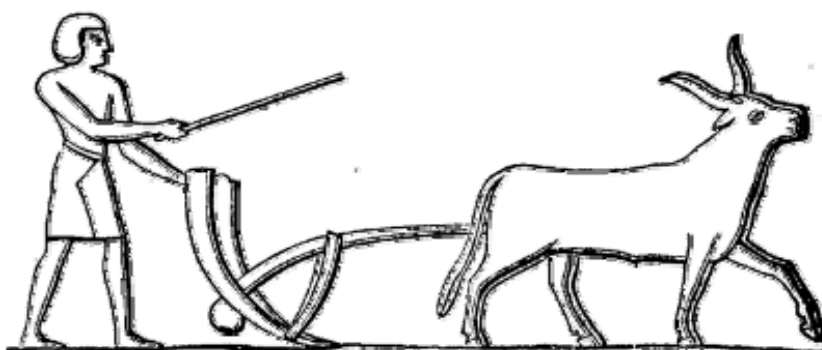


Agriculture



Oriental people are largely agricultural, therefore there are many figures of speech relating to life on the land, which may be found in the Scriptures.

Ox Knoweth His Owner

In Isaiah 1:3 we find: "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

In a small village, the animals owned by a household are gathered up in the morning by boys of the town who are entrusted with the job, and taken out to pasture and water nearby. In the evening they are brought back to the edge of the town, headed in the right direction, and they then find their way into their own enclosures. These animals never make a mistake; they always go to their own place. Each type of animal has a specific type of enclosure: the ass has a crib; the sheep have a sheepfold, etc.

Isaiah is lamenting in this verse that even dumb animals have enough sense to go home to their proper owners, but the people of Israel who have been chosen by God to be His children, do not have sense enough to know their God.

Plowed with Heifer

One of the many figures of speech relating to plowing is found in Judges 14:10; this is the story of Samson's marriage to the Philistine woman. He had proposed a riddle to the groomsmen, and they had plagued his bride until she obtained the answer to the riddle.

Samson said to them, "...If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." The oxen which are used for plowing are kept in the furrow by means of pricking with a goad, which is a nail fixed on the end of a stick. Samson is saying that the bride was goaded by the groomsmen.

Kick Against the Pricks

The same goad is the basis of the remark Jesus made to Paul, when he was struck down on the Damascus Road, "...it is hard to kick against the pricks." (Acts 9:5). As long as the

ox goes straight down the furrow, he is not pricked with the goad. But if he starts to stray out of line, he is pricked. A precocious ox may kick back at the plowman, but the canny plowman holds the goad so that the ox kicks right into it.

Thorn in the Flesh

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (II Corinthians 12:7) also has an agricultural origin. The plowman walks across the land with bare feet, and occasionally he will get a thorn in his foot. Lacking modern sterilization methods, it is far safer to leave the thorn in his foot than it is to pull it out. He must limp about for a couple of weeks until a thick layer skin is formed over and around it, and then he may take his knife and cut it out safely.

When used as a figure of speech, however, a thorn in the flesh always refers to irritating or bothersome people. I know that some wild guesses have been published about Paul's thorn: bad eyesight, a speech impediment, etc. But as this saying is used in the East, it always refers to people and in fact is so used in the Bible itself. For instance:

"But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come to pass, that those which you let remain of them *shall be* pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides..." (Numbers 33:55). And: "Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out *any of* these nations from before you, but they shall be snares and traps unto you and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you." (Joshua 23:13). And again: "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you, but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." (Judges 2:3).

God's Light

Another verse which refers to farming practices is found in Isaiah 50:11:

"Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass *yourselves* about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks *that* ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

In the East, the farmers get up early and build a fire to warm themselves. When they are ready to start to the fields, they take a heavy rope and put the end of it into the fire. They blow on this burning rope to send out sparks ahead of themselves to light the way so that they will not step on a scorpion or a snake with their bare feet.

The verse is saying, we must have the light of God to illuminate the way; we cannot walk safely through the sparks that we have kindled ourselves. We will not stumble in God's light.

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