



# The Law given through Moses

## 22. The pillars\*

Islip Collyer

**A**FTER THE considerations advanced in our last article, it seems reasonable to claim that there is an accumulating mass of evidence indicating a definite meaning in the symbols of the Law. There are no doubt many students who think that all the obvious meanings are consistent with their sceptical assumption that the Law was purely the work of man. If there are any such unbelievers who read these lines, we would ask them to remember the details and take note of the accumulating implications.

IT is surely remarkable that the ancient books of the Bible say so little regarding the hope of a future life. There is no suggestion of human immortality in the Law of Moses, but there are a few hints which indicate the hope of a life beyond the grave, and point forward to something yet to be revealed. Whether by accident or design, the ritual of the way in which the most holy could be entered by the high priest fits perfectly with the apostolic claim that the way to immortality was not opened under the old covenant. Whether by accident or design, the colours used in the cunningly woven veil fit the position and nature of Christ as presented in the New Testament. Whether by accident or design, the apostolic explanation that the veil represented the flesh of Christ is supported by the brief statement, made without comment in the Gospel records, that at the moment of Christ's death the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And now we must take note of the fact that, whether by accident or design, there is a remarkable appropriateness in the fact that the veil was hung on four pillars, and Christ is shown to the world in the four Gospel records.

No doubt men of the scornful type would dismiss this with a laugh. Such men pay little respect to the simply written Gospels, and would

not admit even the possibility that they were foreshadowed by symbol in this manner. It has been recognised, however, even by some of the most thorough unbelievers, that there is something very unusual in those simple Gospels. A very distinctive and majestic character emerges from the brief narrative. In a previous article we quoted the estimate of the late Mr H. G. Wells, "A character beyond all possibility of human invention". It would be difficult, in fact, to imagine anyone who would have desired to invent such a character, even if such a fabrication had been possible. Christ did not favour the Greeks in their theories or ideals, but insisted continually and persistently that the Jews were the chosen people and their Law and prophets would all be fulfilled. He did not favour the Jews, however, but condemned them in the most scathing language. He was distinct and unique.

THERE is nothing unreasonable in the use of the word 'pillar' in the manner suggested. Peter and John were spoken of as "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9). If men could be so described, it seems still more reasonable that the word should be used in connection with books of such basic character as the Gospel records, enduring through the centuries and holding up Christ before each generation. Indeed, if, without any knowledge of the ancient tabernacle, a modern artist desired to paint a symbolic picture of the Christian religion, it would be most natural for him to present a beautifully coloured veil; and, with, the Gospels in mind, he would put it on four pillars rather than on any other number.

Perhaps an objector might here point out that the needlework hanging at the door of the first tent was on five pillars. This was certainly a

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strange number to be used in such a building. We could understand two, four, or indeed any even combination, but the odd number five seems strange. Can any Christian significance be attached to that? Attempts have been made, and it is of course easy to find five other writers who have helped and who might be considered as 'pillars of the church'. The suggestion here, however, is not that the pillars represent men, who so quickly pass off the scene, but rather enduring books that they were moved to write. With this idea in mind, there is a particular significance in the number five. The five books of Moses present the foundation of Divine purpose. At one time Christians were in no doubt as to their importance, and even now, in this age of materialism, unbelief and self-satisfied paganism, there are some disciples who realise that the foundations of Christian hope are in those first five books of Scripture.

PERHAPS we may in imagination make another approach to the ancient sanctuary and see some suggestions of lessons, if not of definite meaning. There are the white linen walls in front of us, the outer court of Israel's encampment; but for the moment we will treat the vision as being a representation of the Christian religion. Are we Christians? Well, if we are only looking at Christianity from the outside in this manner we can hardly make such a claim. We are not Christians simply by being born in a nominally Christian country. Those walls of righteousness seem to indicate very definitely that we are outside. We find the gate of the outer court, a needlework hanging on four pillars. Literally we examine the four Gospel records and for the first time find them interesting. We get some idea of Christ. It is only like a needlework imitation, but it may make us desire to go farther.

In front of us is the tabernacle, with laver at the door, indicating that anyone who desires to enter must pass through the water of purification. Literally we are invited to be baptized into the name of Christ. The holy place, where is the shewbread and the ever-burning light, must be entered before it is possible to reach the most holy. The needlework imitation is hung on five pillars. Literally we are called upon to examine and believe the five books of Moses.

Is there any force of reason in the idea that a close examination of the first five books of Scripture will be a preparation for understanding Christianity? Assuredly those who have studied

deeply will be in no doubt on this matter. In Genesis we have the foundation laid in such a manner as to admit of no element of doubt. There at the beginning we have the cryptic prophecy regarding the seed of the woman and of the serpent.

Then come the promises to Abram, the changing of his name, the narrative of Abraham and his immediate descendants, as if especially designed to show that they had no inheritance of the land in mortal life. We have the prolonged test of faith, the repudiation of a fleshly seed, the delay in the birth of the child of promise until, in the ordinary course of nature, such a birth was impossible, the covenant of circumcision or cutting off flesh before Abraham was permitted to be the father of the promised child. There was the typical confirmation of the covenant with its significant "deep sleep" and "horror of great darkness". Then, as the crowning incident of this allegory in real life, there is the offering of the only son on Mount Moriah, and the prophetic name given to the place.

ON reading this brief recital, a student might exclaim, "You have missed the most significant incident of all"; and perhaps he would be right, for the record of the appearance of Melchizedek presents an extraordinary fund of meaning in a single verse.

Just as the first tent into which priests might enter had only a dim light by which the contents might be examined, so it is in our study of the books. The light comes from the seven flames of the lamp, for the light of the sun is excluded. The whole tent is like a parable of Christianity. The light is maintained by the labour of priests, the oil produced by nature, but brought here by men acting under instruction from God. There is a beautiful covering of cunningly woven curtains with significant cherubic figures embroidered thereon; but above this are the curtains of goats' hair and then the covering of ram skins dyed red. It would need a very close application of the light, and intent scrutiny, to see those beautiful cherubic figures. So, in the present development of Divine purpose, labour is needed to keep the light burning. We may be surrounded by cherubim, but they are not readily seen. We are within a framework of civilisation deeply dyed with the red of sin, and beyond that the wild and untamed.

A student who gives these books close attention soon begins to feel a sense of awe such as

would come to a devout priest within the tent. Attention is drawn to the cunningly woven veil on four pillars like the hanging at the entrance of the outer court. The beauty of this veil is more obvious now, and here the pillars are overlaid with gold.

There can be no doubt that a study of the first five books of the Bible offers the best foundation for a thorough appreciation of Christ. We may learn much regarding human weakness and insignificance and so be able to appreciate better what is meant by the offer of life. It is not merely in the type of Law that lessons may be found, but in the instructions that were given at various times and in the narrative of human reactions. As in the study of nature or of history, the reader will receive some hard blows, but there are ample compensations—most of all in the growing appreciation of the possibilities opened to us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even in the Old Testament there are references showing the significance of the ark containing the tables of testimony being kept in the most holy place. It will no doubt be admitted on every side that the most holy represented the presence of God. The mercy seat was there with the overshadowing wings of the cherubim; and Moses was told that there, above the mercy seat, between the cherubim, God would meet with the representative of the nation. So in later times this came to be a poetic description of the Eternal: "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims" (Ps. 80:1).

The ark containing the tables of testimony was placed under the mercy seat within the most holy place. What was the object of these tables, giving in condensed form the commandments of God? Assuredly it was that the lessons should be

learned by man and so be written on their hearts. This is an idea elaborated by the apostle (2 Cor. 3:3), but it was not originated by him. We find reference to this idea in the Old Testament. Through the prophet Jeremiah there came the promise of a new covenant within the house of Israel, not according to the covenant made when they come forth from the land of Egypt; but God promised: "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33).

We read in the New Testament of names "written in heaven" and of disciples whose lives are "hid with Christ in God" (Heb. 12:23; Col. 3:3). This was well prefigured by the tables of testimony, which gave to men the commandments of God, being kept in the most holy place. Under the old covenant the people were kept at a distance, that they might learn the elementary lesson which men are always so unwilling to receive. They were not allowed to draw near to the mount when the Law was given; and in later times they were forbidden to enter the holy. The sanctuary was in their midst, and it suggested possibilities, but gave no answer, to the questions it seemed to propound.

Christ gives the answer, not in a way satisfactory to the natural man, but with an irresistible appeal to those who have received instruction. God is holy, He will be honoured and sanctified in those who approach Him. He alone is immortal, and the offer of the Divine nature to feeble creatures who have sinned against Him is an extraordinary act of mercy and condescension. The natural man is so unwilling to accept the humiliating truth taught in every part of Scripture that the best approach to Christ—perhaps the only acceptable approach—is through the five books of Moses.

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