

# MOSES: The Servant of God

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### TABERNACLE BUILDING

**“According to all that I shew thee, even so shall ye make it after the pattern which was showed thee in the mount”** (Exodus 25:9, 40).

THE heart of the Jewish people was the Tabernacle, around which their tents circled, and the movements of which determined the journeyings of the host. The Tabernacle also taught them some of the deepest thoughts about God, in a kind of picture language, which was best suited to their immature minds. These we can touch on but incidentally, as our main point is the part borne by Moses in its creation.

We must remember that the children of Israel did not possess a language like our own, with many words, and a rich vocabulary, capable of expressing all kinds of abstract ideas, such as love, wisdom, purity, spirituality, holiness. We hardly realize how great a hindrance to the communication of spiritual truth arises from the lack of suitable words to act as the channels of thought. How could you speak of love to savages, if the only word for it in their language had impure and coarse associations? So that before making his revelation God had to provide language for his thoughts. This He did largely in the construction of the Tabernacle.

#### I. THE CONCEPTION OF THE TABERNACLE

The pattern in the mount! Then clearly there must have been some visible phenomenon, some bright apparition, some glorious picture cast on the clouds or built on the old rocks. There may have been stakes and curtains, cherubs and lamps, gold and silver, altar and candlestick; but they would not bear the touch they existed as a beautiful dream, like some mystery of cloud that stands for a moment in the heavens at sunset, and then is gone.

But it is almost inconceivable that God did not at the same time explain to Moses those wonderful conceptions of his own nature, and his relations to men, which were intended to be set forth in this material structure. In those days of hallowed intercourse, the Almighty Teacher must have impressed on the reverent and receptive mind of his pupil trains of holy thought which engrossed and delighted him. It may be that even to him they were first conveyed under those pictorial forms in which they were afterwards presented to the people; but in any case they were surely communicated by the Spirit which reveals the deep things of God, and makes them known to those who love Him.

They were as follows:

*God's willingness to share man's life.*

If the people had only seen the devouring fire on the top of Sinai, the pavilion of God's presence, they would never have dared to think that there was any community of interest between Him and them. To their minds, He would always have seemed distant and unapproachable. So God said, **"Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them"** (ver. 8); and He promised concerning it, **"I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God"** (Exodus 29:45).

Thus it was ordained that this larger tent should be pitched among them, only differing from their own in its proportions and materials; but standing on the same level sand, struck and pitched at the same hour with theirs, and enduring the same vicissitudes of weather and travel.

Did not this say, as plainly as words could, that the tabernacle of God was with men, and that He was willing to dwell with them and become their God? Did it not teach that the Lord had become a pilgrim with the pilgrim host; no longer a God afar off, but a sharer in their national fortunes? And is not this the very lesson of the Incarnation?

May we not venture to suppose that the Church, that holy body which was being prepared for the Son of God, was even then revealed to the faithful servant? and that in his wonderful structure he was taught to repeat, in material forms, that mystic union of spirit, soul, and body, in the man Christ Jesus, of which the holy of holies, the holy place, and the outer court were the transient but striking emblem?

- It was thus that the mind of man was prepared to learn that God could become flesh, and tabernacle amongst us.

- It was thus that the first syllables were coined which were to be built up into the name Emmanuel. - It was thus that the Incarnation was prefigured.

For the body of JESUS is the true Tabernacle, which the Lord hath pitched, and not man; that body which was born of the pure Virgin, in which He abode with men, and through which He achieved redemption.

*The Greatness of God.*

To this, too, a visible expression was to be given. The Tabernacle was the most superb building of its kind ever reared by man. It must have cost at least a quarter of a million sterling an immense sum for that fugitive nation of slaves. The silver pedestals placed at intervals along the sand to hold the upright boards; the gorgeous tapestry which composed ceiling and walls; the golden furniture, of which the seven-branched candelabra alone weighed one hundredweight of gold, equal to £5500 in value; the brass wrought into sixty brazen pillars, with their silver capitals and hooks, from which were suspended curtains of so slight a gauze that people could see all that was transpiring in the outer court. How costly were these!

On that new year's day, the anniversary of the Exodus (Exodus 40:17), as it stood forth completed in the desert sun shine, it must have seemed to all who beheld it as fair as the New Jerusalem did to the eye of the seer, when he beheld it descending out of Heaven from God; and must have furnished new and enlarged conceptions of the Divine majesty: though to the eye of Moses there must have been almost a disappointment, because the actual fell so far short of the pattern he had seen.

#### *God's Unity.*

All around, the nations were under the spell of idolatry.

But the Tabernacle, with all its differing parts, and materials, and accessories, was one. One ark; one incense altar; one altar of burnt-offering; one sacred purpose in every order and rite for the putting away of uncleanness. It stood, therefore, among men as a perpetual protest against idolatry, and as an emphatic witness to the Unity of God. "**Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord.**" Such was the perpetual message that floated on the desert air from that unique structure.

But how sublime, how awe-inspiring must that message have been, as it first broke on the heart of Moses! He knew it before, but he saw it as one who looks into the heart of truth; comparing small things with great, it was as when we look into the eye of our friend, and detect there depths of life and love which we could not put into words, and which had passed our thoughts.

#### *God's Spirituality.*

On the mountain the lawgiver:

- Saw the robes of the King, but not the King;
- Saw his glory, but not his person;
- Saw his back part, but not his face; and
- Saw the conception that God was a Spirit was conveyed to the people in that most striking form.

Enter the holy place; your eye is arrested by the heavy but magnificent curtain, wrought with cherubim, that cuts off six feet of the length of the entire structure. Pull that aside, and you pass into a chamber which is a perfect cube, a miniature of the New Jerusalem, whose length, and breadth, and height, are equal. In the Egyptian temple, this apartment would contain the crocodile or ibis; but here there was only a box, over which forms of exquisite beauty bent with outspread wings, and between them a light shone which was not borrowed from sun or stars. Could anything more significantly convey the idea that God was a Spirit?

This absence of any visible form in the inner shrine most astonished the rough soldier Pompey, who strode with eager curiosity across the floor, which had never before been pressed by aught but the unsandaled foot of the high priest once a year. He expected to find some visible embodiment of the Lord, and turned contemptuously away deriding the empty void. But to Moses it must have been an unparalleled conception, overpowering his thoughts.

### *God's Purity.*

The impression of this was produced by a series of comparisons.

First, the Tabernacle stood within a courtyard fenced from public approach, the outer part could be trodden only by those men who had passed through certain rites of purification; and as to the inner, it could only be trodden once a year by the high priest, carefully cleansed by many rites, and clad in garments of special design, whilst the blood of slain animals, selected out of the herds for their freedom from any blemish or speck, was sprinkled around. All was done to impress upon the people the care with which they must approach God; and in this way impressions of his holiness were wrought into the national mind, which succeeding centuries have not been able to efface.

And throughout these arrangements, and notably by these repeated references to the blood of sacrifices that was to be shed and sprinkled, Moses became much familiarized with the philosophy of the Atonement.

He must have seen across the centuries the Cross of JESUS, with its mystery of love and sacrifice and substitution for the sins of men; and there must have arisen a very clear prevision of those various aspects of that marvellous death, which were faintly shadowed forth in the offerings, and which touch God and the believer, the offender in ignorance, and the sinner in presumption, the great world of men, and apparently the universe of God.

Such thoughts as these must have penetrated the soul of Moses as he waited before God, oblivious to the flight of time, the waning love and idolatry of his people, or the demands of the body for food. And as we behold the great spectacle of that rapt and spell-bound soul, we get some conception of one part at least of the engagements of eternity, and we are stirred to seek after a more intimate knowledge of God.

Oh to know God! Not to know about Him, but to know Him;

- To **“follow on to know the Lord”**;
- To think his thoughts;
- To give Him time to convey his thoughts into our minds;
- To acquaint ourselves with Him, who, indeed, invites us to the knowledge, and sets open all the doors of his nature for us to enter.

This were better than all beside; no rapturous experience, no deliverance from evil, no flight of emotion, could so repay our soul as this, which must carry in its embrace all of these. It were well, indeed, to suffer the loss of all things to know Him!

## **II. THE REPRODUCTION OF THE PATTERN**

There is a special interest to us all in this.

We are not called to build again the Tabernacle, after that old pattern which has served its purpose, and fallen into disuse because superseded by the clearer revelations of the Gospel; yet there is an analogy which is full of instruction and inspiration in the life of every true believer, and deserves our attention for a moment.

As the Tabernacle dwelt in the mind of God before it was reproduced on the desert sands, so does the life of each one exist, as a conception of that same infinite intelligence which comprehends in its sweep the flight of an angel with the everlasting Gospel, and the fall of a sparrow to the ground.

When a child is born into the world, with all its faculties shut up within it, as a flower in the bud, there is in the mind of God a perfect picture of what that life may become, an ideal to which it may be conformed. There is a clear anticipation of what it will be; but side by side there is a distinct prevision of what it might be.

And if only that pattern could be seen and literally reproduced, if only that life could attain to the Divine ideal, there would be no room for regret or disappointment. It would fulfil its complete purpose as a thought of the Divine mind, and attain its perfect consummation and bliss.

So with the believer standing on the threshold of the Christian life, full of hope and purpose. For him also there is a perfect ideal stored in the Divine nature, of a life full of the blessedness of the Beatitudes, and overflowing with the mighty works of the Gospels. If only it were realized from day to day! of growing glory, from strength to strength, from grace to grace. Alas, that with so many of us, as the years have passed, we have wrought our own evil will and followed our own design!

The main inquiry for us all as we enter on any fresh enterprise, or even pass over the threshold of each new day, should be, not How would other men act? nor, What will make for my own advantage? nor What would increase my reputation, or add to my gains? but What is God's ideal, God's thought, God's pattern? And our one aim should be to understand it, sure that to fulfil it is to have lived well.

*God's Pattern was Comprehensive.*

No tassel, nor socket, nor tiny detail, was left to the fancy or ingenuity of the artificers; all was comprehended in the Divine pattern.

Of every detail God had a plan; because in each some purpose was hidden, and the symmetry of the whole depended on the perfection of each part. So in life God's thought covers all details. Nothing is too trivial to be made a matter of prayer and supplication.

No great life is possible that does not comprehend in its scheme and scope attention to the commonplaces and trifles of character.

*God's Plan was unfolded gradually.*

Probably the account of the revelation of the successive parts of the Tabernacle is an exact transcript of the method by which the Divine design was unfolded to Moses thought. Line upon line, precept upon precept such is ever the Divine method. If we may so put it, the plan of the life of JESUS was only unfolded to his human intelligence a step at a time. Remember how He said, **“the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do.” “He will show Him greater works than these.”**

The eye of the perfect Servant was always fixed on the development of his Father’s scheme for Him; this was shown in the touch of a wasted hand, the cry of an agonized parent, the pressure of the hate of his foes, the demands of the crowds.

We shall not be able to see far in front, nor the whole completed plan of our life; but as we complete one thing, another will be revealed, and then the next, and the next. It may be that we shall have to fulfil the different portions of the Tabernacle of our life, without apparent connection with each other, **“by divers portions and in divers manners,”** and we shall not understand the Divine purpose; but at the end of life we shall see that it was one complete and exquisite structure, of which no part was wanting.

*God’s Plan was commensurate with the people’s resources.*

As the pattern was there on the Mount, there were the materials for its realization in the possession of the people below the gold and silver and precious stones; the blue and purple and scarlet; the fine linen and goats hair; the rams skins and badgers skins; the genius of the artificers; and the willingness of the people.

God never gives a man a pattern without making Himself responsible for the provision of all materials needed for its execution. Take God’s plan, and then trust God utterly for the needful grace; it is there; it only awaits the claim of your faith. All things are added to the man who seeks first and only the kingdom of God. If the materials are not forthcoming, you may seriously question whether you are not working on a plan of your own. God will not provide for a single tassel of your own addition to his scheme.

*God’s Plan must be resolutely Obeyed.*

Again and again in the last chapter of Exodus we are told that all was done, **“as the Lord commanded Moses.”**

This was his supreme joy and satisfaction, that he had not added to or diminished from the Divine command; and so the work was finished. It would be well for us to cultivate the habit of immediate and entire subservience to the prompting of the Divine will, repeating it in the tiniest details as well as in the most difficult experiences.

Thus would the human life become harmonious with the Divine, the tabernacles of our lives would become the home of Him that inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is Holy; and there would be the settling down upon us of the Divine Shekinah, **“the cloud by day and fire by night,”** through all our journeys, till we reach our Father’s home.

*God's Plan is always Progressive.*

In pursuing the earlier stages of the Divine tuition, Moses was specially occupied with elaborating the elementary idea of sacrifice, as in the case of the Paschal Lamb.

The next stage was the building of the Tabernacle, with which we have now been engaged. But this was not the final form of the Divine revelation to which he was called to give visible shape. In after years, when disease was mowing down thousands of victims throughout the camp, as a judgment on the murmurings of the people, their leader was summoned to make a serpent of brass, and place it on a pole, that all who looked might live.

In that supreme moment, he caught sight of the dying Lord, and discerned, not only the fact, but the method of his death. To no other Old Testament seer, so far as we can learn, was it given to know that JESUS must be lifted up upon a cross. But this was permitted to him who had faithfully wrought out the Divine plan in its earlier stages; and he, too, was privileged to set forth, so graphically and simply, the nature of saving faith.

**“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

Thus is it always.

As we climb the hill, the horizon expands; as we do God's will more thoroughly, we know his doctrine more completely; as we follow the Divine plan, we are permitted to look into and proclaim those deeper things, **“which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”**

**~ end of chapter 21 ~**

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