

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

Some Exegetical Studies.

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

Beholding.

THE little web I am now to weave is to have exegesis for its woof and illustration for its warp. As the best of all pulpit illustrations are exegetical, I shall therefore choose only those words which are word-pictures, and shall try to reach the true and direct meaning of the Spirit in them. Ruskin very strongly recommends honest word-by-word study, which he regards as a chief secret of true culture. Someone has said that the history of a word may give us more knowledge than the history of a campaign. The exegetical preacher may adopt these sayings without hesitation or limitation.

We shall not linger over the ordinary New Testament words for 'beholding,' such as *ιδεῖν*, *ὄραν*, *βλέπειν*, and *κατανοεῖν*. These are mere words and not metaphors: they are not self-illuminating: their meaning is fixed only by convention or usage. But we have at least four words for 'beholding,' which amply repay earnest study. One of these is used only by Peter. In 1 P 2¹² and 3² we have *ἐποπτεύσαντες*: 'your good works which they behold,' and 'beholding your chaste behaviour.' In 2 P 1¹⁶ we read, 'we were eye-witnesses (*ἐπόπται*) of His majesty.' The fact that this word is used only by Peter, and used in both his First and Second Epistles, is an argument for identity of authorship. The word *ἐπόπτης* has a technical and very precise meaning. It denotes one who has been initiated into all the mysteries of the heathen religions; one in full communion, who has been admitted to the innermost secrets of his faith; one who enjoys the highest religious privileges and felicities. It thus admirably sets forth the unique vision and insight granted to the favoured three who beheld Christ's glory 'in the holy Mount' of Transfiguration (2 P 1¹⁸).

What a vivid and suggestive simile this would be to Peter's readers! And what a complete renunciation of all priestly ideas! For the aim of Peter, as of all the sacred writers, is to share with all the faithful every spiritual vision which he enjoyed. It was death for the initiated to divulge

the Elusinian and other mysteries. 'Off, ye profane,' was the spirit of paganism in its relation to the many. Priestism is a daring attempt to introduce these pagan ideas into the priestless religion of Jesus Christ. 'Mystery' is one of its watch-words. But in the New Testament 'mystery' means a truth not discoverable by human reason, but made known by Divine revelation: it is not a secret kept, but a secret told to the whole world. It is 'the mystery which hath been hid from ages . . . but now is made manifest to His saints' (Col 1²⁶). All the saints are among the initiated: they all are God's priests. This subject is admirably handled in the second essay in Archbishop Whately's *Essays on the Errors of Romanism*. Historians tell us that many of the most thoughtful heathens were attracted by the frankness, openness, simplicity, and universality of the gospel, which contrasted so favourably with the peeping, muttering, elusive mysteries of Greece and Rome. The conceptions of 'the mysteries' cherished by Romanists and Romanizers have far more affinity with paganism than with Judaism.

In 2 Co 3¹⁸ we find *κατοπτριζόμενοι*, 'beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.' The Revised Version gives in the margin, 'beholding in a mirror.' That seems preferable to 'reflecting in a mirror.' *Κάοπτρον* was the name for a mirror of polished metal. The museums contain many specimens of it.

Glory is excellence, conspicuous and resplendent: it is the outshining of moral and spiritual grandeur. All glory for us is concentrated in the Person and Life of Jesus Christ. In the Lives of the sages we find only splendid fragments and glittering exceptions. By Divine accommodation and adjustment, God teaches truth as we are able to hear it. I cannot gaze steadily on the sun at noon, but I can behold all its glory in the mirror of the unruffled lake. Often the lake is an idealizer, so that the sun or moon seems more beautiful than ever when reflected in its bosom. The gospels are a mirror that tells the

whole truth. Christ's glory revealed there becomes a 'kindly light' to lead us through the encircling gloom. 'Your God is everywhere, and yet dwells in your nation. I should like to see Him,' said the Emperor Trajan to Rabbi Joshua. 'Well, but suppose we first look at one of His ambassadors,' the Rabbi replied. He then took Cæsar into the open air and bade him look at the sun. 'I can't see: the light dazzles me,' said Trajan. 'You can't bear the light of one of His creatures?' the Rabbi said; 'how could you bear the light of the Creator; would not such a light annihilate thee?'

This beholding is not the privilege of the favoured few like Moses and the priests. 'We all, with unveiled face,' without the intervention of a priest. And we are, literally, being metamorphosed into the same image, from glory to glory. The present tense declares a process that is constantly going on. We become what we behold, we share what we see. The process is from the glory of Christ seen by us to the glory of Christ produced in us, and also from one degree of glory to a higher.

In his essay on 'Secret Societies,' De Quincey gives a gorgeous illustration of a reflected glory. 'From a mountain top I have sometimes seen,' he writes, 'a golden pillar of solar splendour which had escaped through rifts and rents in the clouds that to me were as invisible as the sun himself. So in the martyrdom of St. Stephen, Paul could see no gates of heaven that opened, could see no solar orb: to *him* was visible, as the scenery about St. Stephen, nothing but darkness of error and clouds. Yet, even as I far below in the lake, so he far below in the countenance of St. Stephen, saw, with consternation, reflected a golden sunlight, some radiance not earthly, coming through avenues not revealed to himself, some radiance from far-off mountains, such as, upon any theory yet opened to *him*, ought *not* to have been there.' This haunted him, perplexed him, compelled him to think intensely, and at last the reflected glory he beheld was imparted to himself.

The other two great words for 'beholding' are found in St. John's Gospel: 'We beheld (*ἑθεασάμεθα*) His glory' (chap. 1¹⁴), and in Christ's prayer in chap. 17²⁴, 'that they may behold (*θεωρῶσι*) My glory.' These two words have the same root, and are both steeped in all the theatrical, spectacular, and athletic associations of ancient Greece

and Rome. *θεᾶσθαι* has to do chiefly with the theatre and amphitheatre—our word *theatre* comes from it; and *θεωρεῖν* is identified with the athletic games and other shows. The *θεωρός* was the official representation of the State at their athletic festivals, and so the verb meant to witness the games in the way fitted to make the greatest impression.

'Bread and games' was the ceaseless cry of the Roman people in John's day: bread for nothing and games for ever. The Greeks were theatre-mad: *ἀεὶ παῖδες*, everlastingly children, as one of them said: they turned everything to amusement. Shows were the chief events in their lives. The Greeks reckoned their time by the Olympiads, their great contests at Olympia. Hours before the entertainments began, tens of thousands crowded the Roman amphitheatres. They detached themselves from all other interests, and concentrated their attention for hours on end upon the glories presented to their gaze. The enthusiasm of each was heightened by the enthusiasm of all. The sea of faces was brightened with smiles, and the welkin rang with their rapturous applause. All sorts of wonders and sensations were provided for them, so that their interest never flagged. Perfumes, coins, lottery tickets, sweetmeats, and refreshments were now and again showered down upon them. Births and deaths were ordinary events at these gatherings, owing to the fierce excitement, the numbers present, and the many hours spent there. All John's readers had been eye-witnesses of these scenes; at least they could not help being perfectly familiar with all their details. What wonderful illustrations! 'We theaterized His glory,' we gazed delightedly and continually upon it as men gaze upon the scenes in the theatre and the amphitheatre: 'that they may behold My glory,' as the heathens around behold their pastimes, athletic contests, and foot and chariot races.

Bengel, in his own ingenious way, gives us a fine touch here. 'Verba affinia: *ἐσκῆνωσεν* et *ἑθεασάμεθα*, uti *scena* et *theatrum*': He dwelt as in a scene or stage, and we beheld as in a theatre.

These three words—*ἐποπτεύειν*, *θεᾶσθαι*, and *θεωρεῖν*—give a wonderfully complete guide-book for the devout life. For they offer us as illustrations and inspirations, the most honoured and satisfying privileges and experiences in both the

religious and the secular life of the ancients. These three verbs were usually applied only to the most august persons and things. They all signify a beholding which yields surprise, wonder, admiration, love, and the deepest delight. Could

we only carry into the highest region all that these words suggest, our devout life would approach as near to perfection as is possible on earth.

In another paper I hope to *postilize* upon this theme.

Contributions and Comments.

'My Words shall not pass away.'

As the tender melody
Dwells the core of every chord,
Perfect in simplicity
Were the sayings of our Lord.

Other speech is blent with earth,
There clear heaven was in each word,
Truth that found its mortal birth
In the sayings of our Lord.

Sage's pen and poet's lyre
Silent lie beneath earth's sward,
While the pure hope rings but higher
• In the sayings of our Lord.

Other wisdoms, each to each,
Seem but Babel fresh outpoured,—
Wistful yet they backward reach
To the sayings of our Lord.

SARAH ROBERTSON MATHESON.

Isaiah lrv. 11.

Is 65¹¹, not Is 45¹², ought to be the heading of the contribution of Mr. C. H. W. Johns in the last number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES (p. 423, as well as on the cover). May I use this misprint as occasion for an appeal to all printers, publishers, and authors of Great and Greater Britain to do away, at least as much as possible, with the use of Roman figures, that source of so many misprints, and, in consequence, of loss of time. *Vita brevis.*

Many theological books, I am glad to see, have already done so, to name but two, the *Hebrew Dictionary* of Brown - Driver - Briggs, and the *Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by the very editor of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES. EB. NESTLE.

Maulbronn.

P.S.—As to the question put forward by Mr. Johns I may refer to the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, October 1892, p. 733, where Mr. Davis quotes an Assyrian *manu*. The Arabic goddess *Manât* has been compared long ago, the god *M'ny* from Strabo and Jamblich already by Grotius.

Nebuchadrezzar and the Siege of Tyre.

IN last month's EXPOSITORY TIMES (p. 430) Professor Sayce is good enough to refer me for information on the above subject to *The Records of the Past*, new series, iv. pp. 99-100 (1890). There we have the translation by Mr. Pinches of a contract tablet, from the dating of which we learn that in the fortieth year of Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon was king also of Tyre. But this does not supply what I desiderated, namely, proof that Tyre was *captured* at the end of the siege (573 B.C. according to Professor Sayce). The fortieth year of Nebuchadrezzar would be c. 565 B.C., and I never suggested any doubt that long before that time Tyre had somehow or other fallen into the hands of the Babylonian king or come to terms with him. We may then, I presume, take it for granted that there is really no *evidence* as to the issue of the thirteen years' siege.

J. A. SELBIE.

Maryculter, Aberdeen.