

such citations remain to be pointed out. I shall be satisfied if scholars will accept these suggestions, and correct or confirm, and possibly supplement them.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

XV. THE ANCIENT TABERNACLE (CHAP. IX. 1-10).

THE writer now proceeds to compare the old and the new covenants with reference to their respective provisions for religious communion between man and God, his purpose being to show the superiority of the priestly ministry of Christ over that of the Levitical priesthood. In the first five verses of the section now to be considered he gives an inventory of the furniture of the tabernacle pitched in the wilderness; in the next five he describes the religious services there carried on. Thereafter he proceeds to describe in contrast the ministry of Christ, the new covenant High Priest, as performed in the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands.

The first paragraph simply continues the train of thought, and hence the subject of the affirmation in ver. 1 is left to be understood: "Now (*οὖν* leading back to viii. 5) the first (covenant) had ordinances of Divine service and its mundane sanctuary." The epithet *κοσμικόν* here applied to the tabernacle evidently signifies belonging to this material world, in opposition to the heavenly sanctuary (ver. 11) not made with hands out of things visible and tangible. Some have rendered "ornate," or well ordered, for which however the usual Greek word is *κόσμιος*. The purpose of the writer is to point out that the tabernacle belonged to this earth, and therefore possessed the attributes of

all things earthly, materiality and perishableness. The materials might be fine and costly; still they were material, and as such were liable to wax old and vanish away.

In vers. 2-5 is given a detailed description of the arrangements and furniture of this cosmic sanctuary. It is represented as divided into two parts, each of which is called a tabernacle, distinguished as first and second; and the articles contained in, or belonging to, each compartment are carefully specified. "For there was prepared a tabernacle, the first, wherein were the candlestick, and the table, and the shew-bread; which is called the Holy place. But behind the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies; having a golden altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, wherein (was) a golden pot containing manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; of which I cannot now speak severally." The tabernacle called in ver. 3 "the Holy of holies" is in ver. 7 called "the second." The veil between the Holy place and the most Holy place is called the second veil, to distinguish it from the curtain at the door of the tent, which is regarded as the first.

The *inventory* of the tabernacle furniture here given offers several points for consideration. Looking at it as a whole, what strikes one is the great care taken to give a full list of the articles, and also to describe them, specially those of costly material. Several things are named which have no bearing on the comparison between the old and new covenants, no counterparts in the Christian sanctuary, apparently for no other reason than just that the list might be complete. No valuator could be more careful to make an inventory of household furniture perfectly accurate than our author is to give an exhaustive list of the articles to be found in the Jewish tabernacle, whether in the Holy place or in the most Holy. Indeed so careful is he to make the

list complete, not only in his own judgment, but in the judgment of his readers, that he includes things which had no connexion with religious worship, but were merely put into the tabernacle for safe custody, as valuable mementos of incidents in Israel's history; *e.g.* the golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. It is further to be noted in regard to these articles, that they are represented as being within the ark of the covenant, though it is nowhere in the Old Testament said that they were, the direction given being merely that they should be placed before the Testimony,¹ and it being expressly stated in regard to the ark in Solomon's temple that there was nothing in it save the two tables on which the ten commandments were inscribed.² Whether these things ever had been in the ark we do not know. The fact that they are here represented to have been does not settle the point. The writer speaks not by inspiration, or from his own knowledge, but simply in accordance with traditional belief. The rabbis held that the golden pot and Aaron's rod were placed not only before, but inside the ark; and the Jews generally accepted this opinion. And our author is content to state the case as his readers might have stated it. He has no interest or wish to deny the truth of the opinion; on the contrary, his whole purpose in making the enumeration gives him rather an interest in acquiescing in current opinion on the point. For he desires to convince his readers of the superior excellence of the priestly ministry of Christ, and it is a part of his art as an orator to go as far as he honestly can in pleasing those whom he would persuade. If they think that it makes the golden pot and the budding rod more precious to have them inside the ark, why then, let it be so. He acts like a valuator describing certain articles greatly valued by surviving relatives as heirlooms that had belonged to a

¹ Exod. xvi. 32-34; Num. xvii. 10.

² 1 Kings viii. 9.

deceased friend. The valuator sees well enough that the articles in question are of little intrinsic worth, and knows that they would bring little money if sold. But he knows also the superstitious veneration with which the old relics are regarded by the kinsfolk of the departed; so he takes care how he speaks about them, that he may not shock natural feeling by assigning to them their real as distinct from their imaginary sentimental value.

To the same motive is due the careful manner in which notice is taken of the fact that certain articles of furniture had *gold* about them. The writer wishes to avoid the slightest suspicion of ungenerous disparagement. He is required by truth to disparage the old covenant as a whole, in comparison with the new; but he desires to speak of its ordinances and properties with becoming respect, as things regarded with peculiar reverence by his readers, and even held in high esteem by himself. While his doctrine is that the ancient tabernacle was at best but a poor, shadowy affair, he takes pains to show that in his judgment *it was as good as it was possible for a cosmic sanctuary to be*. Its articles of furniture were of the best material; the ark of fine wood covered all over with gold, the altar of incense of similar materials, the pot with manna of pure gold. He feels he can afford to describe in generous terms the furniture of the tabernacle, because, after all, he will have no difficulty in showing the immeasurable superiority of the "true" tabernacle wherein Christ ministers. One single phrase settles the point—*οὐ χειροποίητος* (ver. 11). The old tabernacle and all its furniture were made by the hands of men out of perishable materials. The curtains might be fine in texture and ornamentation, and the wood employed in constructing the tables the most beautiful and durable that could be procured. Still all was material, all was fashioned by human handiwork, all was doomed to wax old and vanish away. The "gold, and silver, and brass, and

the blue, purple, and scarlet cloths, and the fine linen, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood," were all liable to destruction by the devouring tooth of time, that spares nothing visible and tangible.

This eulogistic style of describing the furniture of the cosmic tabernacle was not only generous, but *politic*. The more the furniture was praised, the more the religious service carried on in the tent so furnished was in effect depreciated by the contrast inevitably suggested. In this point of view there is a latent irony in the reference to the precious materials of which the articles were made. The emphasis laid on the excellent quality of these really signifies the inferiority of the whole Levitical system. It says to the ear of the thoughtful: "The furniture of the tabernacle was golden, but its worship was poor; the outward aspect of things was fine, but the spiritual element was weak and defective; the apparatus was costly, but the practical religious result was of small account. The whole system was barbaric and beggarly, placing value in the outside, rather than in the inside, in matter rather than in mind, in the costliness of the furniture rather than in the high intelligence and refined purity of the cultus there carried on."

Looking now at the inventory distributively, let us note what articles are placed in either compartment of the tabernacle respectively. In the first are located the candlestick, the table, and the shew-bread, which was arranged in two rows on the table; to the second are assigned what is called the *θυμιατήριον*, and the ark of the covenant, containing, as is said, the manna pot, Aaron's rod, and the tables of the covenant, and surmounted by the Cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy-seat, or lid of the ark.

After finishing his enumeration, the writer adds that he cannot speak of the things enumerated in detail. Neither can I. The only article of which there is any need to speak

“particularly” is the *θυμιατήριον*, concerning which there are two questions to be considered: What is it? and with what propriety is it assigned to the most Holy place? As to the former, the word *θυμιατήριον* may mean either “the altar of incense,” as I have rendered it, or “the golden censer,” as translated in the Authorized and Revised Versions. It is, as Alford remarks, “a neuter adjective, importing anything having regard to, or employed in, the burning of incense,” and “may therefore mean either an altar upon which, or a censer in which, incense was burned.” The word occurs in Greek authors in both senses, and great division of opinion has arisen among commentators as to which of the two senses is to be preferred here. In favour of the rendering “censer” is a passage in the *Mischna*, in which stress is laid on the censer to be used on the great day of atonement as distinguished from that used on any other day, on the fact of its being of gold, and not only so, but of a particular and precious kind of gold. No mention of such a golden censer occurs in the *Pentateuch*. In *Leviticus xvi. 12*, where directions are given to Aaron concerning the incense offering, we read: “He shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not.” In this passage the Greek name for the censer in the *Septuagint* is τὸ *πυρεῖον*; the censer is not called golden; and, lastly, it could not from the nature of the case be kept in the most Holy place, for the high priest would then have had to go in for it in order to use it, a very unlikely procedure, considering that the very purpose of its use was to make it safe for the officiating priest to go within the veil. Still there may have been a censer, distinguished as the golden one, employed

in after ages in the solemnities of the great day of atonement; and it is conceivable that, following Jewish tradition in this as in other particulars already referred to, the writer might include it in his enumeration.

Conceivable, but that is all: the supposition is highly improbable. For observe what would follow. One very important article of furniture, the golden altar of incense, would in that case find no place in the enumeration. Is it at all likely that so prominent a piece of furniture would be overlooked in an inventory designed to give a full list of the articles that were the glory and boast of the ancient sanctuary? I do not suppose there would be any hesitation on the subject, were it not for the consideration, that by deciding that the altar of incense is intended we seem to make the writer guilty of an inaccuracy in assigning it to the inner shrine of the tabernacle. I have little doubt that this consideration had its own weight with our Revisers in leading them to retain the old rendering, "the golden censer"; and the fact detracts from the value of their judgment, as based, not on the merits of the question, but on the ground of theological prudence. A clearer insight into the mind of the writer would have shown them that this well-meant solicitude for his infallibility was uncalled for.

This brings us to the question as to the propriety of placing the altar of incense among the things belonging to the most Holy place. On this point even such a considerate interpreter as Bleek has not hesitated to say that the writer has fallen into a mistake, not without its bearing on the question of authorship, as showing that the epistle could not have been written by an inhabitant of Palestine, who would have known better, but may with more probability be ascribed to an Alexandrian, who might excusably be imperfectly informed. But it is not credible that so able and well instructed a writer as the author of our epistle, whoever he was, shows himself on every page to be could

commit such a blunder as is imputed to him, that, *viz.*, of locating the altar of incense within rather than without the second veil.¹

But why then, it may be asked, does he not mention this altar among the articles to be found in the first division of the tabernacle? The answer is of vital importance in its bearing on the main doctrine of the epistle, the utter insufficiency of the Levitical system. The fact is, that the altar of incense was a puzzle to one who was called on to state to which part of the tabernacle it belonged. Hence the peculiar manner in which the writer expresses himself in reference to the things assigned to the most Holy place. He does not say, as in connexion with the first division, "in which were" (ἐν ᾗ), but represents it as "having" (ἔχουσα) certain things. The phrase is chosen with special reference to the altar of incense. Of all the other articles it might have been said "in which were," but not of it. Nothing more could be said than that it *belonged* to the second division. The question is, whether even so much could be said, and why the writer preferred to say this rather than to say that the altar of incense stood outside the veil in the first division. Now as to the former part of the question, in so putting the matter our author was only following an Old Testament precedent, the altar of incense being in 1 Kings vi. 22 called the altar "that was by the oracle," or more correctly, as in the Revised Version, the

¹ In his latest work, *Das Urchristenthum*, Pfeleiderer repeats the assertion that the writer makes a mistake as to the altar of incense, and presses it, along with other supposed mistakes (*e.g.* the daily offering of sacrifice by the high priest, chap. x. 11) into the service of his argument as to the destination and authorship of the epistle. As a note on a following page will show, he might have found in the writings of Philo, from which he supposes our author to have drawn freely, a hint of a solution that would have kept him from bringing so hasty a charge. Having referred to this bulky work on primitive Christianity, I may remark that in it the distinguished author appears as weak in criticism as he is strong in exegesis. Herein he differs notably from his contemporary B. Weiss, who is masterly in criticism, but wooden and unsympathetic in exegesis.

altar "that belonged to the oracle." Then the directions given for fixing its position, as recorded in Exodus xxx. 6, are very significant. The rubric runs: "Thou shalt put it before the veil that is by the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy-seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with thee." The purport of this directory seems to be: outside the veil for daily use (for within it could not be used save once a year), but tending inwards, indicating by its very situation a wish to get in, standing there, so to speak, at the door of the most Holy place, petitioning for admission. So the eloquent eulogist of the better ministry of the new covenant appears to have understood it. He thinks of the altar of incense as praying for admission into the inner shrine, and waiting for the removal of the envious veil which forbade entrance. And he so far sympathises with its silent prayer as to admit it within the veil before the time, or at least to acknowledge that, while materially without, it belonged in spirit and function to the most Holy place.

In stating the case as he does our author was not only following usage, but utilizing the double relations of the altar of incense for the purposes of his apologetic. He wanted to make it felt that the position of that altar was difficult to define, that it was both without and within the veil, that you could not place it exclusively in either position without leaving out something that should be added to make the account complete. And he wished to press home the question, What was the cause of the difficulty? The radical evil, he would suggest, was the *existence* of the veil. It was the symbol of an imperfect religion, which denied men free access to God, and so was the parent of this anomaly, that the altar of incense had to be in two places at the same time: within the veil, as there were the mercy-seat and the Hearer of prayer; without the veil, because the incense of prayer must be offered daily, and yet no one

might go within save the high priest, and he only once a year. How thankful, then, should we be that the veil is done away, so that the distinction of without and within no longer exists, and we may come daily to offer the incense of our prayers in the very presence of God, without fear of evil, with perfect "assurance to be heard"!¹

After the inventory of its furniture comes an account of the ministry carried on in the Jewish sanctuary (vers. 6-10); the description of which, coming after the former, has all the effect of an anticlimax. One can hardly fail to say to himself, What a fall is here! The furniture was precious, but the worship how poor! I read first of golden arks, altars, and pots, and then of sacrifices, ceremonies, meats, drinks, divers washings—mere fleshly ordinances, utterly unfit to put away sin. Without any commentary, the two lists placed side by side tell their own tale. Every one capable of reflection feels that a religious system in which the vessels of the sanctuary are so much superior to the *service* cannot be the final and permanent form of man's communion with God, but only a type or parable for the time of better things to come, that could last only till the era of reformation arrived.

This truth, however, the writer does not leave to be inferred, but expressly points out and proves. On two things he insists, as tending to show the insufficiency and therefore the transiency of the Levitical system, and all that pertained to it. First, he asserts that the mere division of the tabernacle into an accessible Holy place and an

¹ A thought similar to the one above stated occurs in Philo in reference, not to the altar of incense, but to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Observing that it is not expressly said in Scripture where it was placed, he asks, "What shall we say?" and decides that it was both within and without paradise—within as to essence, without as to power: οὐσίᾳ μὲν ἐν αὐτῷ, δυνάμει δὲ ἐκτὸς; just the converse of what I have said of the altar of incense, which was within the Holy of holies as to power, without as to essence. Vide *Alleg. i.*, chap. xviii.

inaccessible most Holy place proved the imperfection of the worship there carried on; and, secondly, he points out the disproportion between the great end of religion and the means employed for reaching it under the Levitical system. The former of these positions is dealt with in vers. 6-8, the latter in vers. 9, 10.

The method in which religious worship was carried on in the tabernacle is stated in these terms: "These things being thus prepared, the priests go in continually into the first tabernacle, accomplishing their services; but into the second, once in the year, alone, the high priest, not without blood, which he offers for himself, and for the ignorances of the people."¹ The purpose of this statement is to convey a vivid impression of inaccessibility in reference to the most Holy place, which is done by emphasizing three particulars: (1) that no ordinary priest, not to speak of lay persons, ever entered there, only the high priest; (2) that even the high priest entered only once a year;² (3) that he dared not enter without the blood of a victim, to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the whole people. The inaccessibility was not absolute, but the solitary exception made the sense of inaccessibility more intense than if there had been no exception. Had entrance been absolutely forbidden, men would have regarded the inner sanctuary as a place with which they had no concern, and would have ceased to think of it at all. But the admission of their highest representative in holy things on one solitary day in the year taught them that the most Holy place was a place with which they had to do, and at the same time showed it to be a place very difficult of access. The cere-

¹ The present tenses (*εἰσίσαι, προσφέρει*) are held by some to prove that when the epistle was written the temple service was still going on. But the argument is not conclusive. The present may be that of the Scripture record, the writer describing ideally as if the service were now going on.

² That is, on one day in the year; how often on that one day is of no consequence to the purpose on hand.

monial of the great day of atonement said in effect: You need to get in here, but it is barely possible to get in. You can be admitted only by deputy, as represented by your officially holy man; and even he may enter only at rare intervals, and with fear and trembling, with blood in his hands to atone for his and your sins. The door of the second tabernacle is all but shut against you; open just enough to keep alive in your hearts at once a sense of your need to get in, and the painful consciousness that your desire for admission is rather whetted than satisfied.

In the next verse our author intimates that just this was the import of the arrangement. "The Holy Ghost this (or by this arrangement) indicating that the way of (into) the Holy place has not yet been manifested, while the first tabernacle has a standing" (ver. 8). The idea is, that the exclusion from the inner part of the Jewish tabernacle, and the all but entire restriction of religious service to the outer part, signified "perfect intercourse with God not yet granted, the highest and therefore abiding form of religion a thing yet to come." The writer would have his readers see, in the mere fact of such a division of the tabernacle into a first and second chamber, a Divine intimation that there was a higher boon, a nearer approach to, a more intimate fellowship with God in store for men, which for the present was denied. The first part of the tabernacle, he would say, is yours; the second in its spiritual significance belongs to the future, to the time of Messiah, when all things are to undergo renovation. To cling to legal worship then as something that must last for ever is to shut your ear to the voice of the sanctuary itself, by its very structure bearing witness to its own insufficiency, and saying to all who have ears to hear: "I am not for aye. I have a first and a second chamber, a Near and a Nearer to God. The first and the Near is yours, O people of Israel, for daily use; the second and the Nearer is as good as shut against you.

When that which is perfect is come, the Nearer will be accessible to all, and the veil and the place outside and all the services that now go on there will cease to exist."

In some such sense as this are to be understood the words in the first clause of ver. 9: "Which (the existence, *i.e.*, or standing of the tabernacle as a first chamber)¹ is a parable for the time being." The sense is, that the outer part of the tabernacle, by its position as a first chamber, was a parable, not in word but in a fabric, teaching the temporary, shadowy, imperfect nature of the dispensation. Some think the time referred to is the time of the gospel, and that the idea is, that the services carried on in the holy place were a figure, and nothing more, of the spiritual services offered by Christians. But I think the Authorized Version is correct in making the time referred to be the time present to the Old Testament worshippers. The tabernacle was a parable even to them, bidding them look forward to the future, to the reality whereof it was but a rude sketch or adumbration.

It will be evident from the foregoing exposition how central to the author's system of thought is the conception of Christianity as the religion of free access, and with what truth that conception may be represented as the dogmatic kernel of the epistle.

We come now to the description of the service carried on in the Jewish sanctuary (vers. 9, 10). The aim and effect is to make the reader feel that the ritual was in keeping with the parabolic character of the sanctuary itself, the services not less than the structure of the tabernacle proclaiming it to be but a shadow of good things to come. "A parable in keeping with which are offered both gifts and sacrifices having no power to perfect as to

¹ The *ἡρῖς* refers to *στάσις*, "a standing or position such as." So Mr. Rendall, who remarks: "It is not the chamber itself (as in A.V.), but its position, which is a figure."

conscience him that serveth" (*τὸν λατρεύοντα*, either the officiating priest, or the people worshipping through him). That the legal sacrifices could not perfect the worshipper, whether priest or layman, as to conscience appears to the writer self-evident, and he states the truth as an axiom, hoping that his readers will say Amen to it. Of what limited avail those sacrifices were to put away sin is significantly hinted by the term *ἀγνοήματα* in ver. 7; which points to the fact that the sacrificial system dealt chiefly with mistakes in matters of ritual.¹

Ver. 10, which gives some details regarding the system, is very loosely connected with the foregoing context. "Only with meats and drinks, and divers washings, ordinances of the flesh, imposed till a time of reformation." Two questions may be asked in reference to this loosely constructed sentence: (1) What is it that is called "ordinances of the flesh"? (2) In what relation do the meats and drinks and washings stand to the gifts and sacrifices?—are they the same things under different names, or something additional? The "ordinances" are doubtless the gifts and sacrifices of the preceding verse. The connexion of thought is: "gifts and sacrifices not having the power to perfect as to conscience, on the contrary, being mere ordinances of the flesh putting away ceremonial uncleanness." As to the meats, drinks, etc., I think they are neither altogether the same with the gifts and sacrifices, nor altogether different from them, but things that were very prominent in connexion with sacrifices,—there being meat offerings and drink

¹ Besides such ignorances there were other more real and serious offences for which sacrifices were prescribed = sins against the seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments. These were of the nature of exceptions proving the rule; they were included in the category of expiable offences for special reasons: *e.g.* in a case of keeping back something stolen, entrusted, lent, or found, when the sin was voluntarily confessed and could not otherwise have been proved. Similarly in the case of suppressing truth as a witness, and of the least aggravated offence against chastity, when the offenders were allowed to offer a trespass offering after the sin had been punished by scourging.

offerings prescribed by the law, and many washings connected with sacrifices and their occasions. They are referred to in a loose way to illustrate the grossly material nature of the whole religious services, and to justify the application of the depreciatory terms "ordinances of flesh." We may paraphrase the whole passage thus: "A parable in keeping with which are offered gifts and sacrifices not fit to perfect the worshipper as to conscience, but only, with their meats and drinks, and divers washings, and so forth, mere ordinances of flesh." Thus understood, the careless construction is studied, being an oratorical device to express impatience with the notion that such ceremonies could possibly cleanse the conscience. The writer speaks as Luther was wont to speak of penances, etc. The great reformer never came in the way of such things without getting into a holy rage at them, and relieving his feelings by a contemptuous enumeration, as if holding them up to scorn, and "making a show of them openly." A similar passage may be found in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, just where the words now quoted occur: "If ye be dead with Christ, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (or rather, why do ye dogmatise, saying,) Touch not, taste not, handle not?" The careless, offhand way in which the apostle gives examples of the habit he condemns, "Touch not this, taste not that, handle not a third thing," is expressive of the contempt he feels for the whole system which attached importance to such trivialities.

The expression, "time of reformation" (*καιρός διορθώσεως*), is one of several names given to the new Christian era from an Old Testament point of view. For those who lived under the moonlight of Jewish ordinances, and, conscious of its insufficiency, waited eagerly for the dawn of day, that era, the object of their hope, was the age to come, the time of a better hope, the time of refreshing, the day of redemption, or, as here, the time of rectification. This last

designation, if not the most poetical, is very appropriate. For when Christ, the High Priest of the good things to come, arrived, all defects inherent in the ancient system were remedied. The envious veil was removed, the multitude of inefficient sacrificial rites was replaced by one all-availing sacrifice; the problem of the pacification and purification of conscience was thoroughly dealt with; and religion became, not an affair of mechanical routine, but a rational spiritual service.

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