

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
Volume 30, Number 3, August 2019

Migdal Eder (*Tower of the Flock*)

“And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, good will toward men’” (Luke 2:9-14).

The shepherds of Bethlehem were privileged to receive the birth announcement of the newborn Messiah. Receiving such monumental news indicates these shepherds must have been noble men. However, it was not simply their good characters that created an invitation to visit the humble birthplace of our Lord. The reason may also have been their specific occupation.

Alfred Edersheim writes the following. “Jewish tradition may here prove illustrative and helpful. That the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem was a settled conviction. Equally so was the belief that he was to be revealed from Migdal Eder, the ‘tower of the flock.’ This Migdal Eder was not the watchtower of the ordinary flocks which pastured on the barren sheepground beyond Bethlehem, but lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem.

“A passage in the Mishnah leads to the conclusion that the flocks, which pastured there, were destined for Temple sacrifices, and accordingly, that the shepherds, who watched over them, were not ordinary shepherds. These were under the ban of the Rabbis, on account of their necessary isolation from religious ordinances, and their manner of life, which rendered strict legal observance unlikely, if not absolutely impossible. ... Of the deep symbolic significance of such a coincidence it is needless to speak” (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, pages 186, 187).

One commentator adds this; “There was a place just outside of Bethlehem city, but still within the region commonly known as Bethlehem, where Passover lambs

were kept by specially trained ...shepherds. The lambs were born in this ‘tower of the flock’ known as Migdal Eder under the watchful eye of the shepherds who would then inspect and either certify them for use as sacrifices in the temple or designate them to be released for common use. The new lambs would, according to some sources, even be wrapped in special swaddling clothes once certified” (From International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Dr. Juergen Buehler).

THE CERTIFICATION

The possibility that these were not ordinary shepherds is intriguing. The flocks they cared for were to be used in the temple sacrifices. With the majestic angelic visit these shepherds were directed to an obscure Bethlehem stable in order to inspect another newborn lamb. They came to certify that he would be qualified to someday be offered in sacrifice. This unique lamb would bring universal deliverance as the Messiah, the antitypical Passover lamb.

Edersheim suggested that their occupation caused them to be considered ceremonially unclean and therefore banned by the rabbis. However, despite this, they were still allowed to provide acceptable Passover lambs for sacrifice. There is a compelling message in this seeming contradiction. By selecting them to hear the extraordinary birth announcement God indicated they were not unclean and were deserving of such an honor. How well this illustrates the principle that God chooses the foolish

IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Migdal Eder</i>	1
<i>God's Message at Calvary</i>	2
<i>Living Clean in a Dirty World</i>	6
<i>Caesarea Philippi ... Gates of Hades</i>	8

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things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things to shame them that are strong (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). By selecting these “unclean” shepherds, God once again revealed He is not a respecter of persons, but chooses as He sees fit.

FIRST MESSENGERS OF THE GOSPEL

“And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ... And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (Luke 2:17,18,20).

The visit to our Lord’s birthplace must have been a deeply moving experience. They were not turned away by the humble surroundings. In fact, they would have been most comfortable in such an environment. So touched were they by their experience, they energetically spread the good news of the savior’s birth. In their zeal to spread the good tidings they became the first human messengers of the Gospel message.

TOWER OF THE FLOCK

Micah the 4th chapter contains a wonderful prophecy which compares the work of these ancient shepherds to Kingdom work of Jesus and the Church. It is a remarkable chapter that contextually relates to the kingdom.

“And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

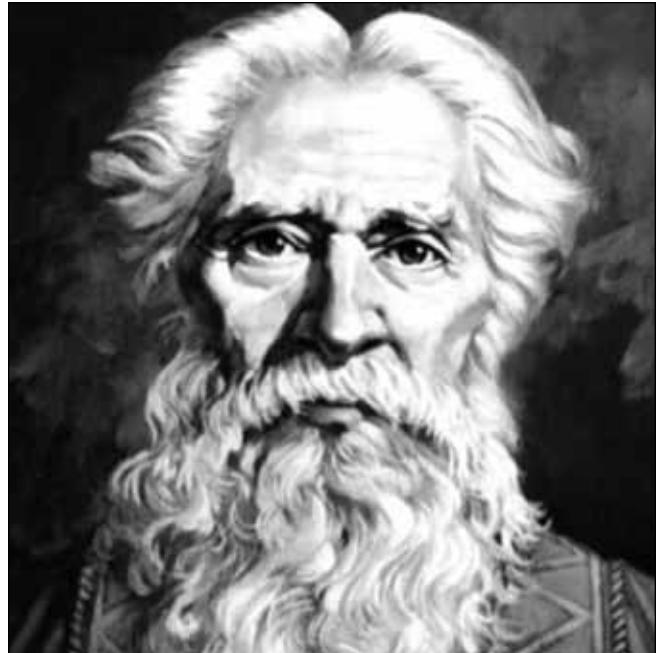
“And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

“But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it” (Micah 4:2-4).

“And thou, O tower of the flock (Migdal Eder), the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem” (Micah 4:8).

“Jesus, by his obedience unto death, has become the strong tower, the fortress, the protection, to all of God’s people” (R4796:4). After finishing his work as the Passover lamb our Lord became chief shepherd, first to the church, his “little flock,” and eventually to the world.

“I am the the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ... I know my own and my own know me ... and I have other sheep which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd” (John



Micah, the Prophet

10:11,14,16). The shepherding work of Jesus spans two ages. He shepherds the church during the present Gospel Age and will watch, guide and protect his sheep who are “not of this fold” during the Kingdom. He stands in the Tower of the Flock during both ages as he watches over his sheep.

Micah 4:8 reveals that the honor of being part of his kingdom Tower is extended to the Church. “And thou, O tower of the flock ... unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.” The word “first” (Strong’s 7223) means “in place, time, or rank.” And so, The Christ will assume dominion over earth as its protecting Tower of the Flock, shepherding mankind with wisdom and love.

— Br. Tom Ruggirello

God’s Message at Calvary

“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent” (Matthew 27:50,51).

By orchestrating the events that occurred while Jesus hung on the cross, and upon his death, God spoke in almost a parable-like way. The messages He conveyed each related to the crucifixion in one way or another.

DARKNESS AT NOON

For example, Jesus was on the cross from the third hour (9:00 AM by our reckoning) until the ninth hour (3:00 PM). “When the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour” (Mark 15:33).

Darkness then covered the land from noon to 3:00 PM. This could not have simply been a solar eclipse since it occurred during the Passover full moon. It was as if nature itself was mourning. But, since we are not told God's intent in sending the darkness, we are left to draw our own conclusions.

One possibility may relate to the words of Jesus when he said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). As his life slowly ebbed away, the light he brought with his personal presence was fading with it. The coming age would be filled with gross darkness, a time when evil men would dominate the Christian world. The term "Dark Ages" is a fitting description of what Christianity was largely to become. The prophet Daniel described it as a time when, "truth would be cast to the ground" (Daniel 8:12). As truth is often depicted by light, the casting down of truth would result in great spiritual darkness (see 2 Corinthians 4:6).

The incoming Gospel Age would also be a dark time for the nation of Israel. The prophet Amos uses a similar event to describe the coming punishment on the Northern kingdom of Israel in his day. "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will cause the sun to go down at **noon**, and I will darken the earth in the clear day. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation" (Amos 8:9,10).

The imagery of the sun being darkened at noon suggests that God used this to predict a coming calamity. Happening when the sun was at its zenith declares that Israel would have been greatly blessed had it been more faithful to God. This same message was reiterated at the cross and pointed

to the trouble coming upon Israel for their rejection and mistreatment of Jesus. Israel's diaspora would bring bitter persecution. Darkness beginning at noon was again significant. With Jesus' first advent Israel should have experienced the brightest time in their history had they accepted him. They were at the noon time of opportunity to share in the heavenly calling. And yet, by rejecting him, darkness would soon engulf the nation.

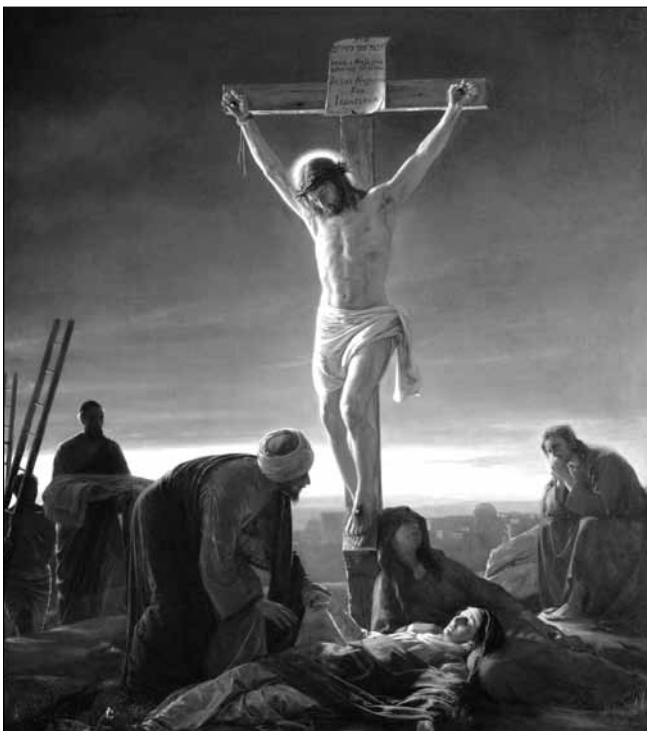
THE SUN RETURNS

Despite this foreboding prediction there was another interesting occurrence often overlooked. The darkness ended precisely at our Lord's death. This too was likely conveying a message. For Jesus personally, his suffering was over. His dark experience with suffering, both physically and mentally, were complete, and he would rest in the grave until raised to a new life.

As the sun began to shine it brought with it a message of hope. After the destruction of the Jewish temple, the hope of seeing it rebuilt became a central component of Jewish faith. The most common expression used to convey their hope was, "Next Year in Jerusalem." For Israel, that hope was inherent in the prophecies regarding its future. "The LORD also shall roar out of Zion and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel" (Joel 3:16). Israel's punishment was prophesied to end, and this tiny nation will be used by God to bless the world (See Isaiah 1:26).

The return of sunlight may also indicate an even larger feature of God's plan. With the death of Jesus, the darkness of sin and death was destined to end. For the church, that process began with the application of blood on their behalf. "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice **in hope** of the glory of God. ... Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Romans 5:2, 9). For the saints of the Gospel Age, justification and the process of sanctification began the journey to eternal life. Faithful believers have clung to the promise of the spiritual healing this would bring. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall" (Malachi 4:2).

For the world at large, hope was also being conveyed, as expressed by the Apostle Paul. "The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own. The world of creation cannot as yet see reality, not because it chooses to be blind, but because in God's purpose it has been so limited — yet it has been given hope and the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay, and have its share in the magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God!" (Romans 8:19-21 Phillips). Though most of the world is still blind to



Darkness fell from Noon to Mid-afternoon.

this hope, it is real and will soon offer an opportunity for eternal life.

THE VEIL WAS RENT

“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matthew 27:50,51).

Josephus records that Herod’s Temple was 60 feet tall and 30 feet wide. He adds that the veil was four inches thick. This then provides the rough dimensions of the veil which divided the Holy from the Most Holy.

The words translated “from the top to the bottom” literally mean “from above downward” (Strong’s 509, 2736). It was so massive and heavy that no human could have torn it like this.

Coming from above indicates this was directed by God and was a significant symbolic gesture. The apostle Paul said, “The way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning” (Hebrews 9:8 NIV).

The type was now being fulfilled in the antitype and the temple building was no longer going to be the meeting place of God. Paul goes on to say, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh... Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

If the veil represented his flesh, as indicated by the apostle, it was fitting that it should be torn upon his death. The account also indicates that the tearing of the veil was “in twain,” i.e. in two parts. This may be a reference to the two parts of Jesus’ sacrifice. His death provided the ransom, and his suffering life, was an additional offering for the future sins of the church and the world. Both are required to provide full atonement with God.

As the church can now boldly approach the throne of grace, pictured in the Most Holy, that same privilege will one day be available to the world. And even though mankind is still unaware of this, it lays a wonderful prospect before the human family.

A GREAT EARTHQUAKE

The Matthew account describes an event not mentioned in the other Gospels. Upon our Lord’s death, “the earth did quake, and the rocks rent” (Matthew 27:51). Here is another unmistakable parable.

In scripture, the earth is used to describe man’s social structure (see Haggai 2:6,7 as an example). With Jesus’ death Jewish society would be shaken to its core. The once stable elements would be torn down. God’s ultimate purpose in bringing such destruction is to build something better and stronger, to build a structure which provides for



The veil was rent in the temple.

the blessing of others. Our Lord’s death was to shake not only Jewish society, but the entire social structure of the world. Through the Gospel Age Jesus’ life has shaken the world. And yet, the greatest shaking is yet to come. All of man’s institutions will be done away with, paving the way for the establishment of God’s kingdom. With such a monumental change mankind will come to realize the upheaval of society was for their eternal welfare.

OPENING OF THE GRAVES

The same earthquake that rent the rocks also opened the graves. The account says, “many bodies of the saints which slept, arose” (Matthew 27:52). This passage has been questioned because it seems to contradict the statement in 1 Corinthians 15:20, that our Lord was “the first-fruits of them that slept.” However, others were awakened from death prior to our Lord (see 2 Kings 4:34). The word “arose” is the Greek *egeiro* (Strong’s 1453). It is the same word used for the awakening of Lazarus (John 12:9), the awakening of the widow’s son (Luke 7:14) and the awakening of Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:54). Though it can also be used for waking from natural sleep, its use here is consistent with the other awakenings from death Jesus performed. Bible Students sometimes refer to these as “resuscitations.” They stood in marked contrast to the resurrection of Jesus who was rewarded with immortality and would never die again. In this he **was** the first.

Some have supposed that the saints coming from the graves were possibly the apostles who had been hiding amongst the tombs after the arrest of Jesus but came forth upon his resurrection. However, upon our Lord’s resurrection the women who first encountered Jesus ran

to tell the apostles that Jesus was alive. Had the apostles been hiding it is unlikely the women would have known where they were. Commenting on these dead coming forth Bro. Russell wrote, "At the very most it was an awakening similar to that which Lazarus experienced, and the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain, to die again, later on. ... We were inclined at first to doubt the genuineness of the passage but find that a portion of it at least appears in the oldest Greek MSS. yet discovered" (R2811).

Other suggestions have been offered to explain this miracle,¹ but if the statement is taken at face value, it would have merely been a temporary awakening, much like those Jesus had raised.

The passage does not state who these saints were, but they could not have been Gospel Age saints since the holy Spirit had not yet been given. It is also unlikely they were any of the Ancient Worthies. The Old Testament may give some insight here. There the word "saints" is used to describe those who endeavored to live faithfully under the Law. For example, in the story of Hannah she prays for those who served God, saying, "He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail (1 Samuel 2:9). She expressed her trust that God would protect those who sincerely followed His commands. As the Jewish Age was ending, it is a reasonable supposition that these saints had been faithful Jews, known to the people of Jerusalem. It was important that their friends and families recognize them and remember their deaths. Seeing them again would provide powerful evidence for the authenticity of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was not a fraud, as the Pharisees had insisted. Here was a witness that his death would result in life.



The Garden Tomb at Jerusalem

The miracle occurred in two stages. At the moment of Jesus' death, the earthquake opened the graves. This was in sync with the ending of darkness and the tearing of the temple veil. But, according to Matthew 27:52, the dead did not come out of their graves until after the resurrection of Jesus, three days later. The reason for the delay is not stated.

The two stages of this miracle may suggest that bringing the dead world back to life cannot occur until after a delay and the shaking of all things thought to be stable (Haggai 2:7, Hebrews 12:26). God's plan is orderly, and events occur in a predetermined sequence. This divine parable preached a wonderful truth about the power and hope provided by the ransom of our Lord. His words, "It is finished" described the sacrificial aspect of his work. But the future work of bringing life to the world will follow the shaking of all nations.

AT THE TOMB

One final parable may have occurred after our Lord's resurrection. At the tomb of Jesus there was an interesting encounter between two angels and Mary Magdalene. The Luke account (Luke 24:4) says the women who came to the tomb saw two men standing before them in shining garments. These angels made the wonderful statement, "He is not here, but is risen." The women then left, bewildered by what they saw and heard.

However, Mary Magdalene returned with Peter and John. After the two apostles witnessed the empty tomb they left, uncertain of what had transpired. But Mary Magdalene remained, weeping outside the sepulcher (see John 20:11,12). The John account provides a small detail not given by the other Gospel writers. He reveals where the angels were situated in the tomb. As Mary stooped down to look inside, the description of what she saw is very specific. "And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." Was their position meant to convey a special message?

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

The image may be reminiscent of the Tabernacle's Ark of the Covenant. The account in Exodus bears a striking similarity to the scene Mary witnessed.

"And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the Mercy Seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be" (Exodus 25:19,20).

Brother Russell explains the meaning of the angels on the Mercy Seat. "The slab of gold called the 'Mercy Seat' (or more properly the Propitiatory, because on it the Priest offered the blood of the sacrifices which propitiated



The Ark of the Covenant

or satisfied the demands of divine justice) represented the underlying principle of Jehovah’s character — justice. ... The Apostle Paul uses the Greek word for Mercy Seat or Propitiatory (*hilasterion*) when referring to our Lord Jesus saying, ‘Whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiatory [or Mercy Seat] To declare his righteousness ... that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus’ (Romans 3:25, 26) ... The two Cherubim represented two other elements of Jehovah’s character, as revealed in His word, *viz.*, divine love and divine power. ... When the Atonement Day sacrifices (bullock and goat) are complete, Love tarries to see the result of its plan. When the blood is sprinkled, Justice cries, ‘It is enough; it is finished!’ Then comes the moment when Love and Power may act, and swiftly they wing their flight to bless the ransomed race” (*Tabernacle Shadows*, pages 124, 125, 126).

Like the animal sacrifices, that could not actually atone for sin, the angels formed of gold on either end of the Mercy Seat were symbols of a future fulfillment. They faced inward, looking down toward the Mercy Seat, waiting for the application of atoning blood. Now, at the tomb of Jesus sat two angels, no longer made of inanimate gold or facing inward.

The Luke account describes them as wearing “dazzling apparel” (Luke 24:4 ASV). Seated at both ends of the bed on which the ransom price had rested, they spoke to Mary Magdalene. “Woman, why weepest thou?” (John 20:13). There was no reason to weep. Jesus was alive, and the value of his sacrificial death would satisfy God’s justice, allowing the angels of love and power to speak words of comfort and hope. No longer were God’s messengers held back. The next phase of God’s plan of salvation could commence. The time was ripe for the merit of Christ to justify believers and usher in the Gospel Age.

Turning from the tomb Mary Magdalene, still not comprehending the situation, encountered Jesus. He too asked why she was weeping. After expressing her desire to find the body of her Lord, Jesus said her name and it became all too clear that this **was** Jesus. It was a moment of overwhelming joy.

CONCLUSION

We now understand the need for Jesus’ atoning work. We see God’s plan progressing to the blessings of the kingdom. We no longer sorrow in hopelessness but rejoice in the great prospect inspired by the empty tomb.

The connection between Jesus’ death and the events orchestrated by God in connection with Calvary is unmistakable. In them God proclaimed that darkness would end, the dead would rise to life and the way to God had now been opened. His communication through these often-overlooked details spoke with such delightful eloquence!

— *Br. Tom Ruggirello*

(1) See the Christian Resources App for a discourse titled, “Difficult Texts” by Bro. Carl Hagensick. *Beauties of the Truth*, Volume 26, Number 4, November 2015, “Out of the Tomb(s),” James Parkinson.

Living Clean in a Dirty World

Quotes from RVIC

Living clean is embodied in the four attributes of Jehovah God Almighty:

“Four living creatures ... they had the faces of a man; and they four had the faces of a lion on the right side; and they four had the faces of an ox on the left side; they four had also the faces of an eagle” (Ezekiel 1:5, 10).

“And every one had four faces: the first faces were the faces of the cherub, and the second faces were the faces of a man, and the third the faces of a lion, and the fourth the faces of an eagle” (Ezekiel 10:14).

“And the first living creature was like a lion, and the second living creature like a bullock, and the third living creature had the face as of a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle” (Revelation 4:7).

These four attributes are specifically identified in Psalm 89:14: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne: Lovingkindness and truth go before thy face.” These are in the same order as in the Revelation scripture. We often say: Power, Justice, Love, and Wisdom.¹

Note the sequence: Man (love), cherub (justice) and lion (power). Loving creating of life, Justly redeeming man by the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and Power in resurrection from the dead.

COUNTERFEIT CHARACTERISTICS

There are four description names for Satan in Revelation: “the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan” (Revelation 20:2, 12:9). These may connect to four counterfeit characteristics of Satan: The tyrant (vs. righteous power), the deceiver (vs. wisdom or truth), the accuser (vs. love), the enemy (vs. justice).² Which characteristics do I resemble? and how consistently?

- Righteous power or tyranny? “How art thou fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the morning ... thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into the heavens, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God ... I will make myself like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:12-14). Yet “God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7).

- Truth or Deceit? “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall surely not begin to die ... “ (Genesis 3:4). “The way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Peter 2:2). “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

- Lovingkindness or Accusation? “for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). “Love covereth a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). [Is love sometimes to thin to cover?] “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends” (Proverbs 17:9).

- Justice or Enmity? The earliest that our Adversary is called ‘Satan’ is in Job (1:6). But we are assured that Satan will be bound for a thousand years and then destroyed a “little time” later (Revelation 20). “He that giveth answer before he heareth, it is folly and shame unto him” (Proverbs 18:13).

MODERN TEMPTATIONS

- Fear: If you are a responsible employee, and you are told to approve something for which you are responsible, but you have reason to believe the product is not ready, will you sign off on it? If you are threatened with being fired if you do not? (If you sign off on it, and the product fails, you may lose your job anyway.) Would you prefer to be fired because you did right, or because you did wrong?

- Temper: It is bad to have a temper, and worse to lose it.

- Patience: We must listen to others (at a Fair booth, for example). Therefore we should do as well to brethren, listen thoughtfully.

DECEIT

“No soldier in active service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4). This world wants to entangle us in social programs, politics, etc., so not witnessing; if you are not on their side they will alienate you, or worse.

- Is there a “little white lie”? Big bad lies hatch from nests of “little white lies.”

- How to tell deceit: Those who lack verified fact are driven to emotion. Does that describe me?

- What to believe, when two or more sides are accusing each other of lying? Consider Israel. Its enemies tell their women and children to act as human shields, because the IDF won’t shoot them. Then Israel is condemned

because supposedly-civilians die. Hadassah hospital heals even Israel’s enemies, but the U.N. condemns Israel for supposed human rights violations (more than Syria, Iran, North Korea, or any other nation).

“Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite, and the Kenizzite, and the Kadmonite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Rephaim” (Genesis 15:18-20). “I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God” (Amos 9:15). Evidently Israel-haters are lying and are fighting against God; let them go their way.

ACCUSATION

- In this world: If you are guilty of something, accuse your opponent before he accuses you. When we hear a barrage of accusations, look to see if it is a cover for the accuser’s own sins.

- Honest people are put down as: Islamophobic, homophobic, xenophobic, misogynist, sexist, bigoted, Nazi, Fascist, anti-Semitic, (or if you are black, you are dismissed as) Uncle Tom ... (Ever hear the media say, Christophobic?) (Does a mob cover its use of Fascist methods by calling itself anti-Fascist?)

ENMITY

- Look to find a way to de-fuse hostility. Br. Edward Fay was challenged by an irritated co-worker: “How does it feel to be always right?” He gently replied, “Lonely, very lonely.”

- Haters are they who most accuse others of hate speech.

- Each sinner is potentially salvable in Kingdom. We need to treat others according to what they probably will be, not according to what they do now, deceived by the god of this world.

CONCLUSION

Let each of us ask self: What characteristic is my biggest problem? Power over others or power to help others? “Little white lies” or truth? Faultfinding or lovingkindness? Harboring a grudge or justice in all things? Work on it!

— James Parkinson

(1) Connecting Psalms 89:14 to the four attributes of God is not an uncommon connection. However, it is not as clear as one might wish. One of the editors observes (and another concurs): The Psalms reference seems weak. How “righteousness” morphs into “righteous power” needs to be explained. Also, “righteousness” contrasted with “justice” needs to be clearer. Or is this just saying, “righteousness” = “justice”? I like the thought “righteous power,” but I am not sure the Hebrew supports this thought.

(2) One of the editors suggests that falsely accusing contrasts with justice, and opposing as an enemy contrasts with love.

Caesarea Philippi and The Gates of Hades

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked ... whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter ... said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus ... said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona ... Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:13-18).

In Matthew 16:13-18, Jesus asked his apostles a simple question: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Here Jesus identifies himself with the title “Son of Man” or “Son of Adam.”) He subsequently narrowed the question, “whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Then Jesus spoke of the founding of “my church,” and affirmed that “the gates of Hades” (symbolic of Adamic Death) would not overpower it (NASB).

On this foundation doctrine, that Jesus is the son of the living God — Jesus would build the faith of his church. The obedience of the perfect man, Jesus, would break open the gates of the prison house of death (Isaiah 61:1) sealed shut by the disobedience of the perfect man, Adam.

THE GATES OF HADES

The gates of hell, *hades*, the grave, would not prevail against Christ’s program. *Hades* is the Greek word for the condition of death. King Hezekiah used a similar expression, using the Hebrew word *sheol* corresponding to the Greek *hades*. The occasion was when God delivered Hezekiah from illness and added 15 years to his life.

“I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the **gates of the grave**: I am deprived of the residue of my years. For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth” (Isaiah 38:10).

Perhaps Jesus had these words in mind when he spoke of the Gates of Hades. However, there is an additional connection to this expression, concerning the location at which Jesus mentioned these words.

At the time, Jesus was in Caesarea Philippi. Perhaps when Jesus spoke of the Gates of Hades, he pointed to a large cave known by the Pagans as the Gates of Hades. Jesus may have used the dark cave to illustrate the condition of death, sometimes rendered the pit, or the grave, as in Ecclesiastes 9:10: “There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”



“The Gates of Hades,” Philippi

HADES IN PAGAN USE

Hades, in Pagan use, referred to a place of departed souls low in the earth, for graves are dug into the earth for common burial. They supposed a lingering of departed souls in some mystical realm of the underworld, as Satan deceived the pagan world into thinking that death is something more than what is apparent and evident, namely a cessation of life.

The Pagan world would oppose and persecute the Church, as in persecutions under Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius through Maximinus, Decius, Valerian, and the “great persecution” from 303 to 313. This is referred to in Revelation 2:10, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

But the “gates of hades” would not overcome. The Church of Christ would weather this storm and prevail. Pagan Rome, by contrast, would be like “a great mountain burning with fire [of God’s judgments] ... cast into the sea” (Revelation 8:8).

AN ULTIMATE RELEASE OF ALL

Jesus’ voluntary sacrifice of his perfect life to redeem Adam would throw open the impenetrable iron-clad gates of death, so that all may live again. “In Adam all die ... in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

All die because of sin. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).

Therefore, all need a redeemer, an intercessor, “one among a thousand, to shew unto man” a way back to “uprightness” (John 33:23). Thus, God gave His only begotten son to become flesh and lay down his life in order to bring life to humanity. What unrelenting love for God’s human creation! “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Hezekiah had said, “Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day. ... we will sing ... all the days of our life in the house of Jehovah” (Isaiah 38:17, 19, 20).

How glorious. When the world is raised and learn that they have life because of their loving God in heaven, and may have life forever, they will want to sing His praises (Isaiah 35). They will glorify God and Jesus, “Through all eternity, to thee, A grateful song I’ll raise, And my eternal joy shall be, To herald wide Thy praise” (Hymn 324).

— Adapted from a discourse by Br. Dan Wesol