

## ARTICLE VI.

THE OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION OF GOD AND  
THE ANCIENT-ORIENTAL LIFE.

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It is a happy omen that the conviction is more and more gaining ground that Israel cannot be understood without a thorough knowledge of the world of culture in which it has taken a place, however modest, — a happy omen, just because for many years the opinion has prevailed that Israel can be known when the course of its history and, in connection with it, the rise from Israel of our canonical scriptures are re-constructed along the lines of Hegel's philosophy. And this change should be hailed the more gladly in the measure in which the application of the Hegelian principia proved the more fatal to the recognition of the peculiar character of Israel. For evolutionary speculation identified logical and historical development, and interpreted all religions as development stadia of absolute thought. In this it forgot not only that spiritual development has an independent character of its own, by which alone it can be known, but also that this development can take place in the direction of truth as well as in that of falsehood; so that its falsification and degeneration can also be called development. And under the influence of this evolutionary speculation Israel's religious life was degraded to the hypothetical level of the surrounding nations, from which

<sup>1</sup>Translated from the Dutch by John H. de Vrles, D.D., Saybrook, Conn.

depth of animism and fetishism, polydemonism and polytheism, under the leadership of the prophets, it attained for itself an ethical monotheistic conception of God. In connection with this, of course the Old Testament scriptures, which give an entirely different portraiture of the history of the old covenant people, and resist in every way the principia of evolutionists as being flagrantly antagonistic to their content, had to be divided into an almost endless series of fragments and for the most part assigned to much later times. The patriarchs and Moses were enveloped in mythical vapors and turned into phantoms, the relation of law and prophets was inverted, the reality of the contents of these scriptures was denied, and the entire system of the canonical books of the Old Testament made into a forgery, which has no equal.

Meanwhile it is noteworthy that it has taken so long a time for the conviction to make its way among us, that Israel cannot be considered apart from the relation with the Ancient-Oriental culture-world. Already since the middle of the last century, and in consequence of excavations which took place in the valley of the Nile, in the plains of the Euphrates-Tigris, in Palestine and Syria, and lastly also in the original sites of the Hittites, the curtain which for centuries has hidden the Ancient-Oriental world from our eyes has more and more been pushed aside. And though in many ways we may be like the mountaineer who from a sea of vapors sees the rise of surrounding mountain tops, but is not able to form a clear idea of the mutual relation which these sustain to each other, it can be said that the ground of the Ancient-Oriental life is more and more open to investigation and that excavations constantly bring more facts to our knowledge.

That, in spite of this, Old Testament students have failed for so long a time to observe the light that has shined from

the East upon our study of the Scriptures and upon our knowledge of the history of Israel, can be accounted for in two ways. In the first place, the uncertainty regarding the Ancient-Oriental life encouraged but little the recognition of the results already obtained. In addition to this, there was the great rapidity with which, under the influence of a preconceived idea, many scholars constructed and destroyed ill-considered hypotheses. But, in the second place, they who acknowledge the reality of the Divine revelation in the midst of Israel were too much obsessed by the mechanical interpretation of that revelation to understand how much light the study of the Ancient-Oriental life can throw upon the Scriptures. On the other hand, they who deny its reality were impressed by the bold lines of the building which they themselves had reared after the Hegelian model. Consequently they allowed themselves to be governed all too easily by the thought that now the problem both of Israel's history and of Israel's canonical scriptures had really been solved.

Thus Israel was regarded as an ancient people, that, on the ground of the evolutionary dogma, must have entertained primitive ideas respecting the metaphysical world, and must have been lost in a naïve belief in spirits and demons. Excavations, however, have long since shown that, relatively, Israel can be called a young people, rising from the culture-life of western Asia, which is anything but primitive, and related to it by thousandfold mysterious ties. While in western Europe the question was widely disputed whether the Mosaic period could be historic, in western Asia numerous data were brought to light which furnished the most striking proofs of the reality of a high state of culture, centuries before Abraham, both in the valley of the Nile and in the plains of the Euphrates-Tigris. And though I well know that, in the first

flush of joy at such important discoveries, the age of that civilization has frequently been estimated far too high, — so that, for instance, documents that were first assigned to  $\pm 4500$  B.C. had to be recorded as  $\pm 2800$  B.C., — it is still true that the so-called prehistoric age does not begin at the point fixed by many Old Testament students.

It is clear, moreover, that the new light which excavations have shed upon the Ancient-Oriental culture-world, in consequence of which an insight is given us not only into the mutual relations of these nations but also into their religious life, has again placed new problems before us. . . . Permit me to treat one of them under the title of

THE OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION OF GOD AND THE ANCIENT-ORIENTAL LIFE.

By formulating my subject in this way, I take my stand in the face of the idea, which has so many defenders, that the Old Testament conception of God is a natural product of the human mind. I accept the reality of a special revelation of God in the midst of humanity which, at first pre-Israelitish, afterwards through Abraham and Moses concentrated in Israel, in order at length in Christianity to become universal. But I do not take Revelation in the sense which Duhm attached to it in 1875 when, in his "Theologie der Propheten" (p. 89), he declared that one cannot escape the necessity of accepting a providential leading in the several stages of the development of religion; nor in the sense of Gunkel, who in 1895 in his "Schöpfung und Chaos" (p. 118) declared, that in the process of development of the Israelitish religion the mighty working of the living God reveals itself. For Duhm's providential leading seems in no single particular to differ from Kuenen's postulated "natural development," and Gunkel's

declaration is explained by his own words: "The history of Revelation takes place among men according to the same psychological laws as every other human event."<sup>1</sup> But he forgets that one may no longer speak of Revelation, when one identifies the divine causality with the natural, and that this is still less permissible where even the latter is not entirely clear to us. Hence when I speak of Revelation I do this in the current Reformed sense, that here we have to do with an act of God, whereby in the way of an historic whole of special means he makes himself known. And while, according to divine plan, this Revelation went through an historic process with more or less clearly marked periods, unfolding itself quantitatively while remaining the same qualitatively, I define it more closely as Old Testament Revelation. For this states that the revelation of God as it comes to us exhibits a unique character. It is preparative, insomuch as it points to the coming Christ, in whom it finds its full unfolding. Agreeably to Israel's disposition and character, it is more or less external in so far as it takes place in signs and wonders, in dreams and visions, through the lot and Urim and Thummim, through angels and through the *mal'ak* Jahwe. In a certain sense we can even call it limited — which, however, is not identical with incomplete — in so far as it is intended first for a single people, and therefore has never quite lost its national character, even though the religious universal is seen gradually breaking forth from the national form. And this revelation of God in the midst of Israel is such a reality, and stands so much in the centrum of things, that if we were to separate this people from it, we would close up the way to the knowledge of their history.

Formerly it was held that the characteristic of that reve-

<sup>1</sup> Israel und Babylonien, p. 37.

lation of God consisted in the fact that it had entered in among an entirely new people, that it had separated them from the sphere of life from which they sprang, and that it had provided them with forms of life and religion which were not found among other nations. That was the time when it was thought that Canaan was an altogether isolated land, without any intercourse with the surrounding nations, where Israel was bound to live as on an island in order to be able to preserve the "covenants of promise." Unacquainted with the Ancient-Oriental culture-life, it was even thought that, in case Israel had anything in common with others, these had borrowed this good from the covenant people. This idea, however, which takes no count of the clear utterances of Scripture, appeared altogether untenable, when by excavations and accidental finds the Ancient Orient with its incalculable treasures was disclosed, and the earlier generations arose again from their graves. Did not the altar of Mar-seilles, found in 1844-45, whose technical terms frequently remind us in a striking manner of the laws of sacrifice in Leviticus, as well as the Davis inscription, found in Carthage in 1858, teach us that meat offerings, expiatory sacrifices, and sin offerings were not something specifically Israelitish? And did we not find here the mention of steers and rams, of turtledoves and young pigeons, as animals that could be offered, even as in Ancient Israel?

The relationship with the Ancient-Oriental world was put still more clearly in the light through the almost numberless tablets of clay, which in 1849 were placed at our disposal by the discovery of the library of Assurbanipal. By this discovery, hymns and psalms, prayers and oracles, mythological texts and magic formulas, give us an insight into the religious-moral life of the inhabitants of the plain of the Tigris-

Euphrates. And since then Nineveh and Babylon, Lagas and Nippur, Erech and Ur, and many other ruins have vied with one another in the restoration of an unthought-of broad strata of literature, by which the several terraces of the Ancient-Oriental society have risen upon our horizon, at least within some measure, enabling us to discover the many ties which bind Israel to that life. The same has been done by the excavations in Egypt, which, if not civilized by a Semitic nation, has been, from ancient times, subject far too much to Semitic influences not to have a part in the restoration of the image of the Ancient-Oriental life. And this witness should be esteemed of greater importance still, since the long sojourn of Israel in Egypt, as well as the political and commercial relations which have existed between Canaan and the valley of the Nile, render it probable that a far-reaching influence went out from this highly cultured land to the inhabitants of the land of West Jordan.

In more modest measures South Arabia also has a share in this, which through the labors of Halévy and Euting, and especially through those of Glaser, has put inscriptions at our disposal, which give us at least some knowledge of the life of Minæans and Sabæans. And whatever interrogation marks may here present themselves, this much at least is true, that this South-Arabian culture, which on its part is connected again with the Babylonian, also penetrated into northern Arabia, and there caused its influence to be felt, so that Israel also has been in contact with it.

Finally, the excavations in Canaan have brought us face to face with the Ancient-Oriental life, which speaks to us of high places and Astarte worship, human sacrifices and oracle inquiries. And though we may regret that, thus far, no important inscriptions bear witness to the world of thought of

the ancient Canaanitish tribes, so that their spiritual life must mainly be known from images and magic rites, sacred stones and tombs, added to what the Amarna letters communicate regarding this, what has thus far been found frequently throws a surprising light upon the sphere in which, according to divine appointment, a place was prepared for the old covenant people.

No wonder, therefore, that at many points the excavations have necessitated a review of opinions that have hitherto been current. There is by no means yet agreement regarding the question whether among the Ancient-Oriental nations Israel occupied a place of its own. In passing, I need but remind you of the conflict over Babel and Bible begun by Friedrich Delitzsch, which created such a stir in both Europe and America in the years 1902 to 1904, and of the conflict which has since become widely known about the good right of Pan-Babylonianism, forcibly defended by Winckler and Alfred Jeremias, to give you an impression of the confusion, hopeless at many points, which still prevails in this domain. While one makes Israel a copy of Babylon, and the Old Testament scriptures the arena of the most heterogeneous influences, the other in his effort to maintain the independent character of the Old Testament revelation of God shoots beyond the mark and shuts his eyes to what cannot be denied.

Several causes operate in this confusion. In the first place, the fact remains that when we speak of the Ancient-Oriental life we have to do with a study that has scarcely yet been begun, in which first the lines only have been drawn, but which for the larger part lies yet fallow. Consequently our knowledge of the Ancient-Oriental relationships of life and of its methods of thought is more or less superficial and at many points is merely hypothetical. Hence the data that have



been obtained should be used with the utmost caution. But this caution is not always observed. In the second place, I observe that the comparison of the several centers of culture which we find in that Ancient-Oriental life has assumed a character which is far too mechanical. While the effort was made to exhibit the points of agreement between the different nations mutually, too much emphasis has been put upon the formal agreement, and it was forgotten that the point which counts is not so much the word as the thought which it contains, nor the action so much as the idea which it embodies. Forgotten also was the fact that, with respect to the religious life of a nation as well as of an individual, the question is how an idea works, — whether it shows itself possessed of vital power and is truly alive, — and not whether it is present as a mere abstraction. And, finally, it was forgotten that unconscious inworking and conscious acceptance are not identical conceptions; that there is more similarity than identity. In the third place, let it be recalled that, in accordance with an aprioristic theory, the points of difference between Israel and the Ancient-Oriental world have been concealed as much as possible (unintentionally no doubt), and the points of agreement put in strongest possible light, in consequence of which inaccurate representations have been formed by those who were unable to examine sources for themselves. Such as, for instance, when the so-called reformatory movement of the “heretical” Pharaoh Amenhotep IV. (Khu-naton) was characterized as monotheistic; while, in fact, as is now generally conceded, it was no more than a monarchistic remolding of a polytheistic fundamental thought.

As a fourth cause of the confusion, we cite the fact that neither they who acknowledged its reality nor they who antagonized it were sufficiently impressed with the organic

character of the revelation of God. And yet this must be put in the foreground, if we would understand its action in the midst of Israel. It has not separated the people of the covenant from the root from which Israel sprang. It has not removed them from the sphere in which they had their rise. It has not provided them with unique usages and forms of life which, as burdens that could not be accounted for, were bound to become unbearable and remain void of influence in the nation's life. God took Israel as the course of history had made it, with its forms and ideas allied to the Ancient-Oriental life, with its polygamy and divorce, with its blood revenge and ban, its slavery and oftentimes cruel usages of war. Hence Israel is no new people, standing entirely apart from the western Asiatic tribes. But, in the several spheres of life, Israel clearly exhibits its relationship with the surrounding culture-world. Entering in among this people and revealing himself to it, God raised it up to a higher level. This of course did not take place at once, but gradually. In this God made use of the sometimes very different historical conditions into which he led his people, and of the most different personalities whom he raised up in the midst of them. Thus in the way of unfolding and developing, which was frequently a way of struggle and combat, the idea of God introduced into Israel was brought to a continuously greater purity, and from this center, in ever-enlarging periphery, it has ever dominated all of life. This could not be otherwise. The revelation of God could bear fruit only when God joined himself to the existing state of things, and gave himself in the form in which it could be received by Israel and organically wrought out by them. But God also took care that the consciousness advanced and became more rich, so that his Revelation could increase in content and cause its glory to

shine forth. Thus the *historia revelationis* unfolds itself and takes forward strides, but—and this has been all too frequently forgotten on the Reformed side—keeps shining forth through the prism of Israel's consciousness, borrowing its forms from it and elevating it with itself, in order thus to prepare it for the coming of the Christ, and to cause it to be able furthermore to enjoy the full unfolding of its glory.

To prevent misunderstanding, permit me, in this connection, to emphasize the point that, to him who occupies this briefly outlined viewpoint of the organic Revelation, it is less important to attempt to show that at the beginning of its career Israel was the lesser in many respects among the great culture-peoples of antiquity, or that it is united to the Ancient-Oriental life by a thousand mysterious ties, or that many of its religious usages bear signs of relationship with those of other nations, or that these give evidence of highly developed moral laws and contain expressions which involuntarily recall Old Testament utterances. The main point is: whether the comparison of the unfolding of Israel's life, as it is sketched in the scriptures of the Old Testament, with that of the life of other nations in the Ancient-Oriental world, does not indicate the inworking of a divine factor, which has governed that life, which has directed its utterances, which has marked out its paths and inspired its unfolding. Hence this is the point, whether an objective study of Israel's culture as well as that of western Asia does not more prominently among the former than among the latter bring an agent into view, which in the face of all human resistance reveals itself in a continuous unfolding of the life principle implanted in that people, whereby at length, in addition to all the traces of relationship, Israel exhibits itself as a magnitude of a superior order.

Of course this revelation of God in the midst of Israel has not contented itself with a single domain upon which to exert its action exclusively. It influenced every department of human thought and will, ambition and activity. It claimed the whole breadth and depth of life. Its inworking extended to world-view as well as to interpretation of life, to personal as well as to social life, to the sphere of law as well as to the intimate circle of the life of the family, and to the more outwardly directed life of culture as well as to that of individual piety. . . .

. . . . In the first place, a few words are necessary on the regulation of social life described in the law books of the Pentateuch. Here we stand undoubtedly upon the broad foundation of the Ancient-Oriental life. There is no creation here *ex nihilo*; but, for the regulation of the several subparts of social life, such as marriage, relations of parents to children, slaves to masters, questions regarding property-rights, penal statutes and judicature, much use is made of what is also found in the Code called after Hammurabi as well as in the Ancient-Arabic usages of law, which have been studied especially by Robertson Smith and Wellhausen. This could scarcely be otherwise. At Sinai Israel became no new people, that had first to produce a culture of its own; here God led its development into new paths. That before the days of Moses this people lived according to legal relationships which were closely allied to those of Ancient Babylon is shown by the comparison of Hammurabi's Code with the accounts of the patriarchs in Genesis. To be sure, this has been greatly exaggerated, so that at length it seemed as though the patriarchs consulted the Code for everything. But, apart from this, it can scarcely be gainsaid that before Moses' time the people lived in a communal organization broadly founded

upon the Ancient-Oriental life, many traces of which are found codified in the Pentateuch.

But if formally as well as materially there are many points of agreement, careful investigation shows that Moses' laws contain principles which Babylon lacks, in spite of its higher form of civilization. Hammurabi demands capital punishment in no less than thirty-four cases, — not merely of grievous offenses, such as murder and adultery, but also for stealing, refusing to render military service, carelessness in building a house or ship, giving shelter to a runaway slave. In the Pentateuch human life is prized more highly, since in offenses of this sort it demands capital punishment only in the cases of murder and adultery, while in many other cases of offense the lawgiver requires merely a fine. Also slaves are afforded better treatment, a woman's honor is more carefully defended, paternal care is extended to widows and orphans, to the lowly, the poor, and strangers. An Israelite is commanded to take care of an enemy's stray ox or ass (Ex. xxiii. 4 f.); while the beasts of the field and the birds of the air are not forgotten (Deut. xxv. 4; xxii. 6).

In the second place, the Pentateuch lawgiver is inexorably severe when it concerns the maintenance of divine ordinances in nature and in morals. Thus death is the penalty for him who smiteth or curseth his father or his mother (Ex. xxi. 15-17), and for him who is a stubborn or rebellious son (Deut. xxi. 18-21), since they are guilty of transgressing the fundamental law of the covenant. Unnatural lewdness was also punishable with death (Ex. xxii. 19). In Hammurabi's Code we look in vain for regulations in behalf of interests such as these, while this is still more the case in a number of matters which Babylon's king could not view in the light of offenses. It is noteworthy, indeed, that in Israel alone

death is the penalty in the case of witchcraft (Ex. xxii. 18), sacrifice to idols (Ex. xxii. 20), enticement to idolatry (Deut. xiii. 7-9 ff.), sacrifice of infants (Lev. xx. 2), witchcraft (Lev. xx. 27), blasphemy (Lev. xxiv. 16), and Sabbath desecration (Ex. xxxi. 14 ff.). This shows not only zeal to maintain the sanctity of the divine commandments, but also abhorrence of everything that savors of idolatry.

The third point of difference between Hammurabi's Code and the Pentateuchal laws also clearly shows the inworking of the revelation of God. However strongly the king of Babylon may guard the maintenance of the legal relationships, transgression of his codified laws is never taken as a sin against the majesty of God, but as an insult to the king. Hence the awful maledictions at its close upon every one who "shall not observe to do the words which I have written, and destroys the law which I have given, and changes my words, and substitutes his name for mine." Thus penalty is not the maintenance of divine right, but vengeance of the king. Hence it is not true when Jastrow in his "Religious Belief" (1911) asserts on page 275 that Hammurabi is merely the spokesman of Sjamasj.

Such is not the case with Israel. Here we find the confession that right is not original with man, but with God. Here it is the right of the will of God, which asserts itself in the case of the rich as well as of the poor. And the acknowledgment that God himself has caused his people to know his laws, ordinances, and statutes has not become an empty formula, as in the case of Hammurabi, who, in his prologue, testifies that he was called by the gods to cause right to prevail in the land, but for the rest takes no count of it; while Moses always appears in the background, and Jahwe is revered as *the* lawgiver. *His* commandments must be written

on the fleshly tablets of the heart and diligently taught the rising generation. And the reality of this conviction alone, which was vital in Israel, explains the verdict of Deut. xvii. 12, that he who resists authority is worthy of death.

Immediately connected with this recognition of the divine character of the law stands the fact that we have no law book in Israel which deals exclusively with social life like the Code of Hammurabi in Babylon. Here the regulations which aim at the normalizing of social life are made subservient to the fundamental religious thought of Jahwe's covenant with Israel, in consequence of which social and religious life are brought to a higher unity, for which reason it is the priest by whom the Torah must be taught.

Hence it is of less significance when it can be shown that, at several points, the lawgiver had to keep count with the relationships of life which he found among the people, and with legal conceptions which were current among the tribes, so that Babylonia, which was more highly civilized and enjoyed the legal relationships of an ordered state, was in some respects superior to Israel. With respect to this, however, two things must be remembered. First, as J. Jeremias has observed already, this cannot apply to Babylonia's moral-religious life, but merely to its social relationships. And, secondly, in Israel the lawgiver tried in every way to render such legal institutes as nugatory as possible. Such is the case, for instance, with respect to blood revenge, which was a legal usage of the times when life was not protected by orderly courts of justice, but by family and tribe. Therefore it is said in the law of the covenant, "Thou shalt not kill," and a sharp distinction is made between intentional and accidental murder. Moreover, aside from the altar, which was counted from remotest antiquity a place of safety (Ex. xxi.

14), cities of refuge were appointed, where the slayer was protected at least from hasty revenge. And the lawgiver deemed this of such importance that he gave specific directions that the ways toward these cities should be kept in order (Deut. xix. 3). Finally, in some instances, an indemnity in money takes the place of blood revenge, which in principle displaces private revenge by public punishment (cf. Ex. xxi.), and introduces a principle among the people which, of necessity, must make itself felt, and change the entire institution of justice. In the law, therefore, we find the endeavor, on the part of the revelation of God, to obtain a form for itself in the legal arrangements of the Ancient-Oriental life, to render these subservient to itself, and to regenerate them by the faith in an holy God.

The same phenomenon is found in the broad domain of religious rites and ceremonies. Here, also, Israel closely joins itself to the Ancient-Oriental life, and we discover many traces of relationship. Prescripts regarding things pure and impure, regulations regarding vows and fasts, were known elsewhere. Among other nations, also, extensive rituals and broadly ramified priesthoods are found. Sabbaths, new-moon feasts, and annual feast cycles are not exclusive Israelitish inheritances. Other gods, also, have had devotees and prophets, which is shown by the Baal priests in the days of Elijah. In the other religions of the Ancient Orient, prayers and hymns, penitential songs and lamentations, are not unknown, and frequently exhibit spiritual moods and methods of expression which are strikingly like those of Israel. Hence we need not be surprised if it can be shown that the dress of Israel's priests exhibits frequent reminders of ancient ideas which were also current among other related



tribal nations; nor that the division into three parts of tabernacle and temple has its ground in the second commandment of the Ancient-Oriental conception of the cosmos; nor that the outward appearance of the ark exhibits traces of relationship with the thrones of gods found among other nations. It is possible, indeed, that the Urim and Thummim have their doubles somewhere, and that the priestly ephod is of Egyptian origin. For it is well known that in religious cults the preservation and maintenance of ancient usages is highly prized.

But even so there is a radical difference in many points. Among the Arabians the priest has been degraded to the rank of a prognosticator, since sacrifice here consists merely in pouring out blood upon the sacred stone, so that it forms a part of the slaughter. In Babylonia and Assyria he has become a magician, who is versed in the formulas and manipulations whereby angered deity is pacified and sickness-causing demons are exorcised. But, alongside of and superior to offering sacrifices in Israel, the priest is charged to teach Jacob the ordinances of the Lord, and Israel the law (Deut. xxxiii. 10), and to pass judgment in the midst of the people (Deut. xvii. 8; xxi. 5). The same holds true regarding the prophet. Israel, too, has known men who counted it the highest honor, like the prophets of Babylon, of whom Winckler<sup>1</sup> speaks, to call themselves servants of the king, to eat at the king's table, and to speak according to the royal desire. But the powerful breath of life on the part of the self-revealing God in the midst of Israel has raised up men who have not brought the product of their own wisdom to the people, but the fruit of the divine address in the soul, and who have been forced to proclaim it, because it was to

<sup>1</sup> *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament* (3d. ed.), p. 171.

them "as a burning fire in their bones." They did not preach the things that were pleasant in the ears of the people; their words are not the result of political calculations, keen observation, or national self-exaltation. What they speak are the mysteriously imparted decrees of the eternal, holy God, who is angry at sin but compassionate with the penitent. Hence, even if many prophets in Israel share ecstasies and visions with others in the East — in connection with which it must not be forgotten that, in the development of prophecy, these become ever less frequent and appear more and more on the periphery — the prophets in Israel cannot be compared with those in Canaan, Phœnicia, Assyria, and Babylonia. In their writings, not even faint parallels can be found to the mighty utterances of Israel's prophets regarding righteousness as the fundamental law of human history, forgiveness of sin as the greatest gift of God to the human soul, and compassionate love as the most glorious revelation of the holy God.

The institution of sacrifice shows that, through the inworking of the self-revealing spirit of God, a religious rite can become entirely different, however much the outward form remains the same. The conception of establishing communion with God by means of sacrifice is not specifically Israelitish, nor is that of the necessity of the atonement. But while in Babylonia, as appears from the use of the verb *kuppuru*, atonement really means nothing but the removal of ceremonial uncleanness, which of course is connected with the ritualistic interpretation of sin, so that, at length, atonement can also be effected by placing food on the head of one sick<sup>1</sup> in Israel, all emphasis is put on atonement by means of shed

<sup>1</sup> Schmidt, Gedanken über die Entwicklung der Religion (1911), p. 98.

blood, clearly taught in Lev. xvii. 11. Moreover, the necessity of the atonement of sin is more and more accentuated, whereby the moral character of transgression is maintained and the conception of sin more and more deepened. Hence two kinds of sacrifices are here found, which elsewhere are lacking, the sin offering and the trespass or guilt offering, which were no late fruits of a long-continued process of development, but collateral ramifications of the old burnt offering. In the third place, — and this is of still more importance, — the thought is more and more quickened in the midst of Israel that bringing an offering is not the first and most important duty of one who would serve God. An offering has value only as an utterance of the disposition of the heart, and not as a mere ritual. An offering is a cult; and God does not ask for a cult, but for religion. And because, in the eyes of the Lord, nothing is more acceptable than the doing of right and the practice of love, as proofs of genuine piety “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. xv. 22), and Israel must offer unto God thanksgiving and pay vows unto the Most High (Ps. l. 14). Israel’s highest calling is not to offer sacrifice: it must be holy, even as its God is holy, “a kingdom of priests, a holy nation” (Ex. xix. 6; Lev. xix. 2; Deut. xxvii. 9).

But we may go one step farther. Religious usages which were original in the Ancient-Oriental life are not always made bearers of new ideas. Some are sharply antagonized, and thereby ties are positively broken which bound Israel to neighboring nations. This is the case, for instance, with augury and divination, which occupy so large a place in religion elsewhere. They have also made themselves felt, forsooth, in the midst of Israel. Among them it has been tried

to divine the near future by means of the dead. Israel has had its weather prophets who, by the study of form, color, and course of clouds, tried to discover future happenings. In spite of this, the word of power stands: "Surely there is no enchantment in Jacob, neither is there any divination in Israel." For both are unanimously rejected by the organs of the revelation of God at work in Israel. And when they do show themselves in the life of the people, Hosea complains: "My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them" (iv. 12), and Jeremiah warns: "Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven" (x. 2). Who does not recognize the bitter irony when the people are told: "Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee" (Isa. xlvii. 13)? The lawgiver doeth the same when, in Lev. xix. 26, he forbids enchantment and the observation of times, and commands in Deut. xviii. 10 that in Israel there shall not be found one that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a necromancer (cf. Lev. xix. 31; xx. 6). And probably, to prevent divination of the future by means of the liver, it is ordered in Ex. xxix. 13 that the caul of the liver of an animal must be burned. I make no mention here of the Urim and Thummim, for though this was an outward means of knowing the will of the Lord in behalf of a sudden event, it had no reference to knowledge of the future. Neither do we know how the divine answer was obtained through their means. Meantime it is noteworthy that, as soon as the relationships were normal in the midst of Israel, these means passed into disuse. The prophets do not allude to them, and in the second

temple they were never used (cf. Ezra ii. 63; Neh. vii. 65).

Thus we see that, socially as well as religiously, Israel stands largely upon the foundation of the Ancient-Oriental life. At the same time it is clear that, in the midst of this people, an agent operates, and a power reveals itself, which animates old forms and makes them bearers of entirely new thoughts; a power which, in spite of human opposition, claims for itself all of life.

This same phenomenon impresses us as soon as we view at closer range the thought regarding the being of God in the Old Testament. Undoubtedly here, also, we find a number of reminders of earlier times. The divine name *El Shaddai*, which occurs especially in the records of the patriarchs, points back, by its ending *ai*, to the Aramaic tribal land. That the name *El* is universally Semitic needs no reminder. The name 'Adôn or Baal or El 'Eljon is also undoubtedly Ancient-Oriental. With respect to other proper names which occur outside of Israel, the question is, whether the divine name Jahwe, apart from possible Israelitish changes, is specifically that of an Israelitish god. Universally Semitic, also, is the usage which speaks of God as Jacob's Strength or Israel's Rock or Israel's Light, etc.

But, with this, all relationship ends. For, with respect to the idea of God, there is, in the heart of the matter, a chasm between Israel and the Ancient-Oriental world which cannot be bridged over. Here oneness stands over against multiplicity. Among the Israelites the word: "Jahwe our God, Jahwe is one" (Deut. vi. 4) prevails, and every effort to make room for other gods by the side of Jahwe is most strenuously resisted by the organs of the divine revelation which are at work in the midst of the people; while in the Ancient-Babylonian pantheon there are no less than sixty-

five named and surnamed gods and goddesses, which number was at later dates considerably increased, and among the Phœnicians there are no less than fifty, and in the Old Testament as well as in the inscriptions more Aramæan gods are mentioned. And, however little we may know of the Minæans and Sabæans, the fact is well established that they, as well as Edomites and Moabites, Canaanites and Ammonites, were polytheistic.

In two ways efforts have been made to escape this antithesis between Israel and the Ancient-Oriental world. First, an attempt has been made to prove that monotheism does not occur in the oldest parts of the Old Testament, but that it is the fruit more particularly of the labor of the prophets, and that along the line of henotheism and monolatry it has developed itself from polytheism, which in its turn is the outcome of animism and fetishism, totemism and polydemonism, still more traces of which can be shown. But this representation is more and more beset with difficulties, and the inner improbability of this evolution process comes ever more clearly to the light. For it leaves the ethical monotheism of the prophets an unsolvable problem, and highest wisdom must be sought in the shrugging of the shoulder with which Wellhausen answers the question in hand, Why, then, has not Khemos, the upper god of Moab, overcome his competitors and become the God of righteousness, Creator of heaven and earth?<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile it is evident that the majority of scholars are not content with this, and seek the explanation of Israel's monotheism in another way. And having no eye for the

<sup>1</sup> "Why from an approximate similar beginning Israelitish history has led to an entirely different result, such as, for instance, the Moabtitish, cannot conclusively be explained" (Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (4th ed.), p. 36).

special character of the Divine revelation before and in the midst of Israel, they have endeavored to make acceptable the position that Israel's monotheism is nothing but a thought developed upon the foundation of an Ancient-Oriental monotheism. The philosophy of religion of prominent men in Egypt and in Babylonia, as well as in Babylonian penitential hymns, together with the significance of names recurring everywhere, indicate, at least according to their view, monotheistic currents, with which not only Abraham, who came from Ur of the Chaldees, but also Moses, who had been taught in all the wisdom of Egypt, must have been familiar. Hommel already labored in this direction when he undertook to show, in his "Die alt-israelitische Überlieferung in inschriftlicher Beleuchtung" (1897), that the group of nations from which sprang not only the dynasty named after Hammurabi, but to which also the Abrahamides must have belonged, was really monotheistical, and that this monotheism was saved by Abraham's emigration into Canaan. This position was taken by Friedrich Delitzsch, who asserted in his first lecture on "Babel and Bible" that monotheism is of Babylonian origin. It has been worked out by Alfred Jeremias in his "Monotheistische Strömungen innerhalb der babylonischen Religion" (1904), while Bruno Baentsch in his "Altorientalischer und israelitischer Monotheismus" (1906) tried to raise the building upon a broader foundation by pointing also to Egypt and the other parts of the Ancient-Oriental world.

But this attempt to explain Israel's monotheism must also be counted as having miscarried. For when, with respect to Babylon, one takes his stand upon the recurrence of proper names compounded with that of the Deity, such as, for instance, "God takes compassion," "God is exalted," "God

look on me," etc., most probably we have here to do with the same kind of *modus loquendi* as we often find in Greek and Roman authors, who repeatedly make mention of an abstract unity, so that it will not do to attach more significance to this than when a Greek father names his son Theodoros or Theodosios. And when, on the other hand, one points to a text like "Ninib is the Marduk of power, Nergal is the Marduk of war, Zazama is the Marduk of slaughter," etc., we plainly see that Babylon's god, who always was very insignificant, and therefore is but rarely mentioned in oldest inscriptions, absorbs the characters of the other principal gods, whose existence, however, is not denied. But such texts in honor of Ea, Ninib, Nergal, and others show that this is different from monotheism, and scarcely deserves to be called a monotheistical tendency. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that such texts rather prove the speculations of the temple schools than bear witness to a living conviction of faith among the people. And when we are reminded of the Babylonian custom of placing on New Year's Day the images of the most important gods round about Marduk, in order to pay homage to the upper god, and with him in solemn convocation to decide upon the lot of country and people for the ensuing year, and in connection with this the words of Ps. lxxxvi. 8 are quoted: "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord," no account is made in that case of the fact that, to the Psalmist, Jahwe was the only really existing person having power; while, even to the priests of Babylonia, Marduk was nothing more than the *primus inter pares*, the first and highest in the company of gods, and that this thought was not the outcome of religious conviction but of political endeavor. In the same way the priests of Ur put the moon god Sin at the head of the gods, and the priests of



Nippur honored their Bel as the upper god. And when reference is made to the repeatedly recurring exaltation of a certain god in Babylonia's penitential songs, where the worshiper addresses the moon god Sin, saying, "In heaven who is exalted? Thou alone art exalted. In the earth who is exalted. Thou alone art exalted," it must not be overlooked that these cannot be more than rhetorical phrases indicative of deep devotion, which are addressed with equal fervor to another god, if the worshiper thinks thereby to be able to obtain help and assistance.

With respect to Egypt the case is the same. Let it be granted that Maspero is correct in his assertion that the higher social classes in Egypt, and especially the priests, never took part in the gross paganism and fetishism of the common people, it cannot be denied that, though polytheism may be here more pantheistically tinted than in the plains of the Euphrates-Tigris, the foundation was the same. And when we are reminded of the attempt of Amenhotep IV. (Khu-n-aton) to secure the worship of Aton, the deified disk of the sun, the supremacy, and that this "heretical" king actively opposed not only Amon, but Osiris as well, we reply, that this movement, which was more political than religious, has more right to the name of monarchistic philosophy of religion than to that of ethical monotheism. For although the royal poet sang the praises of Aton as the only God, than whom there is none other, and although he glorified the disk of the sun in a manner that reminds one strikingly of Ps. civ., at heart his upper god has no unity, as his use of the term "mother" alongside that of "father" shows, and he is viewed exclusively in the light of the natural sun. Moreover, it is well to recall that a monotheist is not he who exalts one god far above another, but he who

worships one to the exclusion of all other gods, whose reality he does not acknowledge. And by way of pantheism the thought may arise that all gods are but manifestations of the one world-god—a doctrine which in Babylonia and Egypt was purely esoteric—there is a chasm which cannot be bridged between this monolatry and Biblical monotheism. The first is an esoteric speculation, which is powerless and utterly indifferent even to the grossest polytheism of the great masses. The second, because it is the fruit of revelation, is a powerful and a living faith in Jahwe, who tolerates no other gods alongside of himself, and who directs the lot of all nations. The first is a theory, the latter a living reality in the heart even of the simple. In their opposition to the worship of strange gods which entered in from all sides, the prophets did not then contend in behalf of a sort of monotheistic doctrine, but for “the knowledge of Jahwe,” i.e. for a method of worship with all its moral consequences which is agreeable to his Divine nature.

And this oneness of God is so much a reality, that the spiritual character of God immediately proceeds from it. To this viewpoint the Ancient-Oriental world has never been able to raise itself. For though they locate their gods in heaven, and view their earthly habitations merely as counterparts of their heavenly abodes, as a result of which the gods are in some measure divested of the gross materialism which characterized them before, they can never think of them apart from nature, whose deified appearance forms they are. This accounts for the fact that they can never think of a god without an image, which is proved by the zeal wherewith they used to conduct vanquished gods to their royal city; while in Israel we find the confession that Jahwe

is eternal and omnipresent, invisible and incapable of being represented by any graven image.

But this spiritual character of God in its fullness is not at once unfolded in the midst of Israel. It may even be said that in some particulars it is limited, but this is not on account, as has been claimed, of the anthropomorphic way in which Jahwe is spoken of in the Old Testament scriptures, and whereby everything that is proper to men and creatures is attributed to him. For no religion can suffer the loss of anthropomorphism, and the question merely is whether the unreal character of this way of representation is felt. But the spiritual character of Jahwe is limited by the externalizing of his worship. This takes place in two ways. First, by the important place which is given to ritual, whereby expressions are made current, such as "bread of God" and "an acceptable savor unto the Lord," which suggest a sensual good pleasure and a more physical idea of God. And, secondly, by localizing the place of worship, whereby in a certain sense the tabernacle and temple are made the habitation of Jahwe. And yet this limitation does not weaken the spiritual character of God. For in order to cause the temporal character of all ritual to be felt and to make its relative value known, Samuel declares: "to obey is better than sacrifice." The sacrificial laws themselves contain an element which constantly antagonizes the opinion that the offering can work *ex opere operato*. The centralization of worship also is clearly represented as the necessary fruit of the spiritual oneness of the people, while at the same time the thought remains vital that neither tabernacle nor temple was the abode of Jahwe. "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings viii. 27).

To maintain this spiritual character of the Lord the ability of being represented by an image, on the part of Jahwe, is most strongly denied. The second commandment speaks clearly with respect to this. For a long time it has been claimed that this commandment is of a much later date, but it is more and more evident that this judgment is not founded upon an objective historical critical investigation, but is the result of a preconceived evolutionistic dogma. And now, when it is attempted to show that the ephod, ark, and even the Nehushtan of 2 Kings xviii. 4 are images of Jahwe, and to represent the worship of the calf as an integral part of legitimate Jahweism, unprejudiced investigation will every time recall that Israel distinguishes itself from the Ancient-Oriental world also by the principle of the impossibility of representing Jahwe by an image, which indeed proceeds immediately from his spiritual character.

It is interesting to trace how ably the spiritual character of Jahwe was maintained in the face of the mythological currents which made themselves felt in Israel. It shows that, although Israel shares with the Ancient Orient the personification of nature, and therefore, even as other nations of antiquity, hears in thunder the voice of the Lord, beholds his arrows in the lightning, and listens for his breath in the storm, while the darkness of the clouds is taken to be God's dwelling place or tent, throne or garment, in Israel it did not lead to a deification of the powers of nature, by which a thunder god, a storm god, or a fire demon could originate, nor to a drawing down of Jahwe within the bounds of the revelation of nature. Hence when poets borrow images of mythical representations elsewhere current, it is always done in a way which exhibits the unreality of it. Thus when the poet wishes to speak of Jahwe's omnipotence, he borrows tints

and colors from the Ancient-Oriental mythology, which is not unknown to him, but with it the conflict of the myth is transposed into a mighty judgment. This explains the fact that the vanquished enemy of Jahwe inspires the poet with so little interest. The leviathan is now thought to be in heaven (Job iii. 8), and again is located in the sea (Ps. lxxiv. 13 f.; civ. 26). The serpent is at one time represented as being present in heaven (Job xxvi. 13), and again is located at the bottom of the sea (Amos ix. 3). In Job xxvi. as being present in heaven (Job xxvi. 13), and again is lo-monster; while in Job ix. 13 Rahab's helpers are taken to be in heaven. Bible writers indeed are so familiar with these beings, which are entirely unreal to them, that they use them as sketches of their images of the future. Thus in Isa. xxvii. 1 the Lord's opponent is transposed into the future, and has become the type of the anti-godly world-power seen in a threefold form. Entirely along this same line, in Isa. xxx. 7 and Ps. lxxxvii. 4, Rahab has become the nickname of Egypt. Gunkel should have thought of this before, in his "Schöpfung und Chaos," he defended the opinion that the conflict of Jahwe against Rahab, leviathan, and serpent points to a continuance in Israel of the well-known Babylonian myth of Marduk's conflict against Tiamat, which through the Canaanites must have come to this people. And when he points to other places where it is said that Jahwe rebukes the sea, threatens and judges it, we are not dealing with remnants of a sea myth, but with an animation of the powers of nature, a poetic personification, with the express purpose of representing the power of the Lord over every created thing by image and by word.

Of course this does not imply that in Israel this spiritual character of Jahwe has always been appreciated; and this for

two reasons. First, because Israel has plucked the bitter fruits of its past. According to Josh. xxiv. 15, Israel's fathers, on the other side of the river, served strange gods, with everything that went with it. And this trunk, which it had in common with the entire Oriental world, was indeed engrafted with a noble shoot, but this did not prevent the wild wood, whenever it had a chance, from budding again, always threatening thereby the growth of the shoot, and succeeding to the full extent of its power in preventing its fuller development. This was the more dangerous because, in the second place, Israel underwent in many respects the influence of Canaanitish culture, and ran so great a risk of becoming itself Canaanitish, that, according to Hosea, it actually became so in part. And since culture and religion here most closely grew together, the customary worship of the local powers of nature, which in Canaan were subsumed under the name of Baal, became common also in the midst of Israel. A more or less conscious syncretism was the result of this, by which, in the mind of many, Jahwe was comprehended within the bounds of the revelation forms of nature. And as a result of this there were many who worshiped Jahwe side by side with Baal, or at least spoke of him in the same way as the Canaanites spoke of their gods. Old Testament scriptures contain several instances of this. How greatly this had taken possession of the common mind appears from David's word to Saul (1 Sam. xxvi. 19): "If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, let him smell an offering," a manner of speech which surely is foreign to all recognition of the spiritual character of Jahwe.

But even if it is true that this spiritual idea of God was grasped with great difficulty only by a few, and that the religion of the rank and file of the people has always had more

or less incomplete understanding of it, nevertheless it has taken root in the midst of Israel; and, thanks to the labors of the prophets, it has there borne glorious fruit. And to the reality of ethical monotheism alone, Israel owes the fact that at length it was not lost in Canaan, and that it has not been willing, once and for all, to exchange its covenant God for the Baals, to be lost infamously with them in the extinction of the Ancient-Oriental nations. And this ethical monotheism is not the result of the labor of the prophets, even though it is entirely true that they studied it more deeply, and have realized more fully its far-reaching influence upon the whole life of the nation. But it is the fruit of the revelatory activities of that God who has been pleased to make Israel a channel to which the stream of salvation has momentarily been confined, in order, in the fullness of time, to break through all national limitations and pour itself forth upon all the nations of the earth. This revelation of God has governed all the utterances of Israel's life, in order presently to reach its highest unfolding in Jesus Christ, and from being national to become universal.