

HENRY WOOD



LIFE MORE  
ABUNDANT

THE NEW THOUGHT ARCHIVES

# **Life More Abundant**

## ***Scriptural Truth In Modern Application***

**Henry Wood**

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## **Life More Abundant**

### **Preface**

AMONG the important progressive movements of the present time, perhaps there is none more far-reaching in its relations than the emancipation of the Bible from literalism and formalism. This great work is many-sided, and it invites the aid of every one who can make any contribution to its moving forces. The aim of the writer is spiritually constructive. He would undermine no one's faith in the Bible, but rather brighten and deepen it, and aid in its establishment upon a surer basis. We are living in a period of transition and unrest. To conserve a true faith in the midst of the present uncertainty should be both the duty and pleasure of every friend of vital Christianity.

At a time when professional and technical scholarship is so widely engaged in Biblical interpretation and criticism, it would appear that there is little room for anything additional. The clerical profession, to its honor, is taking up anew the study and solution of the inner significance of the Scriptures, and the general search for truth for its own intrinsic value was never before so keen and thorough. And yet, it hardly can be questioned that many of the broadest and best of the higher critics are not entirely free from the bias, conscious or unconscious, of denominational training and association. Again, owing to the technical and voluminous character of their researches, their work is more especially fitted to the capacity of scholars than to the popular mind. It involves a thorough specialization, for which, even the clerical profession, in general is not well equipped. But the product of these eminent scholars may be taken at a reasonable valuation and used as common capital, and any one is at liberty to make it the basis for more general and popular deduction and implication.

But aside from very valuable historical and literary criticism, the relations of the Bible to science, philosophy, psychology, and modern thought in many directions, are intimate and of deep significance. The passing of literalism is causing alarm among a large class of people, who feel that their belief, supposedly settled, is being undermined. Their Bible seems to be losing its authority and sanctity. A great transition is upon us, and nothing can hold it back. The vital problem which demands solution is : How shall popular faith in the Bible be spiritualized and made more intelligent, rather than weakened or destroyed ? Transition periods are always full of unrest and misunderstanding. The incidental iconoclasm which is involved, to the average observer seems like an unhallowed attack upon precious sanctities. Why harrow up the peaceful and complacent surface of religious life and disturb devout confidence

which long ago was settled and finished ? Only because the soul is constituted for progression and the inner nature cannot be stilled by any surface application, however historic or approved. The conservation of a living faith must find its essential supports in the diviner depths of the soul nature.

This work from an independent standpoint has for its purpose the preservation of all that is intrinsic in the Written Word. It is addressed to the intelligent lay mind, which has neither the time nor training for dealing with the intricacies of technical criticism and spiritual symbolism. "The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life." The literalism and inerrancy which have been put upon the Bible, under a mistaken obligation of loyalty, are burdensome, and largely obliterate its harmony, beauty, and unity. Thus, the basis has been formed for numerous divisions and rival sects, for under detached textual interpretation each finds its own endorsement. The intellectual form or shell has been grasped instead of the inner verity. The Church has been split into fragments and dogmatized upon non-essentials. Under the confusion of varying polities, and the complexity of ecclesiastical machinery, the essence and vitality has exhaled and escaped. The truth of the Bible, which was originally expressed in warm Oriental symbolism, is marred, or hidden, by its rendering into rigid, cold, and prosaic English. Here is the real cause for most of the prevailing scepticism and agnosticism. The sceptic is as much of a literalist as the extreme orthodox, and his unbelief is the logical outcome. The believer in absolute inerrancy, not only misses the intrinsic treasure of the Bible himself, but he furnishes the weapons for an attack by its opponents.

If the general, even though simple survey of this great subject which is attempted in this volume be of any popular

use in the rescue of Scripture from mechanical hardness which largely hides its deeper harmonizing and transforming power, in freeing it from the barnacles which have glued themselves to it, in emancipating it from the unlovely dogmatisms with which it has been identified, in making it more natural and attractive, instead of abnormal and far away, in interpreting it as a variety in unity, instead of a collection of discordant texts and sayings, in showing inspiration in each part to the degree that it inspires, in recognizing that its divinity comes through man instead of being a projection toward him from without, in discovering the immanence, oneness, and love of God, as well as his formal legality and anthropomorphic kingship if, in any measure, these principles be made more popularly apparent by the perusal of this volume as one of many auxiliary influences, the author will feel that his effort has not been in vain.

## **I - A Condensed Survey**

THERE is a general desire to know the Bible better. In this age of keen and searching inquiry, everything is on trial. Principles, dogmas, and opinions are being tested in real life, and weighed in delicate balances. Nothing is exempt from this sifting process, no, not even the Bible. Sentiment, tradition, and general belief are no longer above question or beyond fair criticism. The demand which is present at every inquest is : What is its merit ? This is the criterion of truth, and determines value. No friend of the Bible need object to the application of this universal test to the Book. Rather he should seek it. Outward authority, sanctity, sentiment, and prestige have changeable values, but merit endures. It would seem therefore, that no apology is necessary for a consideration of the Bible, on its merits.

Nothing less can form the real basis for a hearty love and warm appreciation of the Written Word.

In the simplest terms, the Bible is a record of the spiritual experiences and divine intimacies of gifted and eminent souls. While it contains numerous abstract principles, warnings, and commands, it, more definitely, is a guide to life, through its delineation of numberless experiments in actual living. Its authors, each freighted with some varying influx of divine truth, are scattered like beacon lights along the pathway of human history. They represent the Hebrew race and religion, and later, the rise and spread of a broader and higher manifestation of truth and light in the early distinctive Christian system.

The Old Testament is a selected and vital part of the early Hebrew literature, including the national history of religion, government, ethics, and philosophy. It is the fittest survival of a great mass of the sacred writings of a race in many ways peculiarly favored. But internally it makes no unique claims for itself as a collective unit, for it only became such after a long period of demonstrated quality and superior vitality. The Old Testament represents the heart and soul of the ancient national writings, or, more exactly, their blossoming in the form of literature. Wherein is literature distinguished from writings in general? To rightly deserve the name, it must be more than a recital of objective and historical facts, more than intellectual information, more than the science, law, or mechanical achievement of the period. It must bear the subjective stamp of humanity, and convey the subtle aroma of the human spirit. It must be exuberant with its current hopes, aspirations, and ideals, and also recount its sufferings and sacrifices. It must teach lessons suffused with life and motive, and appeal to the imaginative nature. It must

furnish a comparative mirror for the educational use of other times and races.

To picture in musical verse or rhythm the prevailing spirit and creative imagination of any race or period, is to enshrine it in the most vivid setting. A liberal portion of the Old Testament literature appears in poetic form, and is rich in dramatic quality. Lofty flights of spiritual insight and attainment mark the Psalms, and are rich in the messages of the prophets, in the soul pictures of the epic of Job, and in many other graphic sketches of human expression and practical heroism.

Even the simpler ancient narratives show a purpose more than historic. They teach religious and ethical lessons and inspire confidence in the divine purpose and dealings. But all these vary with each writer, as age, environment, and temperament are differentiated. Some of the moral and ethical transactions which seem to receive approval, cannot stand in the fuller light of the New Testament and modern standards. The cruel destruction of alien peoples, the occasional revelation of a revengeful spirit, and the maledictions of the imprecatory Psalms must receive emphatic disapproval. The evolutionary progress between the earlier and later Scripture is thus made plain, and the mischievous dogma that the Bible was written, word by word, by divine dictation becomes logically untenable. Both the goodness and the unchangeableness of God would receive a challenge from such an idolatry of the letter. The errancy and fallibility of the human element in the Bible is thereby made certain. That the Old Testament worthies were men not exempt from the passions and mistakes of other men, is abundantly shown, and their history is full of lessons for suggestion and improvement.



The Old Testament is a treatise in moral philosophy, illustrated by pictures of character and circumstance. The steady, unfolding, spiritual sense of a favored people, their experiments, mistakes, and disciplinary penalties constitute a peculiar religious system, dramatically presented in human action. Through the sacred literature, the Hebrew race for long centuries was a living and breathing solidarity. It occupied the center of the stage of human development, not only for its own time, but for an educational incentive to subsequent ages. The moral supremacy of the Hebrew monotheism stands out by contrast with the polytheism of the surrounding ethnic systems. But the contemporary religions had their sacred writings, some of them lofty in spirit and aim, and well fitted to their peculiar times and races, and of great service in the moral development of the world. The Vedas, Puranas, Zend Avesta, Upanishads, Koran, Eddas, and many other sacred writings are full of high thoughts and noble utterances. Many of them are poetic in form, idealistic in quality, and spiritually elevating and inspirational. A careful and impartial study of comparative religion plainly shows that many Christian apologists have been unjust in their estimate of other Scriptures, and disparaged them unduly. Many leading ideas in Christian theology, like those of the trinity, sacrifice, atonement, and a corresponding observance of special times and anniversaries, are found elsewhere, often with such distinctness as to indicate a common origin. Dr. James Freeman Clarke in his notable work, "Ten Great Religions," gives many examples of a striking similarity, from which two selections may be quoted as illustrative. They are from two Babylonian tablets, which contain an account of the Creation.

## THE FIRST TABLET

1. When the upper region was not yet called heaven,

2. and the lower region was not yet called earth,
3. and the abyss of Hades had not yet opened its arms,
4. then the chaos of waters gave birth to all of them
5. and the waters were gathered into one place.
6. No men yet dwelt together : no animals yet wandered about :
7. none of the gods had yet been born.
8. Their names were not spoken : their attributes were not known.
9. Then the eldest of the gods
10. Lakhmu and Lakhamu were born
11. and grew up
12. Assur and Kissur were born next
13. and lived through long periods
14. Anu

(The rest of this tablet is missing.)

## THE FIFTH TABLET

(This fifth tablet, Dr. Clarke thought very important, because it indicated the origin of the Sabbath in close correspondence with the creative record in the Bible. It is

also known that the Babylonians observed the Sabbath with many restrictions.)

1. He constructed dwellings for the great gods.
2. He fixed up constellations, whose figures were like animals.
3. He made the year. Into four quarters he divided it.
4. Twelve months he established, with their constellations three by three.
5. And for the days of the year he appointed festivals.
6. He made dwellings for the planets : for their rising and setting.
7. And that nothing should go amiss, and that the course of none should be retarded,
8. he placed with them the dwellings of Bel and Hea.
9. He opened great gates, on every side :
10. he made strong the portals, on the left hand and on the right.
11. In the center he placed luminaries.
12. The moon he appointed to rule the night
13. and to wander through the night until the dawn of day.
14. Every month without fail he made holy assembly days.

15. In the beginning of the month, at the rising of the night,
16. it shot forth its horns to illuminate the heavens.
17. On the seventh day he appointed a holy day,
18. and to cease from all business he commanded.
19. Then arose the sun in the horizon of heaven in  
(glory).

But these, and all other creative records which have come to light lack the sublimity, beauty, and coherence of the narrative in Genesis. Notwithstanding the multitude of lofty sentiments in the Scriptures of the ethnic religions, the positive and practical transcendence of the Bible as a guide in human conduct and life is too evident to be brought in question. But we must not be unmindful that Judaism was but a racial system embodied in a national literature, though possessing universal elements and lessons. But its expansive successor, Christianity, burst the bonds of race and nation and developed a positive catholicity.

The Bible is the leading exponent of morals and the higher human attainment. But it does not claim to be a complete and finished revelation. Truth does not originate in its pages, nor gain authority from textual declarations. It eternally existed, The Decalogue was inscribed in man's nature long before it was graven upon tables of stone. The Written Word has been regarded as a code of divine legislation, or even as the edict of a Monarch, but more truly it is an emancipation. The love of God wrought into the lives of men of old men like us through all the lights and shadows of human experience brings out in high relief the ideals to be sought and the mistakes to be avoided in

the uneven earthly pilgrimage, over which they passed far in advance of us.

Unchangeable principles are presented in the Book in many forms and guises, but their acceptance comes only in evolutionary order. The ideals which are held up by its many authors, in their successive periods, show a constant advance and uplift. The earlier concepts of God were low and unworthy. Jehovah, the tribal or national deity was only supreme in degree, as compared with the gods of the neighboring peoples. Among many, he towered the highest. In a deep sense each nation made its own ideal and name for the unseen Power, and its concept corresponded with its own state of development. There could be no appreciative capacity beyond. No one can worship the true God, except to the degree that he has the truth and conscious image within himself.

That which every one calls God is but an objective appellation for his own vision, high or low, of the one universal Power, Life, Intelligence, and Will. From the very nature of things he is true or false in the degree of truth or falsity in the worshipper. Startling as it may seem, so far as conscious relation exists on the manward side, each one makes his own God. From the limited, local, and exclusive idea of the Infinite which prevailed during the early stages of the Old Testament literature, there is a constant advance in moral quality, on and up to the lofty concepts which are so richly set forth in the New Testament Scriptures.

The idea of sacrifice as a means of propitiation or appeasement to the deity was a fitting characteristic of all the early religious systems. Such a rite, based upon fear and mystery, clearly reveals the moral status of the gradations at the dawn of the spiritual consciousness.

The evolutionary character of the Bible is also apparent in the very slow unfoldment of ideas of future existence and immortality. While almost entirely lacking, except by feeble implication in the Old Testament, life after death is brought distinctly to the front only in the New. If the Bible, as a completed divine product came directly from God, it would logically follow that all parts of it should be of equal authority and moral excellence. But if it be a divine message, in and through man, colored by the human medium, it must contain a mingling of the fallible and imperfect. If sunshine passes through colored glass, it is modified in manifestation. How can the finite bring forth pure infinite product ? Any " revelation " must be upon the level of the recipient, otherwise it is a vain formality. If there be abundant divine goodness, only human goodness can in any degree interpret it.

Despite temporary interruptions, the great human procession is moving forward by easy stages, and of this general trend, the Bible furnishes an accurate index. Note the great distance traveled between the early sanction of slavery and polygamy and the indiscriminate slaughter of enemies, to the lofty ideals of the Sermon on the Mount, the golden rule, and the fourth Gospel. Is God vacillating and changeable? Then the improvement must have been in men, as reflected in the rising outlooks of their Biblical literature. Man grows just in proportion as his consciousness awakens to his own intrinsic divinity and oneness with his Source. He is slow to discover himself as a child of God, made in the divine image and likeness.

The Bible is like a great mirror. Objectively the same in motive and mission, each reader catches an aspect and reflection somewhat unique. It has one message but many interpretations, one dramatic story, but both acted and seen by many unlike characters, under all kinds of

conditions, fixed in its present objective form, yet always varying in significance, even to the same individual in differing moods and periods. In the final analysis, to the individual, it is his idea of the Book which is the Bible to him. This psychological principle shows why each one of the scores of sects finds its own peculiar creed in the same collective content. Through the use of "proof texts," which constitutes the crowning abuse of the spirit of inspired literature, each finds exactly what it looks for. Even upon the supposition that every word and punctuation mark were of divine origin, the diversity of dogmatic interpretations would not be lessened. Through fitting selections from the Bible, men read themselves into it.

The prevailing view of the Bible has made it rigid and prosaic in form but feeble in practical vitality. A mere intellectual belief and acceptance can have no power until it is translated into fresh and personal manifestation. Even truth is dead until positively incarnated. Inspiration means inbreathing. God's spirit can be breathed into a living soul, but not into dead things, or parchment, or letters. These may suggest life, but they cannot live.

Turning to the New Testament, its shaping, the selection of its different parts, and its final unification were as unstudied and undesigned as in the case of the older Scriptures. There was no plan, and the writers had no idea of a future formulated and united Book. Spiritual spontaneity only can explain the process and final result. Jesus wrote no treatise for future generations. His teachings were spirit and life and they awakened the divinity in human souls. They were living principles and morally contagious. His message was not a form of law, not freighted with pessimism but glowing with optimism. His words, meagerly reported, through memory and tradition became a growing inspiration, and his followers at length

made imperfect records of their substance. As the power of faith and spiritual simplicity in the Primitive Church was gradually replaced by an era of theological speculation, tradition took shape, special dogmas were formulated, and apologetics multiplied. Great differences of opinion existed as to the relative authority and merit of the sacred writings, but by the close of the second century the Scripture for general use in the churches had substantially been chosen. But still there were some dissensions, and not until the third council of Carthage, at the close of the third century, was the canon confirmed and approved, and handed down to the Western Church.

When the Bible is brought into close contact with the human soul it is able to kindle an inner spirit and life. With many misinterpretations, it yet has been the great organizing and vitalizing force in the higher development of life and conduct. But because of the greatly increased depth and range of modern knowledge, much of the letter would be regarded as mythical, were it not proved that a great mine of meaning and spiritual correspondence lives beneath it. Here is its vital inspirational power. As an analysis of the letter, behold the dry technicality of a Biblical commentary of the former time and type. The pressed and dried leaves of a flower do not reveal its beauty and symmetry. If the Bible is to live, it must live in the soul. There it cannot be a dead letter.

For a simple outline of the wonderful variety in the sacred Book we take the liberty of a quotation from a former work :

" The inspired Book is like a vast landscape, rich and varied, both in foreground and perspective. There are majestic mountain peaks whose summits pierce the clouds; peaceful valleys containing green pastures; trees and



plants, waving grain and blooming flowers, fruitful gardens and sandy wastes, purling brooks and mighty rivers, lowing herds and gentle flocks, rocks, pitfalls, precipices, fog, sunshine, and shadow. Law, History, Poetry, and Prophecy, in the Old Testament, and the higher ethical and more spiritual teaching in the Gospels and Epistles of the New are mingled in changing proportion in the different periods of the unique history of the Hebrew nation. Upon the surface of this great swift-flowing current are seen the simple dignity of patriarchal and pastoral life, the cruelty of slavery, institutes of priestly orders and sacrificial offerings, the government of judgeship, the authority of kingship, graceful poetry and metrical psalmody, weary ages of captivity, prophetic teaching and warning, Messianic expectancy, fulfillment, tragedy, spiritual baptism, persecution, the planting of churches, and racial dispersion.

"What wonderful life lessons are dramatically portrayed in the symbolical epic of Job ; and its impressiveness does not depend upon its historic verity, any more than does the significance of the Parable of the Ten Virgins. The Psalms of David, which are full of pictures of ever-changing and diverse spiritual moods, are equally instructive, and true to nature, whether written by the royal Psalmist or by a score of less known authors. The letters to the seven Churches would have the same applicability if addressed to the churches of the world, as they had to those of a little corner of western Asia. The Sacred Hebrew Writings make up a grand chorus of warning, reproof, discipline, incentive, and inspiration."

## **Ii - Eden And The Fall**

THE Bible is a wonderful Book because it is full of hidden treasure. The letter of Scripture may be translated from Oriental into Occidental forms of speech, but the rich glow of spiritual truth can be seen and felt only "between the lines, " by the inner perception. Its prose, though not rhythmical, is really poetic. So long as rigidity of form, doctrine, and proof texts, as such, are in the mind, the beauty and inner plasticity of the Word is veiled.

The story of Eden, and of Adam and Eve, is a signal example of the wealth of the East in allegory and literary art. One vital truth, however, should be kept constantly in mind. The thing or principle symbolized is always vastly greater than the illustration or symbol. The imagery comes, not to destroy but to fulfill. The figurative words and phrases are only the tools of the artist, and are of no more lasting significance than the painter's brush or the sculptor's chisel. Think of the generations gone by, who have been taught to venerate the tools which have been placed in front of the divine masterpiece, and have thereby "died without the sight."

Before the full significance of the Edenic narrative can be interpreted, some knowledge of evolutionary and psychological processes is necessary. Creation no longer means something from nothing, but a process of unfoldment and sequence. From the letter of the account, the details are arbitrary and historic, but incoherent. By divine fiat the cosmos springs forth out of nothing. But notwithstanding this superficial appearance, Moses, or other early Biblical writers concerned, had a poetic vision or intuitive perception of the fundamental truth. This clear-sightedness stood in the place of scientific or technical acquirement.

Before taking up the tradition more in detail, we may note the later and broader philosophy of creative development. To some, evolution still means Darwinian materialism, but this has passed as any full and coherent evolutionary statement. Though of great value in its own domain, and as an entering wedge, it is only partial and incomplete. It is to science what literalism is to the Bible. Only does development become fully rounded and rational when it includes the psychical and spiritual depths of being. Rich ore does not usually lie upon the surface. Philosophical idealism shows the fallacy of the theory that sensation is the basis of all knowledge. Darwin's dictum, that "all potency is contained in matter," has long enough been held up as defining evolution by its dogmatic opponents. Were not Spencer, Drummond, Le Conte, Fisk, and a host of others entitled to be called evolutionists ? Spiritual unfoldment, as normal, is as impossible to the materialist as to the dogmatist. The former deals only with the factors of sense, while the latter defines evolution by the same limited standard. "Men of straw" are easily knocked down. Kant gave a finishing touch to the doctrine that sensation forms the complete basis of knowledge, but his wonderful psychological analysis needed the crown and counterpart of the spiritual realm. Every man and philosophers are no exception receives his wages in the coin of his own realm. To disconnect matter, mind, and spirit, an essential and interrelated trinity, is to make each fragmentary and misleading.

Evolution when grasped in its full breadth is the handmaid of religion. Only an exclusive view of its lower side has made it seem atheistic, and like an enemy. On the other hand, an arbitrary religion of dogma, stripped of its vital relation to unfoldment, is equally misleading. If we insist upon breaking the beautiful sphere of truth into fragments, how can they be symmetrical ?

The Fall, as an allegorical picture of an evolutionary boundary in human unfoldment, has been dealt with in two previous works by the writer, but the subject is so fundamental that in this connection a concise presentation seems necessary.

Though the creative story shadows forth, in allegory and metaphor, an order of sequence in general accord with modern cosmology, its primal purpose is a portraiture of the nature of man. The curtain is lifted upon the drama of soul unfoldment. We turn outward and gaze into the past, when in reality its acts and scenes are within. It carries a dual significance, including the race, and also each individual unit. As the long physical history of the steps of human development is told again in the gestative processes of the ante-natal body, so the Adamic nature and experience is evermore repeated. What a convincing proof of the solidarity of the race that its history is re-written in every member. Adam in Eden was a candidate for humanity. In the narrative there are two accounts of the creation of man, which are radically unlike. Rather the first was creating and the second forming. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This is a picture of real man what he is in essence. In a certain deep sense he was divine and complete from the beginning. God's image could not be essentially imperfect, even though imperfectly manifested. It is the manifestation which perceptibly advances.

The later account, in the second chapter reads : " And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground." The first was man, the child of God, and the second, the outward form. The first was God's likeness, really a part of himself, and the second, man's material instrument or embodiment. Scientific, philosophical, and religious systems, alike, have