

Moses Stuart and the Unintentional Secularization of American Biblical Studies

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■ Abstract

Building off recent work investigating the development of modern biblical criticism, this essay argues that the broadly conservative scholar Moses Stuart (1780–1852) should be seen as playing a key but unintentional role in the secularization of biblical studies in nineteenth-century America. Stuart played this role in several ways. Hermeneutically, he imbibed and popularized naturalistic assumptions summed up in the maxim that the Bible should be interpreted like any other book. Educationally, when arguing for the curricular importance of Hebrew studies, he justified the Bible's importance not via its role as Scripture, but primarily via its place as excellent classical literature. Stuart's example thereby suggests that, in studying the demise of Scripture's sacred status in the modern era, scholars must pay attention not only to the attacks of the Bible's liberal critics but also to the methods and assumptions of its conservative defenders.

■ Keywords

Moses Stuart, hermeneutics, common sense realism, Christian Hebraism, Benjamin Jowett, history of biblical interpretation

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■ Introduction

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Christian Scriptures were transformed from a “scriptural Bible” into an “academic Bible.”¹ As the Bible was read through increasingly naturalistic lenses, biblical scholarship abandoned the roles of theology and divine authorship as decisively important for interpreting the sacred text. Ancient Israel, in turn, became seen as a classical civilization, to be studied in the same way as Greece, Rome, Persia, and Babylon.

While most scholars broadly agree on the basic *fact* of this transformation, the *way* in which such a transformation took place in various contexts remains understudied. This essay will argue that Moses Stuart (1780–1852), longtime professor of biblical science at Andover Seminary, played a key role in transporting and fostering the rise of the “academic Bible” in American biblical scholarship. Stuart, however, has been almost entirely overlooked in this regard. Despite one scholar’s recent judgment that he was “for the first thirty years of the nineteenth century . . . the preeminent Protestant biblical scholar in the United States,” few studies on Stuart exist, and none that assess his broader role in American biblical scholarship.²

Yet Stuart, I will contend—though throughout his career he attempted to defend the Bible’s divinely given authority—in fact laid intellectual and methodological seeds for the Bible’s demise as a sacred text, particularly in American biblical scholarship. Although Stuart held the Bible in highest esteem, his own assumptions fostered modes of thought that would eventually lead to conclusions starkly opposite his own—that the Bible was not sacred Scripture but merely another ancient text like those of Homer or Tacitus. Stuart planted these seeds in at least two ways: first, through promoting and popularizing a series of hermeneutical assumptions that were essentially naturalistic in nature, and second, through “classicizing” the Bible by defending its importance via its similarity to ancient Greek and Roman literature.

This is therefore a study in unintended consequences—a study of how a defender of the Bible’s authority inadvertently undermined that very authority in his own practice and teaching. Broadly speaking, this suggests that much of the Bible’s demise as sacred Scripture in the modern era came about not only from the attacks of the Bible’s liberal critics but also, unintentionally, through the methods and assumptions of Scripture’s most ardent defenders.³

¹ Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Cf. Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

² Shalom Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue: Hebrew and the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 142.

³ This is the basic thesis of several recent works, most notably those by Michael Legaspi (see n. 1) and Michael Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles Over Authority and Interpretation in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Lee focuses on how the process documented here was in fact well underway already in 18th-cent. America, while Legaspi focuses on German scholar J. D. Michaelis and how, in his scholarship, he came to view Israel as one classical civilization

In what follows, I will argue this thesis in two parts. First, I will explore Stuart's hermeneutics. Particular attention will be paid to Stuart's role as a translator and promoter of German higher criticism and the naturalistic hermeneutical assumptions that Stuart imbibed from German scholarship. Second, I will examine several ways in which Stuart, in arguing for the necessity of studying Hebrew in the college curriculum, in fact ended up "classicizing" the Bible by justifying its importance in relation to classical Greece and Rome. Through the hermeneutical naturalism he promoted and his efforts to classicize the Bible, Stuart unintentionally sowed seeds that would undermine the Bible's place as sacred Scripture in later generations of biblical scholars.

■ Hermeneutics, Common Sense Realism, and Methodological Naturalism

At the end of his life, Moses Stuart left behind a significant but convoluted legacy. Contemporaries viewed him in a variety of contradictory ways—as a closet Unitarian,⁴ as an entirely orthodox theologian and master teacher,⁵ and as an apostate from the received Calvinistic orthodoxy of the past.⁶ Contemporary scholars have, in turn, painted their own competing portraits. Stuart has been seen as a conservative defender of Calvinistic orthodoxy,⁷ as an all-around leading biblical scholar,⁸ and as the father of incorporating German higher criticism into American biblical studies.⁹ This competing set of interpretations—perhaps one reason Stuart's role in American biblical scholarship has been undervalued—is, in part, due to the eclectic nature of his life.

Educated at Yale under Timothy Dwight and converted in a revival several years later, Stuart served as a minister at the First Church in New Haven from 1806 to 1810 when he was then called to teach at Andover Theological Seminary, where he served until 1848. Andover, then only recently formed in opposition to Harvard's turn to Unitarianism, was a center of the New England theology—a

among others. The contribution of this essay, then, is to show the ways in which Stuart contributed to the process of the demise of Scripture's sacred status in the American context.

⁴ Unitarianism was a charge repeatedly leveled at Stuart in his own day. See Moses Stuart, "Letter to the Editor, On the Study of the German Language," *Christian Review* 6 (1841) 446–71, at 451–52, 455–57.

⁵ Edwards A. Park, *A Discourse Delivered at the Funeral of Professor Moses Stuart* (Boston: Tappan & Whittemore, 1852); William Adams, *A Discourse on the Life and Services of Professor Moses Stuart* (New York: John F. Trow, 1852).

⁶ Charles Hodge, a contemporary, notably viewed Stuart in this way, founding the *Biblical Repertory* to combat what he saw as the "New Theology" of Stuart and others. See Roy A. Harrisville, *Pandora's Box Opened: An Examination and Defense of the Historical-Critical Method and Its Master Practitioners* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 162.

⁷ Harrisville, *Pandora's Box*, 148–61.

⁸ Goldman, *God's Sacred Tongue*, 142.

⁹ Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969) 45.

moderate Calvinism that softened Jonathan Edwards's teaching on the imputation of Adam's sin and his idealist metaphysics.¹⁰ Yet Andover's articles maintained that Stuart must be "an orthodox and consistent Calvinist" who would train men for the ministry and defend orthodox Calvinism against its theological foes.¹¹ At Andover, Stuart taught the full range of biblical subjects, including Greek, Hebrew, Old and New Testaments, the Septuagint, and hermeneutics.¹² In hermeneutics, in particular, I will argue that he made significant contributions that would go on to have a series of unintended consequences.¹³

Specifically, while Stuart himself had a high regard for the complete authority of the Bible, his own teaching, practice, and translational work fostered a hermeneutical naturalism as the correct method of interpretation. In this way, Stuart deviated significantly from his Calvinist predecessors. In seeking to make the Bible plain and accessible to all, Stuart removed the role of faith and the Spirit from biblical exegesis, thereby making the Bible into a book like all others.

Stuart's key hermeneutical influences in this regard came from Germany. While biblical scholars of the generation after Stuart, such as Charles Hodge, frequently studied in Germany, in Stuart's early teaching career conversance with German scholarship was virtually nonexistent among American biblical scholars.¹⁴ Yet despite this lack of precedent, Stuart taught himself German and became a devoted reader of all the German scholarship he could manage to acquire. One work that became centrally important for him was Johann August Ernesti's 1761 *Institutio Interpretis Novi Testamenti*. Stuart himself translated a greatly abridged version

¹⁰ E. Brooks Holifield notes that "Edwardians," the inheritors of the theology of Jonathan Edwards, divided into three distinct schools at this time: the "New England theology" associated with Andover Theological Seminary, the "New Haven theology" of Yale University, and the "Oberlin theology" of the Ohio River valley. See E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 341–44. Stuart became known for his opposition to the Unitarianism of William Ellery Channing, concerning which, see Jeffrey A. Wilcox, "'A More Thorough Trinitarian': Moses Stuart, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and the Trinitarian Debate in Antebellum New England," in *Schleiermacher's Influences on American Thought and Religious Life* (ed. Jeffrey A. Wilcox, Terrence N. Tice, and Catherine L. Kelsey; 2 vols.; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013) 1:159–89.

¹¹ Leonard Woods, *History of the Andover Theological Seminary* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1885) 257. Professors further had to pledge, "I will maintain and inculcate the Christian faith, as expressed in the [seminary's] Creed . . . and in opposition, not only to Atheists and Infidels, but to Jews, Papists, Mahometans, Arians, Pelagians, Antinomians, Arminians, Socinians, Sabellians, Unitarians, and Universalists; and to all heresies and errors, antient [*sic*] or modern, which may be opposed to the Gospel of CHRIST, or hazardous to the souls of men." See the "Associate Statutes" of Andover Seminary, found in idem, 255–69, at 260.

¹² A description of the extensive duties of the professor of "Sacred Literature" is given in the original "Constitution of the Theological Seminary," found in Woods, *History of the Andover Theological Seminary*, 235.

¹³ While my interpretation differs in some respects, a concise overview of Stuart's hermeneutics can be found in John Giltner, *Moses Stuart: The Father of Biblical Science in America* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 45–55.

¹⁴ Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 8–11.

of this work into English for classroom teaching and published it in 1822, as he could find no other hermeneutical textbooks that he found sufficiently compelling.¹⁵ Later, Stuart went on to promote many of Ernesti's central ideas in various articles in *The Biblical Repository*.

While Ernesti's manual for interpretation was a sprawling work of some 450 pages, Stuart condensed it to a quarter of its size, picking out the sections he thought most important and including his own comments along the way. Centrally these sections included Ernesti's listing of various rules for exegesis. Ernesti's sixteenth rule would have a long and contested afterlife, one that continues to the present day. After explaining that the meaning of words should be determined from common, obvious usage, and that the grammatical sense is the one true sense, Ernesti wrote in rule sixteen: "And because all these things are common to both divine and human books, it is evident that the sense of the words in the sacred books is not obtained or discovered (as far as human effort is concerned) in a different manner than it usually is or should be in human books."¹⁶ Stuart translated this rather lengthy sentence in a loose but consequential fashion: "The Scriptures are to be investigated by the same rules as other books."¹⁷ This pithy rendering accurately sums up a key maxim of Stuart's hermeneutics and one that he would repeat many times. In an 1832 article in *The Biblical Repository* on the science of interpretation, Stuart concluded his exposition once more with the key axiom, "The Bible is to be interpreted in the same way as other books are."¹⁸ If this were not so, Stuart claimed, only inspired people would be able to understand Scripture at all, thereby negating its purpose as intelligible revelation from God.

Ernesti, to be sure, was not the first to promote such a hermeneutic, a fact of which Stuart himself was well-aware.¹⁹ Earlier thinkers such as Joseph Scaliger, Hugo

¹⁵ Johann August Ernesti, *Institutio Interpretis Novi Testamenti* (Leipzig, 1761), translated as Moses Stuart, *Elements of Interpretation: Translated from the Latin of J. A. Ernesti and Accompanied by Notes, with an Appendix Containing Extracts from Morus, Beck and Keil* (Andover, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1822). Stuart's translation went through numerous reprints. Stuart begins his preface by noting his reasons for publishing the book: "The publication of the following work, in its present form, originated from the want of a text-book, in our country, on the science of interpretation" (iii). Cf. Moses Stuart, "Are the Same Principles of Interpretation to Be Applied to the Scriptures as to Other Books?" *The Biblical Repository* 2 (1832) 124–37, at 124. On Ernesti and his apologetic aims, with a brief glance at his reception in Stuart, see John Sailhamer, "Johann August Ernesti: The Role of History in Biblical Interpretation," *JETS* 44 (2001) 193–206.

¹⁶ "Et quoniam haec omnia communia sunt libris divinis et humanis; patet, non alio modo vel quaeri vel reperiri sensum verborum in libris sacris, quoad humana opera intercedit, quam quo in humanis vel solet vel debet"; Johann August Ernesti, *Institutio Interpretis Novi Testamenti* (5th ed.; Leipzig, 1809) 27. I have cited this edition, as it is the one Stuart translated from in 1822. See Stuart, *Elements of Interpretation*, iii.

¹⁷ Stuart, *Elements of Interpretation*, 15.

¹⁸ Stuart, "Are the Same Principles," 130.

¹⁹ "Nearly all treatises on hermeneutics, which have been written since the days of Ernesti, have laid it down as a maxim which cannot be controverted, that the Bible is to be interpreted in the same manner, i.e. by the same principles, as all other books. Writers are not wanting, previously to the period in which Ernesti lived, who have maintained the same thing"; Moses Stuart, "Are the

Grotius, and Baruch Spinoza had all in various ways sought to de-confessionalize biblical interpretation, a process that included seeing Scripture as a historical document similar in some ways to other books.²⁰ Ernesti further had precedents even in his specific wording of interpreting the Bible like any other book, a phrase that perhaps originates in the work of Jean Turretini.²¹ Yet Ernesti, at least as Stuart understood him, was one of the first to systematize hermeneutics as a science and to set forth clearly the central nature of this interpretive axiom.²² And it is through Ernesti, via Stuart, that this axiom was popularized in American biblical scholarship.

In the context of American religious pluralism, or at least the pluralism of various Christian denominations, Stuart used his axiom of interpreting the Bible like any other book to fend off what he viewed as arbitrary exegetical practices and to create a common interpretive ground based on grammar, philology, and history, in which scholars of all theological commitments could converse and debate. He was pressed to this especially in response to the democratizing impulses of the Revolutionary War and the Second Great Awakening, which had led to traditional Christian authority structures quickly losing their plausibility by the early to mid-nineteenth century.²³ In Stuart's day, room was rapidly being made for individuals to interpret the Bible on their own, a situation that led to a cacophony of differing hermeneutical approaches. This coincided with attacks on the historical reliability of the Bible coming especially from German critics abroad. By relying on the empirical methods of history and philology, Stuart hoped to rebuild trust in the authority and singular meaning of the biblical text and to curb interpretive pluralism. In the last instance, he taught that "our ultimate appeal then is to the laws of Exegesis."²⁴

Contemporary scholarship frequently points to Benjamin Jowett's 1860 "On the Interpretation of Scripture" as a watershed moment in the history of biblical exegesis for its promotion of the hermeneutical presupposition that the Bible is to be interpreted like any other book.²⁵ Yet Stuart was vigorously promoting such a

Same Principles," 124.

²⁰ Helpful here are H. J. M. Nellen, "Growing Tension between Church Doctrines and Critical Exegesis of the Old Testament," in *The Nineteenth Century* (ed. Magne Sæbø; vol. 3.1. of *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 802–26; Steven Nadler, "The Bible Hermeneutics of Baruch de Spinoza," in *ibid.*, 827–36. It is noteworthy, however, that earlier thinkers such as Grotius still believed that Scripture possessed deeper meanings beyond solely a literal-historical sense, something which Stuart adamantly denied. See Nellen, "Growing Tension," 812–14; Stuart, "Are the Same Principles."

²¹ Moberly traces the wording to Jean Turretini's *De Sacrae Scripturae interpretandae methodo tractatus bipartitus* (Trajecti Thuviorum, 1728); see R. W. L. Moberly, "Interpret the Bible Like Any Other Book"? Requiem for an Axiom," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4 (2010) 91–110, at 93.

²² "Ernesti's work was one of the *first* respectable efforts, to reduce the principles of interpretation to a science"; Stuart, *Elements of Interpretation*, v (italics in original).

²³ See Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty*, 173–84; Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) esp. 162–89.

²⁴ Moses Stuart, "Lectures on Hermeneutics, 1 and 2," Moses Stuart Papers, Andover Newton Theological School Library, as quoted in Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty*, 174.

²⁵ Benjamin Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Essays and Reviews* (London: John

principle already in his 1822 translation of Ernesti, which he used to teach hundreds of students, and in various published articles. Given his popular abridgement of Ernesti's work, not to mention Stuart's own teaching and voluminous publications, Stuart should be given pride of place in popularizing for American scholarship the notion of interpreting the Bible like any other book.²⁶ The idea would go on to be repeated countless times by others in the English-speaking world including, most notably, Jowett.

The results of Stuart's central hermeneutical axiom were a key series of assumptions that he propounded about the task of interpretation. For Stuart, there existed universal laws of exegesis which, in theory, all sound interpreters could agree on. These universally agreeable laws of interpretation existed, since interpretation "is an art which has its foundation in the laws of our intellectual and rational nature, and is coeval and connate with this nature."²⁷ Indeed, Stuart identified the image of God with the "rational and immortal part" of the human creature, and this shared rationality, in his mind, led to shared and agreeable laws of exegesis.²⁸

The obvious problem, however, was that such agreed-upon laws of exegesis were not actually evident in the variety of hermeneutical practices adhered to by interpreters. How then was the good interpreter to judge between various hermeneutical schema? The answer lay in the coordination of two key concepts: reason and common sense. Stuart confidently proclaimed: "The origin and basis of all true hermeneutical science are the reason and common sense of men, at all times and in all ages, applied to the interpretation of language either spoken or written."²⁹

These two key concepts operated in distinct ways, yet simultaneously with one another. For Stuart, the role of reason was to judge between different hermeneutical approaches. A sound use of reason would, almost inevitably, lead the interpreter to see literal, historical exegesis as the only accurate path.³⁰ Literal exegesis was

W. Parker and Son, 1860) 330–433. Jowett is used most famously in David Steinmetz's article "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *ThTo* 37 (1980) 27–38. A more recent work, building off Steinmetz, that uses Jowett as a launching point is Keith Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018) 172–74. While not explicitly citing Steinmetz or Jowett, Craig Carter begins the first page of his *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018) by deconstructing the statement "We should interpret the Bible like any other book" (ix). A constructive biblical-theological rebuttal to this idea that notes its prehistory in Ernesti, but neglects the role of Stuart, is offered in Moberly, "Interpret the Bible Like Any Other Book?"

²⁶ Stuart's *Elements of Interpretation* went through second (London, 1822), third (Andover, 1838), and fourth (Andover and New York, 1842) editions.

²⁷ Stuart, "Are the Same Principles," 126.

²⁸ Moses Stuart, "On the Alleged Obscurity of Prophecy," *The Biblical Repository* 2 (1832) 217–45, at 222; cf. Stuart, "Are the Same Principles," 125–26, 129.

²⁹ Moses Stuart, *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Andover, MA: Allen, Morrill, & Wardwell, 1842) 9.

³⁰ Telling here are two statements by Stuart: "To the question which is the test by which different principles of hermeneutics are to be tried, I answer without hesitation, Reason"; Moses Stuart,

eminently “reasonable,” since, for Stuart, it was what we all implicitly practiced daily in our communication with one another. Furthermore, this had been so since time immemorial. The correct principles of interpretation were instinctively practiced in the garden of Eden, in the antediluvian period, and down to the present day, so that all people were in fact good interpreters of one another’s language. To deny this was simply to ignore reality. Therefore, Scripture should be interpreted literally as an intelligible revelation from God, and to do otherwise was to malign the nature of revelation itself.³¹

If reason allowed the interpreter to distinguish between competing approaches to exegesis, common sense then played the simultaneous role of verifying our reason with its instinctive hermeneutical impulses. Stuart here, like many of his contemporaries, betrayed the influence of the Common Sense reasoning of Scottish thinkers such as Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) and Thomas Reid (1710–1796).³² In this school of thought, there are certain basic assumptions that we all implicitly operate on, even if we intellectually doubt them or cannot empirically verify them. Morality belongs to these assumptions, but for Stuart, so do good hermeneutical principles. Indeed, these principles “are a consequence of the practical, exegetical *instinct* (I had almost said) of the human race.”³³

If Stuart had stopped here, we might not know that he was a man of faith at all. However, it is precisely once common sense and reason have played their role that Stuart’s hermeneutics take an interesting turn, a turn to religious feeling and sympathy. Here we see a certain Romantic influence on Stuart’s thought, as he believed that the good interpreter must be able to sympathize with the author, to enter into their feelings, and to have the same spirit about themselves as the author did:

Who, for example, can read and fully understand Milton and Homer, without the spirit and soul of poetry within him which will enable him to enter into their views and feelings? . . . [The interpreter must have] a poetic feeling in order to read Milton with success, or a mathematical feeling in order to study intelligibly Newton and La Place.³⁴

“Lecture on Hermeneutics” Lecture 1, cited in Mark Granquist, “The Role of ‘Common Sense’ in the Hermeneutics of Moses Stuart,” *HTR* 83 (1999) 305–19, at 312. Also, “[Reason cannot act as the] *interpreter* of revelation, and not in any case as a *legislator*. Reason can only judge of the appropriate laws of exegesis, and direct them in order to discover simply what the sacred writers meant to assert”; Stuart, “Letters to Dr. Channing on the Trinity,” Letter 1, pp. 10–11, quoted in Granquist, “Common Sense,” 313 (italics in original).

³¹ Stuart, “Are the Same Principles,” 124–26.

³² Mark Granquist shows the decisive influence of Common Sense Realism on Stuart in Granquist, “Common Sense.” For the role of Common Sense reasoning more broadly in this period, see Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 93–113.

³³ Moses Stuart, “Remarks on Jahn’s Definition of Interpretation,” *The Biblical Repository* 1 (1831), quoted in Granquist, “Common Sense,” 314 (italics in original).

³⁴ Stuart, “Are the Same Principles,” 135.

In the same way, the interpreter of Scripture must have a religious feeling and sympathy in common with the biblical authors. This would enable one to best enter into their spirit and modes of thought and thereby to understand them.

While this Romantic turn might seem to abandon Stuart's naturalistic bent, it in fact does nothing of the sort. Rather, Stuart's turn to feeling and sympathy is best understood as a corollary of his Common Sense philosophy.³⁵ Entering into the biblical author's feelings through religious sympathy was simply a way to make use of the common instinctual presuppositions of a shared human nature. It was to exploit what one held in common with the author as a means of achieving epistemological clarity. Entering into an author's "views, sympathies, and feelings" rendered the interpreter best suited for the task at hand.³⁶

For Stuart, several exegetical conclusions followed from interpreting the Bible in the same way as any other book, and I will note two by way of illustration. First, Stuart's hermeneutics determined his understanding of biblical prophecy.³⁷ In the nineteenth century, nearly all critical scholars either believed prophecy to have been written after the fact, as they denied that biblical authors could indeed have any divinely given foreknowledge of future events, or they otherwise stressed that the meaning of predictions in the Hebrew Bible did not align with their purported New Testament fulfillments. In response to this, Ernst Hengstenberg (1802–1869), the leading conservative German biblical scholar, argued that biblical prophecy was in fact clear only to the eyes of faith, and obscure in nature to all others. Its true meaning could only be fully understood after the fact.³⁸ Hengstenberg's views were promoted by an English translation of a forty-five page selection from his *Christologie des Alten Testaments*, published in 1832 in *The Biblical Repository*.³⁹ For Hengstenberg, while prophecy in the Hebrew Bible was obscure, Jesus and the New Testament authors were the true interpreters of this prophecy.

Stuart, despite sharing much common ground with Hengstenberg, believed the German scholar to be gravely mistaken. With Hengstenberg, Stuart believed that Jesus did in fact fulfill numerous ancient Israelite prophecies and that the New Testament writers were right in reading the Hebrew Bible in that way. He further agreed that there was only a single, literal meaning to the biblical text, including

³⁵ For this, see esp. Granquist, "Common Sense," 315–16.

³⁶ Moses Stuart, "Hints Respecting Commentaries upon the Scriptures," *The Biblical Repository* 3 (1833) 130–85, at 172.

³⁷ For this, see also Harrisville, *Pandora's Box*, 150–58, who offers further examples of Stuart's attacks on Hengstenberg's views.

³⁸ The prime work of Hengstenberg's that Stuart referred to in this regard was Ernst Hengstenberg, *Christologie des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: L. Oehmigke, 1829). Cf. Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 51–52. For Hengstenberg, see Rudolf Smend, "A Conservative Approach in Opposition to a Historical-Critical Interpretation: E. W. Hengstenberg and Franz Delitzsch," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament* (ed. Sæbø), 3.1:494–520; M. A. Deuschle, *Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung des kirchlichen Konservatismus im Preußen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

³⁹ Ernst Hengstenberg, "On the Nature of Prophecy," *The Biblical Repository* 2 (trans. James F. Warner; 1832) 138–73 (see esp. 166–73).

the writings of the scriptural prophets.⁴⁰ Contrary to Hengstenberg's opponents, Stuart also argued that the New Testament fulfillments did indeed align with the original meaning of the prophetic predictions.⁴¹ Yet Stuart nevertheless thought that Hengstenberg's concept of an obscure prophecy undermined the nature of revelation itself. He therefore responded in the very next issue of the *Repository* with a sizable article directly rebutting Hengstenberg's position.⁴² If God gave a prophecy that no one at the time could understand, Stuart argued, then what was the point of giving it? Furthermore, why would the prophet utter his words in a state of ecstasy (as Hengstenberg claimed) if God had created us as rational beings? In Stuart's view, then, the prophets were not ecstatic figures but instead "the most rational, and intelligent, and free" of all beings.⁴³ Any misunderstandings of prophecy rested with the modern interpreter and not with an alleged obscurity in the original utterance itself. A decade later, in his *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy*, Stuart would again publish on the topic, and once more singled out Hengstenberg's views for attack.⁴⁴

What is interesting here is how Stuart's hermeneutical convictions led him to quarrel in print and at length with one of Germany's most respected conservative scholars, one who would seem to have been capable of being one of Stuart's great allies. Instead, however, of taking alliance with one of Germany's few conservative scholars, Stuart felt a need to attack him in print for impairing the fundamental intelligibility of the biblical writings.

A second result of Stuart's hermeneutics came in his assessment of the rising discipline of geology as it related to the creation days of Genesis 1.⁴⁵ An old Yale friend of Stuart's, the geologist Benjamin Silliman—also an evangelical converted under Timothy Dwight—had argued in print that the "days" of Gen 1 were not twenty-four hours in length but that each consisted of an indeterminate period of time. Several years later Edward Hitchcock, a notable pupil of Silliman's, also argued from his geological convictions but this time claimed that there was a temporal gap indicated in the first sentence of Genesis. While the six days could be indeed twenty-four hours, they came only after an indeterminate period of creation. Arguing that the Hebrew *wāw* in Gen 1:2 should be translated as "afterward," Hitchcock read the opening of Genesis as follows: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. *Afterward* the earth was desolate."⁴⁶

⁴⁰ For Hengstenberg on the single sense of prophecy, see *ibid.*, 162–63.

⁴¹ Stuart, "Alleged Obscurity," 219.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁴ Moses Stuart, *Hints on the Interpretation of Prophecy*, esp. the section "Is Prophecy Unintelligible?" on pp. 47–66. Two editions were published in 1842, with a third, enlarged edition appearing in 1851. Stuart's views on the intelligibility of prophecy did not change between the editions.

⁴⁵ For an overview of this debate, see Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 66–74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 70 (emphasis added). The works in question are Benjamin Silliman, "The Consistency of Geology with Sacred History," in Robert Bakewell, *An Introduction to Geology* (ed. Benjamin Silliman; 2nd US ed.; New Haven: H. Howe, 1833) 389–466; Edward Hitchcock, "The Connection

Stuart responded strongly, arguing from his grammatical-historical hermeneutic and the pride of place he gave to philology in all exegetical questions. While he was not opposed to geology in principle, he nevertheless believed that it was not allowable “to violate the laws of exegesis in order to accommodate a geological theory.”⁴⁷ What upset him above all was the philological arguments made by the geologists, who even drew on German scholarship that Stuart claimed they clearly did not understand. He castigated them: “The digging of rocks and the digging of Hebrew roots are not as yet precisely the same operation.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, geologists were clearly not even yet in agreement among themselves as to the relative age of the earth. Therefore, their theories did not deserve serious consideration. Thus, while Stuart valued the natural sciences, his insistence on literal, philologically bound exegesis in this instance led him to insist on a strict six-day creation, a position that once again set him apart from other theological conservatives such as Silliman and Hitchcock.

With these two examples of Stuart’s hermeneutics in mind, several conclusions stand out in stark relief. First, Stuart’s naturalistic hermeneutic led him not only to controversial exegetical conclusions but also, even in theory, clearly deviated from the Calvinist tradition that he sought to uphold. Notably absent in Stuart’s hermeneutical thought is any important role for faith or the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process. The Westminster Standards had endorsed the perspicuity of Scripture in matters pertaining to salvation but nevertheless noted the need for a divine “enabling” to understand Scripture correctly. They further noted that not all things in Scripture were “plain in themselves.”⁴⁹ Similarly, John Calvin, frequently quoted by Stuart, had written that “no man can hesitate to acknowledge that he is able to understand the mysteries of God, only in so far as illuminated by his grace.”⁵⁰ Stuart, on the other hand, held to a contrary opinion: “I cannot see of what use the Scriptures are, provided a renewed revelation or illumination is necessary.”⁵¹ In his quest to defend the intelligibility of biblical revelation, Stuart tended to emphasize the inherent perspicuity of *all* Scripture, provided the right tools and principles of interpretation were utilized by a rational interpreter.⁵²

between Geology and the Mosaic History of the Creation,” *The Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 6 (1835) 261–332.

⁴⁷ Moses Stuart, cited in Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 69.

⁴⁸ Moses Stuart, “A Critical Examination of Some Passages in Gen. 1; with Remarks on Difficulties that Attend Some of the Present Modes of Geological Reasoning,” *The Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 7 (1836) 46–107, at 103, cited in Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 73.

⁴⁹ Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 157; Westminster Confession of Faith I.vi–vii.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006) II.ii.21.

⁵¹ Stuart, “Are the Same Principles,” 130.

⁵² Hengstenberg is again an instructive counterpoint here. His position is aptly characterized by his pithy remark, “Es sollen eben nicht alle die Schrift verstehen”; E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christologie des Alten Testaments und Commentar über die messianischen Weissagungen* (4 parts in 3 vols.; 2nd ed.; Berlin, 1854–57) 3.2:131.

In a similar fashion, whereas traditionally the inspiration of Scripture was akin to seeing the apostles as “certain and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit,”⁵³ Stuart rejected the dictation theory of inspiration, though not abandoning the idea of inspiration itself. Rather, Stuart’s understanding of biblical inspiration tended to stress the heightened intellect, morality, and rationality of the biblical authors.⁵⁴ The Spirit made the biblical authors the “most rational, and intelligent, and free” of all beings, which only reinforced for Stuart that the interpreter was to use “the fundamental principles of the hermeneutical art” that God had “implanted” within humanity as the means to understanding Scripture’s words.⁵⁵ These principles were simply literal, grammatical-historical exegesis—a naturalistic hermeneutical method based upon a naturalistic understanding of the Bible’s nature and communicative methods.⁵⁶

The axiom “The Bible is to be interpreted in the same way as other books are” therefore led Stuart away from the Calvinistic heritage he sought to defend. While Stuart aimed to fortify the clarity and intelligibility of the biblical text against more critically oriented scholars, he ended up imbibing assumptions that, for many, led to starkly opposite conclusions. In this regard, Benjamin Jowett’s use of the same hermeneutical principle in his 1860 “On the Interpretation of Scripture” forms a telling counterpoint. Jowett’s essay was the seventh and final contribution in *Essays and Reviews*, a highly controversial, theologically liberal British work that attempted to reconcile the Bible with science by denying the reality of miracles, the predictive nature of biblical prophecy, and other traditional Christian beliefs. Interpreting the Bible like any other book, it turned out, was a knife that could cut both ways. While Stuart would have been dismayed to see Scripture jettisoned as an authoritative word from God, later authors used arguments highly similar to his own to do just that. However, it was not only in his hermeneutics that Stuart inadvertently undermined biblical authority. He did so again in another instance—an educational controversy over the necessity of studying biblical Hebrew.

⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.viii.9.

⁵⁴ Stuart, “Alleged Obscurity,” 224, 228–29. Stuart later wrote, “The inspired man ascends an intellectual and moral eminence so high, that his prospect widens almost without bounds, and what is altogether hidden from ordinary men is more or less distinctly within his view”; *A Commentary on the Apocalypse* (2 vols.; Andover, MA: Allen, Morill & Wardwell, 1845) 1:168. In comparing these quotations of Calvin to Stuart, I do not intend thereby to hold up Calvin as the inviolable standard of the Reformed tradition. Rather, I merely use him as a shorthand for designating a general consensus that theologians of this tradition held to. Furthermore, because Stuart himself identified as a “Calvinist” and lauds Calvin not infrequently, the comparison seems apt. For one such instance of Stuart praising Calvin, see Stuart, “Hints Respecting Commentaries,” 147–48.

⁵⁵ The quotes come, respectively, from Stuart, “Alleged Obscurity,” 229, and Stuart, “Are the Same Principles,” 129.

⁵⁶ Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 45–55; Harrisville, *Pandora’s Box*, 150–58.

■ Surrendering Scripture's Sacredness for the Sake of Hebrew Studies

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Hebrew studies in the United States stood in disarray and disrepute. Earlier in the nation's history, Hebrew had formed an integral part of college curriculums, and the first presidents of Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Dartmouth were all known as distinguished and dedicated Christian Hebraists.⁵⁷ Despite such a strong start, Hebrew studies notably declined toward the end of the eighteenth century, with 1785 often being seen as a key turning point—the year in which Harvard made Hebrew an elective in the curriculum. Indeed, Stuart himself later claimed that when he began his tenure at Andover in 1810 only one institution in America taught Hebrew.⁵⁸

At the beginning of Stuart's tenure, Hebrew language studies were rare because they were typically seen as outdated and impractical, with linguistic education being derided as “scholastic” by proponents of Benjamin Franklin's emphasis on practical learning. Yet despite this opposition to the teaching of languages, one area of study still flourishing was classics—the study of ancient Greek and Roman literature.⁵⁹ Indeed, Greek and Latin remained integral parts of the college curriculum.

Concurrent with this neglect of Hebrew in America, however, was a flowering of Hebraism and related orientalist disciplines in Europe. Indeed, the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 and its transliteration by the French prodigy Jean-François Champollion in 1822 was revolutionizing the field of orientalism. At the same time, scholars were beginning to understand the cuneiform writing of Mesopotamia and advances in Akkadian were giving comparative Semitics a fresh injection of life.⁶⁰ Old Testament studies proper were also burgeoning on the Continent, with many of Germany's greatest biblical scholars producing their works in this era—scholars such as J. D. Michaelis, J. G. Eichhorn, Wilhelm Gesenius, and Heinrich Ewald. Stuart, as an early American student of German biblical scholarship, was beginning to reap the fruits of these discoveries in his own learning.

In this context, a joint venture of Congregationalists and Presbyterians founded the American Education Society in 1815. The society aimed to support college

⁵⁷ Goldman, *Hebrew and the Bible*, xvii, xxi.

⁵⁸ “When I began to teach the Hebrew language at this Seminary, there was only one Institution in the country where it was taught; which was Dr. Mason's Divinity School in the city of New York. There were neither lexicons, nor grammars, nor any other parts of a Hebrew apparatus, to be had”; Moses Stuart, *Letter to the Editor of the North American Review, On Hebrew Grammar* (Andover, MA: William H. Wardwell, 1847) 5. Fascinating remarks about the state of Hebrew studies during this period can also be found in Charles C. Torrey, “The Beginnings of Oriental Study at Andover,” *AJSL* 13 (1897) 249–66; Goldman, *God's Sacred Tongue*, 139–40.

⁵⁹ The comment of Goldman summarizes the situation nicely: “The Hebraism of liberal Harvard and of more conservative Yale had waned by the first decade of the nineteenth century. Classicism thrived; Hebraism declined.” Goldman, *God's Sacred Tongue*, 140.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 142; John Sandys-Wunsch, *What Have They Done to the Bible? A History of Modern Biblical Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Glazier, 2005) 292–97; John Ray, *The Rosetta Stone and the Rebirth of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

students intending to enter Christian ministry who needed financial assistance to do so. It gave both scholarships and loans, aiding about two hundred students per year in the early 1820s and expanding its work to aid over one thousand students annually by the end of the 1830s. It was thus the most important source of financial assistance for the training of ministers in New England.⁶¹

Notably, the American Education Society strongly supported the study of the Greek and Roman pagan classics, even withdrawing support from students at Oberlin College and the Oneida Institute when those institutions steered their curriculums away from classical studies.⁶² Yet Stuart, who himself played a role in helping found the society, desired to promote the study, not only of Greek and Latin, but of Hebrew as well. To this end, in 1827 he succeeded in implementing at his own institution what became known as the “Andover Rule”—a requirement that students entering Andover Theological Seminary first pass a basic Hebrew competency exam. This was a crucial change, for it required that Hebrew be taught at the college level, a rare option at the time.⁶³ In order to promote such college-level teaching, Stuart wrote a series of three articles in which he justified Hebrew studies pragmatically, defending their usefulness primarily in relation to the study of the Greek and Roman classics.⁶⁴

Stuart’s first article to the American Education Society came in 1828 and defended the society’s insistence that their ministerial candidates engage in classical studies at the college level.⁶⁵ Stuart noted that some had lately begun to disparage the value of studying the classics, but defended the society’s insistence on training “*able and learned*” ministers for the cause of religion.⁶⁶ He insisted that classical studies were worth the time expended on them, and then went on to give a series of nine reasons why this was the case.

Among Stuart’s reasons were that studying the classics improved the memory of youth, helped them in making logical distinctions, improved linguistic and rhetorical style and eloquence, and aided in an understanding of both the English language and important English literature. Above all, however, Stuart promoted classical studies for the way in which they supported the study of the Bible. In particular, Greek

⁶¹ For a brief overview of this history, see James Findlay, “The Congregationalists and American Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* 17 (1977) 449–54. The fullest analysis is given in Natalie Naylor, “Raising a Learned Ministry: The American Education Society, 1815–1860” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1971).

⁶² Naylor, “Raising a Learned Ministry,” 224–25.

⁶³ The “Andover Rule” of Stuart lasted for a decade, from 1827 to 1837. See Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 22.

⁶⁴ The three articles in view are Moses Stuart, “Letter on the Study of the Classics,” *Quarterly Journal of the American Education Society* 1 (1828) 85–98; idem, “Study of the Hebrew,” *Quarterly Journal of the American Education Society* 2 (1829) 193–204; idem, “Union of Classical and Sacred Studies,” *Quarterly Journal of the American Education Society* 3 (1831) 161–66.

⁶⁵ A brief contextual look at these articles of Stuart’s can be found in Naylor, “Raising a Learned Ministry,” 261–64.

⁶⁶ Stuart, “Letter on the Study of the Classics,” 88 (italics in original).

and Latin made accessible the Greek and Latin fathers of the church, as well as the whole range of classical Greek literature, which was necessary for understanding the language, idioms, and meaning of words in the New Testament. Furthermore, a knowledge of Latin opened the storehouses of contemporary philological learning, as the majority of the best lexicons and grammars were written in that language.⁶⁷

It was only by understanding the original languages of the Scriptures that ministers could defend orthodox doctrine against its detractors and truly learn the riches of Scripture for themselves. Knowledge of the biblical languages would also make ministers able translators for foreign mission fields as well as for the burgeoning western territories of the expanding American nation.⁶⁸ This insistence on the languages was a distinctly Protestant endeavor, capable of keeping the church from falling back into “Romish superstition.”⁶⁹

In his second letter to the American Education Society, Stuart expanded on his defense of the classics but widened his view to mount an explicit case for the teaching of Hebrew at the college level.⁷⁰ He alluded at the outset to the “Andover Rule” and therefore implored that colleges make the study of Hebrew available to their students. In pleading for the importance of Hebrew, Stuart made a crucial and decisive move—he defended Hebrew’s usefulness almost exclusively with reference to classical studies.

Stuart, a self-confessed “enthusiasm for the study of the Bible,” comes across as somewhat desperate in his defense of Hebrew, an important fact, as he appears ready to use all means necessary to promote its importance.⁷¹ Therefore he reminded his readers of the reasons for studying the classics and then proceeded to ask rhetorically: “Is there any one reason here [for studying the classics], which does not apply, in its main force, to the Hebrew Scriptures?”⁷² If Greek and Latin should be studied, then Hebrew certainly should be as well. And if colleges will not promote Hebrew learning, they may as well discard Greek and Latin with it.

After all, Stuart declared, the Hebrew literature of the Scriptures is in fact *the most classical of all literature*. If one values classical literature for its antiquity, then what book is more ancient than the Hebrew Bible? If one values it for its morality, does not Scripture promote the finest system of ethics? What’s more, Stuart declared Hebrew literature also to be the finest source of poetic and stylistic elegance, superior in all respects even to Cicero or Virgil:

⁶⁷ Ibid., esp. 92–93. Stuart gave many of the same reasons in his defense of the usefulness of Hebrew in Stuart, “Study of the Hebrew,” 194–95.

⁶⁸ Stuart, “Letter on the Study of the Classics,” 95, 98. Notably, numerous students of Stuart went on to become Bible translators, with Adoniram Judson being the most well-known among them. For a full list, see Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 27, and the sources cited there.

⁶⁹ Stuart, “Letter on the Study of the Classics,” 96.

⁷⁰ Stuart, “Study of the Hebrew.”

⁷¹ For the quote, see *ibid.*, 213.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 196.

If the poetry, which animated the voice and strung the lyre, ages before Homer or Hesiod tuned their harps, is worthy of regard; in the Hebrew Scriptures, and there only it is to be found.

. . . There is in the original [Hebrew] language itself, a naïveté, an energy, a pathos, a perfect simplicity . . . the language has a brevity, an energy, a descriptive power, a flexibility, in poetry, which render it absolutely an object of wonder and astonishment to a feeling, discerning reader.⁷³

In making this argument, Stuart drew upon the latest advances in biblical study, relying particularly on the work of English scholar Robert Lowth (1710–1787). Lowth, a professor of poetry at Oxford in the mid-eighteenth century, had made massive advances in the study of Hebrew poetry in his *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum*.⁷⁴ There, he famously noted the parallelism in Hebrew poetry and classified it into three categories—synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic. With the work of Lowth as his intellectual support, Stuart could declare that, stylistically, the Hebrew prophets excelled the Greek and Latin writers in every respect.⁷⁵ Therefore, the literature of the ancient Israelites eminently deserved serious study and rigorous instruction at the college level.

Stuart yet again held the Germans up as a model in this regard. The Germans, “those great masters of the science of liberal education,” studied not only Homer and Virgil, Xenophon and Livy, but the Hebrew Scriptures as well.⁷⁶ They thus grasped the nature of the Bible as classical literature. Arguing in this way, Stuart promoted a project similar, though not identical, to one that scholars such as Johann David Michaelis had fostered nearly a century prior. Familiar as he was with Michaelis, Stuart too strove for an “academic ecumenism” in which a shared prioritizing of history and philology could produce shared interpretations of the Bible from across scholars of differing confessional commitments.⁷⁷ He likewise sought to establish a place for the Bible—in his case, particularly the study of the Old Testament—in the modern university. Yet while for the Germans this aligned with their project of state-building and the education of a cultural ruling class, Stuart was animated by

⁷³ Both quotations come from *ibid.*, 197.

⁷⁴ Robert Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1753). An English translation was made by George Gregory in 1787. The work was first published in America in Boston in 1829 as *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.

⁷⁵ Stuart, “Study of the Hebrew,” 197–98. Stuart’s comments here are clearly influenced by the work of Lowth, though he does not explicitly acknowledge this. However, in his third letter to the Society, Stuart does expressly praise Lowth’s “immortal work on Hebrew poetry”; see Stuart, “Union of Classical and Sacred Studies,” 163. Stuart further praises Lowth in his *Hebrew Chrestomathy: Designed as an Introduction to a Course of Hebrew Study* (3rd ed.; Andover, MA: Gould & Newman, 1838) 165.

⁷⁶ Stuart, “Study of the Hebrew,” 198.

⁷⁷ Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture*, 33. This entire paragraph leans upon Legaspi’s work. Stuart’s familiarity with Michaelis is shown by his broad use of him; see, e.g., Moses Stuart, *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language* (Andover, MA: Flagg & Gould, 1828) vi; *idem*, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1850) 18, 313, 460; *idem*, *Critical History and Defense of the Old Testament Canon* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1849) 57, 59, 73, 102, 318.

differing forces—namely, his theologically infused enthusiasm for the superiority of the Bible and his missionary desire for translators to render it into the world’s numerous languages.⁷⁸ He therefore stated his goal with some gusto: “*Classics* will not, I trust, at some future day, mean merely *heathen* authors. It will comprise the SACRED BOOKS . . . these most important of all *Classics*.”⁷⁹

Importantly, what Stuart defended in writing, he also backed up by example. In 1829, the same year in which he wrote his defense of the study of Hebrew, he also published the first edition of his *Hebrew Chrestomathy*.⁸⁰ While Stuart had already published multiple editions of his own Hebrew grammar, the *Hebrew Chrestomathy* was his first endeavor to adapt the chrestomathy form of study—long used for learning Greek and Latin—to Hebrew.⁸¹ In this type of work, the author compiled a series of passages in gradually increasing difficulty, followed by grammatical notes and annotations. In his preface to the work, Stuart noted that many esteemed European scholars, including J. G. Eichhorn and others, rejected the usefulness of the chrestomathy format for teaching Hebrew. Yet Stuart defended his *Chrestomathy* with reference to the widespread usage of Latin and Greek chrestomathies, even declaring that his own work would allow students to make faster progress in Hebrew than anyone could hope to make in Greek or Latin.⁸² In all likelihood then, Stuart’s publication of his *Chrestomathy* was no mere pedagogical endeavor. Rather, given the fact that it was published at the same time that Stuart was busy arguing for putting Hebrew back into the college curriculum, the *Chrestomathy* represents an implicit attempt to place Hebrew alongside Greek and Latin in both linguistic similarity and in educational importance.

In his *Chrestomathy* as well as in his letters to the American Education Society, Stuart relentlessly defended the importance of studying Hebrew. What is most noteworthy, however, is not the fact that he promoted Hebraic studies, as others had done so before him, but rather the *way* in which he did so. Rather than arguing for studying the sacred tongue by virtue of its intrinsic importance as one of the scriptural languages, Stuart felt compelled to promote the study of Hebrew by placing it along something already widely acknowledged as important—the study of classical Greek and Latin literature. He therefore defended the value of the Bible not primarily by its being qualitatively different than all other books, as the

⁷⁸ For biblical education as state-building, see Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture*. For Stuart’s zeal for foreign missions and its impact upon his work as an educator, see Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 27–28; Stuart, “Letter on the Study of the Classics,” 95–98.

⁷⁹ Stuart, “Letter on the Study of the Classics,” 96 (italics in original).

⁸⁰ Moses Stuart, *Hebrew Chrestomathy: Designed as the First Volume of a Course of Hebrew Study* (Andover, MA: Flagg & Gould, 1829).

⁸¹ The *Chrestomathy* later went through second (1832) and third (1838) editions. Stuart had published an elementary Hebrew grammar in 1813 and a more substantial grammar in 1821. The latter work went through numerous further editions and expansions. See Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 137–38.

⁸² Stuart, *Hebrew Chrestomathy*, iii–viii.

Christian tradition typically had done, but rather by its being the best and most ancient book among many.

While Stuart's wish would flower for a short time, his classicizing of the Bible laid the groundwork for dismissing the relevance of faith for biblical studies and for the conversion of the Bible from being Scripture into being just another ancient text for dispassionate intellectual study. As Michael Legaspi has written of the parallel situation in Germany: "As the foundation for Jewish and Christian scriptural canons, the Old Testament held sway over vast cultures and territories for millennia. But as the remnant of a classic Eastern civilization, it held the interest of scholars for only a few decades."⁸³

■ The Legacy of Moses Stuart

This essay has argued that Moses Stuart played a key role in the gradual transformation of the Christian Scriptures from a scriptural Bible into an academic Bible in American biblical scholarship. While Stuart sought to defend the importance of the Bible as sacred Scripture, he nevertheless adhered to fundamentally naturalistic and rationalistic assumptions in his hermeneutics. Indeed, Stuart stands as a prime exemplar for what a leading reference work describes as the general nineteenth-century shift "from a predominantly theological to a methodically secularized framework of biblical studies."⁸⁴

In addition to his naturalistic hermeneutical method, Stuart sidelined the theological presuppositions of his Calvinistic heritage in an effort to defend the importance of Hebrew studies. Rather than arguing for Hebrew's importance as a byproduct of the Bible's divine inspiration, he defended it by arguing that the Bible was the greatest work of classical literature. Inherently an unstable project, this idea of the Bible as the preeminent classical text would be incapable of sustaining the respect and interest in coming generations of either the academy or the church.⁸⁵ Indeed, soon after Stuart's own time, scholars began to struggle to explain why studying a classical Israel should be more important than studying a classical India or Babylon. After all, was not Israel in its own day a small and relatively unimportant people? A Bible stripped of its sacredness could no longer demand a place of privilege in the academy but, rather, had to fight to justify its legitimacy as an object of scholarly inquiry.⁸⁶

⁸³ Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture*, 159.

⁸⁴ Magne Sæbø, "Introductory Remarks on Two Methodological Problems in Biblical Studies," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament* (ed. Sæbø), 3.1:19–26, at 25.

⁸⁵ Legaspi again: "[Michaelis's classical Israel] was venerable enough to be a plausible part of religious scholarship, but too impoverished theologically to sustain an actual community of faith"; Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture*, 159.

⁸⁶ This trend is traced from the 19th cent. to the present day in Jon Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993) 106–26.

Ironically, as one of sacred Scripture's most ardent defenders, Moses Stuart conceded theological ground that ultimately left little room for Scripture to be sacred at all. In placing the Bible among the classics, he promoted a process that would undermine traditional claims for the Bible's divinely given authority. As scholarship continues to seek to understand the historical forces that transformed biblical studies in the modern era, it must pay attention not only to attacks upon the Bible by theological liberals and critics, but also to the methods and assumptions by which theological conservatives like Stuart sought to defend Scripture's sacred status.