

SUGGESTIONS TO BIBLE STUDENTS.

A brother writes, inquiring, "From what source are the meanings of the Bible symbols derived?" and says he cannot get away from their wonderful aptness and the remarkable light they throw on the word, but that he cannot always trace their derivation. And again he inquires, "How do you know which is symbolic and which literal? Where does the one end and the other begin?"

These queries suggest to us the propriety of calling attention to several items which we think should be observed by students of the Scripture:

First, we should remember that the Scriptures were intended to be the theological text book, and the statement and interpreter of divine law for all the world; that it was written from a standpoint of scientific knowledge and prophetic foresight beyond the knowledge of men either in the past or present, and that, what is prophecy to one age becomes history to a future age. It was not God's purpose to disclose all his plans to man at once, nor yet to leave him in total ignorance; hence truths relative to the future are generally expressed in types and symbols and dark sayings.

Secondly, we should always observe the various classes to which the epistles, gospels, prophecies, &c., are specially addressed; for although all the Scriptures will in the future be profitable to all men, certain portions of them have special reference to special classes now. For instance, the law given only to Israel to bring them to, or to prepare them to accept Christ, will in the future be to all men, to bring them to perfection. So also the instructions now given specially [R715 : page 6] to the gospel church, pointing out their stormy pathway of suffering, will in the future, show the world how well the Christ is prepared to sympathize and succor all those then striving to overcome evil, and grow up to perfection.

If we carefully note the opening address of each of the epistles, of the Acts of the Apostles, and the Revelation, we will notice that, with one exception (the epistle of James), each is addressed to the saints, the sanctified in Christ Jesus, either as a class, or, as in a few cases, to individual saints, the contents being applicable to the entire church. It will also be noticed that the teaching of Jesus, as recorded in the four Gospels, was not an effort to persuade men to be his disciples, but rather to confirm the faith of those who had already become his disciples. He opened his mouth in parables and dark sayings to the multitude, and explained them privately to his disciples. So we find the O.T. abounding in types, symbols, and many peculiar items of history, which to the world, at the present time, have little or no interest except as matters of jest and ridicule, but which by the consecrated Bible student are found to contain concealed links of truth which form parts of the one unbroken chain of the divine testimony.

In the present time the Bible proves therefore to be of special interest and profit, only to consecrated students, and vain is the hope of converting the world by opening its pages before eyes blinded by prejudice and pride. Within the present century, Bibles have been printed by the million and scattered over the world like autumn leaves, but they are not read by the million, and they are not studied even by those who are so zealously engaged in the commendable work of publishing them. All except consecrated saints are in profound ignorance of the mass of its precious truth. Is it then asked, How is the world to be brought to a knowledge of the truth? We answer, through the agency of the living teacher. By this means, either directly or indirectly, the first interest is always awakened. It has been so in the past; it is so in the present, and it will be so in the future. And for this reason God has never left himself without a living witness in the world. Paul said, How shall they hear without a preacher? (Rom. 10:14.) And again he said, "Ye are our epistle known and read of all men." The world will read the living epistles, when they will not read the written one.

For this reason Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth," and again, "Ye are the light of the world" – "Let your light shine." If men see our light, they will in time believe in it, and will be attracted to the fountain whence we received it – the word of God. This explains why the Scriptures are directed so expressly to the saints. The great Prophet, or Teacher of the next age – the Christ, head and body – (Deut. 18:15) is now being prepared, educated, disciplined and instructed for a great missionary work. The school of Christ in this age is preparing the teachers of the world for the incoming Millennial age.

Thirdly, we should notice that spiritual truths, or those truths relating to our "high calling" to a spiritual nature, have only been brought to light since Pentecost; and whatever reference is made to these spiritual truths in former writings, was only shadowed forth in types and symbols, and dark sayings, impossible to be interpreted until the spirit (mind) of God, through the Apostles' writings, revealed their significance to the saints. Even Jesus did not teach this line of truth, except in parables and dark sayings, for the time had not yet come. He said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:12.) Consequently we find those portions of the Scriptures written after Pentecost devoted largely to the expounding of the O.T. Scriptures, as well as adding new elements of truth in the light of which other dark sayings and symbols become luminous. The New Testament thus becomes the key to the old.

Let us look, for instance, at a few illustrations as to how the key is used. Paul declares (Heb. 9:8-10, and 10:1) that the Tabernacle, and its service and ceremonies were typical. This key throws open a wide door for investigation; and following the Apostle's exposition, we see the deep significance of **[R716 : page 6]** its many ceremonies. [See "Tabernacle Teachings."] We are also shown that the rule in interpreting types and symbols is their exact fitness to their antitypes and their *perfect harmony* with every principle and statement of the inspired writers. If our interpretation of any type or symbol jars in the

least with any other statement of the word, we have no right to use it. We may be sure we are not correct.

Take, for instance, the symbols earth, sea, mountain, hill. We know that they are used in a symbolic sense when they have a fitness as symbols, and when, if understood literally, they would be out of harmony with the context, or with other portions of Scripture. Thus, in Rev. 21:1, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." If this were literal it would be a contradiction of Eccl. 1:4 "The earth abideth forever." But being elsewhere informed that society, as at present organized under civil and so-called religious restraint, but really held in slavery under Satan, the prince of this world, is to be dissolved, and that the elements of tyranny, ignorance and superstition, which heretofore bound them are to melt away (2 Pet. 3:10-12; John 12:31) we see that the expression, "the first earth passed away," would be a fitting symbol of such an event, and that the new earth would strikingly symbolize the new organization of society under "The Prince of Peace." And we find that this application fits, in every instance, where earth is used as a symbol.

While *earth* thus represents organized and settled society, *sea*, in contrast with it, fittingly represents the more unrestrained and ungovernable masses of men easily stirred and influenced by the storm, hence the fitness of the statement that under the new heavens there shall be *no more SEA*.

As *mountains* and *hills* tower above the earth, so the civil powers of earth are aptly symbolized by them, mountains being the great powers, and hills the lesser. "Therefore, will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains [present governments] be carried into the midst of the *sea*" – overthrown by a general uprising of the people. (Psa. 46:2.)

These will serve as illustrations. They might be multiplied beyond the limit of our space. The fitness of their application, and their *harmonious* fitness in every instance where they are used

symbolically, is clear evidence of the correctness of their application. In fact, symbols, types, parables and all dark sayings of Scripture, are subject to this same test. When asked to interpret one of his parables, Jesus replied, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" (Mark 4:10-13.) He expected them to think if they would see the point in his sayings. He, therefore, only explained the one parable and left us to find the significance of the others by study, comparison and observation of his methods and principles. Any interpretation which is out of harmony with the general principles laid down in the Scriptures, or at variance with any plain, direct statement, may be set down as incorrect, whether we see a better one or not.

Since it is necessary to have the mind or plan of God clearly before our minds; and to do this requires sympathy and harmony; and since to have sympathy of thought, and to be able to appreciate God's plans, is requisite to our preparation for the study of the symbols of Revelation and the types of the Old Testament, it is evident that these symbols are not, at the present time, given to, nor for, any but the *saints*: "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." It is further evident that these revelations of God's plans, etc., are not given to produce sanctification (consecration), but to strengthen, and confirm, and upbuild, those who are sanctified (set apart) – "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" – that such, being acquainted with the divine designs, may be thus enabled to work and sacrifice in harmony with the progressing development of that plan.

Hence the *appreciation* of the fitness of the symbols and types, is the result of possessing the spirit or mind of Christ; and this spirit of truth guides quietly into one truth after another, as each becomes due. With that guidance the fitness is manifest; without it, it is undiscernable.

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