

**THE RELIGIOUS
IDEAS OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT**

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The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament by H. Wheeler Robinson

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BY

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PREFACE

BEHIND the shifting scenes and crowded stage of Old Testament history, and expressed in the varied literature of a thousand years, there are a few simple, yet profound, ideas which are fundamental to the religion of Israel. It is the aim of this book,¹ within the limits of the series to which it belongs, to present these leading ideas in their historical setting, with some indication of their theological and philosophical value, and of their significance for Christianity. The method of treatment is therefore distinct from that which would naturally be adopted for a history of the religion as a whole through successive periods, though the historical development is more or less followed in the discussion of each topic, and in the order of treatment. Archæological detail is given only to the extent necessary for the illustration of the forms assumed by the ideas. The general point of view is that of one who believes critical study of the Old Testament to be no obstacle but a great help to the progress of the Gospel of the New Testament. The interest felt during recent years in the literature of the period between the two parts of Scripture, and in the Judaism of the time of Christ, has perhaps tended to obscure the elementary truth that the Gospel of the New Testament after all springs from the dominant ideas of the Old Testament. The unity of

¹ A summary of the argument is given in the closing paragraph of the first chapter.

Scripture is shown by its fundamental conception of religion as the personal fellowship of God and man. Prior to the New Testament, and judged simply from the standpoint of comparative religion, the Old Testament offers the purest and noblest example of that conception. The proof of the reality of that fellowship is the moral emphasis which characterises the religion of Israel.

The author of this book is much indebted to Dr. G. Buchanan Gray and the Rev. David Stewart, M.A., who have read it in manuscript, and rendered valuable help by their numerous criticisms and suggestions. He has also to thank the Rev. H. C. Rowse, M.A., for assistance in the correction of the proofs.

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THE RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY AS THE SOURCE OF THE IDEAS

THE difference between conventional impressions of the Old Testament and the attitude of the serious student towards it, may be compared with that between two views of the same landscape, as seen by the casual spectator and by the geologist respectively. Both are gazing on the same fertile valley, set in its framework of lofty hills, through the verdure of which can be seen here and there the course of the streams that feed the river below. The one gratefully accepts the whole scene as it lies before him, in its abiding majesty and grace. The other, not necessarily less responsive to its beauty, looks beneath the thin covering of soil on the hills to the limestone that makes them, thinks of the buried fossils that tell the story of successive ages, traces the slow creation of that far-stretching plain through the soil washed down from the crumbling rock, to be carried onwards and deposited afresh by the ceaseless ministry of the river. His mind's eye rests, not on the result alone, but on the interaction of forces, the successive processes, the evolving work of uncounted centuries that have made this result. He understands better what he sees, because he knows how it came to be what it is.

It is not otherwise with the Old Testament. We know