

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM.

HEBREWS I. I, 2.

“GOD who in various modes and in divers parts spake in time past unto our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, for whom also he made the ages.” Such is the keynote to one of the most remarkable books of the New Testament, and all its subsequent arguments are but the prolonged echoes of its opening strain. We feel irresistibly, on the very threshold of this Epistle, that we are standing between two worlds—an old world which is passing away, and a new world which is dawning. The refrain which is maintained throughout is but the amplification of one pregnant sentence, “Here we have no continuing city.” Jerusalem is compassed about with armies; the Jewish age is going out and the Gentile age is coming in. The old forms of thought are fast disappearing, and the glory of the Temple-worship is fading. Roman arms and Greek culture are sapping the foundations of the ancient theocracy, and the culture is even more powerful than the arms. The Writer to the Hebrews stands amid the vanishing forms of a disappearing world, and sees the structure of ten centuries melting in the rays of the Western sun.

No one can read the Epistle without perceiving that the Writer of this book belongs to the Pauline school; in other words, that he has more sympathy with the new age which is coming than with the old age which is going. Yet if we look more closely, we shall find that there is a conservative element amidst his sympathies. His heart is with the future, but the future

which claims his heart is one which will absorb rather than divorce the past. He sees clearly that the forms of Judaism were in their very nature transitory and perishable, and that no conjunction of circumstances could ever have made them permanent. But he sees not less clearly that they typified that which could not perish; that they were not illusions, much less delusions, but the shadows of things to come, whose glory all along had been the forecast of the substance which they prefigured. He is prepared to see them fade, but not to fade into nothingness. When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part is done away; yet all the parts exist in the completed whole. So to the eye of this Writer the shadows of Judaism only fade in that light which gave them birth, and yield their borrowed glory to the coming substance which they foreshadowed. He repudiates the notion that he is proclaiming a new system of the universe; he will not even admit that a new voice is speaking. He maintains that from the beginning there has been a continuity of Divine revelation: "God who in times past spoke to our fathers hath in these last days spoken unto us." The voice has never been broken, the accents have never been interrupted; there has simply been a change in tone and modulation, as the ear of the listener developed from the organ of a child into the sense of a mature man.

But, having conceded so much to the spirit of Judaism, the Writer of this Epistle proceeds to exhibit the vast advance which the last stage of the revelation has made upon its earlier stages. He goes on to enumerate the different points in which the Divine voice in Christianity is distinguished from the Divine voice in Judaism, and in every one of these points he

finds the advantage on the side of the former. It seems to us that he has succeeded in pointing out four distinct grounds of superiority. (1) He says that the Jewish revelation was not uniform in its appearance, but given in "various modes;" whereas the revelation of Christ was given in the continuous image of a single human form. (2) He declares that the Jewish revelation did not exhibit a united view of the universe, but was made in "divers parts;" whereas the manifestation of Christ was the revelation of one connected life. (3) He maintains that Judaism was only a temporary manifestation of God: "He spoke unto our fathers in times past;" whereas Christianity was the centre of all epochs, past, present, and future: "whom he hath appointed heir of all things, for whom also he made the ages." (4) He affirms that Judaism did not give the Divine Voice from the fountain-head: God spoke to our fathers only by "the prophets;" whereas in Christianity we have the Voice direct from heaven, because we have the revelation made from the brightness of his own glory: "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son."

I. The Writer says that the Jewish Revelation was not uniform in its appearance. It approached the mind of the prophet not in one aspect, but in "various modes." Sometimes it came to him in a dream of the night, sometimes in a vision of the day, sometimes through a type or symbol, sometimes in a historical event, occasionally perhaps by an inward suggestion made in the silence of the soul. These were merely isolated messages. They declared the will of God, but not the mind of God. They announced the Divine law in relation to particular acts, but they did not reveal

that *principle* of the Divine law which is the reason even of the will of God, and regulates all acts. To reveal such a principle was to lay bare the Divine Heart itself, and that demanded another form of revelation. There is only one way in which the workings of a mind can be revealed to a human being, and that is through the form of humanity. There may be other modes of communication for other intelligences, but there is no other mode given under heaven whereby intelligence can be known to man. To man, who is a person, there can, strictly speaking, be no revelation of that which is impersonal. He can tell some requirements of the beast of the field ; he can put his hand on many of the laws of nature : but he knows neither the life of the one nor the substance of the other. Judaism could lay its hand upon the laws of God, but it was too philosophical to attempt the unveiling of the Lawgiver. Its very conception of God precluded it from such an aim. He was the self-contained, self-existent Jehovah ; incomprehensible, unspeakable, dwelling in a light whose glory was the fact that it was inaccessible. He was incapable of being seen in Himself, incapable of being known in Himself, incapable even of being named. All his acts towards man were but symbolic acts ; they expressed not his nature, but his will ; not the manner of his thoughts, but the manner in which He desired the creation to think of Him. The God of developed Judaism was the God of Dr. Mansel and Sir William Hamilton — the Being whose presence we can know, but whose nature is unknowable ; whose commands we may receive, but the principle of whose commands is ever hid from our eyes. Judaism could approach Him only in the outer court of the Taber-

nacle, in the "various modes" by which He indicated his sovereign will ; but the inner court of the Sanctuary was for ever veiled from view, and the Fatherhood behind the sovereignty was unseen, unfelt, unknown.

Now Christianity claims to have unveiled this Presence, and to have unveiled it in the only way in which it can be disclosed to a human soul—by personification. "God manifest in the flesh" is the keynote of the Christian Revelation. There for the first time in the history of Judaism the human speaks to the human. For the first time in the exercise of his religion the soul of the worshipper is brought into direct contact with the object of his worship ; receives no longer his messages, but becomes recipient of his revelations ; obeys no longer his will, but reads his heart. In the human manifestation of the Divine he finds the one and only form in which his human soul can actually meet with God ; and just because the one essential form has come, the many accidental modes of communication drop away. The perfect manifestation takes up into itself the broken and imperfect voices. The dream fades in the reality, the vision melts in the tangible image, the type is lost in the antitype, the historical event is merged in One who professes to be the source of history : "God who in various modes spoke to our fathers hath spoken unto us through the image of a man."

2. The Writer to the Hebrews now passes on to consider the second point of comparison between Christianity and Judaism. He tells us that the Judaic revelation was partial and fragmentary ; that it presented to the mind of the worshipper a divided view of the universe ; to use his own words, that it was

made in "divers parts." This is all the more remarkable from the fact that the God of Judaism was a Being of absolute will. It might have been expected that a religion whose leading feature was the recognition of Divine Sovereignty, would have recognized, above everything else, the unity of plan in the universe. But the truth is, there was an element in this world which the Jewish mind revolted from, and which, with all its Theocratic tendencies, it had the utmost difficulty in referring to a Divine agency at all; that element was the existence of suffering. That the sufferings of this present life were a preparation for the glory to be revealed; that the dark shades in human destiny were an essential part of the great universal plan; that the sorrows which beset humanity were themselves workers together with joy for the good of humanity, was a thought which it never entered into the heart of the Jew to conceive. There are traces of its advent indeed in the later Judaism, and notably in the book of Job, where the central thought seems to be the possibility that human suffering may have a deeper root than human evil; but the very existence of such a modification is itself a proof that Judaism had then become incorporated with foreign elements. The essential character of the religion is the sharp line of demarcation it draws between sorrow and joy. All the connection between them is that they come from one common source; they do not proceed from one common plan. They are both sent by God, but they are sent for opposite purposes; joy to reward, sorrow to punish. Joy is the blessing which the Theocratic government bestows on goodness; sorrow is the penalty which the Theocratic

government affixes to the transgression of its laws. Hence to the Jewish mind there is always in the hour of calamity something more painful than the calamity itself: the deepest pain is the inference derived from it. When Paul says, "The sting of death is sin," he expresses the sentiment of every pious Israelite. The bitterness of death, the bitterness of every physical, mental, and moral affliction, lay outside of itself, consisted in the fact that the affliction was the symbol of the Divine anger and the mark of the Divine vengeance. The going back of the shadow on the dial was not merely, nor even chiefly, hailed as a promise of recovery from sickness; its highest promise was this, that it rolled a cloud from the Divine countenance, and restored to the sufferer the sense of God's favour. Joy and sorrow were both the angels of the Eternal, but each was appointed to rule a different department of the universe. They never met together in the performance of one work; the one was ever the angel of blessing, the other was ever the angel of retribution. The result was that the vision of the prophet was the vision of a divided universe. He saw the history of the world separated into two parallel lines. On the one side he beheld the earth crowned with blessings; on the other he saw it smitten with plague, pestilence, and famine; one basked in sunshine, the other lay in shadow. There was no possibility that the sunshine should ever issue from the shadow. Sorrow might at any time give place to joy, but it could never work out joy. The life of pleasure was separated as effectually from the life of pain as if the world had actually been ruled by two opposite principles of light and darkness. Hence it is that the prophetic writings of

the Old Testament exhibit such strange, such sudden, transitions from the height to the valleys, from exultation to despair. No man can listen to the outpourings of the Psalmist without being impressed with the presence of two contending influences—a God-attracting and a God-repelling power. In the brief compass of a few verses the alternations are often startling. One moment he is basking in the unclouded light, the next he is plunged in an abyss of darkness. One moment he is inspired by the Divine nearness, the next he is crying out, “How long, O Lord! how long! Why art thou so far from helping me?” In the fragmentary nature of Jewish Revelation, it could hardly be otherwise. If prosperity was the sign of God’s favour, and adversity the sign of his displeasure, what else could human life present than the alternating aspect of Divine nearness and Divine separation? The joys and sorrows of life divide the hours of every day; if the Divine plan of human development be referred exclusively to its joys, the hours of no day can reveal an unbroken religious rest.

But here again Christianity steps in as an arbiter. As it reconciled the “various modes” in one form, so now it reconciles the “divers parts” in one revelation. Let us understand how this reconciliation is effected. Christianity holds as distinctly as Judaism that there is an intimate and indissoluble connection between sin and suffering; but it does not hold that there is an indissoluble connection between suffering and sin. It maintains, like Judaism, that wherever there is transgression there must be sorrow; but it denies the converse, that wherever there is sorrow there must necessarily be transgression. Christianity does not

annul the Jewish conception, but it adds something to that conception ; and the element which it adds is all important. It agrees with Judaism in holding that sorrow is the penalty of sin ; but it goes on to say that the penalty itself may become remedial, that the cross of expiation may lead back to the crown of glory. The thought has a philosophical as well as a religious importance: it brings back suffering within the range of the Divine plan. The moment punishment is contemplated as a possible remedy, it is contemplated as a part of individual development. It ceases any longer to be outside the circle of the universe ; it assumes a new attitude in relation to human progress. Its mission is no longer merely that of an avenger of the past ; it has found an additional work as a pioneer of the future. Christianity, accordingly, exhibits a united universe. Sorrow and joy cease to have a separate work ; they become the steps of one common process ; they work together for good. To make the unity more complete, it is exhibited in the revelation of a single life. A man of pre-eminent sorrows becomes, through his sorrows, the source of universal joys. A being of all others the most afflicted proclaims his cross to be the world's crown, and under the deepest shadow of that cross bequeaths to the world a peace which passes its comprehension. The ancient glory of Jewish prosperity ceases to be the soul's ideal, but in its room there rises the ideal of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; the old motive had been the search of happiness, the new stimulus is to be the pursuit of blessedness. Yet this new search, unlike the former one, is to take sorrow as its guide ; the weight of glory is to be worked out by

affliction. Christ is the revealer of a new dispensation; and He is Himself the first-fruit of the dispensation. He comes into the world with a joy set before Him; but it is a joy which He can only secure when He has endured the cross and despised the shame. In that connection the cross loses its shame, and the world loses its dualism. The dark shades which had constituted one hemisphere of history fade into the unbroken circle of a cloudless universe; and the Writer to the Hebrews, as he surveys the transformation, describes thus the absorption of the partial in the perfect: "God who in divers parts spoke to our fathers hath spoken unto us in the revelation of a united life."

3. We come now to the third point of comparison between Christianity and Judaism. The Jewish Revelation is here said to have been in itself merely temporary: "in times past." It was not given for the world as a world, but for a portion of the world at a particular epoch. It was one of those revelations which are only meant to be true for the age to which they speak, but which cease to have any significance for the ages to come. In this respect also the Writer to the Hebrews proceeds to draw a contrast between the first and the second revelation. He declares that the new light which was dawning had all along been existing behind the old lights, and that all the radiance of the old lights had been borrowed from this source. The entire scope and aim of the Epistle to the Hebrews is the enunciation of the truth that Christianity was from the beginning the goal of Judaism. When he says, "There remaineth a rest to the people of God," he is not, as the reader popularly supposes,

speaking of the future state of the soul; he is speaking of the future state of Judaism, which, in his view, was Christianity. What he means to say is simply this: "Do not imagine that the promises made by God in the Old Testament have ever been fulfilled in that Testament. He has said more to your nation than has ever yet been performed; "there *remaineth* a rest to the people of God." You have had many rests in your journey through the wilderness; you have had the semblance of a permanent rest in the land of Canaan; but has the semblance proved a reality? He has promised you the full and absolute possession of a land flowing with milk and honey: has that promise ever been fulfilled? have you up to this hour possessed the entire land of Palestine? He has promised you a seed like the sands of the sea in multitude: has that promise been fulfilled? Is it not with difficulty that you can detect a remnant of the lineage of David? He has promised you a kingdom that will never be moved, and a king that will sit on the throne of David for ever: has that promise been fulfilled? is not the nationality of Israel fading before your eyes? What are you to conclude from all this? Not, assuredly, that the promise has been false; but that your interpretation of it has been limited. Is it not clear to you by this time that Palestine was never meant to be your rest, that your promised rest is yet to come, that it awaits you, *remaineth* for you? Canaan was not the land flowing with milk and honey; you are only now reaching the borders of that promised country. The numerical population of outward Israel was not the multitudinous seed; the true seed is only about to be sown. The Messianic empire of

David was not the immutable and immovable kingdom; the kingdom which shall never be moved is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Such is a brief paraphrase of the main design of this Epistle. It aims to demonstrate that the permanent truth in Judaism was all along the latent and prospective Christianity which slumbered within it. The Writer expresses this truth in the very opening verses, where he contrasts the local character of Judaism with the permanent character of Christianity. The one was a revelation made "in times past;" the other was the centre of all revelations, past, present, and future: "Whom he hath appointed heir of all things, for whom also he made the ages." It will be seen that in using such language he is really assuming a conservative position. He is seeking to dissipate the notion that he is about to introduce an innovation. In all departments of human life there is a tendency to resist change; in no department is that tendency so strong as in the sphere of religion, and in no religious sphere was it so powerful as in Judaism. A worship which was based on the thought of Divine unity was at all times likely most strenuously to resist any effort at modification or transmutation. It was hence of the utmost importance that Christianity, in making its appearance to the world, should not make its appearance as a new or isolated thing. It was above all things desirable that the keynote of its manifestation should be this: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law." In displaying itself to the eye of Judaism, Christianity had to bring out of its treasure things old as well as new; and it was clearly its wisest policy to direct less attention to the new than to the old. The

Writer of this Epistle therefore has studied, amidst the contrasts of his comparison, to find a deeper bond of underlying agreement. Judaism, he says, was all along a local and temporary manifestation; yet there was in it from the beginning something which was older than itself, and which would outlast itself; that permanent element was the principle of Christianity. Christ was from the first the heir of all systems, the goal of Judaism and the flower of heathenism. The idea of the world existed for his sake: for Him God "made the ages." He was the climax of the world's plan. The climax of a plan comes last in order of time, but it is first in order of thought; the end of an author's work is that which is present to him at the beginning. Christ was the Alpha because He was the Omega: He was the first because He was the last. He was the latest and the ripest possible fruit which the tree of life could bear, and therefore He was the final cause of the tree of life's existence. The latest manifestation of the glory of humanity was the first idea which prompted the creation of humanity. That idea was present in Judaism, lay behind its forms and ceremonies, hid in its symbols, slept in its prophecies. The nation, while it seemed to be following its own way, was all the time being led by a way which it knew not. In the very act of pursuing its selfish Messianic policy, it was unconsciously being hurried on to the threshold of a golden age—the dispensation of the fulness of time; for the day of Christ God had made all its ages.

4. This brings us to the last point of comparison which the Writer of this Epistle presents between Christianity and Judaism. He tells us that the Jewish revelation did not come to our fathers from the foun-

tain-head, but only at second hand: God spoke to them "by the prophets." It will be seen that even the prophets themselves were in a not much better condition. They did not, any more than the people, receive a direct revelation; the communications came to them not in their natural aspect, but in "various modes" and in "divers parts." According to this Writer, then, the Jewish people were placed in the very unsatisfactory position of receiving, through a second party, a revelation which had only been made to that party by scattered hints and broken suggestions. The result was that in the worship of the people they felt themselves far removed from the Object of their worship. God was in the heavens; He was in his holy temple, in the secret of his pavilion, on the throne around which were clouds and darkness. It is to this element of distance that we must ascribe much of that tendency to idolatry which is so prevalent in the Jewish history. Men cannot worship a void any more than they can adore an abstraction. A God who is infinitely removed by distance is just as effectually separated from the soul as a God who is infinitely removed by nature. The God of Judaism was not an abstraction; He was essentially a personal Being: but his personality was that of the absolute monarch whose audience-chamber is closed to his people. The result was that between the Monarch and his people there had to be interposed an artificial bridge of communication. Heaven and earth being separated, a ladder had to be stretched between them on which the angels of God might ascend and descend. There sprang up in the Jewish world a system of angel-worship precisely analogous to that which subsequently sprang up

in the mediæval world, and for precisely the same reason—because the immediate Object of worship was too far removed to be accessible. It was on this principle of angelology that a body of men were selected to be the mediators of Divine Revelation. As the intervention of the angel represented God to man, so the intervention of the prophet represented man to God. Even the revelation of angels could not speak to humanity in the mass ; it could only make itself known to the elect humanity—to those who by special gifts had been exalted above their fellows. The prophet was the immediate angel of the people, the lowest step of the ladder which descended from heaven to earth. In speaking to him the Jew spoke at least to a brother man ; the defect of the communication lay in the fact that the prophet himself had not directly received the message. He was commissioned to deliver to the people what had come to him only in various modes and divers parts ; and he himself was rarely, if ever, cognizant of the full import of these tidings which he bore. In a remarkable passage of the First Epistle of Peter it is distinctly set forth that the prophet was not a full recipient of his own message ; that he had to search diligently as to the meaning of the words which he conveyed ; and that the only part of the revelation which to him was personally clear was the fact of its being a revelation which could only be understood by posterity : “Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you.”

Such, then, was the position of the Jewish nation with regard to the privilege of communion with God. It was at best a second-hand communion, conveyed to

the mass of mankind through a selected body of men, who themselves received the message only in fragments, and did not perfectly understand its import. It is here that the Writer to the Hebrews draws the final and the greatest contrast between Judaism and Christianity. He tells the Jewish world that for the first time it was about to pass into the immediate presence of God ; that for the first time it was about to receive, not a message, but a revelation. He tells it that in Christianity it was to obtain a direct vision of that which had been hitherto only a distant report. The prophets were merely the organs through which the heavenly inspiration breathed ; Christ was Himself the breath of inspiration. The prophets were merely the chords through which the heavenly music sounded ; Christ was Himself the melody of heaven. The prophets were merely the servants ; Christ was the Son. The prophets told the world *about* God ; Christ's mission was the revelation of God. He came, not to bring a command from heaven, but to bring down the image of heaven. He brought to the world no light outside the circle of the Divine radiance ; He was the brightness of the Father's glory. As the brightness of the sun is a part of the sun's essence, so, in the view of this Writer, the glory of the visible Christ was the outflowing of the brightness of God. He expresses the same thought when he says that Christ was the express image of God's person ; literally, the impression produced by the *seal* of his person. As the impression of the seal reveals the very nature of that which has stamped it, so has the character of the Son of man conveyed the very stamp of God. Judaism is asked to give up the part for the whole, to

surrender her imperfect record that she may receive a full explanation. The indirect is to be lost in the immediate; law is to be merged in love; and the words which have hitherto been committed to the prophet and to the angel are to come forth directly and spontaneously from the innermost heart of God.

GEORGE MATHESON.

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY.

CHAPTER II.

Verse 1.—*Thou therefore* (*οὖν* points back to the defection of others, contrasting it with what he is satisfied will prove the faithfulness of Timothy), *my child* (no break has occurred in the filial and paternal relation between these two), *be endowed with strength*,¹ *i.e.*, allow yourself to be strengthened, open your heart to the invigorating influences which may reach you, *in the grace which is in Christ Jesus*, in that heavenly succour, that aid of all kinds which flows from Christ Jesus as its Divine source. He is not only the highest type of Divine grace, but its fountain-head.

Verse 2.—*And the things which thou heardest from me in the presence*² *of many witnesses* :—Mack, Huther, Ellicott, refer this to the act of Timothy's ordination by St. Paul and by the presbyters.³ The aorist favours this interpretation. Still, if the Apostle was now looking back on his own ministry as a completed course,⁴ the aorist might be used to denote the whole testi-

¹ Ἐνδυναμοῦ is passive, not middle, if we may judge from the passive form, which cannot well be confounded with middle, in Acts ix. 22; Rom. iv. 20; Heb. xi. 34.

² This use of διὰ is rather unusual. See Winer and Ellicott's note.

³ 1 Tim. i. 18; iv. 14; vi. 12, 13; 2 Tim. i. 6.

⁴ Cf. iv. 7.