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THE TWO TESTAMENTS

I

THE Bible consists of two very unequal sections, known as the Old and New Testaments, the former being roughly about four times as long as the latter. This familiar fact will repay the closest scrutiny since it will be found to furnish invaluable evidence in support of the unique claims which Holy Scripture makes on its own behalf. There can be no room for dispute regarding the witness of the Bible to itself. Again and again there may be found in its pages statements which only mean that their authors believed the Scriptures to be the Word of God to man. If it be replied that many of these refer only to the Old Testament, then the answer is that, if such language could be used of the Old Testament by the witness of the New, how much more may claims equally, and even more exalted, be made on behalf of the New. There are many lines of demonstration followed in vindicating such views, and the presence of the Two Testaments within the covers of one book furnishes support which is by no means negligible, since it can be so easily verified by all and sundry, its apprehension and appreciation demanding no specialised knowledge. The full significance of this fact can be best understood if it be observed that the Old and New Testaments, while offering a remarkable series of similarities and differences, are complementary like the bass and treble in music, or like hydrogen and oxygen whose combination in the proper proportions constitutes water.

Turning first to the similarities, reference may be made to their Jewish origin. It is true that Luke was a Gentile, and there may possibly be contributions from non-Jewish hands in the Old Testament, but broadly speaking, the Bible which is the supreme literary production of the world, was the work of Hebrew authors. That similarity is very far from being formal. The plays of Shakespeare and the poetry of Milton are both the work of Englishmen, if we may not venture to call them

Londoners. That mentally creates a certain degree of resemblance, but it is not to be compared with what may be called the family likeness which exists between the two great divisions of the Bible. It may be compared to the works of divines belonging to the same school. Thus Puritan literature is usually characterised by certain features which proclaim its common origin from the same school of piety. This similarity is intensified by the fact that the historical portions of both Testaments are very largely concerned with the Jewish people. That statement applies to the Old Testament narratives, and to the Four Gospels, while even in the Acts of the Apostles, and the New Testament Epistles, the Jewish people are never very far from the foreground. The leading figures of the New Testament are all of Jewish origin, not excepting Our Lord Jesus Christ who was born under the Law, and circumcised the eighth day.

Again attention may be drawn to the fact that Old and New Testaments were alike inspired by the same Holy Spirit, and in the same measure. The attitude adopted by Our Lord and His Apostles to the Old Testament surely supplies all the evidence which may be demanded for such an assertion. The Old Testament was their Bible. It rendered the same services to them as the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament perform for the modern believer. They appeal to the Old Testament for the proof of doctrine. With its promises and precepts they inspire and instruct their souls. It was Our Lord's refuge in the hour of death. Sir George Adam Smith clarifies the implications of these statements in effective fashion when he observes that, what was indispensable to the Redeemer, must be indispensable to the redeemed. That can only be true if both Testaments owe their origin in common to the loving wisdom of God in making such abundant provision for the spiritual and intellectual needs of mankind by His Holy Spirit enlightening and enlarging the hearts of holy men so that out of their Divine fulness their mouths spoke, and their hands wrote. As for the equal inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, comparison of their contents will go far to substantiate such a claim. Let the two be compared in their heights and depths, and, while the Old Testament will be found to offer many features which seem hard to reconcile with such a theory, it can also point to such a miracle as the Psalter. John Bright

said that he was prepared to stake the whole case for a special Divine revelation on the Book of Psalms, from which the New Testament quotes so copiously and so frequently. The two Testaments are like the two sexes, both being God's workmanship.

Yet another point of similarity can be traced in the resemblance of their teaching. That may appear to be an ill-considered observation in view of the manifold differences and diversities exhibited by the Law and the Prophets when compared with the Gospels and the Epistles, but fundamentally the Old Testament Gospel is that of the New. The Thirty-Nine Articles declare that salvation is offered to the sinner in the Old Testament equally with the New. One impressive proof is that multitudes have been led into the valley of decision through Old Testament passages. Spurgeon owed his conversion under God to a discourse, based on a verse from Isaiah, the Evangelical Prophet. It may be argued that such passages require the New Testament to illuminate them, and that cannot be denied. It can, however, be urged in reply that the Old Testament lends itself to such exegesis in a marvellous way. The greatest preachers of the gospel have been mighty in the Old Testament Scriptures without going the length of those who allegorized its sayings and stories so that Samson with his hands on the pillars of Dagon's temple became a type of Christ and Him Crucified. In passing, it may be observed that it is better to err on that side than in the way of extreme rationalization. But full and final demonstration is surely provided by the Epistle to the Romans. There Paul appeals to passages in the Old Testament in support of his contention that men have always been justified by faith and not by works of law from the beginnings of the Jewish people. The just have always lived by faith under both the old and new covenants.

II

These resemblances are all the more striking when they are taken in conjunction with the contrasts offered by the Old and New Testaments. Passing reference has already been made to the comparative brevity of the latter in comparison with its neighbour. That is a minor matter compared with other considerations. There is the question of the languages in which the

various books are written. The Old Testament was originally composed in Hebrew and Aramaic, while the New is written in Greek. It is hardly necessary to dwell on the fact that the one has been written in two Oriental Tongues, while the other is composed in an Occidental language. Would it be feasible to hazard the suggestion that Hebrew and Greek are the supreme media for literary expression in the East and West respectively? In any case the two languages are as the poles apart in their genius so that it can be truly said of the two Testaments that, when they are conjoined in the Bible, extremes meet. Insufficient attention is paid to the apologetic value of this fact. Doubtless there are instances in the sacred books of other religions where the oracles appear in more than one language but it is very doubtful if there be anything which even remotely resembles the phenomenon presented by the Old and New Testaments. The Septuagint never displaced the Hebrew Scriptures from their primacy. It always bore the same relation to them as the Authorised Version does, a translation, nothing more and nothing else, and yet it seems possible that the whole Bible might have been preserved in Greek, just as the Koran is written in Arabic. But diversity is often a sign of God's dealings. He is ever a lover of variety.

The contents and composition of the two Testaments provide still further contrasts. The range and variety of the Old Testament are wonderful justifying by itself in great measure Jerome's description of the Bible as the Divine Library. It contains prose and poetry, law and prophecy, wisdom and apocalyptic. On the other hand, the New Testament can be fairly described as historical and epistolary. Its literary forms are not nearly so varied as those of the Old Testament. The same applies to their contents when considered in more detail. The thirty-nine books of the one in the English Bible offer innumerable points of difference to the twenty-seven books of the other, so that an Old Testament quotation in the New Testament is often comparable to a purple patch in its distinctness, and distinction as well. The time of their composition is equally striking when compared and contrasted. The New Testament was written during the career of the Apostle John in little more than one generation while the Old Testament is the work of many centuries. Indeed the two are illustrated by the great London sanctuaries of Westminster Abbey, and St. Paul's

Cathedral. The former has been the result of additions extending over many centuries while the latter is the abiding monument to the architectural genius of Sir Christopher Wren. Surely one star differeth from another in glory. The Old Testament has been well described as the classical literature of Judaism, a temple infinitely more wonderful than that of Solomon. The New Testament comprises the classics of Christianity whose rapid appearance is almost like that of Jonah's gourd in comparison with the Old.

But the most remarkable contrast of all lies in the teaching. It is not only similar but radically different as this arresting fact will show. The Old Testament is the Bible of Judaism. When the devout and learned Jew searches the Scriptures of the Old Testament, they do not testify to him of Christ. They tell of a Messiah Who is yet to come but He is not to be identified with Jesus of Nazareth. It is well to think on these things for they enable the Christian reader to appraise more accurately the difference which the addition of the New Testament makes. Without it the Old Testament is reduced to a religious manual, full of truth and grace, but lacking in these vital and vitalising elements which make Christianity the greatest thing in the world. It is impossible to praise too generously the ethical monotheism of the Old Testament but without the trinitarian teaching of the New, it is null and void as a regenerating and reviving force in human experience. Indeed, it may be argued that things which are most similar are often farthest apart in their essence and fruits. Esau and Jacob were twin brothers and yet it is written that the one was beloved of God and the other was hated. In the same fashion the Old and New Testaments offer many points of resemblance and many points of difference, and yet between them there is a great gulf fixed which only Christ can bridge, for in Him there is neither Jew nor Greek. To the believer the Old Testament is a savour of life unto life, while to the Jew it is a savour of death unto death, since it does not point forward and upward to Christ but backward and downward to Moses. There is nothing so sad as a case of arrested development in human life, and that is the tragedy of the Old Testament apart from the New.

III

It is impossible to understand and appreciate the wonder of the two Testaments until they are approached as complementary, the one to the other. They are as indispensable to each other as the flint and steel, or the negative and positive poles of electricity. Thus the New Testament presupposes the Old. It does not lay again the foundation which has been so well and truly laid by the men of the earlier dispensation. Our Lord came not to destroy but to fulfil. In a very real sense the New Testament begins where the Old Testament stops like the relation of poetry to prose. That is no reflection on the Old. Its writers went as far as they could, or indeed as any man was able to do, only proving what abysmal need there was for the appearing of the Son of Man Whose mission it was to untie, and not to cut the Gordian knot of redemption. But without the Old Testament the New would have been impossible just as there can be no flower without a stalk. It was the same God Who first spoke at sundry times and in divers manners by His servants, the prophets, and then spoke in His Son. It is like the working of God in Nature, Providence and Grace. These often dovetail into each other in a way which reveals in unmistakable fashion that the same hand, a pierced hand, regulates them to the last detail. The New Testament would simply be futile without the Old because incomprehensible and incomplete. It is hard to understand how certain sections of the Christian Church can claim to dispense with the Old Testament as an organ of Divine revelation. Nothing can be properly understood and evaluated apart from its history. Everything and everybody is the resultant of a process, and that principle applies with great force to the relations of the Old and New Testaments.

Indeed it may be said that the New Testament is but the continuation and consummation of the Old. There is no New Testament doctrine which does not have its roots struck deep in the Old. It may not be immediately recognisable. Otherwise there would be no need for the New but the beginning is made for future development just as all philosophy is in Plato in germ and embryo. Modern critical scholarship might be disposed to demur to these statements on the grounds that they are irreconcilable with the historical approach to the Old

Testament. It may be that there have been excesses in the exegesis of the older books, but whatever view be taken of the precise meaning of many passages, the fact remains that the Old Testament provided a context in which Christianity arose easily, spontaneously, and rapidly. Its earliest preachers and apostles began life as uncompromising monotheists, and yet we find the chiefest of them, the former Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, rejoicing in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles, nor Christianity from the Analects of Confucius, or the Vedic Hymns. The Old Testament was a corn of wheat which fell into the ground and died, and consequently brought forth much fruit because it was superseded by the New.

The correspondence of the two Testaments also calls for comment. Truly deep calleth unto deep. Thus the Law was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. It was the means whereby the need, which only Our Redeemer could satisfy, has been revealed, for they that are whole have no need of a physician but they that are sick. The sickness of man's soul was discovered in Old Testament times. Healing and restoration are effected in the New. The same can be said of types and anti-types, of prophecies and their fulfilment, of aspirations and their achievement. If the Old Testament be the candlestick, the New is the candle. If the well be dug in the Old Testament, the water of life springs up in the New. If sin abounds in the Old Testament, grace doth much more abound in the New.

It is a matter of common observation in man's experience that nothing can be accomplished by one factor in isolation. A combination is almost always required. G. K. Chesterton has observed that the organs of the human body appear in pairs. There are two eyes, and ears, and hands. On the same analogy, may it not be argued that the Two Testaments also illustrate this truth. Of itself the Old Testament is impotent, and of itself the New Testament is incomplete. Together they represent the very power and wisdom of God, and as we have just seen that is due as much to their differences as to their resemblances. God has always worked with contrasted figures like Wesley and Whitefield or Moody and Sankey, and it need be no cause for wonder that the same principle is illustrated by the union of the Old and New Testaments to form the Bible, two witnesses

by which every word regarding the Lord Jesus Christ may be established. The familiar words in Ecclesiastes have a whimsical bearing on the subject. "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward of their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him." That is as true of the Old and New Testaments as of all else.

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