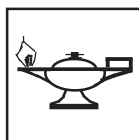


be anathema” (1 Cor. 16:22). The depth and breadth of the great apostle’s affection for his Lord is an example to us all. Let us note that we, too, must reveal this love.

In this study the two verbs for love are considered. The corresponding nouns call for separate treatment, which will be given in a further article, God willing.



Encounter

Reprinted items from earlier issues, chosen by the Publishing Editor

The Law given through Moses*

20. Hidden meanings

Islip Collyer

WHEN WE speak of the Mosaic parable and make the claim that there are hidden prophecies in the ritual of the Law, we are obviously raising an issue which in these sceptical days needs to be presented very plainly. One who denies that God ever spoke through Moses can recognise some of the merits of the Law as a system of jurisprudence, but he is under a logical compulsion to reject the idea that there could be any hidden meaning in any way pointing forward to Christianity. Good laws might be made by men, but there could not possibly be any of these hidden predictions apart from a definite divine impulse.

There is, of course, an equally clear logical compulsion for the unbeliever to reject the applicability of any of the Messianic prophecies to Jesus, however obvious some of the references seem to Christians. It may be thought that, if a sceptic can satisfy himself that such prophecies as in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and the ninth chapter of Daniel have no reference to Jesus and no bearing on Christian foundations, there is nothing in the Mosaic Law that would startle him.

This may be a reasonable comment, but we never quite know what human reactions will be. It is certain that, while men hold the major convictions that God has not spoken either through prophets or apostles, they must reject all idea of Old Testament references to Jesus, whether in plain language or parable. If ever this stubborn resistance begins to give way, they will soon see the cumulative force of hundreds of details which

can no longer be ignored. There is no telling what particular argument may influence a man and so open up this great vista to his understanding. It seems desirable, therefore, to raise this question as to whether in the ancient ritual of the Mosaic Law there is any suggestion of a meaning to compel a recognition of something beyond the knowledge of man.

IF a reader has ever perused the details of the Law, he must surely admit that there is something arresting and extraordinary in the elaborate ritual so forcefully urged upon Moses. “Look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount” (Ex. 25:40). So Moses was admonished, in connection with a constant repetition of the words, “Thou shalt make”. A few chapters later, the details are all presented again, with repetition of the words, “and he made”, showing that Moses was careful to observe all the instructions given. In the book of Leviticus the greater part of the space is devoted to the elaborate ritual of sacrifice and the humiliating description of human uncleanness.

However we may regard the matter, whether it is admitted that the Law came through Moses or whether it is assigned to a much later date, there must surely have been an object in its presentation. A student who makes the attempt to assess the facts correctly will recognise some historical references which cannot reasonably be

* First published August 1948.

resisted. Thus the death of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10) was a matter which no Israelite would have desired to invent. It was a national humiliation for the sons of the high priest to be so condemned. The error of these young men was definitely connected with the ritual so forcefully presented in the book of Exodus. The tragedy is referred to incidentally twice in the book of Numbers (3:3,4; 26:61). Then, in a much later reference to genealogies (1 Chron. 24:2), there is mention of the fact that Nadab and Abihu died before their father and had no children. A candid unbeliever must surely recognise the historical evidence in this matter.

A sceptic may suggest, however, that with lamps used in a confined tent a fatal accident might easily occur, and if the priest's sons were so destroyed by fire in the holy place it would be natural for men to assume that they had transgressed. We may concede the reasonableness of such a comment, if a tent with a great reputation for holiness was there. The significance of the historical allusion remains.

In similar manner we may take note of the incidental reference to uncleanness in the days of Saul (1 Sam. 20:26). It would have been quite reasonable for David to have absented himself even from an important feast with the king, if something had befallen him to make him ceremonially unclean. Normally, however, the uncleanness would only have lasted until the evening; and so, when David failed to appear the second day of the feast, inquiries were made. Such incidental references in the history yield convincing evidence that the details of the Law were ancient, that they were authoritative, and that, however faulty the people were in their practice, they recognised that the precepts of Moses came from God.

WE may begin our survey of hidden meanings, then, by taking note of the rules regarding uncleanness. Some of these rules were of the most practical character, excellent for health, and setting an example for the world. They command the admiration of thoughtful men, and, as was pointed out in previous articles,¹ their wisdom has been approved by modern doctors of medicine. One of the rules, however, went beyond anything that was beneficial for mortal life. The uncleanness was of a ceremonial character, without any practical meaning, but with very definite inconvenience to the people. The touch of a dead body, proximity to the unclean, or the touch

of a bed which was accounted as defiled, all such things would make a man unclean until the evening. Even the seed to be sown in the field might be rendered unclean by the touch of a dead body, although it obviously could have no effect on the plants it might produce.

We can well imagine a truculent unbeliever reading the list of defilements in a debate with telling effect in calling forth the plaudits of his supporters. "Unclean! Continually being accounted unclean. You couldn't be born, or married, or die, without being unclean and needing a sacrifice! And as for temporary uncleanness, they would pretty nearly always be unclean until the evening! To touch a dead body or to sit on a couch that was supposed to be defiled, or to touch a man who had a boil, they would be unclean until the evening! Can you imagine God ordering stuff like that to be written?"

THE appropriate answer is that we have no data on which we could form a judgment as to what God would or would not require. Apart from the Bible we have no information as to Divine demands. We know something about men, however, and it is surely very difficult to imagine men imposing such uncomfortable laws on themselves. The argument applies in the opposite direction from that in which the unbeliever tries to use it. Men often fall into such an error of logic. They assume that an idea very distasteful to them would be equally distasteful to God; and then, in trying to account for something in the old law which they hate, they have to suppose that men of a past age were very different from their modern counterparts.

Human beings may have changed in the course of ages; but even in the most remote times men were much nearer to us than we can ever be to the Creator. Basically there has probably been little change in human nature. We cannot suppose that men have ever liked to be humiliated, blamed and condemned as the Jews were by their prophets, or to be accounted unclean as they so frequently were by their Law. There are some obvious domestic defilements which suggest to us the need for washing, but we certainly do not desire to advertise our defilement to our friends and to be accounted unclean until the evening. It is in fact a very unpleasant idea, so

1. "Cleanliness", [Nov. 2001, p. 421](#), and "Food and national health", [Dec. 2001, p. 458](#).

unpleasant that unbelievers feel that it cannot come from God.

THE real conclusion one might draw from the feeling is that it cannot come from man. And this is a thought continually forced on the minds of those who regularly read their Bible. The people of Israel were condemned by their prophets in such language as cannot be found in the treasured writings of any other nation, and they were condemned by their Law in a host of irksome details such as cannot be found in any other law. The Apostle Peter truthfully described the Law as “a yoke . . . which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

We can hardly suppose that such condemnation had no meaning. Indeed, one would be inclined to think that even those who regard the Mosaic Law as of merely human origin would still feel impelled to recognise an object in the elaborate rules regarding uncleanness. This object is clearly revealed in the books of the Law. God is represented as saying, “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). This idea of separation is closely linked with the promises made to the fathers of Israel and with

the symbol of circumcision, the very significant figure of the cutting off of sinful flesh.

Although the books of the Law make no reference to that popular belief of the ancient world, the doctrine of natural immortality, and although there is very little mention of anything to suggest a life beyond the grave, the promises certainly presented a hope which the fathers never realised in this life. Was the elaborate insistence on cleansing in any way related to this hope—a preparation for something higher than mortal life involving the repudiation of all defilements connected with the flesh?

A man of sceptical tendency may suggest that even the recognition of such ideas as this does not necessarily involve a belief in the Divine inspiration of the Law. We may concede this point quite cheerfully. If students are willing to perceive a meaning in the elaborate ceremonial and can be sufficiently interested to follow where reason leads, the picture will become clearer and more compelling as knowledge increases. Finally they may be led quite naturally to meanings which “[enter] into that within the veil”, and far beyond the ken of men who lived in ancient Israel.



Correspondence

Comments on articles appearing in the magazine are always welcome, and should be addressed to the editor in whose section the article appears.

“Return, return, O Shulamite”

Sister Elizabeth Evans demonstrates well in her article (Dec. 2002, p. 439) the spiritual insight of the Queen of Sheba in travelling from far to prove for herself the wisdom of the son of David who reigned on the throne of the Lord (2 Chron. 9:8). In this she surely becomes a type of the Gentile nations who will undertake a similar journey to Jerusalem in the Kingdom age (Ps. 72:10). Nevertheless, there are numerous clues within the Song of Solomon to suggest that the female character in this book is not of royal birth at all.

It is possible, as Sister Evans points out, and as has been expounded further by other writers within the Brotherhood, that the events portrayed poetically in the Song of Songs have a basis in King Solomon’s own experiences. He would not be the only one in Scripture whose life we are meant to see as a parable of greater things. How-

ever, it is not essential that we approach the book in this way, as its exhortations come largely from what is symbolised by the relationship between the bride and bridegroom, not merely literal events which may have befallen two individuals. Similarly, there can be little doubt that a marriage takes place, and is consummated, in the Song of Solomon, whereas there is no firm evidence from Scripture that this happened between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

So what clues are there as to the origins of the Shulamite? It will help us in the search if we remember that the plot in the Song of Songs does not unfold in strict chronological order. In chapter 1, for example, the bride-to-be is already in Solomon’s palace keenly anticipating their wedding, and it is only in subsequent chapters that we learn about some of the events which have led to that exciting day. First, then, a few details from the bride herself: