



# The Law given through Moses

## 27. Sundry details\*

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**I**T HAS BEEN remarked that the only light in the first part of the tabernacle came from the seven flames of the lamp. This is not strictly correct, although it is easy to understand a student making such a statement. No light would come through the boards or through the thick skins and curtains with which the tent was covered, so that the priests would be dependent on the light of the lamp to enable them to carry out their duties. A little light might penetrate the needlework hanging at the entrance, but not enough for practical purposes. So in a general way it was correct that the only light was from the lamp. Sometimes, however, there was another light, a very wonderful light shining through the cunningly woven veil from the most holy place.

SOME interesting thoughts arise in this connection. All the primary colours were present in the entrance to the most holy: blue, purple and scarlet in the veil, and the yellow of pure gold from the pillars. The full glory of an immortal messenger shining through the veil would make a wonderful sight, all the colours of the rainbow being present. This manifestation of all the colours into which white light can be divided was a revelation of the glory of God. It reminds us of the several references to the rainbow in Scripture, the rainbowed angel of the Apocalypse and the vision seen by Ezekiel: "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (Ezek. 1:28).

The account of the rainbow in Genesis has been the subject of some criticism by men who do not accept the record of the Flood. It has been argued that the rainbow, being a natural phenomenon, cannot be regarded as the sign of a

covenant or a guarantee of immunity from another overwhelming flood. It arises from the reflection in raindrops dividing the light of the sun, and, as a natural law, must have been visible at all times when sunlight shone through water spray. The same effect may be seen on a small scale when a garden syringe sends forth a spray of water on a sunny day. Very similar results can be obtained from a series of glasses set at the correct angle toward each other. Critics have argued that the rainbow must have been coexistent with light and water, and therefore cannot reasonably be regarded as a sign such as the narrative of the Flood suggests.

It must be remembered, however, that the appearance of the bow in the heavens is always taken as a sign that the rain will soon cease. An old country rhyme took note of this fact: "Sunshine and shower won't last half an hour". After a particularly heavy shower we may sometimes see an especially wonderful display, even two bows stretching across the sky. If there were higher clouds obscuring the light of the sun, the bow would not appear. If the earth were completely surrounded with clouds, such as in their final bursting would cause a flood as disastrous as that in the days of Noah, the rainbow would not be seen at all. The frequent appearance of the rainbow is a guarantee of clearing skies and favourable conditions, whether men are ready to thank God for the blessings of the fruitful earth, or whether they accept all natural laws without any sense of gratitude, wonder or reverence.

Rain and sunshine are two of the supremely important blessings granted to man. They are both absolutely necessary for life, but either of

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these essential elements would be destructive without the other. Brilliant sunshine without any rain would scorch and kill all vegetation and so destroy all animal life. Incessant rain without sunshine would bring another destructive flood. In balanced combination they give us life and growth, while at the same time revealing the glory of God. Therefore it is surely very reasonable that the rainbow should be a sign that there would never again be a destructive flood such as that which came in the days of Noah, and that the earth would have its successive seasons of seed time and harvest, the fruitful product of sunshine and rain in balanced supply.

ONE of the particular instructions given through Moses was that if an altar was built of stones, it must be of natural, unhewn boulders. The use of a tool to shape the stones would defile them. Men were forbidden to make steps for the ascent of the altar, for that would be the work of impure hands and would involve defilement. The nakedness of man must not be found on God's altar. The late Brother C. C. Walker made a brief and effective application of this law when discussing the paternity of the Lord Jesus. He said that those who reject the New Testament record, and allege that Jesus was not begotten of the Holy Spirit, in effect declare that we have a defiled altar on which the nakedness of man has been discovered.

It is well to bear in mind this stringent law when considering certain later events recorded in the historical portions of Scripture. We are informed in the eighth chapter of Joshua that, after the destruction of Ai, Joshua built an altar in Mount Ebal and offered sacrifice thereon. The altar was erected strictly in accordance with the instructions given through Moses. It was of whole stones, on which no man had used any tool. Then, immediately after, we read that he wrote on the stones a copy of the Law of Moses. At first sight it reads as if the writing was upon the stones of the altar, but this is certainly not the meaning. The passage definitely connects with Deuteronomy 27, where explicit instruction was given as to this offering on Mount Ebal, the writing of the Law and the blessings and curses to be pronounced in connection therewith. They were to "set . . . up great stones, and plaister them with plaister" (v. 2). On these prepared stones the words of the Law were to be written. Then they were to build an altar of whole stones on which no tool of man had been used. Burnt of-

ferings and peace offerings were to be offered, and then there was to be the impressive ceremony of blessing and cursing.

Clearly the "great stones" mentioned in Deuteronomy 27 would be chosen with due regard to the object in view. They would need to be large, flat and smooth. The plastering referred to would be to improve their surface for writing, and would almost certainly involve the use of a tool.

It has been assumed by some students that the only words "written and engraven on stones" were the Ten Commandments. It seems, however, that much more was written on these great stones set up between Gerizim and Ebal: "thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law" (v. 3); "he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses . . . And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written" (Josh. 8:32,34).

In Deuteronomy 27 the emphasis seems to be put on the curses. The ceremony may have been more extended than appears from the record. When few of the people could read, they needed oral instruction to teach them the Law by which their lives were to be governed. Just as young children learn by chanting the truths they are required to remember, so a primitive people such as Israel, called to the discipline of a stern law, needed such dramatic and forceful presentation of essential truths.

THE matters particularly emphasised probably needed such enforcement because of the corrupt practices which had been in the land and still prevailed among surrounding nations. The loud call for a curse upon any who offended in these things, and the unanimous assent chanted by all the people, would assuredly be impressive; and the knowledge that the words of the Law were written on these great stones would assist the memory even of those who could not read.

At the end of the ceremony there came a curse, the full significance of which was not fully understood either at the time or in later days: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen" (Deut. 27:26). Thus the people gave assent to a proclamation which put them all under the curse of the Law, for it is certain that none was able to render perfect obedience. It was, as the Apostle Peter said, "a yoke . . . which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10).