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# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

# CTQ

Volume 47, Number 3

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JULY 1983

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# The Influence of the Two Delitzsches on Biblical and Near Eastern Studies

Raymond F. Surburg

The nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth saw the appearance of a father and son on the stage of European Biblical studies both of whom exercised a considerable influence upon the theological and philological thinking of many scholars, pastors, and lay people. They were Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890) and Friedrich Delitzsch (1850-1922).<sup>1</sup> Their lives present many interesting parallels and also exhibit many contrasts relative to their attitude toward Hebrew, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. Both men were also interested in Near Eastern Studies; the son probably contributed more in the arena of Near Eastern studies than did the father, while the latter's literary and teaching efforts were much more important than his son's in the disciplines of Biblical interpretation.

## I. Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890)

Franz Delitzsch was born in Leipzig of Jewish parentage.<sup>2</sup> Despite poverty he studied theology, Hebrew, and rabbinical literature. He was converted to Christianity, specifically, to Lutheranism. His friend Schultz was, humanly speaking, responsible for his conversion, and Delitzsch, after his adoption of the Christian faith, associated intimately with the circle of students who were followers of the Reverend Martin Stephan, many of whom followed the latter to America in 1839. As a result of Delitzsch's associations with this group he soon became an enthusiastic Lutheran and it was for this reason that he declined a call to a Prussian university. Loehe intended to call him as professor to Fort Wayne, Indiana.<sup>3</sup> In 1842 Delitzsch became privatdocent at Leipzig. Delitzsch was a voluminous writer throughout his academic career. By 1842 he had already published a number of works. In 1836 he composed *Zur Geschichte der juedischen Poesie* (Leipzig), two years later he published *Wissenschaft, Kunst, Judentum* (Grimma), three years after that appeared *Anekdoten zur Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Scholastik unter Juden und Moslemen* (Leipzig), and in 1842 came *Philemon oder das Buch von der Freundschaft in Christos* (Dressen) and *Wer sind die Mystiker?* In 1846 Delitzsch was called to a professorship at Rostock to succeed von Hofmann, and in 1850 he assumed a chair at Erlangen, where he was to be von Hofmann's associate.<sup>4</sup>

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The article on "F. Delitzsch" in the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* says: "In early life he was a adherent of the theology represented by Hofmann, but his Biblical criticism was freer than Hofmann's hyper-conservative position would allow."<sup>5</sup>

In 1867 Delitzsch became professor at Leipzig, where he labored with Luthardt and Kahnis until his death in 1890. At Leipzig he became acquainted with the school which was developing at the University of Erlangen under the influence of J.C.K. von Hofmann, the father of what came to be known as the *heilsgeschichtliche Schule*. Hofmann developed a hermeneutic which differed from that of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions and the use of this different hermeneutic led to departures from orthodox Lutheran theology. As a result of Delitzsch's association with von Hofmann and others of the Erlangen school, he adopted erroneous views about the Bible and the person of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Delitzsch established himself as a great scholar and teacher. He wrote on a number of different disciplines. However, his main interest was the field of Old Testament interpretation. In addition to writing commentaries he wrote on Hebrew poetry, on plants, and very early in his career on Lutheranism.<sup>7</sup> One of the passions of Delitzsch's life was to see in Old Testament studies a confrontation with the Judaism of his time. He founded the "Institutus Judaicus," later called the "Delitzschianum." Here he occupied himself with Jewish literature and culture. It was his burning desire that the middle wall of partition between synagogue and the church should be broken down. No other Protestant theologian ever showed such a concern for a confrontation with Judaism as Delitzsch manifested. Throughout his academic career he wrote books dealing with post-Old Testament Judaism. In 1838 he issued *Wissenschaft, Kunst, Judentum* (Grima) and in 1841 *Anekdoten zur Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Scholastik unter Juden und Moslemen*. No other person was better qualified to translate the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, which appeared as *Die Buecher des Neuen Testaments aus dem Griechischen uebersetzt*, and before his death 70,000 copies of this Hebrew New Testament had been sold. In the interest of this work he wrote a number of tracts and edited *Saat auf Hoffnung*. Of abiding interest is Delitzsch's concern to bring to life the Jewish background of the New Testament writings as he did in such books as *Hillel* (1887), *Handwerkerleben zur Zeit Jesu* (1868; English translation, 1902), and *Ein Tag in Capernaum* (1871).

### *Franz Delitzsch as a Theologian*

In 1839 Delitzsch published a book, *Luthertum und Luegentum* for the three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. He wrote in the preface:

I confess without shame that in matters of faith I am 300 years behind our time, because I came to see, after wandering a long time in the mazes of error, that the truth is but one, and indeed a truth eternal, immutable, and, since it is revealed by God, in no need of sifting or improvement.<sup>8</sup>

Concerning Holy Writ Delitzsch further asserted:

It alone is the foundation on which the Christian Church bids defiance to the gates of hell, the touchstone distinguishing truth from error, according to which the Church judges but should also be judged . . . The Church is placed over this word not as judge, but as steward, of whom God will demand account.<sup>9</sup>

Delitzsch rebuked those who were misusing and misinterpreting Luther and claiming him as their patron for their interpretation of the Bible. In opposition to them Delitzsch claimed:

Never, however, does Luther by the term "Word of God" understand anything else than the letter of the Holy Scripture, never the inspiration of the inner light, the vagaries of blind reason, or the illusions of the mistaken feeling, but always the written Word, according to the simple sense of the words, according to its clear meaning to the exclusion of all human mediation, falsification, and spiritualization . . .<sup>10</sup>

In this same book Delitzsch spoke highly of the Old Lutheran theologians and also advocated what the opponents of Lutheran orthodoxy have termed "restitution theology." Of the Old Lutheran dogmaticians he wrote in this jubilee volume:

These old Lutheran teachers were not merely erudite, but also sanctified theologians, trained in the school of the Holy Spirit, filled with heavenly wisdom, sweet consolation, and a living knowledge of God; God's Word was implanted in their hearts, it was fused with their faith, and turned into sap and strength in them . . .<sup>11</sup>

Delitzsch appealed to the people of the 1840's to return to the same Word of God in the manner of Jeremiah, who said: "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. 6:16). He spoke appreciatively of the fact

that the doctrine of justification and the means of grace has been restored to the world through Luther. To this generation Delitzsch appealed to "search the Scriptures; you will find and see that this faith is the Lutheran, the Christian faith, based on the immutable and imperishable Word of the eternal truth. This faith has nothing in common with confused doubt, brooding gloom, and sickly decadence, as many imagine; no, indeed, it produces bright eyes, good cheer, and strong vigor."<sup>12</sup>

Ten years later Delitzsch sent greetings to his American friends of strictly confessional tendencies, renewed his confession to the Lutheran Confessions, and admonished Lutherans to cling to their faith, because in it lay the future of the Lutheran Church. However, from a strictly confessional viewpoint, under the pressure of "scientific science" (to quote C.F.W. Walther) Delitzsch later forsook his own testimony of faith. At one time Walther and F. Delitzsch were great friends, as may be seen from the letter of condolence Delitzsch sent on the occasion of Walther's death in 1887.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this seemingly confessional stance, Delitzsch opposed the idea "of fencing off" theology with the letter of the Formula of Concord, and when his colleague Kahnis was attacked, Delitzsch published a defense of him (1863). In 1863 Delitzsch published his *System der christlichen Apologetik*. After 1850 his confessional Lutheran position deteriorated. He abandoned the inspiration of Holy Scripture. He raised this question: Is it permissible to call Jesus Christ the Lord Sabaoth, the one God, besides whom there is none other? (The reader may consult *Die Allgemeine Ev. Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* of 1884, No. 49.) It is the conviction of Francis Pieper that, by raising this question and answering it negatively, Delitzsch "manifested that his spiritual insight had fallen far below the Christian level, for he actually denied the clear statement of Colossians 2:9. If Delitzsch really followed the implications of his denial, then he thought of the Son of God only as a half-god or third-god. Every form of Subordinationism and modern Kenoticism is nothing less than a relapse into pagan polytheism."<sup>14</sup>

Delitzsch came to hold un-Lutheran views on Christ's incarnation in that he deprived the Son of God of the possession of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, his theology was not free from theosophic influences, as is shown in his *System der biblischen Psychologie* (Leipzig: 1855). For those who took offense at his concessions to the modern critical school he wrote *Der tiefe Graben zwischen alte und moderner*

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*Theologie. Ein Bekenntnis* (Leipzig, 1888; second edition, 1890).

*Franz Delitzsch as an Exegete*

Franz Delitzsch was foremost as an exegete. As already stated he was the author of a number of commentaries. They came from his pen in rapid order — *Habbakkuk* (1843) written while at Rostock, *Genesis* (1852; fifth edition, 1881), *Psalms* (1859-1860; fifth edition, 1894), *Job* (1864; second edition, 1878), *Isaiah* (1866; fourth edition, 1889), *Proverbs* (1873), *Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes* (1875).<sup>16</sup> Together with Carl Friedrich Keil he produced the *Biblischer Kommentar ueber das alte Testament*. This commentary was to be written from the perspective of Lutheran orthodoxy and was to renew the churchly tradition. The critical scholar was to abstain from the use of higher criticism in his commentaries. The facts of revelation were to be the basis for the exegetical comments. However, Delitzsch always presented a careful exegesis based upon thorough grammatical-lexicographical studies.<sup>17</sup> Delitzsch had been a student of Fuerst, a great student of the vocabulary of the Old Testament. Delitzsch stressed the Hebrew idiom. His discussion of grammatical and lexicographical matters is highly instructive.<sup>18</sup> In his early years he desisted from using that type of approach which challenged the statements of the Old Testament books. However, as time went on he yielded to the higher criticism which was promoted by other Old Testament scholars and which was regarded as scientific and scholarly.<sup>19</sup> His later commentaries as well as his revisions of those he had written earlier reflect his change of exegetical methodology, as he endeavored to be in tune with the views that were advocated by scholars who rejected the miracles of the Bible, predictive prophecy, and the inerrancy of the Bible. The article on Delitzsch in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* claims that his Old Testament commentaries were some of the best ever produced in Germany. In the earlier editions they show the influence of von Hofmann, but in his *Commentary on Hebrews* (Leipzig, 1857) he defended the Old Protestant doctrine of the atonement.<sup>20</sup>

In his first edition of the Genesis commentary he considered the book a unity. As time went on he changed his position and adopted one of the forms of what later was known as the Final Documentary Hypothesis. Delitzsch saw two different historical traditions in Genesis, an Elohistic *Grundschrift* ("foundational document") and a Yahwistic source. The first, he claimed, had its origin in the days of Moses, and the second had its origin in the

days of Joshua. He espoused the Supplementary Hypothesis which Tuch had advocated. This early dating of supposed sources of the Pentateuch was surrendered by him in later additions to the Genesis commentary. When J. Wellhausen was setting forth his devastating views, Delitzsch again revised his Genesis Commentary.

It appears that Delitzsch was constantly changing his views from commentary to commentary, depending on the views current at the time of the issuing of a commentary. Hans Joachim Kraus asserted that it is not easy to give a presentation of Delitzsch as an exegete, because he changed his views from commentary to commentary.<sup>21</sup> It was especially in regard to *Psalms*, *Isaiah* and *Genesis* that Old Testament men who have adopted a historical-critical methodology have spoken favorably of Delitzsch's exegetical efforts. However, Keil and those Lutheran scholars who rejected the presuppositions and the conclusions of nineteenth-century higher criticism opposed Delitzsch's changing views. Keil refused to accept in any way the Documentary Hypothesis, nor would he countenance the theory of a multiple authorship of the Book of Isaiah.

Relative to Genesis 1:2, Delitzsch (like Kurtz, Rudelbach, and Guericke) taught that *tohu* and *bohu* denoted the remains of an earlier world which perished when some of the angels fell and that the creation described in Genesis 1 was merely a restitution of a prior creation,<sup>22</sup> a view for which there is no Biblical evidence whatsoever.<sup>23</sup> In dealing with Genesis 6:1-3 Delitzsch supported the view advocated by Kurtz, in his book *Die Ehen der Soehne Gottes mit den Toechtern des Menschen* (1857), that angels married women. This interpretation contradicts the statement of Christ that angels do not marry nor are they given in marriage.

Delitzsch rejected the concept of the Messiah as the central theme controlling the Old Testament. He claimed that the concept of God's rule was the organizing theme of the Old Testament.<sup>24</sup> Delitzsch did consider the Old Testament Messianic prophecies important, although here also he was not as conservative as other Lutheran scholars. In the summer of 1887 Delitzsch delivered his lectures on Messianic prophecies. In his preface, written shortly before his death, to the second edition of these lectures he wrote as follows:

. . . I sought to put the product of my long scientific investigation into as brief, attractive, and suggestive a form as possible. At the same time the wish inspired me to leave as a

legacy to the *Institutum Judaicum* the compendium of a *concordia fidei*, to our missionaries a *vademecum*.<sup>25</sup>

Delitzsch states that, in dealing with the prophecies of the Messiah according to chronological succession, critical questions should not be ignored.<sup>26</sup> He did assert his belief in the supernatural and in some form of predictive prophecy. Delitzsch employed the term "Messianic" in both a wider and narrower sense. Genesis 3:15 he interpreted as being the Protevangelium, and he stated that it was not to be understood as merely announcing that there would be a struggle of the snake and its descendants with mankind.<sup>27</sup>

Delitzsch discussed the great trilogy of Messianic texts in Isaiah's chapters 7, 9, and 11. He translated *almah* as virgin but also claimed that the prophecy of Immanuel's birth would be fulfilled in Assyrian times:

The birth of this Immanuel is the *oth* (sign) worked by God which takes the place of the sign which Ahaz declined to ask. The meeting of Isaiah with Ahaz occurred about the year 734 B.C., and it is impossible that the sign can first have been realized after seven centuries; the birth of Immanuel is in the view of the prophet a fact of the immediate future . . .

Delitzsch thus espoused what one might call a typical understanding or that of double fulfillment — contrary to orthodox Lutheran hermeneutical principles. He likewise wrote about Isaiah 7:14:

Those who think that Immanuel, because he was a child of the Assyrian time of judgment, could not be the Messiah, fail to recognize the law of perspective shortening to which all prophecy, even that concerning Jesus Christ Himself in the Gospels, is subject.

For Delitzsch, then, it was only in an indirect way that Isaiah predicted the virginal conception and birth of Jesus. It was Delitzsch's hope, however, that his discussion of these Isaianic verses might lead the Jews to Christ and that they would accept Jesus' claims to be the fulfiller of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies.

### *Franz Delitzsch as a Textual Critic*

Delitzsch was interested in the textual criticism of the Old Testament's Hebrew and Aramaic text. In 1886 he published *Fortgesetzte Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der kompl-*



*tenischen Polyglotte*. Between 1861 and 1897 he, together with S. Baer, edited an edition of the Old Testament, with the exception of Exodus-Deuteronomy. Paul Kahle thought, however, that Delitzsch placed too much confidence in the textual efforts of Baer.

Delitzsch was, then, a very competent scholar who was held in great esteem, as may be seen from the title "the venerable" bestowed upon him by students and colleagues. Kraeling asserted about Franz Delitzsch that he "was one of the foremost exegetes of the nineteenth century."<sup>28</sup>

## II. Friedrich Delitzsch (1850-1920)

Friedrich Delitzsch was the son of Franz Delitzsch. He was born in Erlangen on September 3, 1850, and in his home Friedrich received an orthodox Lutheran religious education. Like his father he was educated at the University of Leipzig. He received his doctorate for work in Sanskrit. He studied Assyriology under E. Schrader in Jena from 1873 to 1874. His academic career spanned service at three German universities, those of Leipzig, Breslau, and Berlin. He taught Assyriology from 1874 to 1893 in Leipzig, in Breslau from 1893-1899, in Berlin from 1899 to 1920.<sup>29</sup>

Friedrich Delitzsch won fame as an Assyriologist and as a teacher of men who developed the young science of Assyriology. His books for his students laid the groundwork for a much-needed systematic approach to the Assyrian and Babylonian languages, now commonly called Accadian. He was also a pioneer in the discipline of Sumerology. Delitzsch wrote numerous scientific treatises on other Semitic languages and on Oriental geography and religion. After a number of British scholars had succeeded in deciphering Assyrian-Babylonian and were able to read some of its inscriptions rather correctly, it was Delitzsch who helped develop the new science of Assyriology and placed it upon a sound philological basis.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Delitzsch has been called the real founder of the science of Assyriology. He trained some of the greatest Assyriologists which Germany has produced. We refer to men like Heinrich Zimmern (1862-1931), who worked at Leipzig; Peter Jensen (1861-1936), who taught and did research at Marburg; Fritz Hommel (1854-1938) at Muenster; and Paul Haupt (1858-1926), who taught at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where W.F. Albright received his training. American scholars who received their training under Delitzsch were Hilprecht of the University of Pennsylvania and

R.F. Harper, who later became president of the University of Chicago.

Besides teaching, Delitzsch published textbooks for his students and other scholarly works. His grammars, chrestomathies, and dictionaries went through a number of editions. *Assyrische Lesestuecke* (ninth edition, 1899; English translation, 1899), *Assyrische Grammatik* (1889, English translation, 1899) *Assyrisches Handwoerterbuch zur gesammten bisher veroeffentlichen Keilschriftliteratur* (3 parts, 1887-90), *Grundzuege der Sumerischen Grammatik* (1913). In 1884 he wrote a treatise on *Die Sprache der Kossaer* (Leipzig) and in 1896 a discussion of the origin of cuneiform writing, *Die Entstehung des aeltesten Schriftsystems order der Ursprung der Keilschriftzeichen*. In 1891 he authored a history of Babylonia, appearing in German as *Geschichte Babyloniens and Assyriens* (Calwer Verlag). With Paul Haupt he edited the *Assyriologische Bibliothek* (Leipzig, 1881ff.) and *Beitraege zur Assyriologie und semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (1889ff.).<sup>31</sup>

#### *Friedrich Delitzsch as Biblical Scholar*

While most of Delitzsch's labors dealt with Assyriology and related fields, he was also interested in the Old Testament and theology. In 1881 Delitzsch published his study *Wo Lag das Paradies?* Many theories and books have been written on the original location of Paradise. He favored Babylonia and identified the four rivers which flowed out of Eden with the Euphrates, the Tigris, and two Babylonian canals.<sup>32</sup>

Twice in his lifetime Delitzsch caused a stir that had widespread repercussions. His lectures delivered at Berlin in the presence of the German emperor caused quite a stir when delivered and when they appeared in print as *Babel und Bibel* (1902-1903). The Christian world was upset by them because he claimed that the Old Testament was dependent on Babylonia for its distinctive ideas and religious values.<sup>33</sup> As a result of excavations in the Mesopotamian valley and the decipherment of religious texts, a school of interpretation sprang up especially in Germany which claimed that the prototypes for much of the Old Testament were to be found in the Sumerian and Babylonian literatures. Clements has called it the "Bibel-Babel" controversy, which held the attention of people between 1902 and 1914.<sup>34</sup> This controversy was a sharply conducted debate over the question of traces of Babylonian mythology in the Old Testament which

began with a lecture given by Friedrich Delitzsch before the German Oriental Society in the presence of Kaiser Wilhelm.

Delitzsch's Bibel-Babel views were a part of a movement sponsored by Hugo Winckler, "who maintained that a unified system of thought, embodying the conceptions of the ancient Babylonians about the nature of the universe and man's place in it, has been the common property of all people in the ancient Orient from early times."<sup>35</sup> It was Winckler's contention that many conceptions in the Old Testament had been derived from this system of ideas. The "pan-Babylonian" theory which Delitzsch helped to fire did not have many advocates, and this school of thought did not survive long. Later on it was the Egyptologists who made similar alleged claims about the influence of Egyptian ideas upon the Old Testament. Since 1929 Ugaritic specialists have been asserting the same claims for the influence of the Ugaritic language and Canaanite conceptions on Old Testament language and religion.

#### *Delitzsch's Attack upon the Old Testament*

The other work of Friedrich Delitzsch which caused a sensation in church circles was his two-volume attack upon the Old Testament called *Die grosse Tauschung* ("The Great Deception").<sup>36</sup> The purpose of this two-volume work was to "show with strong arguments why the Old Testament is unfit to be used as normative Scriptures by the Christian Church." These books were intended for lay people who were favorably inclined toward the critical approach to the Old Testament. The charges made against the Old Testament in these two books shocked many Christian people when they read the denigrating statements about the Old Testament, which was considered the Word of God by Jesus, Paul, and the other New Testament authors.

What led Delitzsch to make such an attack upon the Bible of Judaism by one who had Jewish blood coursing through his veins? As a child and young man he had received an orthodox Lutheran training in Christianity, and his childhood and adolescent training had inculcated in him a high respect for both the Old and New Testaments. The truth is that it was his university training which was responsible for shaking his faith and which ultimately caused him to hold an extremely low view of three-fourths of the Bible. His faith was singularly shaken in a course taken at Leipzig dealing with the Book of Deuteronomy. The professor explicated the view that this Mosaic book was not

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written by Moses, but actually was a document which came from the time of Josiah, written by a school of writers known as the Deuteronomists in the sixth century B.C. After Delitzsch heard and accepted these views, he exclaimed: "Then Deuteronomy is a falsification!" When the professor heard the young Delitzsch blurt this out, he exclaimed: "For God's sake! That may be true, but one must not say such a thing." At that time it was still possible to charge professors with heresy, and so higher-critical teachers needed to state things circumspectly. As a result of that course, the desire and resolve was born in Friedrich Delitzsch to unmask the deceptions he believed were found in the Old Testament.

Delitzsch, therefore, embarked upon a vicious and slanderous attack upon the Old Testament, a book which his father prized so highly and loved so much. In endeavoring to show the deceptions of the Old Testament, he deliberately chose episodes which Kraeling claimed had great difficulties associated with them and with which most people, who did not read the Old Testament, were unacquainted.<sup>37</sup> Thus Delitzsch claimed that Jericho fell through the treachery of a bribed harlot who admitted the Israelites into the city. What an indictment of the morals of the Israelites! — thus argued Delitzsch. The taking of the city of Jericho as described in Joshua 6 he claimed was simply ridiculous and impossible. He had a field day ridiculing Old Testament narratives, and he summarized his first volume by asserting that "the Old Testament" was full of deceptions of all kinds — a veritable hodge-podge of erroneous, incredible, undependable figures, including those of biblical chronology; a veritable labyrinth of betrayals, of misleading reworkings, revisions, and transpositions, and, therefore, of anachronisms; a constant intermixture of contradictory particulars and whole stories, unhistorical inventions, legends, folk-tales — in short, a book full of intentional and unintentional deceptions (in part, self-deceptions), a very dangerous book in the use of which the greatest care is necessary."<sup>38</sup> According to Delitzsch, the only value of the Old Testament was as an historical document, a book full of linguistic beauty with helpful archaeological information. However, as a book to be used by Christians it "was a relatively late and very cloudy source, a propaganda document" from Genesis 1 through 2 Chronicles 36.

That this two-volume diatribe should have elicited severe criticism from both Jews and Christians surprised no one. The

Jews accused him of anti-Semitism, although he disclaimed this charge, citing the fact that he supported Jewish students and that he had friends among the Jews. Delitzsch argued that Jesus was not a Jew, but a Galilean, in whose veins the blood of the Cutheans surged, people who had come from the Sumerian plains and thus were not Jews. He also endeavored to support the alleged non-Jewish ancestry of Jesus by an appeal to His supposedly non-Jewish mental outlook. Jesus sponsored a broad universalism and humanitarian outlook which Delitzsch claimed stood in sharp contrast to Jewish particularism. Delitzsch could find no bridge between the Old Testament and Jesus' mentality. The son of Franz Delitzsch contended that Christianity is an absolutely new religion, totally distinct from that of the Old Testament. Kraeling, in describing the views of Delitzsch reflected in volume 2 of *The Great Deception*, wrote:

How monstrous from the standpoint of Christianity that the all-wise God should have chosen as His favorite people one that was to crucify the Son of God and entertain for Him and for Christianity such a deadly hate through all generations.<sup>39</sup>

Delitzsch suggested that the study of the Old Testament should be abolished as a branch of theological studies. It would be better, if one insisted on teaching theological students the contents of the Old Testament, to have it taught as part of Oriental studies and the history of religion, and then taught by competent scholars, who naturally would be committed to the historical-critical approach to the Old Testament. Delitzsch claimed that it was a waste of time for theological students to study Hebrew. A course in Hebrew literature, history, and religion would suffice for the training of future Protestant pastors. The New Testament should be studied without consulting the Old Testament, and teachers should teach New Testament courses in such a way as to show students the errors of Jewish evangelists who found Christ foretold in the Old Testament. Delitzsch argued for freeing the New Testament from the embrace of the Old Testament and further recommended that Jesus' teachings should be reduced to its original purity for the blessing of the Christian church. The views of Delitzsch on the Old Testament were similar to those of his famous contemporary, Adolph von Harnack, who taught that the use of the Old Testament in the Christian church had done irreparable harm to the latter.<sup>40</sup>

*Delitzsch's Interest in the Old Testament  
as a Literary Production*

Although he advised Christian students that it was not necessary to study the Old Testament in preparation for their task of proclaiming the teachings of the Bible, Delitzsch himself made an intensive study of the Hebrew Old Testament. In 1883 he published *The Hebrew Language Viewed in the Light of Assyrian Research* and, three years later, *Prolegomenon eines neuen hebraischen-aramaischen Woerterbuch zum Alten Testament*, showing the preparation he made for a Hebrew lexicon on which he spent many years and which was ready for publication but was never printed by any publishing firm, a development Kraeling called "poetic justice."<sup>41</sup> In 1920 Delitzsch published his *Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament*, which was intended as an aid to the lexicon and grammar and to lectures on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. He claimed that he had gathered these observations while working on his never-published lexicon. It was Delitzsch's contention that the Hebrew Old Testament text was replete with all kinds of errors,<sup>42</sup> which he attempted to classify in this 160-page book. He did not think very highly of the scribes of the Talmudic period (c. 135-500 A.D.) or of the Massoretes (500-1000 A.D.), who studied the text very carefully and who were meticulous in their copying of the sacred text.

Although Delitzsch's Old Testament views were hostile to the Old Testament, in his evaluation of Delitzsch's position Kraeling appears to be sympathetic to the former's contribution to the Old Testament studies. Kraeling claimed that, if one eliminated the anti-Semitism and the charges that the Old Testament contains deceptions, Delitzsch made people aware of the limitations of the Old Testament. In Kraeling's opinion pious Christians have read the objectionable Biblical stories in a daze. The Union Seminary professor averred: "This has doubtless been seriously detrimental to the moral sense of Christendom. The constant uncritical acceptance of the most monstrous contradictions in the record, furthermore, has helped to lull people's critical faculties. If the church was shaken by having it said, it well deserved to be."<sup>43</sup> Kraeling further opined that Delitzsch had rendered a great service to Christianity by showing that Christians would have to find a better basis for retaining the Old Testament in its religious program. The Jewish traditionalism of the New Testament writers could no longer be defended. According to Kraeling Delitzsch showed the impossibility of the old orthodox views concerning the Old Testament which, says he, no enlightened

person would now wish to defend.<sup>44</sup>

Both Delitzsch and Kraeling, brought up originally as Lutherans, as higher critics rejected the reliability of the Bible; both refused to acknowledge that either testament is the Word of God. The inerrancy of the Scriptures is anathema to both. Since the Bible is for them a human book with all the limitations one associates with human productions, it is only a matter of degree to which a given writer will go in his unfavorable treatment of the Old Testament. Neither Delitzsch or Kraeling have an adequate view of the value or the purpose of the Old Testament Scriptures. Their opinions of the New Testament are also unsatisfactory.

### III. Father and Son Contrasted

What a contrast the two Delitzsches represent! The father held the Old Testament in the highest esteem as a part of God's revelation to mankind. The father found Christ foretold and foreshadowed in the Old Testament; the son rejected Messianic prediction completely. The father was a Christian believer; the son was an apostate. The father made positive and worthwhile contributions to Old Testament studies, especially in the period before he constantly had to change his views to be relevant to the latest fads of Old Testament scholarship. The son helped to rob believing Christians of their faith in the trustworthiness of the Bible — both the Old Testament and also the New Testament (because of the manner in which the New Testament writers used the Old Testament).

The father, Franz Delitzsch, made worthwhile contributions to Biblical studies. He was interested in Jewish evangelism. His appreciation of the New Testament for the correct interpretation of the Old Testament was a worthwhile viewpoint. From an orthodox viewpoint, however, his capitulation to rationalism and his bowing before the "golden calf" of higher criticism somewhat diminished his ultimate contribution. The son, Friedrich Delitzsch, made significant contributions to Near Eastern studies, but unfortunately employed his Assriological knowledge to attack the Old Testament.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. E. Kutsch, "Delitzsch, Franz," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3. voellige neubearbeitete Auflage, II, pp. 74-75; Emil C. Kraeling, "Delitzsch, Franz," *Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia* (1971), VII, p. 205a.
2. George J. Fritschel, "Delitzsch, Dr. Franz," *The Lutheran Cyclopedia*, edited by H.E. Jacobs and J.A.W. Haas (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 153.
3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*
5. Cf. Elgin S. Moyer, *Who Was Who in Church History?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 230.
6. Hans Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-Kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1956), p. 210.
7. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, 205a.
8. Franz Delitzsch, *Luthertum und Luegentum. Ein offenes Bekenntnis beim Reformationsjubilaeum der Stadt Leipzig* (Grimm, 1839), as cited by Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I. p. 168.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Pieper, p. 178.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
15. Pieper, II, pp. 105, 292.
16. Kraus, p. 211.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
18. Emil Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 95.
19. Kraus, p. 212.
20. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
21. Kraus, *ibid.*
22. Pieper, I, p. 471.
23. The restitution theory was rejected in the nineteenth century by Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positiva*, edited by C.F.W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Verlag, 1869), II, p. 83.
24. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblischer Kommentar ueber die Psalmen* (Leipzig: Doerffling und Francke, 1867), pp. 45-452.
25. Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*. Translated by Samuel Ives Curtis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), author's preface.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. ix-xii.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
28. Kraeling, "Delitzsch, Franz," *Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia*, 1971, VII, 205.
29. I.M. Price, *Beitraege zur Assyriologie*, 102 (1927), pp. i-xi.; H. Zimmern, *Zur deutschen Morgenlaendischen Gesellschaft*, 77 (1923), pp. 121-129.
30. J. Brinkman, "Delitzsch, Friedrich," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, IV, p. 736.
31. For Friedrich Delitzsch's contribution to Assyriology cf. Wallis Budge, *The Rise and Progress of Assyriology* (London: Martin Hopkinson and Co., 1925), pp. 98, 119, 178, 209, 210, 253, 272-277, 299.; F.M. Th. de Lange, "Assyriologie," *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, I, p. 657.; C. Wade Meade, *Road to Babylon: Development of U.S. Assyriology* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 16, 40, 41, 46, 64, 98.
32. Kraus, pp. 274-278; Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation*, pp. 150-160.
33. *Friedrich Delitzsch, Babel und Bibel* (Leipzig, 1903-1905).
34. Ronald E. Clements, *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation*



- (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 13-14.
35. Robert Hahn, *The Old Testament in Modern Research* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 90.
  36. Friedrich Delitzsch, *Die Grosse Tauschung* (Leipzig, 1920-21), 2 vols. Cf. also Kraus, p. 279.
  37. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.
  38. Delitzsch, *Die Grosse Tauschung*, p. 52.
  39. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
  40. A. von Harnack, *Marcion*. 2. Auflage, 1924, pp. 127-222.
  41. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
  42. Friedrich Delitzsch, *Die Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1920), p. lii.
  43. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, p. 160.