ed Egyptians, who appear to have derived from him or ſome of his deſcendants the rite of circumcision, and to have been for a while ſtopt in their progreſs towards the laſt ſtage of that degrading idolatry which afterwards ren­dered their national worſhip the opprobrium of the whole earth, (ſee Polytheism, n⁰ 28). We are informed that his name was had in the greateſt veneration all over the Eaſt ; that the Magians, Sabians, Perſians, and Indians, all glory in him as the great reformer of their reſpective re­ligions : and to us it appears extremely probable, that not only the Brachmans, but likewiſe the Hindoo god Brahma@@\*, derive their names from the father of the faithful. As he was let into the various counſels of the Almighty, and taught to reaſon and reflect upon them ; as he was fully appriſed of the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, with the particular circumſtances of that miraculous event ; and as he had frequent revelations of the promiſed Redeemer, whoſe day he longed earneſtly to ſee, and ſeeing it was glad— there can be no doubt but that he and his family took care to propagate theſe important doctrines in every nation which they viſited ; for the only reaſon which we can conceive for his being made to wander from place to place was, that different people might be induced to inquire after his profeſſion, his religion, and his hopes.

But though the Supreme Being was pleaſed to manifeſt himſelf in a more frequent and familiar manner to Abraham, he by no means left the reſt of the world without sufficient light. Lot profeſſed the true religion in the midſt of Sodom. In Canaan we meet with Melchizedeck, king and prieſt of the moſt high God, who bleſſed Abraham, and to whom that patriarch himſelf did homage. Abimelech king of Gerar receiving an admonition from the Lord, immedi­ately paid a due regard to it ; and the same ſenſe of religion and virtue deſcended to his ſon. Laban and Bethuel ac­knowledged the Lord, and the former of them was even favoured with a viſion. In Arabia, we find Job and his three friends, all men of high rank, entering into the deepeſt diſquiſitions in theology ; agreeing about the unity, omni­potence, and ſpirituality of God ; the juſtice of his provi­dence, with other fundamental articles of true religion ; and mentioning divine inspiration or revelation as a thing not uncommon in their age and country@@\* @@(U). Balaam ap­pears to have been a true prophet ; and as he was unqueſtionably a man of bad morals, the natural inference is, that the gift of prophecy was then, as afterwards, beſtowed on individuals, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the public ; and that, as in “ every nation, he who feareth God and worketh righteouſneſs is accepted ot him ;” ſo in thoſe early ages of the world, when mankind were but chil­dren in religious knowledge, they were bleſſed with the light of divine revelation wherever they were diſpoſed to make a proper uſe of it.

Very few, however, appear to have had this diſpoſition ; and therefore God was pleaſed to adopt Abraham and part of his poſterity as the race from which the great Redeemer was to ſpring, to train them up by degrees in ſuitable no­tions of their Creator, and gradually to open up to them, as they were able to receive it, the nature of that diſpenſation under which “ all the nations of the earth were to be bleſſed in the patriarch’s ſeed, (ſee Prophecy, n⁰ 13). For this purpoſe, he held frequent correſpondence with them ; and to ſtrengthen and confirm their faith, to fix and preſerve their dependence on the one God of heaven and earth, he daily gave them new promises, each more magnifi­cent than that which preceded it. He blessed Iſaac, miraculouſly increaſed his ſubſtance, and soon made him the en­vy of the neighbouring princes. He foretold the condition of his two ſons, renewed the promiſe made to Abraham, and bleſſed the adopted ſon Jacob, with whom he condeſcended to converſe as he had converſed with Abraham and Iſaac ; renewing to him the great promiſe ; bestowing upon him all kinds of riches ; and impreſſing ſuch terror upon all the cities which were round about him as prevented them from hurting either him or his family.

All this was indeed little enough to keep alive even in the mind of Jacob a tolerable ſenſe of duty and dependence on his Creator. After the firſt viſion he is ſurpriſed, and heſitates, ſeeming inclined to make a kind or ſtipulation with his Maker. "If (ſays he) God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, ſo that I come again to my father’s houſe in peace, *then* ſhall the Lord be my God@@\*.” It ap­pears not to have been till after many ſuch revelations, bleſſings, and deliverances, and being reminded of the vow which on this occaſion he had vowed, that he let himſelf in good earneſt to reform the religion of his own family, and to drive out from it all ſtrange gods@@\*. So little able, in that age, were the boaſted powers of the human mind to preſerve in the world juſt notions of the unity of the God­head, that we ſee there was a neceſſity for very frequent re­velations, to prevent even the beſt men from running head­long into polytheism and idolatry.

Thus was God obliged to treat even with the patriarchs themlelves, by way of poſitive covenant and expreſs com­pact ; to promiſe to be their God if they would be his peo­ple ; to give them a portion of temporal bleſſings as intro­ductory to future and ſpiritual ones ; and to engage them in his ſervice by immediate rewards, till they could be led on to higher views, and prepared by the bringing in of a better hope to worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth. With regard to what may be called the *theory* of religion, mankind were yet ſcarcely got out of their childhood. Some extraordinary perſons indeed occaſionally appeared in different countries, ſuch as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Job, with many others, who had a more enlarged proſpect of things, and entertain­ed more worthy ſentiments of the divine diſpenſations and of the ultimate end of man ; but these were far ſuperior to the times in which they lived, and appear to have been pro­videntially raised up to prevent the ſavage ſtate and ſavage idolatry from becoming univerſal among men. See Sa­vage.

The worſhip which was practiſed by thoſe holy men appears to have conſiſted principally of the three kinds of ſacrifice mentioned elſewhere (ſee Sacrifice) ; to which were doubtleſs added prayers and praiſes, with the more va­luable oblation of pure hands and devout hearts. Such of them as looked forward to a future redemption, and had any tolerable notion of the means by which it was to be ef­fected, as Abraham certainly had, muſt have been ſensible that the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin, and that their ſacrifices were therefore valuable only when they were offered in faith of that great promiſe, “ which they,

@@@[m]\* See Asiatic Researches and Newt. Chron.

@@@[m]\* Job iv. 12, 15, 16, 17, vi. 10. xxiii. 12.

@@@[m]\* Gen. xxviii. 20, 21.

@@@[m]\* Gen. xxxv. 2.

@@@(U) There are great disputes among the learned reſpecting the antiquity and the author of the *book* of Job, and whe­ther it be a hiſtory of events, or a poem which has its foundation in hiſtory. All ſober men, however, are agreed, that there really was ſuch a *perſon* as Job, eminent for patience under uncommon ſufferings ; and that he was of very remote antiquity. The LXX. give us the names of his father and mother, and ſay that he was the fifth from Abraham.