

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

is correct."—*The Book of Psalms* (Expositor's Bible), p. 279. There would be no such difficulty if the northern Kadesh is understood, as oaks are plentiful in the neighbourhood.

I should be very glad if you could give me any information on the point.—H. M.

If this is "Kadesh on the Orontes," it is the only time it is mentioned in Scripture. But the basin of the Orontes could not be accurately described as "a wilderness," and מִדְּבָר קֶדֶשׁ "wilderness of Kadesh" could have only one meaning to the Hebrew. The Psalm is a poetical description of a thunderstorm, such as often breaks over the Lebanons. Wrecking the forests on the northern heights, its terrific voice wakes trembling echoes in the distant desert of the south. What a vivid impression this conveys of the violence of the storm! But not too vivid. The present writer witnessed a thunderstorm in Mount Gilead four years ago, in which it seemed as if the most distant hills must vibrate to the wild music. No language could so fitly describe it as the language of this psalm.

The "local colouring" in ver. 9 need not refer to the district of Kadesh. The poet's thought would

travel eastward from Kadesh a long way before getting among oaks, or any other trees. Mount Gilead is still a well-wooded region: from the present treeless condition of the western mountains nothing could be inferred as to their ancient state. As late as crusading times large tracts were covered with forests, which in parts even encroached upon the plains.

W. EWING.

Late of *Tiberias*.

If Professor Smith, in his new book on the *Geography of Palestine*, differs from the authorities of the Palestine Exploration Fund, are the latter not more likely to be correct than he?—A. G.

But they do not differ. Major Conder, in *The Critical Review*, went carefully over Dr. Smith's book, and noted all the points of possible difference, and they amount to very little over the whole. Besides, Dr. Smith is a Palestinian traveller himself, and has eyes to see. *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* is not merely a new *Sinai and Palestine*, vivid and picturesque, it is authoritative on its subject.

EDITOR.

The Parables of Zechariah.

BY THE REV. JAMES STALKER, D.D., GLASGOW.

VI.

THE PARABLE OF THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICK (CHAP. iv.).

IN the last parable—that of the brand plucked from the burning—the prophet dealt with the sense of guilt under which the community was depressed, and, by the vision of the high priest stripped of his filthy garments and crowned with a fair mitre, brought home to the conscience of his contemporaries the assurance of the pardoning grace of God. This was an important preparation for the heavy task upon which they were entering; for the sense of guilt is a disabling state of mind. But something more was requisite. The removal of guilt is a negative blessing: it takes away an impeding condition: but it cannot by itself communicate the sustained force necessary for doing the work of God. This is a positive blessing; and with this the present parable deals; for it promises that the community will be filled with the Spirit of God. While the foregoing parable was specially intended

for the benefit of Joshua the high priest, this was specially meant for the comfort and encouragement of Zerubbabel.

I. Let us first try to form in our minds a clear image of the new vision which the angel of inspiration caused to appear on the screen of prophecy.

"A candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which were upon the top thereof; and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof"—thus the prophet describes what he saw. Further down the chapter, one or two important touches are added; but, instead of quoting them here, we will weave them into our own more detailed description.

No doubt the object thus seen was suggested to

the imagination of the prophet by the golden candlestick of the tabernacle, with its seven lights;¹ though the similarity is not complete.

In the prophet's vision also the lights were seven—the perfect number, denoting abundance. There is some difficulty in determining how they were arranged—whether in a row or in a circle. This depends on the position of the bowl, containing the oil, from which they were fed. This was “on the top”; which may mean on the top of the shaft or trunk of the candlestick, the seven branches springing up in a row from the cover of the bowl; or it may mean that the bowl was the highest part of the whole candlestick, standing on the top of the shaft, which went up through the branches and stood out above them, while they curved downwards from it, so that the lights formed a circle.

From the bowl to the lights went seven pipes, conveying the oil. The Hebrew, literally translated, would mean that there were seven pipes for each light—forty-nine in all. If this be correct, the intention is to indicate the copiousness of the supply—a suitable enough idea in this place. But the text is doubtful.²

Of course the bowl from which the oil was supplied to the lights had itself to be supplied; and the way in which this was effected was the most remarkable feature of the vision. On the two sides of the bowl were two pipes, curving outwards and terminating in two mouths, into which oil was constantly being distilled from two olive trees which stood on the two sides of the candlestick. On each tree there was a fruitful branch, which, hanging in the orifice of the pipe, dropped its oil into it. In Palestine, oil for burning was obtained from the olive tree, but of course by a process considerably more circuitous than this. In the vision, however, the oil in the trees was so abundant and pure that it could be distilled in this simple way directly from the living source.

In English religious literature there is a parallel to this vision: “I saw,” says Bunyan in the account of the Pilgrim's visit to the Interpreter's House, “that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did

the fire burn higher and hotter. Then said Christian, What means this? The Interpreter answered, This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the devil; but, in that thou seest the fire, notwithstanding, burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that. So he had him about to the back side of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, out of the which he did also continually cast, but secretly, into the fire. Then said Christian, What means this? The Interpreter answered, This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of His grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart; by the means of which, notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still.”

Not widely different from this is the obvious drift of Zechariah's vision, except that, while Bunyan is thinking of the individual, Zechariah contemplates the community.

The oil is the influence of the Spirit of God—that inspiration of enthusiasm and power with which great tasks are accomplished. The seven burning lamps denote the bright flame of sanctified energy which this inspiration would cause to burn all over the community, and keep burning till the work of building the temple was completed. The seven pipes feeding each lamp, if this was what the prophet saw, indicate the different ways in which the Spirit's influence, pouring through every channel to the point where it is needed, becomes at once light to the intellect, warmth to the feelings, tension to the will, and reinvigoration to every faculty.

The two fruitful branches from which the oil dropped into the orifices of the two receiving pipes were explained to the prophet to mean “the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth”—a designation by which we are to understand Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, or perhaps, more strictly, the restored priestly and kingly offices which they represented. This feature brings out the truth, illustrated elsewhere in many parts of Scripture, that men called of God to be leaders in movements involving His glory may be the media through which the Holy Spirit is communicated to others. First they are filled with the divine influence themselves, and then contact with them fills and inspires others.

But what are the two trees which poured their

¹ Ex. xxv. 31 ff.

² Some understand the Hebrew to mean two pipes for each lamp.

oil through these branches? The prophet asked this question, but received no answer. Is any answer requisite? What can the living source of such energy and inspiration be except God Himself? If we were permitted to import New Testament ideas into Old Testament passages, we might even give a ready answer to the question why the source is not represented as single, but as twofold; because we now know that the Holy Spirit "proceedeth from the Father and the Son."

II. Thus we explain the parable of the Golden Candlestick; but the prophet has himself added an interpretation, in which he applies the truth to the circumstances in which he found himself. This explanation is singularly comprehensive and powerful; and it has a telling application to the work of God everywhere and at all times, as well as to the special task in which Zechariah was absorbed.

He draws from the vision four inferences.

The first was intended to supply comfort in the paucity of visible resources: "This is the word of God unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Such is the force by which the work of God is accomplished.

It is not by might nor by power. In ordinary undertakings there are well-known forces on which men are wont to rely. They are such as these—money, numbers, intellect, social influence. God also can rally these to His side and employ them in His cause; yet it is not by these that His work is done. The experiment has been tried a hundred times. In periods when His Spirit has been poured out, wealth, numbers and influence have accrued to the Church; and then, in unspiritual periods, she has tried with these resources to do the work without Him. But the result has always been the same: in spite of even a congestion of means she has become weak and useless, and Ichabod has been written on her walls.

On the other hand, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there the work of the Lord, whatever it may be, is done easily and thoroughly. If material resources are required, they are not lacking; the right ideas, the right words, the right methods, the right men appear as if by magic; the weak become strong and the foolish wise, because they are only the organs of a Power which is not themselves. It is like the possession of a gift for anything. Take

music, for example: a person who has not the gift toils after excellence long and laboriously, yet the result is only a faint and partial success; but the child of nature, who possesses the gift, rises and almost without an effort carries off the honours. Or take oratory: the man of information, industry and common sense, who, everyone says, ought to make an impression, puts himself under masters and burns the midnight oil, yet his hearers remain cold; while he who possesses the gift, though without a tithe of the other's acquirements, carries the audience by storm. So the Holy Spirit is a gift. There are times of His special outpouring, when those who are doing God's work are borne forward on a current of enthusiasm; obstacles give way at a touch; and results of which they have not ventured to dream are so suddenly realised that they dare not attribute them to themselves, but exclaim involuntarily, "What hath God wrought!"

Not less valuable, however, is the power of patiently working with earthly materials for un-earthly objects, when, without display but without faltering, the eye is kept fixed on a motive too high for unaided human nature. And the power of doing so comes from the same source.

The prophet's second inference refers to the difficulties of God's work: "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain."

The difficulties of Zerubbabel's undertaking were immense: they were like a great mountain; but Zechariah tells him that, when the Spirit is poured out, they will melt away. Nay, the mountain would, he was able to assure him, become a plain—instead of being an obstacle in the way of God's cause, it would form the very path over which the good cause would advance to victory.

Probably the greatest mountain in Zerubbabel's way was the royal prohibition laid on his undertaking; but again and again in that age He who holds in His hand the hearts of monarchs, and turns them as the rivers of water, made His people to find such favour with the kings who ruled over them that they obtained from them decrees sanctioning their undertakings; so that the authority and resources of great empires were at their back, helping them on, instead of in front, blocking the way. So it has often been. When Christianity was ready to start on its triumphant career in the apostolic age, the mountain in its way was the persecuting rage of Saul of Tarsus, which threatened

to annihilate the infant Church ; and God not only removed the obstacle, but converted the persecutor into the greatest missionary of the cross the world has ever seen. On a smaller scale, such things are happening every day ; and the mouth of God's people is filled with laughter when, in the home or the workshop, those who have been the greatest trials and stumblingblocks are converted into new centres of Christian energy and enterprise. There is nothing too hard for the Lord. When, in the opening spring, He sends His breath through the desolate sierras of the Alps, the frost loosens its deadly grip on the mountains, and snowdrift and glacier are converted into rivers, which, as they flow brimming to the sea, fertilise the valleys of Germany and the plains of Italy and France ; and so, when the breath of His Spirit is heard in the land, hard hearts are melted, opponents are changed into friends, and influences which have been working for evil are brought over to the side of good.

The third inference refers to the smallness of the beginnings of God's work : "For who hath despised the day of small things?"¹

The first efforts of the little community of returned exiles, whom Zerubbabel led, were feeble in the extreme. For long there were only the beginnings of a temple ; the walls could not be got to rise far above the ground. It was a day of small things ; and there were plenty of contemptuous enemies around, and perhaps some lukewarm

¹ Verse 10 is difficult ; indeed, in the Authorised Version unintelligible. The Revised Version affords at least sense. Ewald's notion may be right, that the verse describes the carving on the copestone of seven eyes, to denote that the seven eyes of God, that is, His watchful care, rested on it. Wellhausen proposes a great deal of omission and transposition : after the first line of ver. 6—"Then he answered and spake to me, saying"—he passes to the middle of ver. 10, and translates, "These seven lamps are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro throughout the whole earth." Then he reads the rest of the verses in the following order :—11 (delete 12), 13, 14, 6 (minus first line), 7, 8, 9, 10a. This is highly ingenious ; but it is a complete mistake to make the seven lamps of this vision represent the watchful care of God. So interpreted, this vision would merely repeat the message of the first. Wellhausen's transpositions, brilliant as they sometimes are, remind one of a well-known text-book on English Composition, in which it is shown how much more effectively Bacon and Milton might have written if they had arranged their sentences in better order. Bacon and Milton, not enjoying the advantage of the worthy Scotch professor's coaching, were fallible ; and, as Zechariah is no great stylist, it is to be feared he hardly deserves the credit of the improved arrangement of his sentences.

friends within, who despised these small beginnings and predicted that they would never come to anything. In like manner, two generations afterwards, when Nehemiah was building the walls of the city, there were scorers who said, that if a fox should climb up on his wall, the weight would bring it down.

Now, small things are sometimes contemptible. The frog is contemptible when it is puffing itself out to look like an ox. So is the gossip of society or the cant of a coterie, when it gives itself out as the verdict of the world. But, on the whole, it is not safe to sneer at small beginnings. The critic, secure in his omniscience, tears to shreds the first tentative efforts of a new genius, but with the result that he is himself pilloried as a Philistine in literary history. The statesman, hidebound in the traditions of his office, uses all the resources of government to obstruct and harry the struggling cause of liberty ; but the day comes when the friends of freedom, their cause having triumphed, are able to make use of the same machinery for placing him in the traitor's dock. In a single seed there may be the potency of whole harvests in the future. Nearly every movement must be small at the beginning ; but the onlookers, before criticising, ought to consider how much virtue is in its motive, and how much power is at its back. The tide, flowing in long fingers, which are thrust forth and withdrawn, up the channels of the estuary, is a small thing ; some have even attempted to sweep it out with the besoms of conventionality ; but of what avail can such efforts be when behind it is the mighty swell of the Atlantic ? The beginnings of the work of God's Spirit in the soul are often so small that they may easily furnish a theme for the laughter of fools. A dream perhaps, or a hymn sung by a child, or the exhortation of a simple Christian, or a meeting not very wisely conducted may be all that can be pointed to ; yet in it may be the germ of a changed life here and a blessed eternity hereafter. So is it with His work on the larger scale of the world. Christianity itself consisted at one time of a few humble people, at whom the principalities and powers of the earth could scoff as unlearned and ignorant men ; but the Spirit of God was in it, and Christianity is now the acknowledged teacher of the race. Still, however, Christian efforts and movements in their initial stages are open to scorn on account of their small dimensions ; but let those who are concerned in them only trust in the Spirit

of God, and they may leave their critics to the disillusionment which is their fate.

The last inference from the vision related to the completion of the temple: "The hands of Zerubabel have laid the foundations of this house, his hands shall also finish it;" "And he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." As yet Zerubabel was toiling on, with inadequate resources and numerous

discouragements, and among the people there was little enthusiasm; but the day would come when he would have the honour and the joy of laying the copestone on his work; and then the completed undertaking would fill with enthusiasm the whole community, who, gathered in their thousands, would rend the air with joyful cries to God to let His favour abide on His own sanctuary.

"Studia Sinaitica."

IN MEMORIAM: REV. PROFESSOR DOBIE, B.D.

BY THE REV. J. C. CARRICK, B.D., NEWBATTLE.

IN an old gazetteer, the following description is given of the famous monastery of St. Catharine at the base of Mount Sinai: "Mount Sinai, 7565 feet above sea-level, still bears the name of Horeb, and immediately at its base, overlooking the Waddi Mussa, stands the celebrated monastery of St. Catherine. Its buildings form a quadrangle, enclosed by walls, on an average 30 feet, and at some points 50 feet high, and strengthened by bastions, which give it all the appearance of a fortress. The interior contains, in addition to the cloisters for the monks and extensive offices, a principal church, over loaded with tasteless ornaments: 23 more churches or chapels, each dedicated to a particular saint, and a library, supposed to have been once of great value, but now deprived of its treasures through the carelessness or mercenary spirit of the monks." This is a somewhat derogatory description of the great religious house of the East, which, fortress-like on account of the dangers of the desert, "where no man meets a friend," stands, as it has stood for more than a thousand years, at the base of the steep, frowning peaks, amid which Moses received the Tables of the Law. The whole place is fraught with an undying interest; and standing, as it does, the "St. Bernard's of the desert," it probably shares, with the Alpine hospice and the monastery of Mount Athos, the fame of being the most remarkable and interesting religious house in the world.

Tischendorf's memorable discovery of Codex \aleph brought it vividly before the public eye, and revealed to the world the possibilities of discovery which lay behind the weather-beaten walls of St. Catharine's. Ever since, the library of the house has

been more or less an object of interest to the critical scholar, and the researches of recent times have more than fulfilled the promises held out by earlier labourers. The sudden and distressing death of Professor John Dobie, of Edinburgh University, recalls the fact of his noble contributions to Oriental research; while his imprisonment by the Turks in this very land, adds a romantic interest to the story of his life. The writer can vividly recall the youthful professor's keen devotion to Eastern languages in his student days and early ministry—his delight at any fresh discovery of Semitic document or fact; his undying love of the holy language, which has given Christendom her elder Scripture; his affection for the people who form one of the most striking and ever-present of the Christian evidences. A life, spent largely among the peoples of the East—Arabs and Hindus—and honoured by the coveted prizes of Eastern Governments, has been cut short on the very threshold of its promised land. His loss to Oriental scholarship is great; second only to that of the late Professor Robertson Smith, in whose footsteps, of careful and accurate research and living scholarship, he earnestly followed. May the same blessed promise, which cheered Moses at Sinai in his hour of need, cheer his father and friends—"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

One of the most remarkable and interesting series of publications of recent years has just been inaugurated by the Cambridge University Press (C. J. Clay & Sons), bearing the general title of *Studia Sinaitica*. Four volumes have already appeared, and, as the title of the entire series