

THE MORALITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649477432

The Morality of the Old Testament by Newman Smyth

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NEWMAN SMYTH

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HELPS TO BELIEF.



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MORALITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

BY
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AUTHOR OF "OLD FAITHS IN NEW LIGHT," "THE REALITY OF
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CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED:

LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK & MELBOURNE.

1886.

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CHAPTER I.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

IT is easy to discover moral difficulties in the Old Testament. In its histories deeds are recorded which it is difficult for us to justify ; and from its moral teachings not a few passages might be cited which do not commend themselves wholly to a tender Christian conscience. From such moral difficulties and imperfections an argument is often gathered against the alleged fact of a divine revelation in the religion of Israel. It is tacitly assumed that faulty human characters could not be chosen to stand as bearers of a divine purpose

of redemption. It is asked how a holy God could elect for His service, and bless with divine communications, men who would be regarded as blameworthy by our standards of conduct; and who, in some of their acts, might even be judged guilty of offences against our laws. It is urged that a divine revelation should be free at least from all moral reproach and blemish, even though scientific accuracy may not be expected of it; and it is said that imperfect commandments, or low standards of human conduct, or defective conceptions of human rights and duties, are not consistent with the idea of a law given by God which is holy, just, and good.

Candid believers who have not grasped the real method of revelation through the Bible, or the Biblical history, are often embarrassed when pressed by unbelievers with these numerous moral difficulties and obscurities of the Old Testament; and even the elect, in the *anxiety of their faith*, are sometimes so far

deceived as to fall into doubtful ways of excusing the questionable conduct of Old Testament worthies to the hurt of their better Christian consciences. The many laboured justifications of passages of doubtful morality in the Old Testament which have been put forth hardly afford entire satisfaction to those who offer them ; and, on the other hand, the arguments against the Bible which are easily, and often flippantly, derived from its confessed moral difficulties, cease to have any real and rational validity, when the actual method of revelation, in its broad scope, and its necessary temporal limitations, has been once clearly apprehended. Before any satisfactory explanation of the difficult passages of the Old Testament can be given, the method of the Lord in the history of Israel must be studied, and the real processes of the development of the true religion in Israel must be understood. We are not prepared, therefore, to pass judgment upon the offering of Isaac, for example,