

MOSES, THE ANGELIC MEDIATOR.

THE little verse, Galatians iii. 20, "Now a mediator is not a mediator of one; but God is one," as given in A.V. and R.V., has the distinction of being one of the most obscure and difficult of interpretation in the whole Bible. The number of different explanations of it extant has been reckoned by different commentators at 250, 300, 450 and even a still higher figure, and it has been said, indeed, that the verse requires a bibliography for itself. It may seem rather presumptuous under such circumstances to propound another explanation of the text, yet this is what I venture to do. The verse forms the keystone of an important argument of St. Paul, and we cannot therefore be content to allow it to remain in its present obscurity. There is no suspicion of corruption in the text. There can be no doubt that the Apostle not only had a meaning in the words he used, but wished to convey that meaning clearly and convincingly to those whom he was addressing. Now the sense of the verse as expressed in the translations of both A.V. and R.V. is so difficult to comprehend that after between four and five hundred "explanations" it still remains as enigmatical as ever.

Up to a certain point the drift of the Apostle's argument is clear enough. He is showing the superiority of the Promise of Faith made to Abraham to the Law *διαταγῆς δι' ἀγγέλων, ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου* (viz. Moses). But at this point, according to our versions, both A.V. and R.V. and the great mass of commentators, he lays down a general proposition relating to the *functions* of a mediator. "A mediator is not of one," *i.e.* according to the universal explanation, a mediator implies two parties at least. So far as the term "mediator" is concerned the argument assumes this form:—

A mediator is not of one:

God is one. . . .

Therefore? . . . But the puzzle is, *what* is the inference to be deduced?

The object of this paper is not to attempt to summarize the opinions of even the stars of Biblical exegesis on this subject, but rather to state the views which a careful study of the context in the original and of the chief collateral passages in the New Testament have suggested to the writer, and to ask for these views, however novel in some respects they may seem, fair consideration at the hands of Biblical scholars.

It will hardly, I presume, be denied that St. Paul is here developing an argument which he first heard used by Stephen. The speech in which that argument occurs was made under circumstances calculated deeply to impress even ordinary listeners.

O! but they say the tongues of dying men
Enforce attention like deep harmony;

but on the memory of Saul, bitterly conscious of his guilty complicity in the martyr's death, we may be sure every word would be indelibly branded. That death-speech of Stephen was St. Paul's first lesson in Gospel theology. We may therefore confidently assume that whatever views were there set forth as to the way in which the Law was given to the Jews, and the relative importance of the Law and the Promise in God's dealings with man would be fully accepted by St. Paul, and would govern his own teaching on the same subjects.

That St. Paul's very words in Galatians iii. 19 were an echo of Stephen's speech is of course obvious. The phrase *διαταγείς δι' ἀγγέλων* is an almost verbal reproduction of Stephen's *οἵτινες ἐλάβετε τὸν νόμον εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων*.

Moses is conspicuous alike in the argument of Stephen and Paul, and, in both arguments, his connection with angels in the giving of the Law is much insisted on. In

the word "Angels," if the view here advocated be correct, will be found the key to this difficult passage.

Alford, in his remarks on Galatians iii. 18, 19, and 20, says that clearly (1) *ὁ μεσίτης* and *ὁ θεός* are opposed, and that (2) *ἐνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν* and *εἷς ἐστιν* are also opposed; but if we look carefully at the passage, we shall, I think, see that there is an opposition intended between *θεός* and the *ἄγγελοι* referred to. *τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ δι' ἐπαγγελίας κεχάρισται ὁ θεός* (v. 18), but the Law on the other hand is said to have been *διαταγείς*, and that not *directly* by the Supreme God, but through inferior beings, *δι' ἁγγέλων*.

Paul argues thus. The Promise is superior to the Law, because made *directly* by God. The Law, on the other hand, was "ordered through the medium of angels" (Page), "ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator" (R.V.) Even in the words *διαταγείς* and *κεχάρισται* there is implied a contrast unfavourable to the Law; for the word *διαταγείς* suggests an austerity of command which is absent from *κεχάρισται*, which signifies rather a gracious and gratuitous bestowal.

This view, which represents Moses as only the indirect medium of God's delivery of the Law, is somewhat startling to us, accustomed as we are to understand various passages of the O.T. as repeatedly speaking of God as dealing *directly* with Moses in the matter. However, it seems evident that it is this view which is taken by Stephen, and by the Apostle following him. To avoid anthropomorphism, Jewish theologians assumed that in all places where God is spoken of as exhibiting Himself in human semblance, or as having used human speech, He in reality acted or spoke through angelic or human intermediaries. This principle was evidently accepted by Stephen. In Acts vii. 35 he speaks of Moses as having been "sent as a deliverer," not directly by God as *we* should suppose from what seems to us as the natural meaning of Exodus iii.

passim, but as an angelic mediator, "by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush." In like manner, according to Stephen, the Law was not given directly by God to Moses, but in this case also he was but an angelic mediator (Acts vii. 38). "This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake unto him in Mount Sinai, and with our fathers who received living oracles to give unto us" (R. V.).

Strange as this notion of angelic intervention between God and Moses in the giving of the Law appears to us, it finds support, *e.g.*, in such passages of Scripture as Deuteronomy xxxiii. 2 foll. (R. V.).

The Lord came from Sinai.

And rose from Seir unto them.

He shined forth from Paran.

And He came from the ten thousands of holy ones.

At His right hand was a fiery law unto them.

Although in Acts vii. 38 Stephen only refers to *one* angel as having been the medium through whom the Law was conveyed to Moses, yet it is evident from *v.* 53 that he regarded this angel as being the chief of "ten thousand of Holy Ones" then attendant on Jehovah, for he now uses the *plural* number *εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων*. We shall see later on that St. Paul takes advantage, for the purpose of his argument, of the use of the plural number here by Stephen.

That angels were the enactors of the Law was, as is well known, the Rabbinical view (see the quotations given *in loco* by Alford, Ellicott, Lightfoot, etc.), and it was the view held, as appears from the passages quoted, by Stephen also. It follows therefore from this view (and this is clearly the argument which St. Paul is urging in the third chapter of this Epistle), that Moses was not, in the giving of the Law, the mediator between God and man, but only between angels and man. He was therefore, so to speak, not a Divine but only an angelic mediator.

The contrast then between the Dispensation of Angels as presented by the Law, and the Dispensation of Promise as presented by the Gospel, is vital to the Apostle's argument, and the phrase *διαταγείς κ.τ.λ.* is not to be regarded as a mere passing reminiscence of Stephen's *εἰς διαταγὰς τῶν ἀγγέλων*, but *necessary* to the line of reasoning which St. Paul is here pursuing.

If further confirmation of this view be required, we find it in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which, whatever opinion be held as to its authorship, expresses, as is generally admitted, the main features of St. Paul's teaching. There we find the course of argument pursued, the phrases employed in many cases identical with those adopted in the Epistle to the Galatians.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we see that the author's object, just as in the Epistle to the Galatians, is to show the superiority of the gospel to the legal dispensation by proving that the latter was promulgated through the instrumentality of angels and by an angelic mediator, Moses, while the former was proclaimed by God through His Son (*One* with the Father), who was thus the "Mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises" (Heb. viii. 6, R. V.).

In the three chief places in the New Testament in which the promise and the law are contrasted, viz., the speech of Stephen, Galatians iii. *passim*, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, the argument is made to turn on the word *ἄγγελοι*. That the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was saturated with the Jewish theory of angelic ministration which figures so conspicuously in Stephen's speech is sufficiently obvious. Indeed, he evidently has that speech in his mind through the whole course of his argument. His *ὁ δι' ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος* (Heb. ii. 2) bears manifest reference to Stephen's words in Acts vii. 38, *μετὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ λαλοῦντος αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ ὄρει Σίνα κ.τ.λ.* Indeed,

the word ἄγγελοι in that Epistle is repeated almost *usque ad satietatem*, occurring eleven times in the first two chapters.

But though the course of St. Paul's argument so far may be tolerably clear, there are serious difficulties yet to come. What is the meaning of ὁ μεσίτης in verse 20? How are ἐνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν and εἷς ἔστιν to be interpreted?

Space will not allow me to do much more than give that explanation of the verse which I myself venture to propose. Both A.V. and R.V. translate ὁ μεσίτης as if the article were generic. "Now *a* mediator is not of one; but God is one." Bishop Ellicott, *in loco*, says, "In the first part of the verse all are agreed; 'now *every* mediator involves the idea of more than one.'"

Against this translation I venture, with much deference to the learned authorities *contra*, to protest, and that on more than one ground.

In the first place, if we take the words ὁ μεσίτης to introduce a general proposition, it is impossible to see their relevancy to the argument. This is shown by the hopeless disagreement as to the bearing of that proposition of all the authorities who uphold that translation.

Again, it is not easy to see on grammatical grounds why the article should not here be regarded as *individualising*, not generic. Granted that οὗτος ὁ μεσίτης would be the more usual expression, are we to say that St. Paul was so nice in his observance of grammatical rule, so pure in style, that he *could* not have used the article here in an individualising sense? The very form of expression [ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου. ὁ δὲ μεσίτης] in which the article, omitted with the noun first employed, appears when that noun is repeated as the subject of the following sentence, imparting a slight distinguishing emphasis to the noun so repeated, is found, *e.g.*, in this very epistle:

v. 13: ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ ἐκλήθητε . . . μόνον μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν.
 And v. 16: ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς οὐ μὴ τελέσητε. ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ.

And twice in the following verse, Romans v. 4: ἡ θλίψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται. ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ δοκιμὴν, ἡ δὲ δοκιμὴ ἐλπίδα.

In the face of such examples from St. Paul's own epistles, examples which it would be easy to supplement from other Greek authors, it is surely somewhat rash to assert, as Bishop Ellicott does, that ὁ δὲ μεσίτης ἐνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν must necessarily mean, "Now every mediator involves the idea of more than one." Why may we not, on the contrary, giving the individualising sense, as in the above passages, to the article, translate, "Now the Mediator (just referred to) is not of one," etc. ?

There is one difficulty yet remaining, of which I shall offer an explanation which I have not seen put forward elsewhere, but for which, should it even on a first view appear somewhat startling, I beg, at least, a patient hearing. The translation which I suggest has, at all events, the merit of intelligibility, a not unimportant consideration, it will be admitted, in a controversy such as that in which the Apostle was then engaged.

"Now the mediator (in question) is not a mediator of one (*i.e.*, appointed to act by, or the nominee of one); but God is One."

The gist of the argument is now plain, viz., that the mediator here spoken of, Moses, not being appointed to act in his mediatorial capacity directly by One person, viz., by God, but by a *plurality* of persons, the angels, must be regarded as an angelic, not a Divine mediator, not the direct, but the indirect agent between God and man, and thus, as an inferior mediator, he gives a stamp of inferiority to the temporary and provisional system with which he was connected.

We can now see why St. Paul uses the *plural* number in speaking of the angelic ministration of the law on Mount Sinai, why he says δι' ἀγγέλων, as in Acts vii. 53, instead

of speaking of a *single* angel, as in Acts vii. 38, *μετὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ λαλοῦντος*, etc. It was because it suited his argument better to use the plural number, which he also believed the facts of the case justified him in using.

If any one objects to such an argument as trivial and unworthy of the subject, I reply that it is exactly similar to one which the apostle has used immediately before, vv. 16 foll. : " Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his *seed*. He saith not to *seeds*, as of *many*, but as of *One*, and to thy *seed*."

The force of the argument in both these cases lies in a numerical opposition. If the apostle founded an argument upon this opposition in the one case, he may well have done so in the other.

Finally, we must remember that the whole discourse is a polemic directed against Judaising teachers, and is, to a large extent, an *argumentum ad hominem*. The Apostle is turning against his Judaising opponents the very arguments which they had employed to undermine the faith of his Galatian converts. He has attacked and routed his enemies on their own ground.

They trusted in the mediator Moses, but he shows that not only was Christ the Mediator of a better covenant, but that, strictly speaking, Moses was not a mediator of the One God, but only of the angelic host, "for," as he elsewhere (2 Tim. ii. 5) affirms with unqualified emphasis, "there is *One God, one Mediator* also between God and men, Himself Man, Christ Jesus."

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