

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Eleventh Week - First Day

APPLES OF GOLD

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."

Proverbs 25:11

How are we to understand "apples of gold in pictures of silver"? Alas, it is impossible to affix any distinct idea to these words, a circumstance which is alone sufficient to show that they have been misunderstood. Many translations have been proposed, the Septuagint rendering the words "an apple of gold in a sardina (cornelian) collar." Another (the Vulgate) proposes "apples of gold in beds of silver," suggesting that apples of gold were fixed upon the columns of a bed of silver or suspended from it as ornaments.

Now Scripture certainly mentions beds of gold and silver (Esther 1:6), and ancient history states that Sardanapalus had a large number of them and that the Parthian kings slept on beds of gold. Beds of brass are mentioned in the Trojan war, and the king of Bashan had a bed of iron. It is therefore not intrinsically improbable that in the reign of Solomon, when the precious metals were so plentiful in his realm, that there should have been beds of silver. If so, we may conceive that apples of gold might somehow be attached as ornaments with good effect. However, as we cannot associate high four-poster bedsteads with the East, this explanation is unlikely and leads instinctively to its rejection by those who have made the ancient and modern East their study.

We do not find quite the same objection to the explanation which assumes the apples of gold were figures of apples in gold upon a silver background, "apples of gold enchased¹ in silver" or "among figures of silver." Considering that the Hebrews employed figures of fruits in precious metals (notably in the time of Solomon), we incline very favorably to this explanation. But we slightly prefer another that is more generally received and is in itself both beautiful and probable--that the apples of gold were oranges or lemons in *baskets* of silver, or of silver network through which the golden yellow of the fruit appeared. In either case we are confident that, whether real or imitated, apples are not intended.

One reason for this is that the apple is of small value in Palestine or anywhere else in the Levant, except perhaps in some parts of the mountainous country southeast of the Black Sea.

1 To decorate with inlay, embossing, or engraving (dictionary.com).

But where they are found in the Levant, they are very bad and have no esteem whatsoever. It is somewhat different with oranges, but in Palestine the climate is not favorable and oranges are neither very abundant nor very good. On the other hand, the variety of fragrant lemon called the *citron* attains its highest perfection in that country and is very abundant. By the consent of the Jewish writers themselves, as well as from the probability of the case, we apprehend that *citron* is always to be understood by the word translated *apple* in the common version. And Josephus tells us that the citron was well known to the Hebrews, mentioning that on one occasion King Alexander Janneus was pelted with citrons while in the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Now when we understand that a word fitly spoken-- that is, spoken at the fit or proper time--is like placing an apple of gold (or a citron) in a basket of silver, we obtain a most appropriate and elegant similitude. In the present text it is peculiarly and beautifully appropriate.