

VOLUME XXV.

ANDOVER-HARVARD
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY
NUMBER 4.
MAY 12 1914

...THE... HARVARD
DIVINITY SCHOOL
**UNION SEMINARY
REVIEW**

A PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY

APRIL—MAY, 1914.

CONTENTS

THE ORIENTAL MYSTERY RELIGIONS AND THE CHRISTIANITY OF PAUL.....	Harris E. Kirk, D. D....	253
THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF STONEWALL JACKSON.....	James Power Smith, D. D....	271
BRINGING LITTLE CHILDREN TO THE SAVIOUR.....	G. B. Strickler, D. D....	280
INFANT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP..	William R. Henderson, D. D..	291
THE CHURCH AND HER CHILDREN—SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCES...	D. K. Walthall, Ph. D....	301
THE HOUSE OF GOD IN THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION.....	Theron H. Rice, D. D....	305

MISSIONARY

THE SUCCESS AND TASK OF CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN.....	A. K. Reischauer, D. D..	313
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EDITORIAL

BOOK REVIEWS

RICHMOND, VA.

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

T. W. SIMPSON, *Business Manager*

\$1.00 a year.
25c. a copy.

Published October, January, April and July.

RICHMOND PRESS, INC., PRINTERS

Entered at the Post Office at Richmond, Va., as second class matter.

THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

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THE ORIENTAL MYSTERY RELIGIONS AND THE CHRISTIANITY OF PAUL.

THE REV. HARRIS E. KIRK, D. D.,

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Two ambitious attempts to explain Paul's conception of Christianity, apart from the view that he was but completing the revelation of his Master, have characterized biblical investigation in recent years.* One from the point of view of philosophy; the other from the point of view of history and a study of the monuments. The former is more familiar; the latter just now is more popular.

This view of Paul's teaching, a favorite with the "Religio-historical school" in Germany, is to the effect that we have in Paul's Christianity a supreme example of religious syncretism. Paul is said to have taken the original revelation of Jesus, and worked it up according to ideas then prevailing in the Roman Empire. His ruling ideas were borrowed from the popular mystery cults, which for the most part came from the Orient.

This view is now being urged upon us as the most satisfactory explanation of Paulinism by such writers as Percy Gardner, Kirsopp Lake, and Father Loisy. These writers agree, apart from minor differences, that Christianity was and is to this day a mystery religion. Of course the sources of this view are to be found in the Germans; in the writings of such scholars as Reitzenstein, Bousset, Dieterich and Wendland.

This conception of Christian origins is going to be widely

*Denney: *Jesus and the Gospel*, pages 9-12.

THE HOUSE OF GOD IN THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION.

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It has always been recognized as one of the most delightful methods of Bible-study to take some great subject and follow it throughout the course of its development in the Sacred Scriptures. As a rule it will be found that where one of these important subjects is first introduced a few important *elements* of the idea are made to stand out distinctly. As the subject recurs again and again the conception is enriched more and more until, in the last stages of revelation, it stands before us perfect and entire, lacking nothing.

It is proposed in the present paper to apply this method to one of the most interesting ideas in the Bible—that of the House of God. In order to trace its development it will be convenient to take into account the four stages generally recognized in the history of redemption as that history is recorded in the Scriptures, (1) The Patriarchal Age, (2) The Mosaic Dispensation (from Moses to Christ), (3) The Gospel Dispensation, and (4) The World to Come, (or as it is often called, The Kingdom of Glory).

We first encounter the idea of “the House of God” as we follow the steps of the exile Jacob on his journey from his father’s home at Beersheba to his uncle’s home in Haran. It will be recalled how “he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and, behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending upon it.” We all remember the generous promise which God there made to Jacob and how the narrative continues: “And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, “How

dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Early next morning the solitary traveler set up the stone on which his weary head had rested, anointed it with oil, and called the place Bethel, God's House.

How very simple was this first "house of God!" Just a place, marked with a single unhewn stone, erected near the wayside by a poor man. Yet from the brief account of it we may gather the elements which enter into the conception of God's House wherever it is found. Let us notice what they are.

1. First of all, it was a place where *God revealed Himself*. As Jacob slept Jehovah stood above the ladder and "when Jacob awaked out of his sleep he said, Surely Jehovah is in this place and I knew it not." God referred to it in after years as the place where "God appeared" unto Jacob, and Jacob is said to have "built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el; because *there God was revealed unto him.*"

2. Again it was a place where God revealed *His grace*. Was there ever a man more obviously undeserving than that sleeper? Fresh from the dishonorable stratagem practiced on his blind old father, betraying the meanest and most ignoble conceptions of God's character, as if he could be cheated into blessing him as a man might have been. And yet as he lies there, the theft of his brother's blessing only a few days old, God appears to him as his friend, renews to him the Abrahamic covenant and makes the most liberal promises to him. Surely this is grace, the unmerited favor of God.

3. And, finally, Bethel was a place where God revealed *His glory*. This is not only evident from the scenery of the vision—the stairway reaching to the starry heavens, the angels of God descending in shining companies from their celestial abode and ascending again to be lost to view in the encompassing splendor of the opening skies, but it is shown by the effect the vision produced on Jacob. "He was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." The glory of God as here disclosed had awed him almost to the point of terror.

Here, then, are three elements which enter into the idea of

the House of God—a revelation of God, a revelation of God's grace, a revelation of God's glory. We find them all associated with that simple patriarchal shrine which first bears in Sacred Scripture the name of Bethel, God's House.

When we pass from the Patriarchal Age to the Mosaic Dispensation we find the idea of the House of God embodied first in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. These two structures were, from our present point of view, one and the same. The Temple was simply a permanent Tabernacle as the Tabernacle had been a portable Temple. The one was adapted to the life of wandering in the wilderness, the other was suited to the settled life in the Holy Land. Their symbolism and significance were the same. We shall treat them accordingly.

We are at once aware that the new form which the idea has assumed is much more imposing and complex. We can well believe that the conception embodied is here enlarged and enriched by the wealth of additional and suggestive detail. And yet it is clear as we listen to the Bible's own exposition of these sacred buildings that the same three elements which we found in the idea at Bethel are here also.

1. For, first, the Tabernacle (in which we include of course all its furniture and its ritual service) was nothing more nor less than an elaborate *revelation*, in symbols and ceremonies, *of God*.

2. And it is just as clear that the Tabernacle Revelation was a disclosure of *God's grace*. It was the Old Testament gospel. Every lamb on the altar was an imperfect utterance of the great gospel truth revealed in "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." Every act of the Jewish High Priest was the imperfect utterance of the great gospel truth revealed when Jesus appeared in the presence of God for us. And so with every part of the Tabernacle-Temple system. They were the "shadow of good things to come though not the very image of the things." They were, therefore, a revelation of the grace of God.

3. It is also certain that the Tabernacle and Temple were revelations of the *glory of God*. Recall how they were to be made of the most precious and beautiful materials obtainable. How gold and silver and purple and scarlet and fine twined linen, how cunning embroidery and all the work of the most skilful artifi-

cers met in these structures to make a house "exceeding magnificent," and that not to the glory of the builders, but "because great is our God above all gods." It was to reflect God's glory that they were made so splendid. And then when the dwelling of Jehovah was dedicated to him, Jehovah himself came down in overpowering glory and took possession of and filled his house.

In passing from the Mosaic to the gospel dispensation we are conscious of a still more striking change. Every thoughtful reader must have been struck with the fact that we read almost nothing in the New Testament of houses of worship for Christian congregations. The fact is that the word "church" which probably suggests first of all to *our* minds a building, never means a building in the New Testament. What has become of the House of God?

If we go back to the first chapter of the gospel, according to John, we get a clue. The Evangelist describes in his prologue the incarnation of the pre-existent Logos in this language: "And the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us" (1:14). The margin translates more literally, "and *tabernacled* among us." Turn back to Exodus 25:8, 9 and there you find God saying to Moses: "Let them *make me a sanctuary* that I may *dwell among them*;" and in Exodus 29:43, 45: "The Tent shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tent of meeting. And I will *dwell among* the children of Israel and will be their God."

You see at once what the Apostle John is doing in 1:14; he is appropriating the language used of the dwelling of Jehovah among his people Israel in the Tabernacle for the purpose of describing God's dwelling among us in the Incarnate Saviour. Jesus as he lived and moved among men was God tabernacling among us, was doing that which Jehovah's dwelling among Israel in the Tabernacle had all along represented and foreshadowed.

In the second chapter of the gospel, according to John, verses 19-21, we get further light on this same fact. The unbelieving Jews had demanded what sign Jesus would offer as the proof of his authority to do certain things. He answered promptly, "Destroy this *temple* and in three days I will raise it up." Here again the margin translates, "Destroy this *sanctuary*." This reply perplexed all who heard him and John explains, "He spake

of the temple of his *body*." His body was the "sanctuary" (sanctuary being the very term used by God in directing the building of a dwelling place for Jehovah in the midst of Israel.)

From these two clues it is not hard to discern that under the gospel dispensation the Tabernacle and Temple are superseded, primarily by the Incarnate Saviour who is Immanuel, God with us, dwelling among us in a profounder, more real and nobler sense than He dwelt among Israel in the curtains of the Tabernacle or the walls of the Temple. But this is not the whole fact. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, writes to the church: "Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (I have quoted the American Revised Version, with the marginal rendering). According to this passage the Church of Christ is to-day the temple of God—the Church as a corporate body. The same Apostle teaches also that each several member of the Church is also a temple of God. See 1 Corinthians 6:19: "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, which ye have from God?" The context here, as well as the use of the singular number, "body," shows that the individual believer is meant just as it is clear from the connection in the former passage that the Church as a corporate whole is meant. Both the Church as a whole and the individual member of the Church, therefore, are said to be the temple of God, who dwells in them by His Spirit. Paul unites the two ideas in a passage in Ephesians (2:20-22) where he writes of the Church: "Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together into a habitation of God in the Spirit." The Apostle Peter has the same idea in his first epistle (2:4, 5): "Unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house."

To gather up the teaching of all these passages we may say that the New Testament represents our Lord Jesus Christ himself

as the reality which the Tabernacle and Temple foreshadowed, the fulfilment of what they predicted, namely, God dwelling among men in order to redeem them unto himself. But inasmuch as the Church is Christ's mystical "body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all," she is associated with him as the antitype, which the Tabernacle and Temple typified; she, too, in vital union with her Lord and Head, is the temple of God, a habitation of God by the Spirit. And, furthermore, as each individual believer is one of the "living stones" builded into this holy temple, the body of each individual believer is therefore a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in him.

Now Christ has left the world and gone back to glory, but his body, the Church, is still here. When, therefore, we are asked what is to-day that which answers to the Mosaic Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon under the old dispensation, we are bound to answer not any building however imposing or venerable, but the living, breathing, worshiping, witnessing Church, praising God and preaching the gospel unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

What an important practical effect it has on the Church's work to apprehend this truth clearly! It saves her sons from lavishing their gifts on costly cathedrals and sets them to testifying their devotion in sending out, equipping and maintaining multitudes of missionaries. Thus the real temple of God is being builded out of living stones, souls won to Christ, and added to his body the Church.

It requires only a suggestive word or two to indicate how the same elements enter into the concept of a House of God in our dispensation. For everybody sees at once that in Christ and his witnessing Church we have a *revelation of God*. Jesus is declared to be "God manifest in the flesh" and he himself declared, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father;" while we are also taught that God reveals Himself in renewed men; Jesus is the light of the world, but declares of his people also: "Ye are the light of the world."

Then, too, Christ and his Church are a revelation of God's redeeming *grace*. He came to seek and to save that which was

lost and he has commissioned his Church to preach the glad tidings of salvation from sin to all nations.

It is not so obvious to the unspiritual eye, but it is very true, that Christ and his body the Church are a revelation of the *glory* of God. In no mere sensible phenomena has God ever given such an exhibition of His glory as in the work of Christ, in which his Church is privileged to share. This work of saving lost sinners is the glory of God's *grace*, the *riches* of His glory.

Well, what of the House of God in the world to come? There are just two passages which teach us concerning this. In the Book of Revelation, the twenty-first chapter, we read (verses 1-4): "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God; and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away."

In this passage we hear the words "the Tabernacle of God." We are not told that the building was seen as part of the architecture of the Holy City. The "Great Voice" simply makes use of language which all readers of the word of God would understand when He announces, as the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, "Behold the Tabernacle of God is [now] with men." Henceforth God's presence is among men as it was symbolized in the Mosaic Tabernacle, He shall [henceforth] "*dwell with them.*" Associated with the symbol of the Tabernacle here, as everywhere, are the ideas of *a revelation of God to men*, a revelation of His *grace* ("He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more"), and a revelation of his *glory* (as the scenery of the whole vision indicates).

But there is one other passage, also, in this twenty-first chapter, at the twenty-second verse. After describing the Holy

City in other respects John says: "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb, are the temple thereof." The Temple had been the outward, visible embodiment of God's presence among His people. But it had veiled as well as revealed Him. In all the dispensations on this side of glory God's people see through a glass darkly. But *then*, "when that which is perfect is come," they shall see face to face, and gaze upon the Saviour as he is. In the world to come there will be no House of God, but God Himself, perfectly revealed, in the fulness of His *grace* and of his *glory*, shall be the eternal portion of His Redeemed.