

Israel's Ideal or Studies in Old Testament Theology
Rev. John Adams, B.D.
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In these studies in Old Testament Theology an attempt is made to present in popular form the gist and trend of development of the main Old Testament doctrines. The principle of revelation is recognized but as the title "Israel's Ideal" indicates, in a subjectivized sense. Besides this, the critical conclusions of the Graf-Wellhausen School as to the dating of the writings are accepted. The author seems to be of the opinion that this may be done without detriment to or serious modification of the supernatural content of the Old Testament. His own methods, however, furnish to our mind a most convincing illustration of the impossibility of this. He adopts from this critical school not merely its chronology but also the tenet that ethical monotheism is the differentiating principle of the Old Testament religion. Hand in hand with this goes the acceptance of the antithesis of the ethical and the ritual as constituting the two poles between which the development revolves. As others have done before, Mr. Adams helps himself with carrying this antithesis, which according to the critics is prophetic in its origin, back into the mind of Moses. The result is a curious revival of the old patristic, semi-agnosticizing view (later held by Cocceius and Spencer), that the ritual institutions were an afterthought in the Mosaic religion occasioned by the lapse of the people into idolatry. Moses is represented as in a burst of indignation and disappointment casting the two tables of the law beneath the mount and postponing his entire program to the unknown possibilities of the future, and as having to consent to a compromise of his ideal with the ritual. To be sure, this is not the Moses of the critical school; much less is it the Moses of the Pentateuch; it is a new Moses copied after the figure of the prophets as the modern school conceives them, and so it is after all a Moses in accord with the critical ideal if not in accord with the critical history. At any rate by this scheme the legitimacy and continuity of the higher ethical religion are saved. To some extent the author dates this religion back even into the patriarchal period, although he has to say so much about the "hinterland" of Semitic paganism, that the figures of the patriarchs do not stand out very definitely on his canvas. Our main grievance is that the ritual finds so little favor in the author's view. It would be going too far to say that the antithesis between ethical and ritual is identical with that between an unredemptive and redemptive interpretation of the heart of the Old Testament religion; for there is a strong redemptive strand in the prophetic part of the Old Testament, altogether apart from the ritual. Yet one cannot help feeling that where the ethical is thus pointedly put over against the ceremonial, as the critics are accustomed to do, that there, together with false ritualism, also that true ceremonial, which embodies so much of the Old Testament Gospel, must suffer from the damage wrought. After all, valuable though the ethical monotheism be as a unique acquisition of Israel, we cannot acknowledge that it is the heart of the Old Testament religion. This must always lie in the doctrine of salvation and the recognition of this must inevitably lead to a different and higher appreciation of the ritual than Mr. Adams is able to accord it from his premises.