



The Law given through Moses*

25. Sundry shadows

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IN STUDYING the Law, and in reading the history of its origin, one is continually moved to ask questions as to why certain regulations were made, and why certain events were recorded. Sometimes a student feels confident that a question can be answered, as we have shown in preceding articles. A meaning fitting into the general scheme of Divine revelation seems so unmistakable that we think it could only be resisted by the strongest prejudices of unbelief.

At other times the question persists without a satisfactory explanation being found. It is like the discovery of strange signs, carved in the rocks of a deserted shore. We may be convinced that the carvings are the work of human beings, but we cannot read the message. The haunting question sometimes seems on the point of receiving an answer, and then it recedes into obscurity again.

There are men who claim to find a meaning for everything, and can see cryptic messages even in the most ordinary of historical records. We have known of students so intent on such competitive discoveries that they have expounded hidden meanings in the validity of which they themselves had no belief. Such forced readings do harm, tending to bring discredit upon a study which, when earnestly and carefully pursued, may be of real value.

In this article we will propound some questions which may stimulate the thoughts of readers, even if no finally satisfactory answers can be found. It must be acknowledged by any honest and intelligent reader that there are many features of the Law which seem the reverse of all that normal human beings would choose to invent, and there are many incidents in the history remote from all that normal historians would desire to report. These matters challenge the attention of a student, suggesting that there may be a deeper reason for their inclusion. Some

are the ritual prophecies we have already noted, and solid reasons have been assigned for the interpretations suggested. We may now glance at some other matters that may stimulate the thoughts of students, even if no clear meaning emerges.

WHILE in the wilderness, the people were sustained by bread from heaven, or manna, a name they gave to it because they could form no judgment as to its real nature (Ex. 16:15). All readers are well acquainted with the New Testament application of this type. If unbelievers repudiate the record, it would be interesting to know how they would explain the reaction of the people as recorded in the book of Numbers. One would suppose that a writer of historical romance would represent that such an astonishing provision of food for the nation would have been accepted with thankfulness and awe. We can hardly imagine a writer of fiction presenting such an anticlimax to the bread from heaven as we find in Scripture. "God not only delivered our fathers from Egypt, but He sustained them in the wilderness with bread from heaven, angel's food, miraculously provided for them. They did not like the food, however, they complained bitterly of it and wanted to return to Egypt to get the more varied and appetising food provided when they were in bondage".

This is only one of the many evidences of truth in the Bible record. God did not aim to give the people the most convincing demonstrations of His power, or to feed them with the varied meats which they would most appreciate. The aim was higher than the ordinary historian would understand, and the reactions of the people were on a much lower plane than any Jew would have

* First published February 1949.

desired to record. For the moment, however, we are not seeking for such evidence, but rather looking for the possibility of hidden meanings.

Was the wilderness a type of something much greater, something to be experienced by all the servants of God? Had the bread a significance such as was suggested even by the words of Moses? "He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna . . . that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). And did the people suggest a type in their tiring of the bread from heaven and desiring to return to the conditions of bondage? It is hard to understand the Israelites desiring to return to Egyptian slavery, but we may see instances every day of Christians tiring of the Word of God and turning back to the bondage of the world.

THEN, glancing at the extraordinary record of Moses at Sinai and the disgraceful episode of the golden calf, we may ask, Was there something more than the historical assurances we have already noted, any analogy between the ascent of Moses to receive the Law and the ascent of the Lord to receive the Kingdom and to return (*cf.* Lk. 19:12)? Was there any hidden meaning in the shattering of the first tables of testimony because of Israel's sin? In a [previous article](#) we have taken note of the historical bearing of this matter, the origin of the ten commandments being so definitely connected with a painful incident which no Jew would ever have invented.¹ Did the breaking of the tables also bear a hidden suggestion that Israel as a nation would not enter into the higher life because of sin?

Later, when the new tables of testimony had been written, they were placed in the ark, and this was kept beneath the mercy seat in the most holy place. The golden pot of hidden manna and Aaron's rod that budded were also put into the ark. This certainly suggests an interesting association of ideas: the Law of God, designed to be written on the hearts of men, placed in the most holy along with the symbol of incorruptibility and the symbol of Divine choice. God preserves in heaven the records from which He, according to His will, can restore the living characters of those on whose hearts His Word has been written. "Ye are dead", says the apostle, "and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). The power of immortal life and the unerring judge

are also in heaven waiting for the day of manifestation.

ANOTHER extraordinary incident is related in Exodus 34. When Moses came down from the mount having received the rewritten tables of testimony, the skin of his face shone, so that Aaron and the people were afraid to draw near to him. In the Septuagint Version we read that his face was made glorious so that they feared to approach him. To the unbeliever we might put the questions, If this happened, what was the cause? If it never happened, why was it recorded? It was not merely a declaration that Moses was so glorified, but it is plainly stated that the people were afraid to come near to him, so that he had to put a veil over his face to conceal it from their eyes. The first time he came down from the mount the people had corrupted themselves. Moses in anger threw down the tablets and broke them, and then drastic judgement followed. The second time, when Moses came with the new tables, the people had behaved better, but there was a glory in the leader's face on which they could not look. The use of a veil in such a connection is surely most significant.

The whole incident looks like a parable with a hidden meaning. How can we regard it other than in the light of New Testament teaching? The children of Israel could not see to the end of the Law. There was a glory in Moses and the precepts given through him that the Jews have never properly appreciated. Even now there is a veil obscuring their vision and preventing them from seeing the glory of the Law and the testimonies that have been preserved by them.

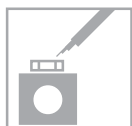
In connection with this failure of Israel to appreciate the full value of the revelation which they have conveyed to mankind, it is interesting to note a matter of detail recorded in the book of Kings. When the nation reached the apex of its glory and power in the days of Solomon, a temple was built to take the place of the tabernacle. There had been a building at Shiloh spoken of as "the temple" in the early days of Samuel, but we have no reason to suppose that it was especially designed for Divine service like the temples of later date. The ark was taken from thence and captured by the Philistines. After this it never returned to Shiloh. It was in the house of Abinadab for twenty years. Finally, after the adminis-

1. [Aug. 2002, p. 291.](#)

tration of some painful lessons, it was treated in accordance with Divine command and was brought to Jerusalem.

When the temple was completed, it was put in its proper position beneath the overshadowing wings of the cherubim in the most holy place. We read that at this time there was nothing in the ark but the tables of testimony placed there

by Moses at Mount Horeb. The golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod had gone. They had a beautiful temple instead of a tent; the nation had reached its highest position of glory and splendour in temporal things; but from the most treasured of all the holy emblems they had lost the symbol of incorruptible nature and the symbol of Divine judgement and approval.



Correspondence

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

Ezekiel's visions of the Millennium

I can sympathise with Brother Jeremy Thomas (Nov. 2003, p. 416) when he says that Ezekiel's visions are not easy to understand. I myself have had the problems, but I eventually concluded that one can make things worse by some of the methods adopted to explain them.

The prince in Ezekiel

My imagination will not stretch to giving everything a purely figurative interpretation, and if the prince is not Christ, who is he? If he is just a mortal being, it seems incredible that only he should be permitted to enter and leave the sanctuary by that eastern gateway, because the glory of the Lord had returned by it (43:4; 44:2,3). And it would be a high honour indeed for such a mortal to be granted an especial place in the holy portion to be sited right in the centre of the land (45:7,8). And if the prince is a mortal, of whom we read nothing in any other scripture, he would have to be chosen from the regathered tribes of Israel, and what would be his moral qualifications? We are all being prepared for the Kingdom by lives of probation, so would he qualify for an entrance into the Kingdom of God?

Could the prince have been Zerubbabel? He was certainly of the royal line, but he neither sought nor was appointed to take the role of king, indeed the Jews' Gentile overlords would not have permitted it. Both Zerubbabel and Nehemiah were governors, not princes, of Judah (Hag. 1:1,14; Neh. 5:14). And I say again that, through the prophet Ezekiel, God had plainly stated that the throne would be overturned until He come whose right it is (21:27), and without question that is Christ (Lk. 1:32,33). And in two places, as the prophecy moves to the final re-

gathering of Israel, the "prince" is named as "David", who is to be their prince "for ever" (Ezek. 34:24;37:25). In the remaining chapters of the book there are seventeen verses which mention "the prince", and Christ must at least be there among them. Are we left to guess which verses refer to Christ?

We all accept that chapters 36-39 speak of the latter-day revival of Israel, reaching a climax with the destruction of Gog and the uniting again of the whole house of Israel (37:19; 39:25). In the last verse of chapter 39 God says: "Neither will I hide My face any more from them". The remainder of the book presents a logical progression, stage by stage, leading in the last chapter to the millennial layout of the land, with the twelve tribal cantons detailed, and the announcement that "the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (v. 35). This was already anticipated in 43:7, where God says that Zion is "the place of My throne . . . where I will dwell", as we read in Psalm 132:13,14.

The fulfilment of Ezekiel 40-48

These visions of Ezekiel reach far beyond the return from Babylon. In chapter 40 the prophet is taken to a very high mountain in the land of Israel, and he describes in great detail the frame of a city which he saw. No such elaborate descriptions were ever given when Solomon built his temple, and it is clear that Ezekiel is writing of a building different from that of Solomon's. He is not speaking of the restoration work of Ezra and Nehemiah, but of the erection of a new temple yet future. In describing the chambers of this new building he tells of a place where they washed the burnt offering, and where were tables for killing the various offerings, together with all the instruments they needed for the