

THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

a Presidential Address

before the

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It is usual for a Presidential address to consist of a survey. Often it is desirable to examine the situation in some field of thought, to see in what direction science has been moving and to make recommendations regarding its future course of action. Consequently I have decided to make such a survey in regard to the Old Testament, and have entitled this paper, "The Scientific Approach to the Old Testament".

In the past, various approaches to the Old Testament have been used. Each of these approaches have had certain fundamental characteristics, and varying details of application. We are not as much interested, tonight, in the varying details, as in the essential fundamental characteristics. Let us ask this question: just what is the proper scientific approach to the Old Testament?

First we note that, until less than two hundred years ago, the almost universal attitude toward the Old Testament in institutions where its study was carried on to any great extent, was to think of it as a revelation from God. It was considered that this book was inspired, God-breathed, free from error. Josephus, who was born at Jerusalem in A. D. 37, says of the books of the Old Testament: "But what faith we have placed in our own writings is evident by our conduct; for though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared