

Beauties of the Truth

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The Four Visions of God's Glory (Ezekiel 1:1-3:14)

“Behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar, and I fell on my face.”(Ezekiel 3.-23)

PROLOGUE

In each of us is a deeply-felt need to relate to God-the ultimate reality -through the same conscious senses that make the rest of our world real. God lives in a completely different dimensionality and “no man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). To be granted even a glimpse of God's glory would cause any of us to worship him by falling on our face as it did for Ezekiel. Ultimately, what seeing God with the physical eye means is quite a different question.'

FIRST VISION-THE WHIRLWIND OF INFOLDING FIRE (EZEKIEL 1:4)

The whirlwind of infolding fire presents our minds with a powerful image of light and spirit that “infolds” on itself. Here is energy, power, self-organization (as opposed to the chaotic nature of natural lightning which appears in awesome fury at random and then disappears to leave darkness). There is no darkness in this image, for “... God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:15). Ezekiel, like Job, was both awestruck and speechless before the immediacy and power of this image. Were we to have this vision of God's glory only, we would know the following:

God is Light

God is Powerful

God is Purposeful and Organized

The whirlwind of infolding fire is a technically accurate description of the only geometry by which a luminous plasma discharge can maintain stable operation.² The Lord gives color symbolism in this image as well. The infolding fire is amber colored. This may combine two additional symbols-that of energy, and the color of the priesthood's anointing oil.³

At the most fundamental level, we stand in silence and appreciate our powerlessness before the force of creation. Here is a God of light that infolds on itself and is ever becoming-that is, it does not flash and then stay lost in the darkness -but ever infolds to return and renew itself. This is “He who becometh”

One thousand years earlier, Moses briefly saw the back parts of God's glory (Exodus 33:18-22). Ezekiel, like Moses, knew that he had experienced the glory of God, but he would retain little understanding beyond the sense of awe and power and purpose. God knew that the natural reaction of his creatures to this vision would be fear and awe, but that it would leave us little that is accessible to our conscious minds. For this reason, Ezekiel is presented with a second vision.

SECOND VISION - THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (EZEKIEL 1:5-14)

After experiencing God's glory in the whirlwind of infolding fire, God graciously opened another vision that refines these images into more accessible -more concrete symbols of the four living creatures. Let us begin by asking: Why four beasts?

Collectively, all mankind relates to four directions though they may differ in their orientation. European and Egyptian civilizations favor north, while the Hebrews oriented themselves towards the east as the prime direction (although the primacy of north in divine things appears frequently, Ezekiel 1:4). What is important is that four is the natural collective orientation for relating to our world. In most populated (i.e., non-equatorial) climatic zones, four is the natural number of seasons in the year. Four is a number that gives us a comfortable sense of wholeness and completeness in both space (compass directions) and time (seasons). Extensive cross-cultural studies by psychologists strongly suggest that the recognition of such a quarter image in the divine

is both widespread and highly significant. “Roundness generally symbolizes a natural wholeness, whereas a quadrangular formation represents the realization of this in the consciousness.¹¹⁴ Perhaps it is best to think of this as the distant echo of the image of God that is part of man's “basic wiring’ “ By this man knows when he has “see” God. When the “books are opened,” this vision will likely prove itself to be one of the most easily understood and appreciated. Throughout this image we find no creatures that are unfamiliar, dark, or expressions of the fantastic. For example, there are no sea creatures (as appeared in the tabernacle, Exodus 25:5), nor any creatures of the night (no “great” owl, Isaiah 34:15), nor any creatures of the imagination (none of the dragons that frequent the book of Revelation, Revelation 20:2).

Many interpretations of the vision in Ezekiel have assigned one of God's four attributes, love, wisdom, power and justice, to each of the four living creatures. Leaving aside power, which of the remaining three attributes would we say are not part of the balanced character of a perfect man (as pictured by the first of the living creatures)? The clear statement of scripture is that man is created in God's image -that is, with his attributes of character and for the purpose of dominion (Genesis 1:26). Because the exercise of dominion (i.e. the exercise of stewardship and power) is the God-given purpose of man, can we even be comfortable with dismissing power as one of the divine attributes formed in man? I think not.

I believe that a broader symbolism is present in this vision. Scriptures declares this to be a vision of God's glory. This is where we must begin and end.

MAN - GOD’S IMAGE

Man is the image of God. His attributes are love, wisdom, justice, and even power, as we see from his God-given charge of having dominion over the earth. When in proper balance, these attributes will nourish the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:9, James 3:17); love in action, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance, righteousness, truth and mercy. It is by these fruits that we are known as God's children: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit’ “ (John 15:8)

Two aspects of the man appear in this vision: (1) his face, or character, and (2) his hands, or acting. On one side is the most powerful carnivore, the lion, while on the other side is the most powerful herbivore, the bullock. In a sense, man who eats both flesh and herbs mediates the world between these two creatures. The face of God as a compassionate and reasoning human father is always turned towards us, for “they turned not when they went.” (Ezekiel 1:17). What a beautiful assurance for God's people.

LION – GOD’S POWER IN MORAL RULERSHIP

Universally, the kingly power of the lion as “king of beasts” is recognized. Even European countries far removed from the present day natural range of lions have incorporated the lion into the symbolic crests of kingly office. In a very real sense, we are dealing with the divine crest of kingly office in the vision of the four living ones.

Lions are the largest living carnivores. Their claws and teeth have tremendous power, but most fearsome is the paralyzing roar of the lion. Satan, who has usurped the moral kingship of the world, is pictured in this terrorizing mode: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

The most celebrated trait of the lion is its courage, or boldness. “The righteous are bold as the lion” (Proverbs 28:1). Once a lion decides to engage in fight, we learn that there is no deterring him (Isaiah 31:4), even at the cost of his life (Ecclesiastes 9:4). As we consider the positive aspects of the lion, picturing God's glory, we note the following:

Fearsome and sudden surprise on enemies (roar)

Fearsome attack on enemies (claws and teeth)

Boldness

Determination

Power of rulership

If confronted with this face of God alone, man would approach their creator with a terror far beyond a reverential and Godly fear. Each of the three beasts in this quartet need the spiritual fruitage of the man's face to direct and keep them in proper balance.

Before considering the next face, let us ask: What is the natural complement of the lion's moral rulership? It is physical power. Hence, the direct counterbalance of the lion as the power in the realm of moral rulership is the bullock as the power over the forces of nature.

Notice that this picture differs from Revelation in its intent. In Revelation the focus is on the character of Christ rather than glory. Here we find the lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5) is counterbalanced against the lamb on Mt. Zion (Revelation 14:1).

To add to the complexity, in God's kingdom we are promised “no lion shall be there” (Isaiah 35:9). This immediately seems to contradict this vision of God's glory, as well as the Revelation citation about the lion of the tribe of Judah. How do we reconcile this?

Look at the details of Ezekiel's vision. The wings of the eagle are there, the hands of the man are there, even the feet of the calf (more gentle than the bull's); the claws of the lion are nowhere to be found. Christ's kingdom is the time for the patient nurturing of men along the highway of holiness. Once the lion of the tribe of Judah conquers the forces blocking construction on the highway of holiness, he will retract his claws and not appear as a lion to even the wayward travellers. In Ezekiel's vision the lion nature of God is always available at the right hand of the face of the man. However, since “they turned not when they went,” we would never directly see the lion face on. We would be aware that the face of the lion is part of God's glory, but we would never directly confront its fearsome power.

BULLOCK - GOD'S POWER IN NATURE

The face of the cherub (Ezekiel 10:14-15), the calf (Revelation 4:7) and the “ox” (Ezekiel 1:10) apparently are identical. “Ox” (Strong's #7794) is translated from the Hebrew word used for

bullocks of sacrifice, bulls and oxen. Hence we may conclude that a young bullock is meant. From an outward perspective, the bullock's most significant features are the power of its horns and hooves (Psalms 69:30-31), Proverbs 14:4), and horns are a picture of power.

In the tabernacle, horns are the sole animal feature incorporated into the design of both the brazen altar and the incense altar. While they clearly picture power, we notice that in the sacrifices of the law these features are not offered up in sacrifice. The horns and hooves are burned without the camp (Leviticus 8:17 e.g.). It is not the might nor power (horns and hooves) of even a perfect man that the Lord seeks as an offering, but the will, the heart, and the zeal.



A Living Creature, with four faces.

Bullocks are both the only beast of the quartet that serves as a domestic creature and the only herbivore. When fully grown, bullocks were kept as the power engines of their day. In some senses their strength was more significant than the meat, wealth, or fertility always associated with them. The bullock is the only of the three non-human beasts that naturally The eagle (S.5404) is the last of the four living creatures bonds with man: “the ox knoweth his owner” (Isaiah 1:3). described. It counterbalances the man, and in this position On the other hand, scripture and experience show that this it provides us with the first hint of its meaning. The eagle animal is not considered wise (Proverbs 7:22).

The bullock is unique among the four living ones for these features:

- draft animal kept for its strength
- herbivore – clean beast
- an acceptable sacrifice
- the only animal with horns and hooves

The bullock sacrificed on the Day of Atonement pictures Christ (*Tabernacle Shadows*, pg. 51 – T51). Here in this most significant type Christ sacrificed his fleshly power and strength as a natural man. He who could calm the seas and walk upon the waters set aside these and other natural strengths that he might become Adam’s ransom.

Taken together, these images suggest *power and strength in the natural realm* – by extension this includes natural

law and physics (the lion which is opposite on the quartet is strength and power in the realm of moral law and ruler-ship). From this perspective, we can see that the strength and power which permitted God to create and control the heavens and the earth, the winds and seas, is an intrinsic attribute of his glory. At the same time, this strength and power is amoral (hence, clean). That is the only aspect of God’s glory that has been frequently turned on man to gore and trample. The

forces of nature – like the bullock – operate without understanding. In concert with the other manifestations of glory, they are indeed the power of creation.

The horns on the bullock, and on the altars in the tabernacle, tell us that behind the work of faith during the present age there is *real power* – the force of nature. There *really* is a new creation, the dead *really* will be resurrected, there *really* will be a restitution of all things. The power of “He who becometh” does not give victory through an escape into the ecstasy of mysticism, nor does victory come through the attainment of the introspective calm of “Nirvana,” nor does victory come through the intellectual satisfaction of weaving a fine and beautiful systematic theology. The victory and the glory of God will only be known to “every eye” when the *reality* of God’s power – symbolized in the bull – is revealed in the sight of all nations.

EAGLE-GOD’S NURTURING AND PROTECTION

The eagle (Strong’s #5404) is the last of the four living creatures described. It counterbalances the man, and in this position it provides us with the first hint of its meaning. The eagle is unique among the four living creatures for these reasons:

- The eagle is a bird, the only non-mammal of the quartet.
- The eagle is the only living creature with wings and flight (Proverbs 30:19), that is swift (Job 9:26, Habakkuk 1:8), capable of reaching great heights and distances (“from the ends of the earth as the eagle flieth,” Deuteronomy 28:49).
- The molting and regrowth of plumage lend the appearance of renewal (“...thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s,” Psalm 103:5, Isaiah 40:31).
- It hides and protects its young with its own body, under its wings (Deuteronomy 32:11).
- It occasionally carries its young on its back (Exodus 19:4).
- It uses high nests (Job 39:27, Jeremiah 49:16, Obadiah 4).

Please observe that direct reference to the celebrated eyesight of the eagle is nowhere found in scripture.

Kingdoms have long celebrated the power and swiftness of the eagle's flight in addition to its great territorial expanse. Hence, from ancient Assyria⁵ to Rome to the present day United States, the eagle, or its wings, have appeared in the symbols of state. The scriptures make allusions to the powerful kingdom aspect of the eagle (for example Ezekiel 17:3,7, Jeremiah 48:40, Jeremiah 49:22, Hosea 8:1). In considering the image of the four living ones, this is not the most important characteristic, for actually we are seeing images already present in the lion.

The most powerful and repeated reference to the eagle in scripture concerns the eagle's superlative performance as a nurturing parent. “For the Lord's portion is his people ... As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her

wings; so the Lord alone did lead him ..." (Deuteronomy 32:9-12). These protective wings of the Lord frequently appear in Psalms both ancient and modern.⁶ "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings" (Psalms 17:8). "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings" (Psalms 36:7). "In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge until these calamities be overpast" (Psalms 57:1). See also Psalms 61:4, 63:7, 91:4. Jesus used this same image as he wept over Jerusalem. "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). He wisely abstracted the essence of the scriptural image of the protective eagle without eliciting the image of the (Roman) eagle then oppressing the people.

Taken together, what image is suggested by nurturing lovingkindness, earnest watchcare, renewal, deliverance and flight's freedom of spirit?⁷ There can be no other answer than these are all consistent images of the feminine in God. It now becomes clear why this image is opposite of the man and complements the masculine.⁸

THEY TURNED NOT WHEN THEY WENT (EZEKIEL 1:9)

Were God to turn these beast faces to man, he would be frightened. At Sinai, the power of the bull was briefly unveiled and the earth itself trembled, the mount was covered with a thick cloud and darkness interrupted by lightning (Exodus 19:16-19). The bull-like voice of a loud trumpet resounded throughout the valley. The people entreated Moses, "... let not God speak with us lest we die" (Exodus 20:19).

After this, the calf-like feet took over and we see continued demonstration of God's control of the very elements of creation as God watched over his encampment in the wilderness of Sinai with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. There was daily manna and a stream that followed the camp through the desert.

Again briefly on another occasion God related to man through the face of the lion. Arrogant Pharaoh eventually learned what the Lion-face of the Lord could do to the mightiest kingdom on earth. The Lion exercises his power in the sudden surprise of power. In the ten plagues, God's miraculous power was highly focused as a lion's roar, manifest suddenly, and for a moral purpose. This stands in contrast to the bull-like miraculous power exhibition at Sinai, where the power was general and without intent of causing injury.

God does not meet man with the watchful face of the eagle parent. God would, but as we learn from Jesus, man will not (Matthew 23:37). These eagle features have been seen by only those in close relationship with God who are under the special care of the Lord's wings (Psalm 91:4). After having the experience of these nurturing wings, they can fly (Isaiah 40:31).

God is capable of presenting any of these four faces, and when men in their imaginations ceased to glorify God as God, they changed the symbols of his glorious nature into the first image that impressed them, such as the bull of creation. As men's understanding further darkened these images became empty signs fashioned into abominable idols.

God rightly should be worshipped because he is a powerful creator and he does possess all these beast characteristics. But what God is most interested in teaching us and being worshipped for is the face of the man. “He that hath seen me hath seen the father” (John 14:9). Through Christ, man has the capacity to strive for and transform into this face.

THE FEET OF A CALF - EZEKIEL 1:7

It is neither the flesh threatening claws of the lion, nor the eagle's talons, with which God touches the earth. Neither is it with the weakness of man's feet, which, unless they are on holy ground, must be shod to protect them from the path. Wherever God's feet touch, the ground is holy, and one of these holy places is the tabernacle. Of the creatures permitted on the holy ground of the tabernacle, only two are present in this vision: the man and the bullock. Man's feet are too weak to be appropriate in this image, nor does the image employ the full power of the bullock's hooves, but with *the promise of power not exercised in its fullness*, that is, with the gentler feet of the calf. We see that there are no other feet that the symbol of calf's feet in this image could indeed rightly show. What reassurance we have of God's watchcare even over the details of these visions.

THIRD VISION-WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS (EZEKIEL 1:15-21)

This vision complements the first vision of the infolding fire and brings us again into the realm of powerful, but nonrational, experience, characteristic of the divine. (Such experiences that have a deeply spiritual effect are called “numinous”) The first and third visions do not satisfy our questioning minds with the wealth of symbolic detail conveyed in both the second vision of the four beasts, and fourth vision of the throne to follow. It is necessary that we “understand” these numinous visions convey messages that are both powerful and balancing to the second and fourth visions.

First, in the matter of how the wheels appear, the scripture reads that they are on their “sides” (*ie.* like four stacks of dishes, Ezekiel 1:17). This clearly must be the geometry, or it would not be possible for the wheels to be stacked up within the wheels “so high that they were dreadful” “ Here, these wheels suggest the “wholeness” of God's arrangements in everything between earth and the “dreadful” heights. God plans for a *wholeness* with his creatures at all levels of being, a *wholeness* in his character, a *wholeness* in his covenants. Indeed, we should keep going in our thinking of the “wholeness” of God's every operation until we understand how dreadfully high this wholeness is.

The text seems to suggest that these wheels resembled the topaz stone, which varies from honey colored to blue and is one of the hardest gems.⁹ If it is properly identified, the same color would be suggested that is seen in the first vision.

FOURTH VISION-THE THRONE SCENE (EZEKIEL 1:26-2:14)

The throne of “sapphire” with its internal rays certainly suggests the spokes of the wheels just seen. Once again we see the color amber in this image (Ezekiel 1:27) which is so highly developed that there is now a man's figure of the glory of the Lord (Ezekiel 1:28) speaking and instructing Ezekiel in detail. Additionally, it is significant that Ezekiel eats (Ezekiel 3:1-2). With this sustenance and the completeness of the four visions, Ezekiel is now prepared to do the Lord's bidding.

VOICES IN THE VISION OF GOD'S GLORY

The whirlwind of infolding fire would fill the ears of Ezekiel with a constant roar that would add to his sense of awe of experiencing the divine, but communicate no speech. In the second vision with the four living creatures Ezekiel hears a voice and recognizes it as a voice (Ezekiel 1:26). But he is unable to understand the voice. In the third vision, of the wheels, we are returned to the realm of the numinous as in the first vision, and no additional voice is heard other than the continuing voice of the second vision. But in the fourth vision, of the throne, we have a voice that speaks distinctly.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS - EZEKIEL THE PROPHET OF PSYCHOLOGICAL BALANCE

Notice the balance in these visions as they have made a deliberate transition from the unconscious awareness of the divine through full consciousness. The awesome whirlwind of infolding fire communicates to our unconscious, not our reason. Next, Ezekiel receives a vision of the four living creatures -a symbolic vision employing the language by which the unconscious communicates images to the conscious. The images move back again to the realms of the unconscious for the numinous vision of the wheels. Finally in the throne scene, a realm of full consciousness is presented in which Ezekiel can hear, read, and even eat.

Ezekiel has not only experienced these four visions, these have been presented *without the mediation of angels*. It is little wonder that Ezekiel sat “stunned” for seven days after this experience (Ezekiel 3:15). As we realize how unusual this combination of visions is, in the highest sense, Ezekiel is the prophet of psychological balance. This is one of the prime themes of Ezekiel's prophecy that continues to make his prophecies fascinating, fearful, and awesome to us.

- *Richard Doctor*

1 To “see” something requires the movement of light through time and space. But God is a being who stands outside our four dimensional frame of time and space. Indeed, both the Bible and modern Physics concur that in the distant past time and space did not exist. Time and space were created and they were created by God who stands outside of their frame of reference. It is unlikely that a God who stands outside of space and time can be “seen” Although scripture remains silent on the physics of “seeing” God, they are consistent in asserting that it has never been done.

The present day understanding of the creation of time and space is distinctly different and opposed to the ancient belief that time and space existed as unorganized “chaos” subsequently brought into order by God (or the gods). “ ‘.. all Nature was all Chaos, the rounded body of all things in one..... (Horace Gregory, translator, *Ovid-The Metamorphoses*, Mentor, NY, 1958, Book 1.)

Because the non-biblical thought of “chaos” rather than creation underlies much of our common thinking about the nature of God and the universe, we should be alert to its implications. Not understanding that space and time are created, rather than organized from chaos, spawns some of the following speculation: (1) the seat of God's throne is in the Pleiades, (2) forty days is the appropriate round-trip transit time between earth and heaven, and (3) the “size” of God.

2 Before we leave this first and most real vision, an aside to discuss the whirlwind of infolding lightning may be helpful. The form of the lightning appears to be toroidal, doughnut shaped. My secular profession involves the research of stable plasmas (lightnings) for chemical reactions. The equations of fluid motion and laboratory experiments confirm that the only plasma geometry that has proven stable is a whirlwind of infolding lightning.

3 The natural color of an air discharge is a mix of pink and blue (Sanborn C. Brown, *Introduction to Electrical Discharge in Gases*, Wiley, New York, 1966, pg. 214). As the intensity of the discharge grows, these colors get washed out into white. Hence the amber color, or as the Greeks called it “electrum” (see Rotherham translation) conveys deliberate symbolism. Amber was a valued gem-stone throughout the ancient world and was traded over thousands of miles. It was appreciated for its varying shades of yellow, and at the same time it was considered mystical as the source of static “electricity.”

4 Carl G. Jung, editor, *Man and his Symbols*, Doubleday, New York, 1964, pg. 215.

5 Assyria was passing from domination in Ezekiel's day, but the symbol of state interestingly employed all the elements that we meet in this vision. The Assyrians depicted their kingdom as the head of a man on the body of a bull with the wings of an eagle and the paws of a lion.

6 Hymns that joy in these wings of the Lord include “Under His Wings I am Safely Abiding.”

7 Men have a consistent tendency to want to codify all behavior with innumerable laws, regulations, etc. It is no accident that the symbol of “Liberty Enlightening the World” in New York harbor is a woman. Liberty and freedom are feminine. Western European languages which retain gender recognize them as such.

8 In this respect even the eagle's fine eyesight becomes a significant image of the feminine. Experiments with primate babies show that even more than food, they will identify a doll as mother if they have the assurance of a protective body and open eyes. (Harlow, Harry F., “Love in Infant Monkeys:” reprinted in *The Nature and Nurture of Behavior-Developmental Psychology*, William T. Greenough, compiler, Freeman, San Francisco, 1972).

9 Perhaps the color is less important than the mineral properties. If the “Tarshish stone” were a sapphire variety, the internal radiance of the gem would focus into a “star.” Indeed, a flat disk of sapphire, or other gems with this property of forming internal starlike internal rays, would most appropriately suggest the spokes of a wheel.

God's Providence Since Israel's Statehood

During the first twenty years since 1948, when Israel was recognized as an independent nation by the United Nations, their population was very small in proportion to the area of their possession. Being surrounded by numerous hostile armies, the Jews have urged their kinsmen all over the world to emigrate to the land of promise. Thus Ezekiel's prophecy is fulfilled: “I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men” (Ezekiel 36:37, 38)

The wars of 1956, 1967 and 1973 contributed to the fulfillment of this prophecy. Jews from all over the world arrived by the thousands to help in these wars, and to take residence in the occupied land.

The next twenty years brings us to this day. The Jews' harassment and hate by the surrounding nations has increased. However, Israel's population and progress are also increased. The fall of Socialism in the Soviet Union and its allies has opened the doors in these nations for the free, collective emigration of Jews to Israel.

Now the increased population is a problem, just as Isaiah 49:20 predicted: "The children which thou-shalt have ... shall say again in thine ears, The place is too straight for me: give place to me that I may dwell." The time has come, as all events are pointing, for the solution of this problem in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." (Genesis 15:18)

ISRAEL AND THE PEOPLE ROUND ABOUT

Especially since 1948 the enemies of Israel have declared that Israel must once and for all be driven away. Its enemies both near and far, like the Libyans and Persians, refer to Israel as "a malignant tumor on Palestinian soil that must be forced to disappear" " If it were possible to give a full account of all the reasons for hatred that Israel's enemies claim, there would be no doubt left about their irrevocable intention for Israel's extermination as a nation and as a seed, regardless of Israel's submissiveness, concessions, and territorial compromises.

PALESTINIANS-PHILISTINES OF OLD

"Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge and have taken vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred, therefore ... I will stretch out mine hand upon the Philistines ... I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord ' " (Ezekiel 25:15-17)

The Philistines are today's Palestinians. They are the ones who fought Alexander the Great in Gaza, for which he devastated it. Since then the name Philistine has ceased to be mentioned, and has been replaced by the name of that area, Palestine. God's hand has been against them in recent years. Their support for Iraq in the 1992 war turned to their disadvantage, and forced them to a more conciliatory posture, which led to the recent peace accord.

LEBANON, TYRE, SIDON

"Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled" (Zechariah 11:1, 2). Much of Lebanon seems to be included in God's promise to Abraham. Tyre and Sidon are ancient cities which Jesus visited and taught in (Matthew 15:21, Mark 7:24, Luke 4:24). They flourished in ancient times in commerce, arts, navigation and other fields.

In modern times Lebanon had become the Switzerland of the Middle East as regards international money accumulation, multi-national business headquarters, especially for petroleum companies, and the crossroads of business activities between East and West, North and South. The cedar and fir trees may symbolize these economic and commercial interests.

But under this economic prosperity flourished a smoldering danger, which has now brought Lebanon to ruin. It was home to goods smuggling, narcotics, weapons, and open to all kinds of propaganda, espionage, religious differences and disputes. It has been written in the press that there exist more than 30 different sects in Lebanon; Christian, Muslim, etc., fanatically hating one another. These differences and antagonisms produced years of violence, leaving ruins behind, and the disappearance of the economic mighty ones. Perhaps the land is getting ready to welcome a Jewish population, in accord with God's promise to Abraham.

DAMASCUS

“Damascus is waxed feeble, and turned herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her ... all the men of war shall be cut off... saith the Lord of hosts” (Jeremiah 49:24-27). The Damascus conditions have only started to appear. It is still a subject of discussion and of watching for us.

A LOOK AT OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Those of us who came to the Truth before World War II studied these prophecies, believed in them, and were waiting for their fulfillment. None of us, however, including the author of Studies in the Scriptures, could possibly conceive through the intellect of our faith the extent of Israel's pursuit by its hunters, the brutality, the wars of 1956, 1967 and 1973, the strategy involved, and Israel's resplendent victories.

Who could conceive the mutual destruction of numerous political, social and religious groups in Lebanon, just like the numerous armies “like grasshoppers” of the Midianites and Amalekites upon whom the Lord “set every man’s sword against his fellow.”

We can see how the Lord has exhausted the forces of Israel's two great enemies, Iraq and Iran, with the destructive 8-year war between them. How the Lord turned Iraqi canons toward Kuwait, thereby turning the nations of earth, even in the Muslim world, against it.

All that the prophets have said concerning Israel will be accomplished. And finally the Kingdom of God will come to earth.

- *Hercules Gonos, Greece*

The Seven Lamps and Seven Spirits

*“There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.”
(Revelation 4:5)*

THE SEVEN LAMPS

We might be inclined to believe that the seven lamps have the same meaning as the seven lampstands mentioned in the first chapter of Revelation and that, consequently, they symbolize the Church of Christ. However St. John does not use the same word in both of these cases. John uses the Greek word *luchnia* to describe the lampstand and the word *lampas* in our text.

In the New Testament, we find the word *lampas* in the parable of the ten virgins, in our text and in Revelation 8:10. We omit John 18:3 and Acts 20:8 which have no symbolical import. The Apostle John says to us that the seven lamps are the seven spirits of God (verse 5). When we read Revelation 1:4 we note that the seven spirits of God do not represent the seven Churches-the Church of Christ. “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ” (RSV). Thus grace and peace were given to the seven churches on the part of the seven spirits. This verse points out clearly enough that the Church of Christ is not symbolized by the seven spirits or by the seven lamps of fire.

Our understanding is that a lamp represents the Word of God. The Psalmist says: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalms 119:105). In the Proverbs we read: “For the commandment is a lamp” (Proverbs 6:23). The word lamp in these texts is translated from the Hebrew word *ner*, which means “light, lamp” according to Young’s Concordance. The word *ner* is also used to designate the lamps which were on the candlestick or lampstand of the Tabernacle. We read, for instance, in Exodus 25:36, 37: “The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand [*menorah*], hammered out of pure gold. Then make its seven lamps [*ner*] and set them up on it.”

We have already said that the Greek word *lampas* is used in the parable of the ten virgins. We find it five times in the parable. “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their *lamps* and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their *lamps*.... Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their *lamps*. The foolish ones said to the wise, Give us some of your oil; our *lamps* are going out” (Matthew 25:1-4, 7, 8)

This parable relates to the same time as our text, that is, to the time of the second presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has also some connection with our text. The lamps symbolize the Word of God; the oil represents the holy Spirit. The lamps trimmed or put in order illustrate the Word of God giving a brighter light in this time of the Lord’s presence.

Let us analyze now our text, which says “There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.’ The number seven represents completeness, perfection. The

lamps, as we know, symbolize the Word of God. The lamps were burning and consequently they were giving light; they were burning before the throne, i.e., in the presence of the King who was sitting on the throne.

In Revelation the number seven means a complete and entire state. The book of Revelation makes mention of seven lamps, seven spirits, seven churches, seven lampstands, seven seals, seven horns, seven eyes, seven trumpets, seven plagues, seven thunders, etc. In all these cases it designates completeness composed of seven parts, like the light, which is one and white, but when it passes through a drop of rain and is refracted, gives the seven fundamental colors. It is the same when the white light is decomposed by means of a prism. It produces the spectrum, the series of colored bands. Thus, it is spoken of seven churches, but they represent the only church of Christ; it is also spoken of seven candlesticks, but they stand for the only candlestick which was in the holy place of the tabernacle. In our text it is spoken of seven lamps, but they are representative of the lamp quoted in Psalm 119:105: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.”

In the Reprints, on page 5943, section 6 (R5943), we read: “The opening of the seals has progressed during all the Gospel age” We are now at the end of the Gospel age, when the seventh seal is broken and when, under the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God is to be accomplished (Revelation 10:7). The holy Scriptures are being understood more and more, and many prophecies, which were closed during long centuries, are now unsealed. The Scriptures should be entirely unsealed and understood during the second presence of our Lord, as our text suggests it. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne. In other words the lamp, the Word of God, gives complete light in the days when the Lord is sitting on his throne and when fire, going before him, consumes his foes on every side. (Psalms 97:1-3)

The lamps are of fire in the sense that they shed a complete light in the time of trouble; they give their light, as never before, on the prophecies predicting the present time of trouble, of vengeance and of judgment of nations.

We find a similar text to some extent in Revelation 15:2. There was a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image were standing on it and they were singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb with harps of God in their hands. The sea of glass mixed with fire represents the people in trouble, under the judgments of God. The overcomers are the elect, the members of Christ's body. They had undoubtedly a great knowledge of the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb during the time of trouble.

The lamps were burning before the throne. In the tabernacle the candlestick had seven lamps, which had always to burn. The candlestick was in the Holy, in the first part of the tabernacle. The candlestick itself with its seven branches typifies the complete Church. Our Lord said: “The seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). The candlestick [*menorah*] represents the true Church as light bearers (*Tabernacle Shadows*, pages 115-116 [T115-116]). However the lamps [*ner*] symbolize God's Word (*Tabernacle Shadows*, page 22 [T22]). This thought is confirmed in Bro. Meggiso's notes. In the comments of Exodus 37:23, we read: 'As each lamp represents the Word of God, so the oil in it represents the Holy Spirit in the Word which causes the light' “ In Philipians 2:15, Paul says about the Church: “Among whom you shine as lights [*Greek phoster not lampas*], in the world, holding fast the word of life” (RSV).

In our text, it is not said that the seven lamps of fire were the same as those which were set up on the candlestick. We think that they were not the same, because the candlestick or lampstand is not mentioned at all in the vision of the throne. Nevertheless the ones like the others were burning and giving light. In both cases the light from these lamps represented holy enlightenment, the spirit of the truth (*Tabernacle Shadows*, page 116 [T116]).

The light emanating from the Word of God shines today as never before, because the Lord Jesus is present, and is already reigning over Zion (Psalms 2:6, 45:6,7). The Lord gave us the promised "meat in due season." (Matthew 24:45, Luke 12:37), which we specially find in the six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS

In the *Tabernacle Shadows* as well as in the parable of the ten virgins, we may discern that the lamps will neither burn nor give light if they do not have oil in them. Oil symbolizes the holy Spirit. The seven spirits of God suggest to us the plenitude of Spirit. Our Lord Jesus Christ has the Spirit of God fully and He has at present a complete knowledge of the Word of God. Therefore our Lord may give His faithful ones, who live in the time of the opening of the seventh seal, a complete knowledge of God's Word.

If the seven lamps are the seven spirits, how can they represent the Word of God? someone may ask. The Word of God is precisely spirit and life. Our Lord Jesus said: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63, RSV). The Scriptures have been written by men who were guided by the holy Spirit. The Apostle Peter said:

"Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of men, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21, RSV).

It should be observed that the seven spirits are not exclusively the lamps of fire. They are also the seven eyes of the Lamb (Revelation 5:6). But even in this case, the seven spirits mean plenitude of Spirit. We remember that it is written in the prophecy of Zechariah: "These seven are the eyes of the Lord" (Zechariah 4:10). Nothing can escape the eyes of the Lord and of the Lamb. The Lamb has the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). He has the seven spirits of God. We read in Revelation 3:1: "The words of him who has the seven spirits of God."

- *Antoine Papajak, France*

Errata

In the November, 1992 issue of *Beauties of the Truth* appeared an article titled "Passover - The Time Features." The bulk of this article was from a study prepared more than two decades ago by Sr. Bonnie Gaunt. A note of this authorship was unfortunately omitted.

In the article titled "The Mouth of All God's Holy Prophets," February 1994, item #5 should be Job 33:19-30.

FROM OUR READERS

Dear Brethren,

Just to let you know again how much I appreciate your providing me with Beauties of the Truth. It does indeed stimulate thoughtful consideration and unlimited horizons in study of our Lord's words to us through the blessed scriptures. I thoroughly enjoy each issue, and of course keep them for ready reference.

Admittedly, we are all "leaky vessels" at times and your dear publication, by expression of a viewpoint, the turn of a phrase or even just the use of a word, has refreshed my memory, plugged some leaks, and sent me into further study and review.

Oh, what a joy we have in knowing God's Plan of the Ages! May the Lord continue to bless your service.

- *PC, Oklahoma*

Dear Brethren,

Warm greetings to you.

How correctly named is this magazine, Beauties of the Truth. Its messages are a feast of beautiful informative and inspiring lessons. Thank you for sharing this "labor of love" with others who are in love with our Lord. May our Lord bless you in this service.

- *D.H., Louisiana*