
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

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

If Criticism has shortened the date of some of the books of the Bible, it has lengthened the life of some of its institutions. One of these is the Sabbath. It is true that it has generally been held that the Sabbath was instituted at the Creation of the world. Criticism could not easily place it earlier than that. But has not Criticism advanced the date of the Creation of the world?—advanced it by some thousands of years indeed. Then the Sabbath may, after all, be an older institution than has been supposed—even although Criticism should not find that the Sabbath had been instituted at the Creation.

Criticism does not find that the Sabbath was instituted at the Creation. The latest critical writer on the origin of the Sabbath is Professor Morris Jastrow, jun., of the University of Pennsylvania. Professor Jastrow read a paper on 'The Original Character of the Hebrew Sabbath,' at the Congress of Orientalists, in Paris last September. The paper is published in the *American Journal of Theology* for the current quarter. Professor Jastrow does not believe that the Sabbath was instituted at the Creation. There are apparently two accounts in the Bible of the original institution of the Sabbath. The one is in the very beginning of Genesis, and represents the Sabbath as instituted at the Creation. The other is found in the Book of Exodus, and represents the Sabbath as instituted in the wilderness. Professor Jastrow does not believe that the Sabbath was originally instituted on either of these occasions. But he believes that the narrative in Exodus is older in time and more primitive in character than the narrative in the beginning of Genesis.

Professor Jastrow would probably place the Exodus narrative earlier on literary grounds. But in this paper he is not concerned with that. It is with the original *character* of the Sabbath that he is here concerned. And he finds that in Exodus the traces of its original character are best preserved.

For he believes that the Sabbath was originally not a day of rest, but a day of propitiation. Among the Babylonians there were three kinds of days in the month—'good,' 'bad,' and (not indifferent, but) 'mixed.' The good were the propitious and prosperous days; the bad were unpropitious; and the mixed generally began unpropitiously, but (if the due ceremonies were observed) might end propitiously. These mixed days were therefore marked as 'bad bad good,' or the like, which meant that during the greater part of the day the gods were glum or angry; but if the worshipper was wary, the angry brow might relax, and all be well that ended well.

All depended on the wariness of the worshipper. In Babylonia it was the king that had to behave himself in a perfect way on such a day; and elaborate directions were drawn up for his observance. He must eat nothing that has been cooked on the fire. He must put on no finery or mount his chariot. He must not call a physician if he is sick. He must not even offer sacrifice or oblation till the evening comes. Then, however, the anger of the god being almost gone, he may bring his gifts and offer his sacrifices, and believe that his prayer has been graciously accepted.

So the mixed day was for the most part a day of gloom—a Puritanical Sabbath. It occurred chiefly in the month Elul, and on the 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th days of the month, or, in other words, on the days upon which the moon entered each new quarter. And from the fact that its chief anxiety was the pacification of an angry god, it got its name of *Šabattum*. For, as one of the cuneiform tablets tells us, *Ša-bat-tum* is equivalent to *ûm nûḫ libbi*, or day of the cessation of anger.

It is true that *ûm nûḫ libbi* is literally 'day of rest of the heart.' But that cannot mean 'day of rest for *man's* heart,' for there is no such day as a day of rest for man among the Babylonians or any other ancient nation, except the Hebrews. Therefore it must mean 'day of rest of *the god's heart*.' And what is that for man, but 'day of propitiation'? In other words, the *Šabattum* or Sabbath among the Babylonians was not a day of rest from labour, but a day of atonement. It was a day of painful abstentions on the part of man, if by any means he might be able to cause the face of his god to shine.

Now that does not altogether correspond with the Hebrew Sabbath. The Hebrew Sabbath, whatever its origin, is mainly and most characteristically a day of rest for man. But neither do the two names exactly correspond. Between the Babylonian *Šabattum* and the Hebrew *Sabbath* there is surely some link lost. There is, says Professor Jastrow. Archæologists have felt that there was a lost link, both in meaning and in form. But it is not far lost. In a well-known if somewhat mysterious Hebrew word, Professor Jastrow has himself discovered it.

The word is *shabbāthôn*. It occurs eleven times in all, and always in the Pentateuch. It is applied to the Day of Atonement, to the Harvest Festival, to the New Year's Day, and four times to the Sabbath (Ex 16^{23} 31^{15} 35^{2}, Lv 23^{3}). For the most part it has been looked upon as a derivative from *shabbāth* (*i.e.* Sabbath), and translated 'rest'; it has been regarded, in short, as a more emphatic form of the ordinary word *shabbāth*, and so in the Revised Version it is always rendered 'solemn rest.' Professor Jastrow does not believe that it is a derivative of the word *shabbāth*. He believes that it is an older word. And as for the meaning of it, he holds that whereas *shabbāth* is the name of the institution, *shabbāthôn* is descriptive of its character. And inasmuch as *shabbāthôn* is descriptive of the Day of Atonement, of New Year's Day, and other days besides the Sabbath, the character it gives them must be all alike. There is just one characteristic all these days have in common—they are days of propitiation.

Thus the Babylonian *šabattum* and the Hebrew *shabbāthôn* are identical in form and meaning. Both describe a day of painful propitiation. The Day of Atonement was among the Hebrews such a day. So was New Year's Day. And so were the first and eighth days of the Feast of the Booths, the harvest festival. But *the* day of propitiation was the day on which the moon entered its phases. For that day a name was found to express its special propitiatory character. It was called *the* Sabbath day.

And so at first the Sabbath day was not a day of gladness. An angry deity had to be appeased that day by acts of self-restraint. Even in the Book of Exodus the measures that are prescribed for its observance are almost wholly

restrictive. But the time came when it was necessary to separate the Hebrew from the Babylonian forms of worship. Jehovah must be honoured apart from all the gods that are no gods. And so the Isaiah of the Exile calls upon the people to change their sombre Sabbath and call it a delight, the holy of the LORD and honourable (58[13]).

Nor was the Sabbath at first a day of rest. That character came to it almost accidentally. For one of the ways in which an angry god may be appeased is to stay indoors and out of sight. For fear of the wrath of God no work could be done—at least in the fields—on Sabbath. And then came the injunction that no work *must* be done. The injunction was extended to work at home as well as abroad. The Sabbath became a day of rest. And when the narrative of the Creation was written, so completely had this characteristic obliterated all others that a *reason* for the day of rest was sought. It was found in the idea that God had rested from His creative labours on the seventh day. But that idea would never have given the Sabbath a place in the Decalogue. Before that idea took shape, the Decalogue had been formed. It was when the Sabbath was regarded as a day of propitiation that it found its place in the Law. And that is why its place is in the First Table which describes our duty to God.

'The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.' Such is the Authorized Version of Is 1[13]. There is clearly something wrong. We pass the archaic expression, 'I cannot away with,' though it never was very exact and is of little usefulness now. But Isaiah, and Isaiah in such an impassioned moment, never repeated himself so lamely as to reject the 'calling of assemblies' first and then the 'solemn meeting.'

The Revised Version does not help. It accepts the old-fashioned phrase 'I cannot away with.' It repeats the 'solemn meeting' as well as the 'calling of assemblies.' But in the article by Professor Jastrow, already noticed, the word translated 'solemn meeting' is discussed and another sense found for it here. That it means 'assembly' sometimes there is no doubt. But that meaning, says Professor Jastrow, can only be secondary. It comes from a stem which expresses 'shutting off' or 'restraint.' Joel (1[14]) gives it as a parallel to the word for a 'fast.' Take Isaiah in that sense then, 'I cannot tolerate iniquity and fasting,' and the lame repetition is removed.

Under the editorship of the Rev. J. H. Burn, B.D., and under the title of 'The Churchman's Library,' Messrs. Methuen have begun to issue a series of theological manuals. The title of the series means that the writers of all the volumes will be furnished by the Church of England; it does not mean that other communions will be forbidden to furnish readers. The volumes will vary in size and price. The first, entitled *The Beginnings of English Christianity*, by Professor W. E. Collins of King's College, was issued a month or two ago; the second, entitled *Some New Testament Problems*, by Mr. Arthur Wright of Cambridge, has just been published.

Mr. Wright is to-day our most unwearied advocate of a primitive oral gospel. In that respect he is out of touch with prevailing scholarship, which may find a place for every possible permutation and combination of written gospels, but of an oral gospel will not hear. Yet his book is heartily welcome. For he knows he is out of touch. He knows it, and he is neither embittered nor depressed. He is only the more instant to make his doctrine understood and accepted. And the book is welcome because Mr. Wright is able at times to set his doctrine of an oral gospel aside, and offer us an unfettered exposition of a difficult New Testament text.

One such text is the hyperbole of the camel and the needle's eye in Mk 10[25] and elsewhere. Its words are: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' It is found in all the synoptical Gospels. And in recalling that fact, Mr. Wright introduces just a touch of his oral doctrine. Its presence in St. Mark, he says, is a proof that it circulated in the earliest days of the Church. Its presence in St. Matthew proves that it held its place in the memory of the Church in Jerusalem when St. James succeeded to St. Peter's chair. Its presence in St. Luke proves that it was acceptable to the Gentiles, and often on the lips of St. Paul.

It is a touch of the oral gospel, and we may easily let it pass. The saying is there, whatever it proves; it is found in all the synoptical Gospels, and that is surprising enough. For it is a hard saying. It is so hard a saying that scribe and critic and commentator have successively tried to soften it. They have done what they could to take it out of the Gospels. If they could have had their way it would never have entered in.

The scribe did his work upon it first, even before the end of the second century. In St. Mark's Gospel he found that the whole passage read in this way: 'And Jesus looked round about and saith unto His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard a thing it is to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' Now the scribe did not touch the hyperbole itself. But into the sentence that goes before, the simple and striking sentence, 'How hard a thing it is to enter into the kingdom of God!' he inserted the words, 'for them that trust in riches.' The insertion was accepted. It seemed to explain the hyperbole that followed. It certainly softened its rigour. But it almost carried its meaning away.

The critic came later. It was plainly impossible for a camel to go through a needle's eye. But might not a *cable* be supposed to go? The word for 'camel' (κάμηλος) is so nearly the same as the word for 'cable' (κάμιλος) that an early copyist could be supposed to have made the substitution. But the critic is open to criticism. If it had been the other way the suggestion was plausible—if he had substituted 'cable' when it ought to be 'camel.' But he was an eccentric copyist who found his copy speak of a 'cable' going through the eye of a needle and wrote a 'camel.' Moreover, the hyperbole is not peculiar to Jesus. In a slightly altered form ('It is easier for an elephant to go through a needle's eye') it is found in the Talmud. And, worst of all, there is the suspicion that the ingenious critic, of whom Theophylact is the first to tell us, invented his word for a cable. It is at least of doubtful existence.

Last of all came the commentator with a more plausible and interesting suggestion. In the description of a journey through Hebron (*Lands Classical and Sacred*, i. 326), Lord Nugent wrote: 'We were proceeding through a double gateway . . . there was one wide-arched road, and another narrow one for foot passengers by its side. We met a caravan of loaded camels. The drivers called out to us to betake ourselves for safety . . . to the smaller arch. They called it the hole or *eye of the needle*. If . . . this name is applied, not only to this gate at Hebron, but to all similar gates, it may give an easy solution of what has appeared to some the strained metaphor of the camel going through the needle's eye. A camel could not be made to pass through the smaller gate except with great difficulty, and stripped of the encumbrances of its load, its trappings, and its merchandise.'

But Lord Nugent's evidence for the name of the gate is not very strong, and it never seems to have

been strengthened. Dr. G. E. Post of Beyrout, whose knowledge of the country is unsurpassed, and who has made a special examination of the subject, does not believe it. He has written the article on the CAMEL for the new *Dictionary of the Bible*. He adds three notes at the end of it. First, he says, 'This small gate is known by the name *khaukhah*, but no one of the many whom we have asked ever heard the name *needle's eye* applied to it.' Secondly, he says, 'No camel could be forced through the *khaukhah*. It is a gate from three to four feet in height, and from eighteen inches to two feet in breadth.' Thirdly, he adds, 'Could we suppose a *khaukhah* so exceptionally large that a camel could be forced through it, the hyperbole would be quite lost.'

Nevertheless, the suggestion was greedily received. It rushed into books and pulpits. Even the Revised Version is understood by Mr. Wright to have deferred to its popularity, if not to its plausibility, when it changed 'the eye of a needle' in each of the Gospels into 'the needle's eye.' For it was not the hyperbole alone that staggered men. On another occasion Jesus spoke of those who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel. If nothing but the hyperbole were in the way, there is no reason why men should strain out the one hyperbole and swallow the other.

But the saying itself is in the way. We will not believe that it is so hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. The rich man will not believe it. He thinks it sets the word of God against itself, like Richard II. in his prison at Pomfret—

> As thus: 'Come little ones;' and then again,—
> 'It is as hard to come, as for a camel
> To thread the postern of a needle's eye.'

He thinks it sets the Master against Himself. And in that Mr. Wright is ready to agree with him. 'The young man over whom He had yearned had gone away sorrowful, because he had great possessions. And in the first blow of His grief our Lord exclaimed, "A rich man cannot enter the kingdom." Immediately afterwards He modified the expression. It was hard for anyone, it was inexpressibly hard for a rich man, to enter. But God's grace could enable him to do so: for "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God."'

But that also is needless, as it is a little dangerous. Jesus never said that it is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God: He always said it is not easy. He said so hyperbolically, no doubt. But it is our business to understand the hyperbole, as His hearers would readily understand it. In our prosaic Western way we say, 'It is as easy for a camel to go through the eye of a needle as for a rich man *who trusts in his riches* to enter the kingdom,' and sweep the hyperbole away. What Jesus said, and said always, was this, that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God—inconceivably, inexpressibly hard.

And we know that that is true. From the beginning until now it has been true that not many rich have been called. Well may Mr. Wright exclaim, 'Happy they who enter the kingdom of God in infancy, who carry out their baptismal vows as fast as their childish intellect develops, who learn to love God before they discover the attractions of the world or know the worth of money!'

The 'Suffering Servant' of Isaiah is still the stronghold of predictive prophecy. Criticism has not shaken its strength or lessened its significance. It is among the miracles of the Old Testament what the resurrection of Jesus is among the miracles of the New. Either is sufficient to establish the fact of the miraculous. For it is a mistake to suppose, as Professor Huxley seemed to do when he made so much of the 'Gadarene Pig Affair,' that the miraculous is a chain which hangs by its weakest link. One miracle established, establishes miracle; you may build then upon it at your leisure. The 'Suffering

Servant' of Isaiah is the unshaken foundation of the argument from prophecy.

And its strength increases daily. Not only has criticism left it unshaken, it has given it new stability. We do not refer to the fact that criticism has been compelled to recognize the individuality of the sufferer. It can scarcely be said that criticism has done that yet. In his introduction to the new volume of the 'Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges' (*Isaiah xl.-lvi.*, pp. lxi, 251, 4s.), Professor Skinner finds only two views of the Suffering Servant that call for consideration, and a personal Messiah is not one of them. In an appendix he even distinctly rejects the personal interpretation, finding the *rôle* assigned to this Servant too great to be sustained by any individual, however exalted, according to Old Testament modes of thought, and for himself prefers the *ideal Israel*.

It is not, therefore, that this critic or that can be pointed to, as falling in with the popular interpretation of the prophecy. It is that no critic has been able to show the popular interpretation impossible, or to suggest a more suitable interpretation in its place. Now Isaiah, even this Isaiah, was a prophet for the people. Every new failure on the part of criticism to displace the popular interpretation by another is a new argument in its favour.

But that is only negative. Criticism has rendered a positive service also. It has shown that no prophecy can justly be separated from its fulfilment.

The modern method of studying prophecy is the historical one. The question is asked, not how do we understand the prophecy in the light of its fulfilment, but how did the prophet himself understand it? And that method is not only legitimate, but at the first stage of investigation it is the only legitimate method. Its results, moreover, are valuable. It has actually given back prophecy to our Christian conscience.

And more than that, it has enabled us to see as we never should have seen without it, that as he uttered his prophecy the prophet was more entirely in the hands of God than he himself was aware of. In an interesting volume of sermons, entitled *Pilate's Gift* (R.T.S., pp. 289, 5s), the Bishop of Derry points out that the first words of this prophecy are a summary of the whole. Its first words are, 'Behold, my servant shall deal prudently' (Is 52^{13}). The margin of our English versions suggests as an alternative translation, 'shall prosper.' Both ideas are in the original word. And Dr. Chadwick somewhat clumsily, but necessarily, translates, 'Behold, my servant shall act wisely to a prosperous issue.' Now the prophecy contains some startling things. It contains the picture of One who is innocent, suffering for others. It contains the statement that God took pleasure in his sufferings. It offers him as the sole reward of all his afflictions a seed of sufferers like himself. It does not appear either a prudent proceeding or a successful issue. But in God's hands it has proved both. 'If any man will come after me,' said Jesus, 'let him deny himself and take up his Cross daily and follow me.' He went forward with it Himself, He has had followers in every generation. Isaiah did not see it all. But God did. And at the top of that prophecy He wrote the summary, 'Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently to a successful issue.'