not primarily a matter of ethics. If religion were primarily a matter of

ethics, then the way to Salvation would be by the exact fulfilment of rules concerning conduct, by doing what was ethically right. The obvious and reasonable course, in that case, would be to go to the expert and seek from him a complete *vade mecum*. We should need to have everything already worked out to the smallest detail, because in many cases, perhaps in the majority of cases, we are faced suddenly with a situation, and we have to act immediately, without time for prolonged consideration. If therefore we desired always to do what was right, we should have to have at our ready disposal the whole scheme of conduct worked out in the smallest detail. This is the logical conclusion from the premise that religion is primarily a matter of doing what is right. All this is precisely what the scribes of the Pharisees did; such details were exactly 'the traditions of the elders'. It is of the utmost importance to realize that it was on this matter that our Lord Jesus Christ most severely condemned them, and had His hardest things to say. Where were the scribes of the Pharisees wrong? They were wrong in their premise that Salvation is to be won by the correct observance of the Law. Jesus knew that Religion is primarily a matter of personal relationship with God. The prophets of the Old Testament knew this and so did most of the Psalmists. It is in the priestly traditions that this truth becomes obscured, and the final *Habdalah* setting of the Old Testament makes the same error.

Religion, then, for the Christian is concerned with the relationship of the individual to God. We can learn from human relationships what is the primary requisite if a personal relationship is to be established and maintained; the one condition is that there must be unselfish love and trust on the part of both persons involved. The Life and Death of Christ demonstrated the fact of God's unflinching, wholly unselfish love for man (the New Testament *agape*), and the freedom God gives us demonstrates His trust; therefore the one thing that remains is that the individual man shall love God in this same way and shall trust Him completely. The New Testament (Pauline) word for this is Faith (*pistis*); Paul, Luther and all

who are in this succession are right, even to the extent of saying that what is required is 'faith alone' (*sola fide*), for the one condition which man must fulfil is that he shall come loving God with all his heart and trusting Him completely. This love and trust must grow 'from grace to grace'; and this also is conditioned by faith, for it is the process of Sanctification which takes place within the fellowship of those that trust.

The second fact which must be borne in mind is that the Hebrew Old Testament is the womb out of which the New Testament was born. It is not realized as generally as it ought to be, that the Reformation involved going back to the Hebrew Old Testament. The Old Testament of the Church down to the Reformation was not the Hebrew Old Testament; it was the Latin Bible, based upon the old Greek (Septuagint) Bible rather than upon the Hebrew Old Testament. Luther went back to the original Hebrew, and so did the Reformers generally.

The New Testament was written originally, as every one knows, in Greek—but what sort of Greek, since it is plainly not in Classical Greek? The usual answer is that it was written in Koine Greek, that is, in the Hellenistic Greek which, following the conquests of Alexander the Great and the later Roman consolidation, had become, by the first century A.D., the common speech of all the civilized world. It is customary to think of the Greek of the New Testament as a debased, decayed Classical Greek. This is, indeed, partly true; but it is not the whole truth. It is true that in syntax and general vocabulary, the Greek of the New Testament is the Greek of the papyri which have been discovered of recent years in large numbers, mostly in Egypt. There is a qualification, however, to be made here: the style of any particular writer was influenced by his first language. This is evident in the Gospels. In the Gospel according to St Luke we have the purest Hellenistic Greek of the New Testament. Luke is writing in his own language; he was a Macedonian, and an educated Macedonian. But the other Gospels abound in

Hebraisms and Aramaisms. In this way the syntax and even the vocabulary of the New Testament varies according to the native home and the training of the writer.

This is not the whole story however. Most of the writers of the New Testament had a Hebrew training rather than a Hellenistic one. This means that their theological words are influenced by the Hebrew rather than the Greek, and that these words must be interpreted through the Septuagint back to the Hebrew equivalent. They are not to be interpreted with the classical meaning as their basis and point of departure. This is why in the New Testament the word *psyche* has nothing at all to do with the meaning of the word established in Plato and his successors. In Plato, the *psyche* is the immortal soul of man, existing before birth and persisting after death. In the New Testament it means nothing of that sort. It carries the meaning of the Hebrew *nephesh*, of which it is the regular equivalent in the Septuagint. The *psyche* in the New Testament is something which is finished at death. The 'natural man' of 1 Corinthians 2 is the *psychikos* man, and everything that belongs to the *psyche* ceases to exist at death.

Another case where a reference to Septuagint, and through Septuagint to Hebrew, assists in the interpretation of the New Testament is the word *peirasmos* (translated 'temptation' in Matthew 6¹³) and the corresponding verb *peirazo*. Going back through the Septuagint to the Hebrew, we come to the noun *massah* and the verb *nissah*. Both mean 'testing' in a good, a neutral, or a bad sense. This is recognized in Abbott-Smith, *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, and various passages in the New Testament are explained in a neutral sense. These are passages dealing with afflictions sent by God (Deuteronomy 7¹⁹, etc., in the Old Testament, and passages like 2 Peter 2⁹ and Revelation 3¹⁰ in the New Testament). It is probable also that Matthew 6¹³ comes under this head, especially when it is realized that in the New Testament 'evil' by no means always signifies 'iniquity, sin'. The word *poneros* in the Septuagint is the equivalent of the Hebrew *ra'*, and this Hebrew word means 'evil plight, misfortune' equally with 'moral evil'.

Again, there is the word *parakletos*, translated 'Comforter' in John 14²⁵. The Revised margin has 'Advocate, Helper'. This Greek word and the corresponding verb *parakaleo* stand in the Septuagint mostly for the Hebrew root *nicham*. The Greek verb means 'exhort', but it also follows the Hebrew and means 'comfort'. This is not a true Greek meaning; it comes from the Hebrew. But here it must be remembered without fail that the Hebrew *nicham* does not by any means signify 'console'; it signifies 'comfort *out of*' sorrow, not 'console *in*' sorrow. The essential meaning of the Hebrew word is 'relief, change', and the translation 'comfort' is misleading. The true meaning of the word is to be seen in John 16⁷ and ⁸. When the Paraclete comes, He 'will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement'. The Paraclete ('Comforter') is the One who convicts men, convinces them of the things of Christ, causes them to change their minds and 'will guide you into all truth'.

The number of cases in which we must look back to Hebrew thought through the Septuagint is considerable. This applies even more particularly to theological terms. Paul's great word for 'faith' is *pistis*. To him this word did not mean 'belief' or 'trustworthiness', as Classical Greek would suggest to us. It is the Septuagint equivalent of the Hebrew *'emunah*, which means 'reliance'. This is why Paul, Luther and their successors, by no means the least of them John Wesley, know that 'faith' means 'not only an assent to the whole Gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him . . . a closing with him, and cleaving to him . . . (John Wesley, Sermon on 'Salvation by Faith'). Another important word is 'righteousness' (Greek *dikaiousune*). As we have said elsewhere (*The Distinctive Ideas of the New Testament*, p. 162), this word in the New Testament owes practically nothing to the Greek philosophers, and C. H. Dodd (*The Bible and the Greeks*, p. 46) gives instances of 'the pull away from the idea of "justice"' in the Hebrew equivalent *tsedaqah*. The cases he cites are from a number of instances where the

Septuagint was fully aware that the Hebrew word *tsedaqah* means a benevolence that goes well beyond the strict measure of justice. The word in fact tends to belong to the vocabulary of salvation rather than to that of ethics. Thus, when used in this way, it does not mean 'right conduct' or 'righteousness' so much as 'getting right with God'. It will be found that some such interpretation as this is involved in Paul's phrase 'justification by faith'. It means 'getting right with God', and this 'getting right with God' involves faith, in the sense of trust, full reliance upon Him, recumbency upon Him. Once more we are back to the theme that religion at root involves a personal relationship with God. If the theologians had realized that the New Testament *dikaisounē* stands (certainly in a conversion context) for 'salvation' rather than for 'righteousness' in the ethical sense, we should have been saved from a lot of the discussions concerning whether the verb *dikaioō* means 'made righteous' or 'treated as righteous', or involves righteousness being 'imputed', and the rest. The condition for acceptance by God is not that a man shall be righteous, but simply that he shall come in Faith—that is, repentant, trusting. The man shall be truly repentant and fully trusting. God, so to speak, looks after the ethical side when we have come to Him, and it is He that gives us the strength in all these matters to be 'more than conquerors'.

8. Conclusion

The authority of the Bible, then, for me, for the whole Church, rests on the Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit. Unless He bears witness with my spirit that herein is the Word of God, then the Bible, any of it, all of it, is nothing more than a collection of books written by men, of whom some were wiser than others and some more worldly than others. Further, we know also that Religion is a matter of personal relationship with God; other things must follow and there must always be evident the 'fruit of the spirit', but primarily it is a matter of personal relationship with God. The Bible speaks to me in

these terms because I know that the great religious words such as 'faith' are personal words rather than intellectual words and philosophical words. I know this because I know that the whole Bible is a unity. It is a unity in the sense that it speaks from cover to cover of the Mighty Work of God the Saviour. This is where the inspiration of Scripture is manifest. No other book speaks like this. No other religion speaks as this religion does. No other book follows the trail laid by Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah 53, the Cross, and Mark 8³⁵ and 10⁴²⁻⁵. This is the sense in which the whole Bible has a common theme; and the common theme is fixed, from the literary aspect, by the fact that, theologically, Hebrew and the meaning of the Hebrew dominate throughout, even in the New Testament. Hebrew indeed is the language of Heaven, because it is the Hebrew nuance, carried on through the Septuagint, which enables the New Testament Greek to speak of ideas which are revealed only by God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is why the rise of Protestantism coincides with a return to the Hebrew Old Testament as a living part of the Word of God. It is why the Old Testament is indispensable to a sound theology.