

1 Kings 6:2 (Bible Treasury 1856) 54973

Christian Truth: Volume 34, Silent Building of Solomon's Temple (6:2)

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When Bishop Heber read his beautiful poem, "Palestine," in manuscript to Sir Walter Scott, his friend remarked that in speaking of the temple of Solomon he had forgotten to refer to the silence which prevailed during its erection. The poet immediately retired for a few minutes and introduced the following beautiful lines:

"No workman's steel, no ponderous axes rung; Like some tall palm, the noiseless fabric sprung."

This very remarkable circumstance has been frequently noticed. It is regarded as an indication of the deep sense which Solomon had of the sacredness of the work, and it has given rise to many pious and useful meditations. Matthew Henry in his commentary says, "It was to be the temple of the God of peace, therefore no iron must be heard in it; quietness and silence both become and befriend religious exercises; God's work should be done with as much care and as little noise as may be; the temple was thrown down with axes and hammers; they that did it roared in the midst of the congregation (Psalm 74:4-6); but it was built up in silence. Clamor and violence often hinder, but never further the work of God." These thoughts are well worthy of consideration, especially of those who can never assert their own opinions without violently assailing those of others, nor do anything for God without inviting the multitude to come and see their zeal for the Lord of hosts.

The fact itself, however, has lately received a remarkable confirmation of its truth. Mr. Douglas, a Scotch gentleman, states that during a recent visit to Jerusalem he learned from a very intelligent Hebrew that there were extensive quarries beneath the city; and that there was abundant evidence that from those quarries had been obtained the stones employed in the building and re-building of the temple. He had visited them some time before, with two Englishmen, and discovered that the quarries had contained materials sufficient for building the walls and the city of Jerusalem.

We extract the following statement: "When fairly inside, we found ourselves in an immense vault, and standing upon the top of a pile which was very evidently formed by the accumulation of the minute particles from the final dressings of the blocks of stone. On descending this pile we entered through a large arch into another vault, equally vast, and separated from the first by enormous pillars. This vault, or quarry, led by a gradual descent into another and another, each separated from the other by massive stony partitions which had been left to give additional strength to the vaulted roofs. In some of the quarries the blocks of stone which had been quarried out lay partly dressed; in some the blocks were still attached to the rock; in some the workmen had just commenced chiseling; and in some the architect's line was distinct on the smooth face of the wall of the quarry. The mode in which the blocks were gotten out was similar to that used by the ancient Egyptians, as seen in the sandstone quarries at Hagar Tilsilis and in the granite quarries at Syene. The architect first drew the outline of the blocks on the face of the quarry; the workmen then chiseled them out in their whole thickness, separating them entirely from each other, and leaving them attached by their backs only to the solid wall. They were then detached by cutting a passage behind them, which, while it separated the blocks, left them roughly dressed, and left the wall prepared for further operations. We remarked the similarity between the stones chiseled out in these quarries and the few blocks of stone built into the southeast corner of the wall of Jerusalem, which are so remarkable for their size, their weather-worn appearance, and the peculiar ornamentation of their edges.

"We spent between two and three hours in these quarries. Our examinations were, however, chiefly on the side toward the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Our guide stated that more to the westward was a quarry of the peculiar reddish marble so commonly used as pavement in the streets of Jerusalem. From the place where we entered, the descent was gradual; between some of the quarries, however, there were broad flights of steps cut out of the solid rock. I had no means of judging of the distance between the roofs of the vaults and the streets of the city, except that from the descent the thickness must be enormous. The size and extent of these excavations fully bore out the opinion that they had yielded stones enough to build not only the temple but the whole of Jerusalem.

"The situation of these quarries—the mode by which the stones were got out—and the evidence that the stones were fully prepared and dressed before being removed, may possibly throw light upon the verses of Scripture in which it is said (2 Chron. 2:18), 'And he (Solomon) set threescore and ten thousand of them to be bearers of burdens, and fourscore thousand to be hewers in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred overseers to set the people a work.' And again (1 Kings 6:7), 'And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.'

"It could scarcely have been anticipated that at a period so remote from that in which the temple was erected, any evidence should arise thus to confirm the statement concerning the silence observed in the building; yet this testimony has come forth as it were from the dead to make known the word of truth. This, however, is only one of a large and accumulating class of facts in our day, by which believers are encouraged and the clamorer's voice of infidelity silenced. At the commencement of this century (the 19th), Egypt began to pay its tribute to the truth and accuracy of the Mosaic narrative; and now from the mounds of Assyria we are constantly receiving the most overwhelming testimony to the faithfulness of that portion of the history of Israel and Judah, which stands in connection with Assyrian history."