

The Lampstand and the Pillar of Truth

— December 28, 2024

*1 Timothy 3:15 and Its Shadow in the Tabernacle; The Seven Lamps; and Moses:
God's Thoughts Are Not Our Thoughts*

**Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 3:15; Exodus 25:31–40; 26:35;
27:20–21; 40:25; Numbers 8:1–2; Isaiah 55:8–9; Exodus 2:11–15;
Acts 7:22–30**

“The pillar and base of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15, J.N. Darby translation)

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
(Isaiah 55:8–9)*

The Assembly of the Living God: Seeking the Shadow

First Timothy 3:15 calls the assembly the pillar and base of the truth — J.N. Darby's translation gives pillar and base where the King James has pillar and ground. Hebrews 10:1 tells us that the law had a shadow of good things to come. If the assembly in the New Testament is the pillar and base of the truth, then somewhere in the shadow of the Old Testament there ought to be something with a pillar and a base. And there is. Exodus 25 gives the description of the lampstand made for the tabernacle. In J.N. Darby's translation, verse 31 reads: thou shalt make a lampstand of pure gold... its base and its shaft. A base — like the ground. A shaft — the part that goes up and down, like a pillar. The lampstand had both.

But the lampstand was not only an architectural feature. It was for light. And what the light was for is stated in verse 37: they shall light the lamps, that they may shine out before it — outward, forward, without boundary. The first question a little assembly ought to ask itself, taking its instruction from the shadow of the lampstand, is: is there anything that shines out? Is there a testimony that goes out from this gathering? The answer “we are in a time of ruin in Christendom and things are not as they once were” is true, but it cannot become a reason for extinguishing what ought to still shine. The Pharisees made the word of God of none effect by their traditions; we must not make the purposes of God of none effect by our defeatism. The light has the property of shining out, and it ought to.

What the Lampstand Illuminates: The Table and the Veil

Exodus 26:35 tells us the lampstand was placed on the south side of the tabernacle, opposite the table on the north side. The table held the twelve loaves of showbread, one for each tribe — the standing of the people of God before him, their place of rest in his presence. The light of the lampstand was to shine upon that table. One thing the assembly’s testimony should illuminate is the standing of God’s people before him: their acceptance, their security, their place in the presence of their God.

Exodus 27:20–21 describes the lampstand as shining outside the veil, which is before the testimony. The veil — made of blue and purple and scarlet and fine twined linen — spoke of the person of Christ (Hebrews 10:20 says through the veil, that is his flesh). So the lampstand was to illuminate the veil, to shine forth the moral excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what the assembly of God is for. If Christendom largely ignores the person and glories of Christ, the little assembly gathered in his name ought to be the place where those glories are displayed.

Exodus 40:25 records the first lighting of the lamps: he lighted the lamps before Jehovah, as Jehovah had commanded Moses. No table mentioned, no veil — just the presence of Jehovah. This warns against doing the things of the assembly by habit, as though God were not the living God. He is the assembly of the living God. And Numbers 8:1–2 adds the instruction for the wilderness journey: the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick. In the wilderness, the light is only found close to the lampstand. For the path through this world, light is given by staying close to Christ himself.

God's Thoughts Are Not Our Thoughts: Moses at the Red Sea

Isaiah 55:8–9 gives the principle that makes sense of the way God leads his people: my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. The Lord told Moses to encamp before the Red Sea — with Pharaoh's armies behind them and an impassable body of water ahead. Any human planner would have chosen a clear escape route. But the Lord said: Pharaoh will think they are trapped, and he will pursue — and I will be glorified in him. Glorifying God was not in Moses' immediate thoughts; getting two million people safely away was. That's our thoughts. The Lord's thoughts are higher.

Moses Smiting the Egyptian: Acting Outside the Lord's Will

Exodus 2:11–12 records Moses going out to his brethren, seeing an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, and smiting the Egyptian in return. He looked this way and that, saw no one, and hid the body in the sand. Acts 7:25 gives us the moral insight not visible in the Exodus account: for he thought that his brethren would understand that God by his hand was giving them deliverance. Moses thought he was acting in God's purpose. But there is no record in Exodus that God had told him to smite that Egyptian. What we have in Acts 7 is Moses' thoughts — not

God's thoughts. His brethren did not understand it as he expected; the man he had helped the next day said, who made you a ruler over us? And Moses fled to Midian for forty years.

The pathway of faith is not the pathway of giving something our best shot. Moses' best shot sent him to Midian for forty years. The pathway of faith is knowing what the Lord has said and walking in it. When the Lord spoke from the burning bush and laid out for Moses exactly what he was going to do and what Moses' part in it was, then Moses could go in faith. The Lord did not give him the whole picture; he gave him the next step. A candelabra in an old house gave enough light to walk down the hall without stumbling, but not enough to see the whole house. That is the light the Lord gives for the pathway of faith: enough for the next step.

The second failure of Moses — striking the rock twice in anger when the Lord had said speak to it — cost him and Aaron the right to enter the land. Whatever that failure may have meant for God's timing or for others, it was a loss for Moses personally and a loss for Aaron. Acting in our own will always has a cost. Maybe to ourselves, maybe to the assembly, maybe to what God might have done through us had we been in a right state. The Lord is always accomplishing his purposes; he is always bringing glory to himself. The question is whether we will be vessels fit for that purpose or whether we will act in our own strength and miss what he had for us.

The pillar and base of the truth ... the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick.