

## USE OF SIMILITUDES BY GOD

Our reading has been from Zechariah. This is one of the prophets in whose writings there is a good deal of the obscurity and of the difficulty arising out of the employment of figure and symbol. That there should be any obscurity at all in any part of the prophets seems strange to such as think that all revelation should be as clear as the morning light. There is no ground for the thought in the subject itself. It is in perfect harmony with God's own declaration as to the character of His general communications to the prophets.

*"I have multiplied visions and used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets"* (Hosea 12:10), and again,

*"If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known unto him in a vision and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all Mine house. With him I will speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, **not in dark speeches**"* (Num. 12:6).

"Dark speeches" then is the rule in prophetic communication. They have a meaning, but the meaning is not on the surface, and it has to be sought for. It is not wise to quarrel with this fact or to ignore it. We must recognise it and adapt ourselves humbly to it—taking care at the same time not to push it beyond its own strict boundaries, as those do who claim a veiled meaning for everything, like the Swedenborgians, or a spiritual significance for literal statements, like the common run of popular religionists.

If we surmise the divine object in cloaking meanings in figure and symbol, we may glean it from two features abundantly manifest in the Scriptures and in experience; first, the unutterable majesty of God, the Eternal Self-Subsisting Creator, and the unutterable insignificance, and weakness, and meanness, of the perishing race of groundlings to whom these communications are made. It is a marvel that God should condescend to speak to man at all. That when He does so, He does it in a veiled manner, is manifest from the form of the first communication in Eden, concerning redemption, and the first appointment of a form for fallen worship, in the offering of slain animals. That it is fit it should be so we are made to feel in all our experience of the impossibility of wisdom and folly dwelling together, and the unsuitability of open and friendly intimacies between greatness of any kind and the common shallow run of insignificant men.

That it is advantageous to "*conceal a thing*," while revealing it is also manifest from experience. A riddle is proverbially more interesting than an aphorism. A parable stimulates discernment. A thing seen after the search provoked by obscurity is seen much more clearly than if exhibited in a plain and direct manner in the first instance. This at least is the case with the turbid human intellect. It may be that all created mentality requires thus to be brought to a focus. At all events it is certain that concealment whets curiosity everywhere. Say even to a child, "You mustn't look in this box," that is the one box it wants to see the inside of.

On the whole, then, it is not strange, though at first it might appear so, that there should be dark similitudes in the communications of the prophets. If the darkness were complete—if the riddle were absolutely insoluble—there could be no advantage in it. But it is never so in divine communications. There is always an inkling of the meaning somewhere—a clue by which the secret can be unlocked, which those may find who are humbly anxious to find. It is so in the dark chapter we have read from Zechariah (Ch. 4).

*"The angel that talked with me came again and waked me as a man that is wakened out of his sleep."*

Considering that this is one of the things "*written for our learning*," as Paul alleges (Rom. 15:4), there must be a reason for mentioning a circumstance like this. It cannot be that the mere circumstance of Zechariah having become drowsy would be recorded. It must be that sleep in the case is sleep with a figurative meaning. That there is such a sleep in the experience of God's people, we know from Christ's reference to the death of Lazarus as a being asleep.

*“Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.”*

The disciples did not see the figure.

*“They thought that Jesus had spoken of taking of rest in sleep”* (John 11:13)

Then said Jesus unto them plainly,

*“Lazarus is dead.”*

Thus the plain description is death, the figurative, sleep. To see Zechariah, then, being *“waked, as a man that is wakened out of sleep,”* must be to see him in a figure raised from the dead.

This conclusion is in strict harmony with the surroundings of the incident. Zechariah had beheld (Ch. 3:4-5) the figurative investiture of Joshua with *“change of raiment”* in substitution for *“the filthy garments”* he had upon him—which were said to represent his iniquity. This was a figurative change from the mortal to the immortal. He had heard the angel *“protest unto Joshua”* that he and his companions in the transaction were *“men of sign,”* and that the sign had reference to *“my servant the Branch”* (v.8), in whose day the iniquity of Israel would be removed, and *“every man call his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.”* This was prophecy. Now for Zechariah to fall into a figurative sleep at this point and be wakened by an angel, what could it mean but that the next thing to be seen was to belong to the day when Zechariah and all the prophets and saints should rise from the dead and when the prophecy should be fulfilled? The conclusion becomes absolutely inevitable when we follow Zechariah in his description of what he saw. His attention was directly challenged:

*“What seest thou?”*

Before looking at what he saw, it will be advantageous to consider the hint given in the middle of the vision as to the general meaning. Having seen the vision, the question was addressed to Zechariah,

*Knowest thou not what these be?”*

And he said,

*“No, my Lord.”*

*“Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, this is the Word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying: Not by might, nor by power—(that is, not by human power)—but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.”*

Here is an interpretation to the effect that the things seen by Zechariah signified that the work to be done after the sleep-walking at the resurrection was to be a work of the Spirit of God and not of human accomplishment.

With this clue, we look with some certainty of guidance at the things which Zechariah saw. Briefly stated, they were these; a seven branched candlestick standing between two olive trees and a connection between the candlestick and the trees on each side by means of two branches which emptied the oil of the trees into the candlestick. Looking at these as natural objects figuratively employed, what should we say could be the meaning but this: perpetual combustion and perpetual light. If an oil lamp could be connected with an oil-furnishing tree in such a way as that the oil of the tree would be automatically supplied by the growth of the tree to the lamp, we should have an apparatus capable of everlasting light. Lamps usually burn out because of the supply of the oil giving in; this would be a lamp whose supply of oil would be perpetual, and whose light therefore would never go out. Naturally, therefore, such a figure would mean an arrangement of some kind that would secure a perpetual manifestation of light.

But now, light itself is a figure, used we know in what sense. Jesus says of himself:

*“I am the light of the world.”*

Paul says,

*“Walk as children of the light.”*

We read of darkness covering the earth, and of the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shining in the face of Jesus Christ. The light-shedding candlestick of Zechariah’s vision, then, must signify some arrangement or organization of the Spirit for illuminating the earth after the resurrection. What that organization is, there is no room whatever for doubt. It is the Kingdom of

God and nothing else. This Kingdom in its kernel, consists of Jesus and the saints established in the Holy Land as the rulers of mankind. That they should be exhibited as a light-shedding apparatus of the Spirit is most fitting: for that is just what they are. Mortal men at first, the salvation of the world does not come by them as such, but by the power of the Spirit of God incorporate in them in the day when they are no longer mortal men, but men changed into Spirit-nature, and made efficient for the work which God purposes to effect through them.

But why should the candlestick be represented as fed by the olive trees? There is a clue to this in the fact that Paul speaks of the mortal origin of the sons of God (or the stock from which they are derived) under the figure of an olive tree. You will remember what I am referring to, viz., his question in Rom. 11 to the Gentiles.

*“If some of the branches be broken off and thou being a wild olive tree wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree,”* etc.

It is the foremost feature of the glory to be revealed that it is preceded by and drawn from the state of evil brought into vogue among the sons of men by disobedience. This feature appears to be the one signified by the olive trees. It might seem otherwise from what was said to Zechariah.

*“They are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth;”*

But this dark saying really proves it when looked into. For who are the two anointed ones that stand in the day of glory before the Lord? They are two communities that require anointing in order to be qualified to sustain that position. Anointing and christening are the same in meaning. To be covered with Christ is to be anointed. He is pre-eminently the anointed or Christ, having been *“anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power”* (Acts 10:38). The two communities who stand covered with him though at this time fused into one candlestick are Jews and Gentiles, from both of whom the elements of Spirit-candlestick of the future age will be derived. They will be *“no longer twain.”* They will be *“both one,”* the middle wall of partition having been broken down. But, historically, it will remain a fact, to be recognised in the ages of perfection, that they were two. It is proclaimed in the day of redemption, that the kings and priests of God were redeemed *“out of every kindred, tongue, people and nation.”* So it will be a fact that the one body of that glorious age was originally two—Jew and Gentile—both of whom required anointing before they could be qualified to *“stand before the Lord of all the earth.”* This historic aspect of the glorious state of things prevalent in the age to come is exhibited in the two olive trees which stand on each side of the oil-combusting candlesticks with which they are connected by two *“olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves.”* The two olive branches show it is only a section of the two communities as a whole that is used, and the two golden pipes, that it is on the principle of faith that any are selected from Jew or Gentile to be made use of as sons of light and power in the coming age of glory.

The vision has a powerful practical bearing on the age of darkness in which we live. It is an age distinguished among other things by much scheming for the reformation of the world by various human agencies. The vision tells us that it is all in vain, that the cure must come, and can only come from God:

*“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.”*

The evil plight we are in is by His appointment and His causation, for so the Bible reveals; and in the nature of things, man cannot alter what God ordains. The whole “philosophy of evil,” as men talk, is summed up in Paul’s description of man’s present lot: *“made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope.”* The vanity to which we are subject is not an affair of human will, but of divine ordinance, which we are subject is not an affair of human will, but of divine ordinance, yet with light in the darkness, for it is “in hope” that we are subjected to the evil. It is not without a reason, nor without a purpose, nor without a hope that mankind are in their present evil state. No system of human wisdom can solve the terrible enigma. It is solved and solved completely in the Bible, and the Bible cannot be overthrown.

*“Is it not of the Lord of Hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and shall weary themselves for very vanity?” (Hab. 2:13).*

It is God who creates evil (Isa. 45:7). Man is in an evil state because he is not using his life and his power for the purpose for which God bestowed them. The words have come to pass which were specially addressed to the priests through Malachi,

*“If ye will not hear and if ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of Hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart”*  
(Mal. 2:2).

Till this curse is removed there can be no reformation of the human lot, such as man needs and such as his constitutional mentality leads him to desire and aspire after. Human aims and human schemes in this direction are all in vain. Men might conceivably by human effort be better clothed and fed and housed and educated (though even in these items improvement as regards the mass is not possible to any appreciable extent), but as regards the fundamental needs of man in these relations of his being and state of his nature that have to do with making “life worth living”—man can never change the world from the hell-upon-earth state which has been the average character of its experience for six thousand years past.

*“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.”*

His Spirit in olive-tree-fed candlestick manifestation, or operating through the society being developed from Adam’s race during its painful progress from darkness to light—in other words, working in the sons of God in the day of their manifestation upon the earth in glory—will do the work and will do it with such perfection that at last it will be said,

*“There is no more curse, no more pain, no more death.”*

Called by the gospel, we are called to be constituents of this glorious family. Our particular business at present is to prepare ourselves for this position by submission to the commandments of the gospel. It is here where the candlestick vision brings a powerful lesson to bear as regards our relation to the governments and institutions of the present evil world. It must be manifest to any man’s ordinary understanding that it is no fit preparation for the doing of God’s effectual work for the saints of God to take part with man in his various vain and man-glorifying schemes for doing a work that man cannot do and that God has purposed to do, and which He will do at last by the hands of those who wait patiently for Him. We can never too earnestly repeat to ourselves that this is a time of probation—not of effectuation. It is our part to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, who will exalt us in due time. The waiting may be wearying to flesh and blood, but not more wearying than the disappointments that are inevitably associated with all human schemes; and in the end, this is nothing but joy and peace, satisfaction and glory, immortality and perfection for those who, with enlightened eye and resolute hand, accept the short-lived position of strangers and pilgrims in the journey to an everlasting place in the house of God.

Taken from: - “Seasons of Comfort” Vol. 2  
Pages 473-478  
By Bro. Robert Roberts