**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**EXODUS-036. THE COPIES OF THINGS IN THE HEAVENS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation. 3. And thou shalt put therein the ark of the testimony, and cover the ark with the vail. 4. And thou shalt bring in the table, and set in order the things that are to be set in order upon it; and thou shalt bring in the candlestick, and light the lamps thereof. 5. And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle. 6. And thou shalt set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation. 7. And thou shalt set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and shalt put water therein. 8. And thou shalt set up the court round about, and hang up the hanging at the court gate. 9. And thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that is therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof: and it shall be holy. 10. And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy. 11. And thou shalt anoint the laver and his foot, and sanctify it. 12. And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water. 13. And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 14. And thou shalt bring his sons, and clothe them with coats: 15. And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations. 16. Thus did Moses: according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he."*

*Exodus 40:1-16*

The Exodus began on the night after the fourteenth day of the first month. The Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month; that is, one year, less a fortnight, after the Exodus. Exodus 19:1 shows that the march to Sinai took nearly three months; and if to this we add the eighty days of Moses seclusion on the mountain, we get about six months as occupied in preparing the materials for the Tabernacle. Setting it up was a short process, done in a day. The time specified was ample to get ready a wooden framework of small dimensions, with some curtains and coverings of woven stuffs. What a glad stir there would be in the camp on that New Year's day, when the visible token of God's dwelling in its midst first stood there! Our present purpose is simply to try to bring out the meaning of the Tabernacle and its furniture. It was both a symbol and a type; that is, it expressed in material form certain great religious needs and truths; and, just because it did so, it pointed onwards to the full expression and satisfaction of these in Christ Jesus and His gifts. In other words, it was a parable of the requisites for, and the blessings of, communion with God.

Note, then, first, the general lesson of the Tabernacle as a whole. Its name declares its meaning, the tent of meeting (Rev. Ver.). It was the meeting-place of God with man, as the name is explained in Exodus 29:42, where I will meet with you, to speak there unto thee. It is also named simply the dwelling; that is, of God. It was pitched in the midst of the camp, like the tent of the king with his subjects clustered round him. Other nations had temples, like the solemn structures of Egypt; but this slight, movable sanctuary was a new thing, and spoke of the continual presence of Israel's God, and of His loving condescension in sharing their wandering lives, and, like them, dwelling within curtains. It was a visible representation of a spiritual fact for the then present; it was a parable of the inmost reality of communion between man and God; and it was, therefore, a prophecy both of the full realisation of His presence among men, in the temple of Christ's body, and of the yet future communion of Heaven, which is set before us by the great voice ...saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.

The threefold division into court of the worshippers, holy place for the priests, and holiest of all, was not peculiar to the Tabernacle. It signifies the separation which, after all nearness, must still exist. God is unrevealed after all revelation; afar off, however near; shrouded in the utter darkness of the inmost shrine, and only approached by the priestly intercessor with the blood of the sacrifice. Like all the other arrangements of the Sanctuary, the division of its parts declares a permanent truth, which has impressed itself on the worship of all nations; and it reveals God's way of meeting the need by outward rites for the then present, and by the mediation of the great High-Priest in the time to come, whose death rent the veil, and whose life will, one day, make the holiest place in the heavens patent to our feet.

The enumeration of the furniture of the Tabernacle starts from the innermost shrine, and goes outward. It was fit that it should begin with God's special abode. The holy of holies was a tiny chamber, closed in from light, the form, dimensions, materials, and furniture of which were all significant. It measured ten cubits, or fifteen feet, every way, thereby expressing, in its cubical form and in the predominance of the number ten, stability and completeness. It will be remembered that the same cubical form is given to the heavenly city, in the Apocalypse, for the same reason. There, in the thick darkness, unseen by mortals except for the one approach of the high-priest on the day of atonement, dwelt the glory which made light in the darkness, and flashed on the gold which covered all things in the small shrine.

Our lesson does not speak of cherubim or mercy-seat, but specifies only the ark of the testimony. This was a small chest of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and containing the two tables of the law, which were called the testimony, as bearing witness to Israel of God's will concerning their duty, and as therein bearing witness, too, of what He is. Nor must the other part of the witness-bearing of the law be left out of view,--that it testifies against the transgressors of itself. The ark was the centre-point of the divine revelation, the very throne of God; and it is profoundly significant that its sole contents should be the tables of stone. Egyptian arks contained symbols of their gods, degrading, bestial, and often impure; but the true revelation was a revelation, to the moral sense, of a Being who loves righteousness. Other faiths had their mysteries, whispered in the inmost shrine, which shunned the light of the outer courts; but here the revelation within the veil was the same as that spoken on the house-tops. Our lesson does not refer to the mercy seat, which covered the ark above, and spoke the need for, and the provision of, a means whereby the witness of the law against the worshipper's sins should be, as it were, hid from the face of the enthroned God. The veil which is referred to in verse 3 was that which hung between the holy of holies and the holy place. It did not cover the ark, as the Authorised Version unfortunately renders, but screened it, as the Revised Version correctly gives it. It blazed with colour and embroidered figures of cherubim. No doubt, the colours were symbolical; but it is fancy, rather than interpretation, which seeks meanings beyond splendour in the blue and purple and crimson and white which were blended in its gorgeous folds. What is it which hangs, in ever-shifting hues, between man and God? The veil of creation, embroidered by His own hand with beauty and life, which are symbolised in the cherubim, the types of the animate creation. The two divisions of the Tabernacle, thus separated by the veil, correspond to earth and heaven; and that application of the symbol is certainly intended, though not exclusively.

We step, then, from the mystery of the inner shrine out to the comparatively inferior sacredness of the holy place, daily trodden by the priests. Three articles stand in it: the table for the so-called shew-bread, the great lampstand, and the golden altar of incense. Of these, the altar was in the midst, right in the path to the holiest place; and on the right, looking to the veil, the table of shew-bread; while on the left was the lampstand. These three pieces of furniture were intimately connected with each other, and represented various aspects of the spiritual character of true worshippers. The holy place was eminently the people's, just as the most holy place was eminently God's. True, only the priests entered it; but they did so on behalf of the nation. We may expect, therefore, to find special reference to the human side of worship in its equipments; and we do find it. Of the three articles, the altar of incense was in idea, as in locality, the centre; and we consider it first, though it stands last in our list, suggesting that, in coming from the most holy place, the other two would be first encountered. The full details of its construction and use are found in Exodus 30. Twice a day sweet incense was burned on it, and no other kind of sacrifice was permitted; but once a year it was sprinkled, by the high priest, with expiatory blood. The meaning is obvious. The symbolism of incense as representing prayer in frequent in Scripture, and most natural. What could more beautifully express the upward aspirations of the soul, or the delight of God in these, than the incense sending up its wreaths of fragrant smoke? Incense gives no fragrance nor smoke till it is kindled; and the censer has to be constantly swung to keep up the glow, without which there will be no odour of a sweet smell. So cold prayers are no prayers, but are scentless, and unapt to rise. The heart must be as a coal of fire, if the prayer is to come up before God with acceptance. Twice a day the incense was kindled; and all day long, no doubt, it smouldered, a perpetual incense before the Lord. So, in the life of true communion, there should be daily seasons of special devotion, and a continual glow. The position of the altar of incense was right in the line between the altar of burnt offering, in the outer court, and the entrance to the holiest place; by which we are taught that acceptable prayer follows on reconciliation by sacrifice, and leads into the secret place of the Most High. The yearly atonement for the altar taught that evil imperfection cleaves to all our devotion, which needs and receives the sprinkling of the blood of the great sacrifice.

The great seven-branched candlestick, or lampstand, stood on the right of the altar, as the priest looked to the most holy place. Its meaning is plain. It is an emblem of the Church as recipient and communicative of light, in all the applications of that metaphor, to a dark world. As the sacred lamps streamed out their hospitable rays into the desert all the night, so God's servants are lights in the world. The lamps burned with derived light, which had to be fed as well as kindled. So we are lighted by the touch of the great Aaron, and His gentle hand tends the smoking wick, and nourishes it to a flame. We need the oil of the Spirit to sustain the light. The lamp was a clustered light, representing in its metal oneness the formal and external unity of Israel. The New Testament unity is of a better kind. The seven candlesticks are made one because He walks in the midst, not because they are welded on to one stem.

Consistency of symbolism requires that the table of shew-bread should, like the altar and the candlestick, express some phase of true worship. Its interpretation is less obvious than that of the other two. The name means literally bread of the face; that is, bread presented to, and ever lying before, God. There are two explanations of the meaning. One sees in the offering only a devout recognition of God as the author of material blessing, and a rendering to Him of His gifts of outward nourishment. In this case, the shew-bread would be anomalous, a literality thrust into the midst of symbolism. The other explanation keeps up the congruity, by taking the material bread, which is the result of God's blessing on man's toil, as a symbol of the spiritual results of God's blessing on man's spiritual toil, or, in other words, of practical righteousness or good works, and conceives that these are offered to God, by a strong metaphor, as acceptable food. It is a bold representation, but we may quote I will sup with him as proof that it is not inadmissible; and it is not more bold than the declaration that our obedience is an odour of a sweet smell. So the three pieces of furniture in the holy place spoke of the true Israel, when cleansed by sacrifice and in communion with God, as instant in prayer, continually raying out the light derived from Him, and zealous of good works, well-pleasing to God.

We pass outwards, through another veil, and stand in the court, which was always open to the people. There, before the door of the Tabernacle, was the altar of burnt offering. The order of our chapter brings us to it last, but the order of worship brought the worshipper to it first. Its distinctive character was that on it the blood of the slain sacrifices was offered. It was the place where sinful men could begin to meet with God, the foundation of all the communion of the inner sanctuary. We need not discuss mere details of form and the like. The great lesson taught by the altar and its place, is that reconciliation is needed, and is only possible by sacrifice. As a symbol it taught every Israelite what his own conscience, once awakened, endorsed, that sin must be expiated before the sinner and God can walk in concord. As prophecy, it assured those whose hearts were touched with longing, that God would Himself provide the lamb for the burnt offering, in some way as yet unknown. For us it is an intended prefiguration of the great work of Jesus Christ. We have an altar. We need that altar at the beginning of our fellowship with God, as much as Israel did. A Christianity which does not start from the altar of burnt offering will never get far into the holy place, nor ever reach that innermost shrine where the soul lives and adores, silent before the manifest God between the cherubim.

The laver, or basin, was intended for the priests use, in washing hands and feet before ministering at the altar or entering the tabernacle. It teaches the necessity for purity, in order to priestly service.

Thus these three divisions of the Tabernacle and its court set forth the stages in the approach of the soul to God, beginning with the reconciling sacrifice and cleansing water, advancing to closer communion by prayer, impartation of light received, and offering of good works to God, and so entering within the veil into secret sweetnesses of union with God, which attains its completeness only when we pass from the holy place on earth to the most holy in the heavens.

The remainder of the text can only be glanced at in a sentence or two. It consists of two parts: the consecration of the Tabernacle and its vessels by the anointing oil which, when applied to inanimate objects, simply devoted them to sacred uses, and the consecration of Aaron and his sons. A fuller account is given in Leviticus 8., from which we learn that it was postponed to a later period, and accompanied with a more elaborate ritual than that prescribed here. That consists of three parts: washing, as emblematic of communicated purity; robing, and anointing,--the last act signifying, when applied to men, their endowment with so much of the divine Spirit as fitted them for their theocratic functions. These three things made the sanctifying, or setting apart for God's service, of Aaron and his sons. He is consecrated alone, in order that his primacy may be clearly indicated. He is consecrated by Moses as the higher; then the sons are consecrated with the same ceremonial, to indicate the hereditary priesthood, and the equality of Aaron's successors with himself. They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death, and provision for their brief tenure of office was embodied in the consecration of the sons by the side of the father. Their priesthood was only everlasting by continual succession of short-lived holders of the office. But the prediction which closes the text has had a fulfilment beyond these fleeting, shadowy priests, in Him whose priesthood is everlasting and throughout all generations. because He ever liveth to make intercession (Heb. 7:25).