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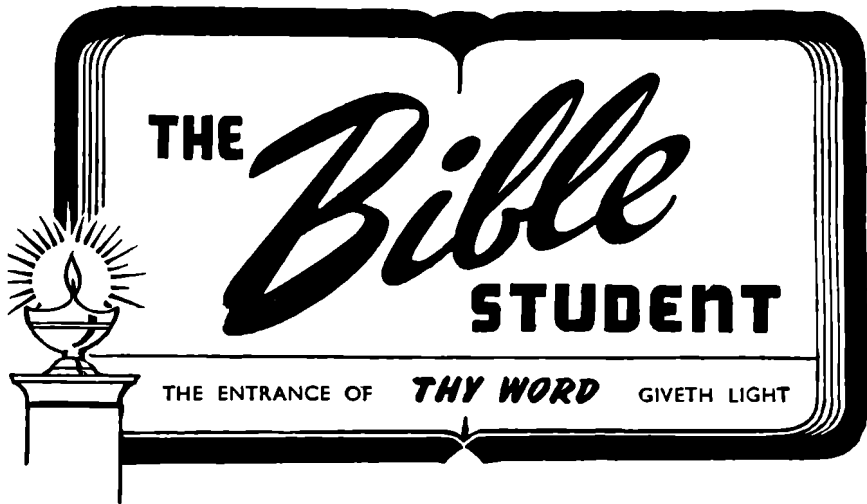
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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

'THE HEIGHTS OF THE HILLS ARE HIS'

A. NAISMITH, M.A.

III. MOUNT SINAI

Sinai has been for centuries the subject of topographical controversy. Which of the summits in the range of mountains rising from the wilderness of Sinai was the mount from which, amid thunders and lightnings, fires and earthquakes, issued the Law of Jehovah? The question has for long been under dispute, but the mass of evidence is in favour of that peak now known as Jebel Musa. 'The claims of the different mountains of the Sinaitic peninsula to be that from which the law was delivered to Israel have been carefully analysed by one who knows the topographical details better, perhaps, than any other Englishman, Col. Sir Charles Wilson, who gives his decision in favour of Jebel Musa, or Moses' Mount,—a decision which must be accepted as final. It has been shown in detail by this author that all the requirements of the case as described in the Bible are met in their minutest details, if we accept Jebel Musa as the Mount of the Law. In this view the late Professor Palmer concurred.' This eminence is 7,363 feet high, with a precipitous cliff just under 7,000 feet at its Northern end, and slopes down into a wide valley where Israel's multitudes might easily have found camping space with their numerous flocks and herds, and from which the summit, except when enveloped in cloud or mist, would have been distinctly visible and the voice of Jehovah clearly heard in the thunder. Dr F. B. Meyer describes this mountain as 'a granite mass, deeply cleft with fissures,' resembling in appearance a huge altar. He also affirms that 'all that transpired on its summit would have been easily visible to the furthest limits of the camp of two million souls pitched beneath'.

In the book of Deuteronomy, which means 'the second statement of the law', the place where God unfolded His precepts is, with one exception (Deut. 32:2) consistently designated 'Horeb', which is, at its first mention in Ex. 3:1, called 'the mountain of God'. The probable explanation of the difference is that Horeb denotes the whole range of hills while Sinai was the chief summit

and the mountain on which Jehovah communicated the Law to Moses.

During the third month after Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the people reached the desert of Sinai (Ex. 19:1) from which place Kadesh-Barnea on the border of Canaan could be reached in eleven days by the Mount Seir route. The wilderness lay at the foot of Sinai and in such close proximity to it that the people could without difficulty approach and touch the mountain. This Jehovah forbade them to do during the days of His awesome presence there (Ex. 19:12). It was upon Mount Sinai that God's holy law was given, His covenant with Israel ratified, His sovereignty as Israel's King recognized and the Levitical hierarchy and ceremonial established. Except for one reference in Judges, one in Nehemiah, and a few in the Psalms, no mention is made of Mount Sinai in the Old Testament Scriptures after the Pentateuch, in which it receives frequent mention. In the New Testament narrative Stephen refers to it in Acts 7:38, and in the New Testament doctrine Paul and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews use it as a figure of the law of Moses which emanated from its summit and of Judaism. (Gal. 4:24-25; Heb. 12:18-20). The only subsequent visit to that mountain-range recorded in Scripture is that of Elijah when Jezebel's threats put his life in jeopardy. Sinai is thus almost entirely associated with the giving of the Law. It is, in a special sense,

The Mount of Transition

A new epoch began in the story of God's relationships with men in Ex. 19. Prior to that, the nation which God had chosen in Abraham had enjoyed the favour of God's unconditional promises in fulfilment of His gracious purposes of blessing. The covenant at Sinai inaugurated the era of Law, which succeeded the dispensation of Promise that had commenced with Jehovah's covenant with Abraham. Israel's redemption by blood, emancipation from Egyptian serfdom, and separation to Jehovah as His own chosen possession, were acts of Divine grace. At Sinai the nation entered into a covenant with Jehovah based on their acceptance of His righteous precepts and their willingness to fulfil His just require-

ments as the condition of future prosperity both temporal and spiritual. When Moses, the mediator of the Sinaitic covenant, presented to Israel the words of Jehovah making obedience to His Law essential to blessing, the people unanimously signified their acceptance of the covenant with the words, 'All that Jehovah hath spoken we will do' (Ex. 19:8). It was a transition from the period of the Theophanies when Jehovah revealed Himself to the pilgrim patriarchs as occasion arose, to a permanent revelation of His requirements and provisions in the moral and ceremonial Law.

"One might have sought and found Thee presently
At some fair oak, or bush, or cave, or well."
"Is my God this way?" "No!" they would reply,
"He is to Sinai gone, as we heard tell.
List, ye may hear great Aaron's bell."

GEORGE HERBERT

Four times in Exodus (24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1) and four times in Deuteronomy (4:13; 9:10; 10:2-4; 5:22) the writing of the Law on Sinai is attributed directly to Jehovah. Both the first tables of stone containing the ten commandments which were hurled to the ground by Moses at the foot of Sinai and the second tables of stone which were later deposited in the Ark of the covenant were 'written with the finger of God'. Thus Mount Sinai was also

The Mount of Transcription

The written commands of God were communicated to Moses while Sinai was enveloped in thick cloud, mist and smoke, and presented the appearance of a volcano in eruption. The voice of Omnipotence was heard preparing the nation of Israel for the vision of the writing of Omniscience.

"God, from the Mount of Sinai, whose grey top
Did tremble, He descending, did Himself
In thunder, lightning, and loud trumpet's sound,
Ordain them laws—part, such as appertain
To civil justice: part, religious rites
Of Sacrifice".

(JOHN MILTON in 'Paradise Lost')

'God has spoken' by prophets, and in His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). God has also written, from time to time, and everytime He writes, it is to impress His laws on the hearts and minds of His creature man. On the summit of a mountain He communicated in writing

His Law of Righteousness. On the alabaster wall of Babylon's royal palace, in the sight of a rebel monarch, He wrote His Law of Retribution. He stooped to inscribe on the earth, His footstool, His Law of Redemption, foreshadowed in John 8:6, 8, and finalized on the Cross on Golgotha's hill, 'that He might redeem them that are under the law'; and now He writes on the hearts of all who believe and accept His redeeming grace the Law of Regeneration (Heb. 10:16, 17). The terms of God's first manuscript have never been abrogated or modified, for His righteousness is ever perfect and His standard can never be lowered. The Decalogue is the supreme witness to God's Majesty and holiness. Four of its enactments have become the basis for laws governing the civilized nations of the world today. Besides defining God's righteous commandments, God's holy law reveals man's sinful state and condemns it. By convincing man of his impotence to fulfil the Divine requirements, the law opens the way for the communication of God's matchless grace in His Son Jesus Christ. For the believer in Christ who is 'not under law but under grace' God's moral law is still a standard by which to test his life, but not the regulator to control it. The first four commandments of the law reveal man's duty to God, the remaining six his duty to his fellow-man. Failure in our duty to God is always followed by failure in our duty to our neighbour. 'Love is the fulfilling of the law'. Man's love to God is expressed in a due regard for the unique honour due to His Person and reverence due to His name and His day. Man's love to his neighbour is expressed in a due regard for the honour to which parents are entitled from their children and for the sanctity of his neighbour's life, property and honour. Every breach of any part of God's law is a violation of the whole.

Sinai was also

The Mount of Transmission

Moses was the mediator of the old covenant: the Lord Jesus is the Mediator of the new. Jehovah descended upon the mountain in fire to communicate His law. Fire is symbolic of His holiness and judgement: 'our God is a consuming fire'. An earthquake shook the mountain so that it trembled in the presence of its Creator (Ps. 68:8). The law, too, that was transmitted was a fiery law

(Deut. 33:2). It was to demonstrate the perverseness of the human heart and to burn in upon the mind of man, as a brand, the knowledge of sin. Holy, just and good in itself, it was to condemn all that is unholy, unrighteous and wicked in us. Clouds, fire, smoke and mysterious voices were the concomitants of the transmission of God's law to the people of Israel. Dr F. B. Meyer helpfully enumerates the lessons to be learnt about God from the phenomena associated with the giving of the law.

(i) *The Majesty of God* was displayed in the thunders and lightnings, the brooding cloud, the trumpet peal and the tropical showers.

(ii) *The Spirituality of God* could be learnt from His invisibility while He gave utterance to His decrees.

(iii) *The Holiness of God* is evidenced by the meticulous instructions given to the people not to touch the mountain on pain of death, but to observe absolute purity and cleanliness of heart, person and dress.

(iv) *The Royalty of God* is manifested in His legislation, His edicts, His precepts. The laws of the Theocracy were accepted by Israel (Deut. 5:22).

On Sinai God employed two orders of beings, His creatures, to transmit His law to His people. It came through the disposition and ordination of angels, spiritual beings who serve in the presence of God (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19), and through the mediation of Moses, a human being who could communicate the Law to his fellow-men (Ex. 20:19, 21; 25:1; John 1:17; Gal. 3:19).

Descending from the mountain top, from the awesome solitude of the Divine presence, after receiving the first tables of stone, Moses saw a sight which kindled within him righteous indignation and moved him to hurl from his hands the stony tablets on which God's commands were engraved. His people had sinned grievously, and Sinai became

The Mount of Transgression

While Jehovah was communicating to Moses the first of His edicts on the summit of Sinai—"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"—followed by the second forbidding idolatry, Aaron, the

brother of the mediator, was fashioning an idol, a golden calf, at the foot of the mountain for the people to worship, and telling them —‘these be thy gods, O Israel’ (Ex. 31:1-4). Moses, the mediator between God and the people, became the advocate and interceded on their behalf with God. ‘Oh, this people have sinned a great sin’, he cried; ‘yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book’. The law Moses was sent to transmit to the people had been broken. It condemned their sin; and their transgression exposed them to the wrath of a holy God.

“Oh! as we ponder on that scene appalling,
When God from Sinai spoke His holy law,
Like Moses on our faces humbly falling,
We feel and own our guilt with trembling awe,
But soon we hear a voice from Calvary, calling
Our eyes to see what Moses never saw”.

At the Divine command Moses returned again to the summit of Sinai (Ex. 34:1-4) to receive from Jehovah the re-written law of commandments in place of the broken tablets. While there, natural fears forgotten, natural pleasures foregone, and natural appetites forsaken, Moses had a vision of the Lord of glory with Whom he communed. The vision made his countenance radiant so that, as he was about to descend with the second tables of stone, it is recorded that ‘Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone’. For him Sinai had become

The Mount of Transfiguration

‘The radiance was a reflection of that Divine glory upon which he had gazed at the top of the mountain.

“The Prophet-leader came from out the cloud,
From long hours spent in communing with God,
Came forth and stretched his wonder-working rod,
And spake clear words to all the listening crowd.

“They gazed and looked, and lo, on brow and face,
A glory and a brightness not of earth,
The eye lit up with fire of heavenly birth,
The whole man bright with beams of God’s great grace.

“They looked and saw the glory, and they shrank
From that dread vision dazzling man’s frail sight;
They could not bear that full excess of light:
Far better veil of cloud, or marsh-mist dank.

“And so o’er face and brow he drew the veil;
 They did not see the glory pass away;
 And yet that heavenly brightness might not stay.
 It vanished quickly, like a twice-told tale.”

EDWARD HAYES PLUMPTRE

For the Christian in this age of grace, redeemed by the blood of Christ from the curse of a broken law, there is the possibility of such a transfiguration and radiance of face and life. We can formulate our request for this radiance in the words of the prayer of Moses the man of God (Ps. 90:17)—‘And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!’ In like manner we too may be transfigured, ‘not as Moses—but we all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 3:18). The metamorphosis takes place by constantly gazing on the effulgent moral glory of Him Who now sits beyond the clouds, Who magnified the whole law and made it honourable, and by mirroring back His radiance of grace and character. Nor need we veil this beauty before the world, for it will not fade if we live in constant communion with our Lord.

BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS

H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

Words of Relationship (*continued*)

The derivative uses of *ben* and *bat* are interesting and are often far from obvious to the English reader.

'adam, man (or Adam), is normally used as a collective, and in the English versions is often correctly translated as a plural. Should a plural be needed in Hebrew, this is provided by the phrase *bene 'adam*, i.e., sons of man, e.g., Gen. 11:5; Dt. 32:8, 2 Sa. 7:14, Is. 52:14, Mic. 5:7. Had the English, instead of sons or children of men, rendered ‘men’, or ‘mankind’, it would have accurately expressed the meaning. The singular *ben 'adam* is used in a number of poetic passages, e.g., Num. 23:19, Job 16:21, Ps. 8:4, Is. 51:12, Jer. 50:40; here it is purely in parallelism to some other