**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ZECHARIAH-005. THE SOURCE OF POWER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And the Angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, 2. And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold, 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 are upon the top thereof: 3. And two olive-trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. 4. So I answered and spake to the Angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? 5. Then the Angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my Lord. 6. Then He answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. 7. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. 8. Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 9. The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you. 10. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth."*

*Zechariah 4:1-10*

THE preceding vision had reference to Joshua the priest, and showed him restored to his prerogative of entrance into the sanctuary. This one concerns his colleague Zerubbabel, the representative of civil power, as he of ecclesiastical, and promises that he shall succeed in rebuilding the Temple. The supposition is natural that the actual work of reconstruction was mainly in the hands of the secular ruler.

Flesh is weak, and the Prophet had fallen into deep sleep, after the tension of the previous vision. That had been shown him by Jehovah, but in this vision we have the same angel interpreter who had spoken with Zechariah before. He does not bring the vision, but simply wakes the Prophet that he may see it, and directs his attention to it by the question, What seest thou? The best way to teach is to make the learner put his conceptions into definite words. We see things more clearly, and they make a deeper impression, when we tell what we see. How many lazy looks we give at things temporal as well as at things eternal, after which we should be unable to answer the Angel's question! It is not every one who sees what he looks at.

The passage has two parts--the vision and its interpretation, with related promises.

The vision may be briefly disposed of. Its original is the great lamp which stood in the tabernacle, and was replaced in the Solomonic Temple by ten smaller ones. These had been carried away at the Captivity, and we do not read of their restoration. But the main thing to note is the differences between this lamp and the one in the tabernacle. The description here confines itself to these: They are three--the bowl or reservoir above the lamp, the pipes from it to the seven lights, and the two olive-trees which stood on either side of the lamp and replenished from their branches the supply in the reservoir. The tabernacle lamp had no reservoir, and consequently no pipes, but was fed with oil by the priests. The meaning of the variations, then, is plain. They were intended to express the fuller and more immediately divine supply of oil. If the Revised Version's rendering of the somewhat doubtful numerals in verse 2 be accepted, each several light had seven pipes, thus expressing the perfection of its supplies.

Now, there can be no doubt about the symbolism of the tabernacle lamp. It represented the true office of Israel, as it rayed out its beams into the darkness of the desert. It meant the same thing as Christ's words, Ye are the light of the world, and as the vision of the seven golden candlesticks, in Revelation 1:12, 13, 20. The substitution of separate lamps for one with seven lights may teach the difference between the mere formal unity of the people of God in the Old Testament and the true oneness, conjoined with diversity, in the New Testament Church, which is one because Christ walks in the midst. Zechariah's lamp, then, called to the minds of the little band of restored exiles their high vocation, and the changed arrangements for the supply of that oil, which is the standing emblem for divine communications fitting for service, or, to keep to the metaphor, fitting to shine, signified the abundance of these.

The explanation of the vision is introduced, as at Zechariah 1:9, 19, by the Prophet's question of its meaning. His angelic teacher is astonished at his dullness, as indeed heavenly eyes must often be at ours, and asks if he does not know so familiar an object. The Prophet's No, my Lord, brings full explanation. Ingenuously acknowledged ignorance never asks Heaven for enlightenment in vain.

First, the true source of strength and success, as shown by the vision, is declared in plain terms. What fed the lamp? Oil, which symbolises the gift of a divine Spirit, if not in the full personal sense as in the New Testament, yet certainly as a God-breathed influence, preparing prophets, priests, kings, and even artificers, for their several forms of service. Whence came the oil? From the two olive-trees, which though, as verse 14 shows, they represented the two leaders, yet set forth the truth that their power for their work was from God; for the Bible knows nothing of nature as a substitute for or antithesis to God, and the growth of the olive and its yield of oil is His doing.

This, then, was the message for Zerubbabel and his people, that God would give such gifts as they needed, in order that the light which He Himself had kindled should not be quenched. If the lamp was fed with oil, it would burn, and there would be a Temple for it to stand in. If we try to imagine the feebleness of the handful of discouraged men, and the ring of enemies round them, we may feel the sweetness of the promise which bade them not despond because they had little of what the world calls might.

We all need the lesson; for the blustering world is apt to make us forget the true source of all real strength for holy service or for noble living. The world's power at its mightiest is weak, and the Church's true power, at her feeblest, is omnipotent, if only she grasps the strength which is hers, and takes the Spirit which is given. The eternal antithesis of man's weakness at his haughtiest, and God's strength even in its feeblest possessors, is taught by that lamp flaming, whatever envious hands or howling storms might seek to quench it, because fed by oil from on high. Let us keep to God's strength, and not corrupt His oil with mixtures of foul-smelling stuff of our own compounding.

Next, in the strength of that revelation of the source of might a defiant challenge is blown to the foe. The great mountain is primarily the frowning difficulties which lifted themselves against Zerubbabel's enterprise, and more widely the whole mass of worldly opposition encountered by God's servants in every age. It seems to bar all advance; but an unseen Hand crushes it down, and flattens it out into a level, on which progress is easy. The Hebrew gives the suddenness and completeness of the transformation with great force; for the whole clause, Thou shalt become a plain, is one word in the original.

Such triumphant rising above difficulties is not presumption when it has been preceded by believing gaze on the source of strength. If we have taken to heart the former words of the Prophet, we shall not be in danger of rash overconfidence when we calmly front obstacles in the path of duty, assured that every mountain shall be made low. A brave scorn of the world, both in its sweetnesses and its terrors, befits God's men, and is apt to fulfil its own confidences; for most of these terrors are like ghosts, who will not wait to be spoken to, but melt away if fairly faced. Nor should we forget the other side of this thought; namely, that it is the constant drift of Providence to abase the lofty in mind, and to raise the lowly. What is high is sure to get many knocks which pass over lower heads. To men of faith every mountain shall either become a plain or be cast into the sea.

Then follows, on the double revelation of the source of strength and the futility of opposition, the assurance of the successful completion of the work. The stone which is to crown the structure shall be brought forth and set in its place amid jubilant prayers not offered in vain, that grace--that is, the protecting favour of God--may rest on it.

The same thought is reiterated and enlarged in the next word, which is somewhat separated from the former, as if the flow of prophetic communication had paused for a moment, and then been resumed. In verse 9 we have the assurance, so seldom granted to God's workers, that Zerubbabel shall be permitted to complete the task which he had begun. It is the fate of most of us to inherit unfinished work from our predecessors, and to bequeath the like to our successors. And in one aspect, all human work is unfinished, as being but a fragment of the fulfilment of the mighty purpose which runs through all the ages. Yet some are more happy than others, in that they see an approximate completion of their work. But whether it be so or not, our task is to do the little we can do, and leave the rest with God, sure that He will work all the fragments into a perfect whole, and content to do the smallest bit of service for Him. Few of us are strong enough to do separate building. We are like coral insects, whose reef is one, though its makers are millions.

Zerubbabel finished his task, but its end was but a new beginning of an order of things of which he did not see the end. There are no beginnings or endings, properly speaking, in human affairs, but all is one unbroken flow. One man only has made a real new beginning, and that is Jesus Christ; and He only will really carry His work to its very last issues. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending. He is the Foundation of the true Temple, and He is also the Headstone of the corner, the foundation on which all rests, the apex to which all runs up. When He begins, He will also make an end.

The completion of the work is to be the token that the angel who spake with me was God's messenger. We can know that before the fulfilment, but we cannot but know it after. Better to be sure that the message is from God while yet the certainty is the result of faith, than to be sure of it afterwards, when the issue has shattered and shamed our doubts.

If we realise that God's Spirit is the guarantee for the success of work done for God, we shall escape the vulgar error of measuring the importance of things by their size, as, no doubt, many of these builders were doing. No one will help on the day of great things who despises that of small ones. They say that the seeds of the big trees in California are the smallest of all the conifers. I do not vouch for the truth of the statement, but God's work always begins with little seeds, as the history of the Church and of every good cause shows. What do these feeble Jews? sneered the spectators of their poor little walls, painfully piled up, over which a fox could jump. They did very little, but they were building the city of God, which has outlasted all the mockers.

Men might look with contempt on the humble beginning, but other eyes than theirs looked at it with other emotions. The eyes which in the last vision were spoken of as directed on the foundation stone, gaze on the work with joy. These are the seven eyes of the Lord, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth (Rev. 5:6). The Spirit is here contemplated in the manifoldness of His operations rather than in the unity of His person. Thus the closing assurance, which involves the success of the work, since God's eyes rest on it with delight, comes round to the first declaration, Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit. Note the strong contrast between despise and rejoice. What matter the scoffs of mockers, if God approves? What are they but fools who look at that which moves His joy, and find in it only food for scorn? What will become of their laughter at last? If we try to get so near God as to see things with His eyes, we shall be saved from many a false estimate of what is great and what is small, and may have our own poor little doings invested with strange dignity, because He deigns to behold and bless them.