

MEN WHO GOT A GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN



Exodus 24:10-11

And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved (praiseworthy) work of a sapphire stone . .

B r o o k y R S t o c k t o n

Men Who Got a Glimpse of Heaven

Version 2.0



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Preface

So, you want to have an encounter with God and to see into heaven?

Think again! Those who saw a glimpse of heaven were forever changed – some for the better, and others for the worse.

This work takes a brief look at men who encountered the Lord and lived to tell about it – a rare experience recorded for our instruction.

May the reader gain insight into God and His heaven – a perspective that causes the man to worship and become holy devoted to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brooky Stockton, ret. pastor / professor



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Title

Men Who Encountered the Lord

Those who saw a bit of heaven and lived long enough to tell
about it



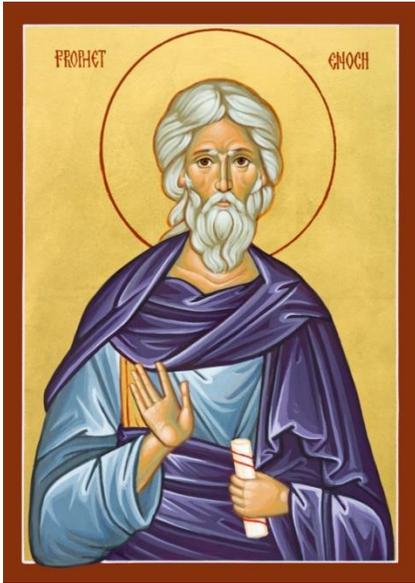
Genesis 28:16-17

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not . . . And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This . . .

1. Enoch's Walkathon

Genesis 5:21-24

Steps to Walking with God



◆ The text does not say that Enoch saw the Lord, but since he was taken up from earth into His presence, we can assume that somewhere in that journey He saw the LORD God.

A Father's Walk with God

I was keeping up with Lance Armstrong, the great American cyclist's ride for a sixth win in the Tour de France. A prize was offered to a winner in a contest to "Come ride with Lance."

Would you like to ride side-by-side with the world's greatest cyclist? Not me! Rigor mortis would set in before I finished the first mile.

In the Bible, however, there is a marathon that you and I are invited to join. A small voice whispers, "Come, walk with Me!"

And, this walkathon is something all of us can enter, if we dare duplicate the steps of Enoch in our lives.

And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years. And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him (Genesis 5:21-24, Hebrews 11:5-6; Jude 14-16).

The crisp chronicle of Enoch's life instructs us about the vocation of walking with our Creator. The short epitaph of nine lines left on Enoch's

tombstone by the Spirit about his life is a testament to the man as well as a witness to the world.

What is not said about Him also thunders a message to us. Which of us has not wondered about life in the prediluvian world? Among the tombs of men, the Spirit cast a light on a hero of the faith and his mighty walk with God for us to consider.

You too can enjoy a mighty walk with God, if you can duplicate the steps surrounding Enoch's walkathon to your own life.

Step One: Walk with God early in life.

Notice that all of Enoch's predecessors are introduced by the term, "they lived." But, **Enoch is introduced with, "He walked with God."** Instead of ending with "he died," the text says, "He was not, for God took him." This is what the Spirit wants us to know and consider.

While I am sure God has been the Companion of many men, the Scripture in English versions only lists two people who ever walked *with* God, Enoch and Noah. Abraham walked "*before* God" (Genesis 17:1), and Israel walked "*after* God" (Deuteronomy 13:4) but Enoch and Noah walked "*with* God."

Walking *before* God implies a life of sonship. Children usually walk in front of their parents where the parents can see and enjoy them.

Walking *after* God implies servanthood. Servants walk behind their masters.

Notice what the text says, "He walked *with* God." Walking *with* God implies companionship. Friends walk side-by-side.

In Hebrew, the adverb word for "with" can mean to "follow after" indicating that Enoch not only walked with God but pursued him with all his heart.

Furthermore, the definite article attached to God and the direct object indicator (*et ha elohim*) informs us that Enoch did not pursue any god, but with *Ha Elohim*, the one and only true God. The imperfect rendering of the Hebrew verb implies continuous action; i.e. he habitually, continuously walked with God day and night! Enoch was not a “fair-weather” Christian who was all maple syrup with no fiber in his diet.

Today, it is common to characterize people as “very spiritual.” By that, pundits either mean the person is very religious and consorts with spirits in the nether world or the person is very subjective, introspective, and open to all kind of ideologies; that is, they are in touch with their feelings. Enoch was neither religious nor introspective. He was a companion of the one, true, God of the Universe.

Step two: Be sure you walk with the God of the Bible and not a god of your own making.

Enoch walked with the God of the Bible – the one, self-existent, personal, infinite, virtuous, triune Spirit who is the God of the Bible, the God of Christ, and the God of the church (spiritual Israel).

He is a loving God (1 John 4:5ff), but He is also a just God!

This is the God Who ordered Abraham to offer the most precious thing in his life (Isaac) as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:1). This is the God who sent Christ to the cross and turned His back on His only Son. This is the God who orders us to give up our bosom sins. This is a God who disciplines His children harshly (Hebrews 12:4ff); a God who’s silence stuns the soul in times of want and need (Psalm 83:1); a God who hides Himself in the darkest hours of the night (Psalm 89:46); a holy God who does not always go out with our armies (Psalm 60:12).

This is the God we are called to follow. Job said of Him, “though he slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

Do you still want to walk with Him?

The pain on the path He chooses for you will test the foundations of your faith,

but . . . there is also unspeakable joy of fellowship with Him (I Peter 1:8; 2 Corinthians 12:1ff).

Do not hear what is not being said. We are not saying the Christian life is dreary, but that there are dreary days — days that trouble the soul. And, it is in these times, we are tempted to be like Oprah who “is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods (of money, of pleasure, and of security)” (Ruth 1:15).

Step Three: Don't look at your weaknesses. Enter the race.

Enoch was an ordinary man who walked with God. Nothing is said that would indicate that Enoch was better than other men; stronger than other contestants; smarter than others; or, unique among men. He didn't have the focus of the Terminator, or the strength of the Incredible Hulk, or the courage of the Dark Knight.

His occupation was so common it was not worth mentioning. He did not make a technological contribution to civilization like Tubal Cain. He was **not** a statesman, monarch, or CEO of some mega corporation. **Nor** was he a mighty leader of men like Moses, or a mammoth size theologian like the Apostle Paul.

We should take courage that ordinary men can walk with their Maker. We are prone to compare ourselves against the impossible standard of the rich and the famous and to question our own spiritual potential. **Enoch's experience assures us that it is possible for ordinary people to walk in unbroken fellowship with the Creator in this life.**

“There is no such thing as a great man of God, only weak, pitiful, faithless men of a great and merciful God.” (Paul Washer).

Step Four: Consent to the walk.

Enoch's walk with God was a voluntary act on his part. He was not coerced! God is a gentleman-Master who does not force His will on any man.

If one wants to walk with God, he must aim to do so. Do you see the verb "walk" (וַיִּתֶּם לֶךָ בְּצִאלֵהָ תֵן אֵשׁ) in the text? It is a Hithpael verb (reflexive in nature) implying that Enoch stirred himself to pursue companionship with the Almighty. He was not coerced into this relationship. It was by consent. He made it his life goal to pursue the Creator.

Likewise, if you and I are going to have a personal relationship with the Creator, our will must be free. Yes, God chooses us, but we must choose Him as our Companion and surrender to this journey voluntarily.

Step Five: Take advantage of milestones in your life.

Enoch's walk with God was affected by a critical event in his life – fatherhood. Notice the preposition "after" (*ahar*) in this verse: "Enoch walked with God *after* he begat Methuselah three hundred years" (Genesis 5:22). I like the rendering, "He walked with God consistently after he begat Methuselah." There was something connected with the birth of his son that ignited Enoch's motivation to pursue a constant, persistent, continual relationship with His Creator.

Sometimes our spiritual energies are stirred by crucial events in our own lives. It may be a monumental event like going off to college, getting married, or in Enoch's case, the birth of a child. Or, it may be something negative like an illness, the death of a loved one, an accident, or trouble with the law. Whatever the instrument, it is blessed if it leads us to a walk with Christ.

Oh, that fathers would take seriously their calling to fatherhood. What a blessing for a child to have a dad that walks with God seeking to guide his family by the Holy Scripture.

Step Six: Walk with Bible in hand, read the rules, and cross the finish line.

Enoch's walk was ignited by Revelation. From the Book of Jude we learn that Enoch received a revelation from God about the global judgment, which was to come upon that wicked, prediluvian world. The text says that Enoch warned his generation,

“Behold the Lord *comes* with many thousands of His holy ones To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are **ungodly** among them of all their **ungodly** deeds which they have **ungodly** committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which **ungodly** sinners have spoken against him.” (Jude 14-15).

So impressed was Enoch with this vision, he named his son, “Methuselah.” The word *Methuselah* means “man of the spear” or “messenger of death,” or “at his death it shall come.” In other words, Methuselah’s life was a life of grace. When Methuselah died after 969 years, Noah was 600 years old. On the day of Methuselah’s death, the Flood engulfed this civilization destroying all but eight souls of humanity.

Methuselah’s birth and Noah entering the ark (187+182+600), it is also 969 years. That means, in the very year Methuselah died, the Flood was sent forth like a javelin on the earth.

Seeing the judgment prophetically, Enoch decided to change his company. Invited into the inner counsels of the Almighty, Enoch chose friendship with God rather than friendship with the world. It is not a test to turn down the worst the world has to offer, but it is a test to turn down the best the world has to offer. Enoch rejected the best the world offered in order to better his walk with God.

Likewise, there is something about this Book which enables one to engage this walkathon. A journey with Him begins with the Word, is maintained by the Word, and is empowered by the Word.

Step Seven: Accept life's responsibilities as His training program for you.

Enoch's walk with God included marital intimacy. He walked with God and had other sons and daughters. He was not abstinent or celibate. He did not fornicate. He was married and enjoyed intimate relations with his wife. Religious people have struggled with sexuality and have not always been at peace with marital commerce. But, this text demonstrates that walking with God does not exclude natural, marital relations.

Step Eight: Keep walking even though the terrain changes.

Enoch walked with God in difficult times. Enoch was a **father**. No doubt he experienced all the pressures of raising and feeding children that other fathers have faced in this life.

When Noah, Enoch's grandson, Lamech, was born the son of Enoch, prophesied (5:29), *"This one (Noah) will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed."* Lamech, grieved over the toils of this life and longed for a day in the life of his son, Noah, when God would relieve men of the misery of the curse and the burden of raising crops on hostile soil. Those were tough days for a farmer. Planting, cultivating, weeding, and harvesting drained the man. There is no doubt Enoch knew the difficulty of tilling the soil. Yet, in the midst of trying to scratch out a living on the land, Enoch experienced uncompromising fellowship with the Spirit.

Enoch was not only a father, **but a prophet**. He was not a hermit or a monk. He knew the difficulty of living among complainers, liars, bullies, and fornicators.

We are prone to excuse ourselves from the duty of fellowship because of the business and hostilities of our age. Many Christians errantly think that our time is the most evil of any generation before us. Not so!

First, notice the age in which Enoch lived. Lamech, the most evil of men, was seventh from Adam in Cain's line. In Lamech, evil reached its peak, and this evil was on a collision course with the judgment of God. Lamech was a homicidal polygamist. Notice his song boasting of murder and vengeance in 4:23. It sounds like modern day rap wherein young blacks chant about cop killing. But in Enoch, the seventh from Adam through the line of Seth, godliness reached its zenith. In the midst of the wickedness of his generation, Enoch braved a different path than his contemporaries.

Enoch was not only a father and a prophet, he was a **lonely man**. Jude tells us that he prophesied of judgment to an evil world. Four times the term "*ungodly*" is mention in Jude 15. He preached to the *ungodly* about their *ungodly* deeds and *ungodly* ways and *ungodly* words. Because he marched to the beat of a different drummer, Enoch walked alone without human companionship, understanding, or sympathy.

Do you find it difficult to walk with God in the business of life, in the midst of sinners, surrounded by all kinds of temptation?

It is not easy to leave Sinful Valley and walk with God on the mountaintops. The air is thin. The climb is uphill. Breathing is strenuous. Muscles tire. Temperatures cool. There are few crowds on mountain tops. There is no one to cheer you on. This loneliness will test your resolve. But, it is here that God purifies the soul and weans us from the fear of men.

Step Nine: Be faithful.

Enoch's walk was consistent. The text says, "he walked with God 300 years." Enoch did not waiver in this marathon. He did not stumble. He did not backslide. He did not change course. He did not drop out of the race. He did not stop and rest. Nor did he take detours.

What would it be like to walk with God?

As a spiritual Olympian, Enoch had to keep pace with his Creator. Sometimes we picture Enoch taking a leisurely Sunday afternoon stroll around the neighborhood. But, I don't think this is what it means. I think God's pace changed from time to time; that is, Enoch had to adjust his gait to match his Companion's stride.

Isaiah understood the different paces in the coliseum of life —

“They that **wait** upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall **run** and not be weary; they shall **walk** and not faint?” (Isaiah 40:31).

A famous Bible preacher (Dr. Pierson) was privileged to peruse George Mueller's Bible. In the margin of this text, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psalm 37:23), he found this inscription, “and the stops too.”

When I was a young boy, my dad would take me hunting. Dad's pace was never the same. Sometimes, he would walk slowly. Sometimes, he would stand still and listen. At other times, dad would scurry up a hill. It was all I could do to keep up with my father on these trips. Likewise, in our walk with God! Sometimes, the pace challenges us. Running, stopping, and waiting test our resolve to know Him.

At other times, it is the path that challenges us. The course may be rocky and steep, or wet and soggy. Not only are we called to walk in love, but to walk in the light; to be tender, and to be tough; to be tolerant of the weak, and intolerant of the wicked; to protect life, and to take life.

The paces and paths of God test our will. Too many of us are fair weather Christians. We are comfortable with the call to love, but are uncomfortable with the call to be holy. We like to follow God to feasts, but seldom to fasts. We are willing to fraternize, but not willing to evangelize. Walking with God calls us to adjust our pace and to go where God wants us to go and do what He wants us to do.

Step Ten: Walk with God until you cross the finish line.

Enoch walked with God until the end. To change analogies from a walkathon to the gridiron, our champion could be called a “fourth quarter Christian” today; i.e., he had to walk with God at the end of his life—in the final quarter of the game—at a time his energy was spent and he was playing hurt. Though bruised, tired, and exhausted, Enoch did not leave the field of play. He walked with His Creator until the final whistle blew.

I am in my sixties now, and I find my walk just as thrilling as when I first began to learn about Christ in my teens. But, the challenge is at times very chilling. There are moments I’m walking on clouds enjoying close communion with my Lord, and then there is the walkathon in dark, polluted valleys where I can neither see Him or feel Him. There are days I feel alone and abandoned. Many of my Christian teammates have walked off the turf discouraged, defeated, and beaten. But, it is here in the darkness amidst the pain and loneliness of life that I too am tempted to leave the field and retire to the bench. Enduring the journey grates my soul. It is here when my faith is tested the most. I must remind myself that God calls me to be a “fourth-quarter Christian” and to walk with Him unto the end.

Step Eleven: Walk by faith and not by sight.

Enoch walked by faith (Hebrews 11:6). There is no indication that Enoch ever saw, heard, or touched God. He did not walk by sight, but by faith. It was Enoch’s life that inspired the writer of Hebrews with this principle: “without faith it is impossible to please God” (11:6), and “he that cometh to God must believe that He is.” Enoch believed that God “is the Rewarder of them that seek him.” Do you see the word “is”?

What is the meaning of the word “is”? In this case the word “is” is not *estin* but *ginomai* (γίνεται), which means that God *becomes* what we need Him to be for us. In Enoch’s case, God’s companionship was a reward for his faith. Interestingly, the word for “walk” in Genesis 5:22 (εὐηρέστησεν)

in the LXX is the same root Greek word for “please” (*euresteo*) found in Hebrews 11:6 (εὐαρεστῆσαι). Apparently, *pleasing God* is another way to express what is involved in *walking with God*.

The text speaks of a second reward, “he *was* not; for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). Apparently, God raptured him off the earth to join him in his eternal dwelling. *Enoch changed his location, but not his Companion*.

Dr. Cambell Morgan told the story of a little girl who came home from Sunday School and said, “Mother, did you know that Enoch went on a long walk with God and God said to him, ‘You are nearer my home than yours. Why don’t you just come home with Me?’”

Enoch’s departure was a solitary type of the huge airlift to come. One day the Lord Jesus will return to snatch his believing ones off this earth before the final judgment on the unbelieving world (I Thessalonians 4:1-17). Just as Enoch escaped the judgment of Noah’s day, believers will escape the wrath to come (5:9).

You may not depart this world like Enoch, but you can escape the judgment like Enoch—if you have Enoch’s faith and walk. Have you entered this walkathon? Your son will be better for it, and there is a reward waiting for you.

2. Noah's Death-Clouds

Genesis 7:11



◆ Seeing the heavens open, in whatever form, can be a terrifying experience.

It was for Noah's generation.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the

seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.

Noah saw the murky, tar-black, electrically-charged thunder-clouds brooding over the sky and the heavens split open raining death and destruction upon men, women, and children.

Business stopped; sleep interrupted; cooking ended; weddings halted; plows abandoned; laughter ceased; hope vanished; corpses floating!

Hebrews 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

2 Peter 2:5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth [person], a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Matthew informs us "But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (19:37).

Possibly a reference the normal routines involved in life and now the wickedness of that generation; that is, when the Parousia occurs, men will be carrying on the regular routines of life not expecting the Lord to come.

Matthew 24:42 — “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”

Therefore, let us keep our house in order — swept clean, table set, and door open—prepared for the guest who may arrive at any moment.

3. Hagar's First Encounter with the Angel of the LORD

Genesis 16



Is there anything more frightening than a young, homeless, unmarried pregnant girl? God found Hagar. Spoke to her. Healed her soul. And, she lived to tell about it.

Genesis 16:6 But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

God's lesson for learning how to respond to deferred hope came through Sarah's servant Hagar. Hurt, and overcome with despair, Hagar jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. Headed back to Egypt, can you imagine what would have happened to her and her baby among pyramid builders — the seat of Vanity Fair?

The worst day in the house of God is better than the best day in the world! Better to be mistreated in the family of God than to survive in the house of the wicked.

Like most human messes, it takes God's light to heal the wounds inflicted in darkness. On the road to Shur, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar. This is the first mention of the "Angel of the Lord" — the Angel of His presence who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

While God did not prevent the Patriarchal couple from making the defective decision to use Hagar to be a surrogate mother, He did step in and prevent the servant girl from making a disastrous decision to flee to the Nile Delta.

Why did He appear to Hagar and not to Abram? There are at least two reasons: (a) God loved Hagar and knew she was the victim of the fleshly behavior of His people, and (b) it was God's will to heal the antagonist (Abraham and Sarah) by the wounds of His little lamb (Hagar - a true victim). Are not we "healed by His stripes?" (Isaiah 53:5-7).

The most hurt among us (Jesus) became the greatest Healer. Therefore, it behooves us to follow His example and to heal those who hurt us (1 Peter 2:23, 24).

The LORD instructed Hagar to go back and to submit to Sarah's abuse (16:9)! And, she did! God did **not** reverse her pregnancy, but he did reverse her fate.

The lesson Hagar learned about the LORD, she was able to share with Abram and Sarah for their healing and good. The perpetrator of a wrong has a greater spiritual need than the victim of the wrong.

But, how could she go back and submit to maltreatment? Surely, this is not politically correct. No government paid counselor would advise an abused woman to return and submit to her abusers. But, God ordered Hagar to do so and she obeyed.

What did she learn in her encounter with God that would enable her to return to this difficult situation?

Lessons learned

Genesis 15:7 And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

First, Hagar learned that God knew all about her burdensome domestic troubles; that He heard her cries, moans, and pains; that God knew where she was (near a spring in the desert: 16:7); that God knew her name (Hagar: 16:7); that God knew who she was and what she did for a living (“Hagar, servant of Sarai”); and, that He knew where she came from and where she was going.

The Angel of the Lord spoke to her: “Where have you come from, and where are you going?” He did not ask her these questions because he did not know the answer, but to let Hagar know that He knew all about her abuse and that He cared for her.

So impressed was Hagar by God’s personal knowledge and concern for her that she named the place, “Beer Laha Roi,” — “the well of the living One who sees me” (16:14) because “she saw the back of him who sees me” (16:13). Not only did she give God a special title which He was pleased to record in His Word forever, she called her son “Ishmael.” The proper noun “Ishmael” is made up of two words, “God” (la) and “hear” (shema) which means “God hears.” The LORD heard the fears, liquid tears, and silent cries of this woman. Isn’t this the reason why the sons of Ismael pray to the God¹ of Hagar five times a day?

Isn’t this the reason why the sons of Ismael pray to the God[1] of Hagar five times a day?

Genesis 16:9 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

Surely, Hagar shared her story with Abraham and Sarah. Most likely, Sarah and Abraham learned a valuable lesson and began to treat Hagar

¹ The name "Allah" is the Arabic word for "The God" and is the unique, personal name for the singular, supreme deity in Islam, originating from the contraction of the Arabic words "al-" (the) and "ilah" (god).

properly. Possibly, Abraham and Hagar apologized to their servant, and treated her quite differently. After all, “the God” was watching of her . . . and of them.

The paradox astounds us. On one hand, we see the tender grace and love God showed Hagar, and on the other hand, how could God cause good come of the legacy of this carnal union?

Second, Hagar learned that God knew all about her child and his future. God gave Hagar special insight into the destiny of the boy she was carrying. From Ishmael came the great Arab nation.

Genesis 16:10 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

Genesis 16:11 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.

God announced the baby’s destiny as a “wild donkey” of a man . . . but, this is more than knowledge. This is foreordination — a decision of the Divine will: a wild man . . . independent . . . autonomous . . . despising cities loving the wilderness . . . alone . . . licking up every blade of green grass . . . in constant search of water . . . wandering . . . untamable . . . evading the mule driver’s whip . . . plundering . . . living the freewheeling life style of a desert pirate. Can anything be more descriptive of Arab history?

And your life? Free? A matter of choice or foreordained?

4. Hagar’s Second Encounter with the Angel of the LORD

Genesis 21



◆ Ejected from her home, fired from her job, alone in the wilderness of Beersheba, with a teenage son, out of water, and under a bush dying of thirst!

Could anything be worse?

The LORD ordained this ejection. Therefore, Hagar and Ishmael were shunned and sent out of Abraham's camp – a blow to Abraham and to

the Egyptian mother.

Genesis 21:16 And she went, and sat her down over against *him* a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against *him*, and lift up her voice, and wept.

In Genesis 21:18, Ishmael is called “a lad” (sixteen years old). Moaning for water, God heard his groans, showed Hagar a well, and quenched their thirst.

Ishmael mocked Isaac, the promised seed, and merited the harsh separation. But, God was gracious to Hagar and her son. Though He ordered their expulsion, He graciously sustained them in the wilderness.

Shortly afterwards Ishmael was able to maintain himself and his mother with his bow (Genesis 21:20). Later, his mother took a wife for him from Egypt (Genesis 21:21).

Marvelous Lessons:

First, Ishmael mocked Isaac – a type of the flesh mocking the Spirit. Thus, it was impossible for Ishmael to remain in the camp.

Second, to fulfill the type, God ordered the expulsion of the boy even though it was distressing for Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael.

Genesis 21:10 Wherefore Sarah said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *even* with Isaac.

Third, God used the crisis to humble Ishmael and to show His great love for all the players in this human drama.

An Example of God's Unconditional Love

Consider the objects of His love: Ishmael, the mocking smart aleck, zit faced teenager; and, Hagar — a victim of Sarah's dense, carnal surrogate plan for Abraham to have a child — an Egyptian maid, the lowest status in society. He loves the big and small, men and women, adults and children, black and white, educated or uneducated.

Consider the distress of this mother and child. Both were forced to live in a crushing abyss of hopelessness — alone, thirsty, frightened, they felt like the last leaf on a winter's limb; like a violin playing to an audience of chairs; like a candle in the back of a cave swallowed up by darkness; like an untethered astronaut wandering in space waiting for the oxygen supply to run out.

Consider the name Hagar gave the Lord: "*El Roi*" or "God sees me." This God of love saw her a second time while in distress and was pleased to meet her needs. She did not see Him; but, He saw her.

Consider the profound state of fear, disconnection, isolation, aching void, and rejection this mother and son felt. No doubt mother and son felt like stars swallowed up by a black hole; like sewage swirling around an abandoned drain pipe; like a black man at a KKK rally surrounded by men in white hoods chanting anthems of white supremacy.

Consider that no one is beyond redemption. Nothing is hopeless. God is out of touch with no one. His love is the sun that rises without fail

showering warmth on both the righteous and the unrighteous; on Abraham and Sarah and Isaac; and, on Hagar and Ishmael.

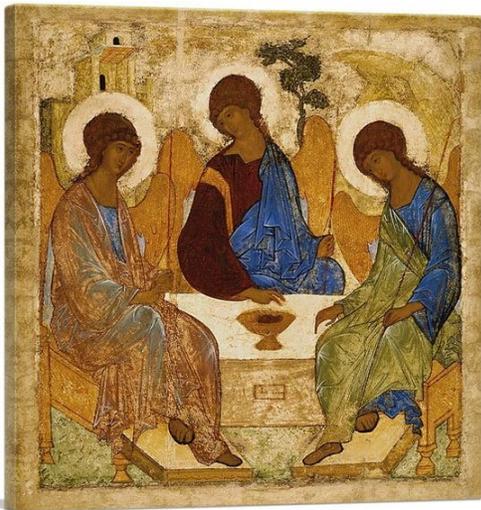
Consider the nature of His provision – an old well and not a new one; a well that was unperceived; that is, in their wanderings, God led mother and child to lay down near a well full of life-sustaining water.

Consider how God kept his promise to Hagar providing for the boy, gifting him with skills to eke out a living in a parched desert, and making him a great Arab nation.

Consider the character of grace in this story: “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch . . . ”

5. Abraham’s Three Visitors

Genesis 18



◆ Abraham did not see into heaven, but Heaven came to him. Not only did he survive, he thrived. He not only saw a theophany of the LORD, he shared a communion meal with Him.

There are times God comes to men in covenant with Him in order to bless them. This was the case with Abraham.

1 And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; 2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw *them*, he ran to meet

them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, 3 And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: 4 Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: 5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

Sitting outdoors under a shade tree in the heat of the day was typically a rest time for Bedouins.

The text says, “The LORD appeared to Abraham.” Abraham looked up and saw three men — angels unawares.

“Abraham ran to meet them” is an amazing response.

No telling how many drifters, beggars, and homeless men wandered into Abraham’s camp looking for a handout and were turned away. But, these three visitors were different.

Everything about the demeanor alerted the patriarch that these three personages were a manifestation of God. Consider their peace, honesty, warmth, integrity, stateliness, friendliness, and nobility. So much so, this 100 year old patriarch ran to meet them. He calls himself, “thy servant.” Rushing, bowing, and offering food shows us he knew that he was the presence of Divinity . . . and that these visitors were not ordinary callers.

The name “Elohim” appears 12 times in chapter seventeen, but not once in chapter eighteen. The word “LORD” or “Lord” appears 16 times in chapter eighteen, and only once in chapter seventeen (17:1).

According to Jewish tradition this visitation occurred three days after Abraham was circumcised; that is, the covenant between Abraham and the LORD established new benefits to Abraham. Elohim now introduces Himself to the circumcised patriarch as the LORD. Though Abraham

called him “Lord” (Adonai), Abraham was in a covenant relationship with the LORD and enjoyed fellowship meal with the LORD (18:8).

Abraham believed, received the sign of the covenant (circumcision), and then fellowshiped with the LORD. Likewise today! Men believe and are justified; receive the sign of the New Covenant (baptism); and, then fellowship with Christ.

However, the descendants of Abraham were first circumcised (8 days old), believed, and then fellowshiped with the LORD (the remnant or spiritual Israel). While all of Abrahams male descendants were circumcised as babies, not all believed; and, therefore, none of them knew the LORD.

It was at this fellowship dinner, the LORD asked about Sarah and informed Abraham that He and Sarah were going to have a child next year at this time.

Sarah was ease dropping on the conversation. In a spirit of doubt and unbelief, she ruffled her feathers over the promise in her heart. She understood biology, and in her mind, pregnancy was out of the question. It was at this time the LORD spoke:

13-14 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

The passage begins with Abraham seeing three men near his tent. While two are referred to as angels (19:1), the third is identified as the LORD (YHWH) who speaks with Abraham directly (18:17).

The terms “LORD”, three men, and the use of “I” in the above text inform us that this is a theophany generally and a christophany specifically — a rare manifestation of the Holy Trinity.

Abraham's circumcision and covenant relationship highlights three benefits:

1. Abraham experienced fellowship with the LORD and gained new insights into His character; (1) that the Lord is the omnipresent personal God; (2) that the LORD is omniscient knowing the thoughts and intents of the heart; (3) that the LORD is omnipotent -- for nothing is impossible for Him. These revelations about the LORD were like opening a window in a dark room and letting the light in.
2. The LORD gave Abraham and Sarah a prophetic promise that a son would be born to them next year – sunlight breaking through the dark clouds of childlessness.
3. Not only could the LORD give elderly Sarah a son, He could give the Virgin a son. Both Sarah and Mary understood, “nothing is impossible with God.” Moreover, it is not only possible to give Mary and Sarah life, it is possible for God to save the rich (Matthew 19:25).
4. The LORD heard Abraham's prayer for Lot and acted up on it – music to the soul of this patriarch.

One of the great lessons of this chapter is that men in a covenant relationship with God have nothing to fear, but those outside His covenant have everything to fear for the shadow of death is upon them – think of the looming, horrendous destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in chapter 19.

Hebrews 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Likewise, it was during this visit the three men warned Abraham that God's judgment was about to fall upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20–21; 19:12–13).

God is not only aware of what is happening on earth, He orders the destruction of sinners as well as shows mercy to the righteous.

If God could keep Lot from stumbling with the wicked, He can keep you and I from the fate of the ungodly:

"To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Jude 24-25).

6. Jacob's Golden Ladder

Genesis 28:10-17

Gateway to Heaven

◆ Want to see God? Think again!

28:10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.

11 And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.

12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it . . .



The Hebrew interjection *heggeh* ("behold") is used four times in this passage.

"Behold" is invitation to come and study the wonderment of this revelation to Jacob. Thus, the reader would do well to stop and think about this.

10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.

Haran, in the Ur of Chaldeas (modern Turkey), is roughly 250 miles from Beersheba in the southern plains of Israel.

Jacob, one of the three patriarchs in Genesis, left his parent's home under a cloud of suspicion with a purpose of finding a wife somewhere in Haran near or related to his Uncle Laban. His first time away of home, we can only speculate about the fear and excitement that rushed through his heart like vortexes on a wind turbine.

The spiritual background of this story is deeply connected to the Abrahamic promise and Messianic birthright Jacob purchased from his brother Esau. Jacob probably held these promises with a loose hand because God had not yet confirmed them to him. Thus, the following account is God's assurance to Jacob that the Abrahamic Covenant is in full force and effect through him.

11 And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.

After a 20-25 mile trek from Beersheba, Jacob fell fast asleep in a place we call "Bethel" – a mountainous region ten miles north of modern Jerusalem. There God revealed himself to the patriarch in a powerful dream – a hand's length away from the Lord. Condescending to speak to Jacob in images and terms that he could understand, the LORD impressed his mind with a dazzling image of interchange between heaven and earth.

Dewitt adds the human element: consider "the state of mind and body in which he must have been - fatigued by travel, saddened by thoughts of home, doubtless meditating on his mother, and more than likely pondering the great benediction of his aged, dying father."

What Jacob Saw

Jacob did **not** see God directly; rather, the LORD revealed Himself to Jacob indirectly through a dream.

(1) Behold the Staircase

12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder (staircase) set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven . . .

The interjection “behold” requires we expand our imagination at the stunning grandeur of this imagery. The ladder (cullam) was a spectacular, large staircase connecting heaven and earth —not a rickety, old wooden ladder. We can only imagine with our mind’s eye the glory and beauty of this magnificent structure.

The Scala d'Oro in Venice's Doge's Palace, the modern marble steps at Hôtel National des Arts et Métiers in Paris, and the mysterious Loretto Chapel staircase in New Mexico are contenders for the most spectacular staircases in the world.

Since Heaven’s structures humble man’s greatest works, we are permitted to envision this ladder as God’s golden staircase (Revelation 21:21). Moreover, because of Exodus 24, we can assume that Jacob saw the sapphire (blue) pavement on which the Lord stood.

“And the twelve gates *were* twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city *was* pure **gold**, as it were transparent glass” (Revelation 21:21).

The whole Jewish idea that this ladder represents the Torah is as ridiculous as a king sitting on a blow-up, inflatable throne. No man struggling to keep the law can ever see God. Even if he did see God, he would be a dead man.

(2) Behold the angels of God

. . . and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

Jacob saw “angels” (mal’ak) in his mind’s eye. These would be some glorious kind of celestial couriers, (cherubim² or seraphim³) passing between heaven and earth.

“Ascending” and “descending” suggests purpose, order, sequence, grouping, calm, and peace. The angels are **not** frantically flapping their wings like hummingbirds trapped in a whirlwind or like frenzied passengers running on an escalator trying to arrive on time for their flight.

The vision represents the calm, orderly interchange between Heaven and Earth.

Ascending and descending messengers communicates serious interplay between heaven and earth, day and night, seven days a week. Angels impact human affairs. Prayers ascend to God; prayers are answered; commands are given; orders are executed. Let God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven is the directive of this Heavenly Court.

"The counsels of heaven are executed on earth, and the affairs of this earth are all known in heaven." (Benson).

Ellicott adds: "Upon these stairs' messengers of Elohim are 'ascending and descending,' carrying up to God men's prayers, and the tale of their wants and sorrows, of their faith

² Cherubim are described in Ezekiel as powerful, complex angelic beings with four faces—man, lion, ox, and eagle—and four wings. They have human-like bodies, feet like a calf's, and are covered in eyes. Their appearance is complex, with detailed descriptions found in the visions of the prophet Ezekiel, who saw them as part of a divine chariot

³ Seraphim are six-winged angelic beings described in the Isaiah, known as the "burning ones," who continuously surround God's throne and praise Him by shouting, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6)

and hope and trust; and bringing down to them help and comfort and blessing."

"The angels upon it carry up the wants of men to God, and bring down the assistance and protection of God to men." (Keil and Delitzsch)

The dream does not describe these angelic messengers, but we presume the décor, dignity, and the stateliness of this interchange must have stunned the patriarch. What a contrast between Jacob's dysfunctional, chaotic, tension-filled home and this scene of dignified couriers passing orderly and peacefully to and from heaven carrying prayers and answers to prayers to and from the LORD.

Jacob called this staircase "the house of God" (bet Elohim) and "the gate way to heaven" (sha'ar ha'shamayim).

What Jacob Heard

(3) Behold the LORD

13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

Jacob saw a dreamy vision of the Lord standing above the golden staircase and heard Him speak. And, he lived to tell about it.

"Standing" represents intense interest and concern.

God introduces Himself to this young patriarch as the "the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." The appellation "LORD" is the tetragrammaton, the personal name of God which means "I am what I am" or "I will be what I need to be" to meet your needs. This is none other than the pre-incarnate Christ, Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

The Spirit makes no attempt to describe the glory and majesty of the LORD – only that He stood with emissaries reporting to Him and receiving orders from Him.

Behold the truth that the LORD is sovereign. "He reigns" is the gospel of the Old Testament (Psalm 97:1). He controls heaven and earth. All creatures are accountable to him. He is their Guide and Guard.

The LORD identified himself to Jacob as the God of Abraham and Isaac – a gigantic confirmation to this young man that his spiritual heritage was true, certain, and not misleading.

A promise is given. Jacob coveted the family birthright, but now he sees for the first time the grand and marvelous wealth and riches of his Messianic inheritance – “the land . . . I give to thee . . . and to thy seed.”

By “land” he means the entire world (Romans 4:13). How could Jacob grasp such a huge promise?

14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Not yet married and with no children, the LORD fans his struggling-faith with tribal images blossoming into populations that make up nations.

“In thee shall all the nations be blessed” is a link to the Messianic promise given to Abraham. To his shock and delight, God promised him that the Messiah (“thy seed”) will come through his family to bless the nations – not just petty Jews.

(4) Behold God’s Presence and Protection

15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

“Behold” is a call for Jacob to be attentive: head up; ears on; mouth shut.

Away from home and scared to death, God promises His presence and protection: "I am with thee, and will keep thee . . ." What assurance! What relief! What comfort!

Behold the truth that God is with His people and will "never, no, never, never, never forsake them" (Hebrews 13:5). Note the five Greek negatives in this text – the strongest way to express the impossibility of a thing.

However, from the rest of the story we learn this promise is not a promise to have a problem-free life without trials and conflict. Jacob's journey was one of the bumpiest rides in human history, but at every turn God was there to protect him. His journey was 100 miles of bad road; a trek through a thick forest of sticky webs where every attempt forward pulled him backward. So rough was Jacob's journey, he cried out "Everything is against me . . ." (Genesis 42:36).

Little did this patriarch know at the time, God was causing all things to work together for good (Romans 8:28).

Jacob's Response

16 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.

Modern men might say, "When Jacob woke out of his sleep and came back to reality." But, this is not so! While not all dreams have Divine meaning, this one did!! The dream was reality! His senses deceived him!

When the patriarch arrived at Bethel, Jacob did not "feel" the presence of God nor did he sense there was anything special about this region of rocks and grass. After he woke up, he realized: "Truly, the LORD is in this place." The LORD was present though Jacob did not perceive Him.

Before his dream, he could not discern the presence of God around him. Before his dream, earthly things seemed real and spiritual things seemed imaginary. Before his dream he walked by sight; after his dream, Jacob

walked by faith. Before his dream God was nowhere to be found; after his dream he discerned the presence of the living God.

Just because people don't feel His presence does not mean He is not there. Likewise, just because people feel like God is with them does not mean He is.

Feelings do not determine reality if God does not exist in the first place.

"We are not looking at the things being seen, but the things not being seen. For the things being seen are temporary, but the things not being seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Many a man has learned the same lesson, "Surely, the LORD is in this place, and I knew it not!"

17 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Jacob responded, "How dreadful (frightening) *is* this place! this *is* none other but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven."

This staircase connected heaven and earth. There is a gate, a staircase, or portal from earth to heaven and heaven to earth; that is, events on earth are impacted by personages imposed by Heaven's will.

There are not two ladders nor are their many escalators to heaven. The Patriarch **only** saw one ladder. Jacob called this staircase "the house of God" (bet Elohim) and "the gate way to heaven" (sha'ar shamayim). There is only one way to God.

We learn from the New Testament that this figure is an icon of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the "way, the truth, and the life" by which men gain access to the Father (John 1:50-52; 14:6). He is the holy ground where man and God meet.

Both the term “afraid” and “dreadful” are the same Hebrew word (*yare'*). Jacob’s reaction was **not** one of bliss. He did not dance the Hora (the Jewish dance of joy). His reaction was one of “fear” and “alarm.”

Some liberal interpreters try to mitigate Jacob’s response by reducing the term “fear” (*yare'*) to one of awe and respect. But, the double use of *yare'* acts like an exclamation point (!) – an emphatic literary tool confirming the fear and panic he felt upon waking up.

Do you want to see God? No, you don’t! He is more than our little minds can grasp.

While joy is the property of all Christian men, a true study of theology produces a healthy fear that leads to self-control, carefulness, and obedience: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

In conclusion, Jacob’s ladder is a glorious type of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the “Gate of Heaven” (*sha’ar shamayim*) and the Way to the House of God.

Jesus explained to Nathanael, “you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51); that is, our Lord informed his new disciple that He is “Jacob’s Ladder;” that He is the Bridge over Troubled waters; the Link between heaven and earth.

Furthermore, His house is one of order, calm, and peace which means we must lay hold of His “shalom” and be guided by it (Romans 16:20; Hebrews 13:20; Philippians 4:6-7).

Those who fear God resist silly, psychological “new age” theories that there are many roads to God and that all religions are gateways to heaven. There is only one way to go up – everything else is a way down; that is, there is only one way to Heaven, but there are many roads to hell.

7. Jacob's Wrestling Match with God

Genesis 32:30



◆ Seeing God can cripple you. It did with Jacob – kind of like carrying a backpack full of stones no one can see.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

Championship Wrestling In the Scripture

Genesis 32

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Genesis 32:24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

You can have answered prayer, but sometimes you have to wrestle for it.

Notice in the Colossians 4:12 passage that Epaphras labored fervently for the Colossian Church in prayer. The phrase “laboring fervently” comes from the Greek participle *agonizomenos*. We get the English term “agonize” from this word – a word that refers to “mental anguish.”

This raises the question, “What do you want and how bad to you want it.”

There are times when God only releases His blessing upon us after a season of intense longing and wrestling with Him (Jon Bloom).

In Genesis 32, Jacob was on his way back home to Canaan with his two wives and many sons after a twenty year sojourn in Paddan-aram. Behind him was angry Uncle Laban; in front of him was angry brother Esau. Jacob was scared to death, because his disaffected brother was coming to meet him — with four hundred armed men (Genesis 32:6). This was not a happy welcome party; it was a cavalry of soldiers.

Jacob acted quickly to save his family from what appeared to be an revenging army ordered to murder him. He divided his small tribe into two camps to see which way Esau would go . . . and he stood in the middle ready to join the un-attacked party.

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day (Genesis 32:24). What do you see?

Championship Wrestling

Ring Side Seats

I was given a ticket to a championship bout at Jabbok Stadium. I entered through Genesis gate and searched for section 32, row 24.

When I arrived, I saw clouds of witnesses. I sat between two camps of angels in the middle of Mahanaim in order to watch a contest between two heavy weights. It was more exciting than two warriors contending for the Olympic gold or the championship belt of the WWF. It was more thrilling than a match between Hulk Hogan and the Rock; between the slamming power of the Undertaker and the raw, bone-crushing holds of the Terminator.

The first contestant was the Angel of the Covenant. He held many titles: King of kings, Lord of lords, Lion of Judah, Lamb of God, Hound of Heaven, and the Heavenly Hercules. He was the undefeated, undisputed Hero of Eternity. The second contestant was a mortal man, Earth's

champion. He also had many titles: Jacob, the Heel Grabber; the Wily Weasel from the Wilderness of Beersheba; and the Grand Slam from Padan Aram. He defeated Esau, the cunning hunter from southern Canaan and Fast Fingers Laban from Mesopotamia. He was a “plain man,” that is, an upright man, but he was more evasive than Big Foot and had all the razzle-dazzle of Jake the Snake.

I have been a contestant in this same stadium on several occasions. But, I have weak knees and a weak will and my diet consist of chocolate éclairs and Devil delights. Maybe, that is why I have never made it past the first round. I decided to study the wrestling moves of these two champions to improve my own wrestling skills.

This was a great battle--a street brawl—a high stakes alley fight with war whoops, head bangers, and tombstone pile drivers. The Hercules of Heaven possessed joint-wrenching strength and specialized in power slams. The Wilderness Weasel had a reputation for his many tricks. He was especially skilled in the heal-grabbing choke slam.

When the Sun went down, under the cover of darkness, I saw what looked like a Lion stirring across the gully stalking his prey. His piercing eyes locked on to the Wilderness Weasel. Quietly and patiently He moved toward his quarry. Jacob looked tired that night and seemed unaware of the presence of the angelic Stalker. When the Lion lunged, Jacob jumped with lightening like speed to evade capture. All night long, the Weasel sprinted from tree-to-tree, rock-to-rock, and bush-to-bush. Amazingly, he managed to elude the take down maneuvers of the Heavenly gladiator.

I learned my first lesson that night. The Angelic Lion was the initiator in the contest. He was the Great Shepherd in search of lost sheep . . . the abandoned Father longing to find His lost son . . . a sniffing Heavenly Hound in search of missing persons. He did not give up. He wanted something from the Heel Grabber, but I could not tell what it was.

My second observation was that the Lion worked under the cover of darkness. He seeks men who are alone and vulnerable. "His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart *is* perfect toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

I thought to myself that if men want to avoid capture, all they need to do is turn on the radio in the morning and the T.V. at night. Noise and busyness frightens lions.

I also learned something about men from the Beersheba Wrestler. Jacob was desperate to retain control of his own life. He was particularly adroit at performing the dance of the seven veils in order to hide from the piercing eyes of this Celestial Lion. He had a lot of flimflam, snake oil, and hocus-pocus. When it comes to Lordship, men can be more elusive than a Madagascar lizard.

I learned that this Stalker of Souls does not want a part of me, but all of me. He does not want an hour on Sunday, but every minute of every hour of every day of every week. Am I holding back something from God? He will contend until He gets what he wants from me.

The contest lasted all night. The Lion pursued. The weasel fled. Dust flew. Like a teeny-bopper doing the jitter bug across the dance floor, Jacob was a master of the zigzag shuffle. It seemed like a stalemate. When the Lion saw that the Wilderness Weasel would not yield, He employed his famous power bomb, extended his paw, and with a Lamb's touch dislocated Jacob's hip. The scream thundered through the auditorium. Jacob collapsed to the ground like a fainting goat. Pain rippled across his face. Sweat poured from his brow. Ditches of fear wrinkled across his brow.

I learned another lesson. God's champion has power bombs that can totally disable a man. Jacob limped. Moses' speech failed. Gideon lost 31,700 soldiers. David's son died. Paul landed on his back in a thorn bush. He knows every man's weak spot.

It hurt me to see Earth's Champion wreathing in pain and groveling in the dust. Slowly, Jacob lifted up his head and in one final attempt to win the match threw a double heel lock on the right ankle of the Angel. He was trapped. The Lion couldn't move. He growled out an order, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." The Heel Gripper refused to release his clutch and blurted out, "I will **not** let you go except you bless me."

It was here I learned the gravity of this contest. Religion is not entertainment, but mortal combat. The Sun was coming up. No man can see God and live. It was "do or die" for Earth's champion. I paused to wonder who would yield, the Lion or the easel? Would the Angel scream "Uncle!" or would the Weasel die? Would the Angel win the man or would the Weasel receive his blessing? Who would prevail?

I began to understand the strategy of the Lion. Jacob's wound increased his desire to obtain the Angel's blessing. The Lion's strength was made perfect in the Weasel's weakness.

"That is my problem," I thought. "I do not crave God enough." Instead of rivers of desire, I have only trickles of interest. Instead of storm clouds of passion, I only have gusts of concerns. Instead of galaxies of love, I spit out small asteroids of affection. He wants to bless me more than I want to be blessed. Must I be wounded before I desire Him more?

The battle raged. The Heel Grabber, a mortal man, had a death grip on the Lion's ankle. Who would prevail in this bone-crushing contest—God or man?

As the first flickers of light kissed the mountain tops of Mahanaim, in the final seconds of the final round, the Ringmaster rushed into the ring of combat to pronounce a winner. Darkness and dust clogged the morning air. I could barely see the contestants. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the Lion slip away into the darkness with a grin on His face. Exhausted, Jacob limped to the center of the ring. Silence settled on Jabbok Stadium. Then, the angels cheered and the stadium shook with shouts and screams.

I saw the inscription "Isra-el" engraved in gold and I heard the Ringmaster shout, "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Jacob's hand was lifted high and the Heel Grabber was presented with the champion's belt.

Going Pro Jacob Received a New Name

I could hardly believe my ears. The Weasel received a new title, "Israel." The word means "prince with God." It is one thing to prevail over men, but God? What did it all mean, I mused?

The name "Jacob" means "heel grabber" or "contender." Some translated the name as "supplanter" meaning a "humble supplicant." Jacob is described as a "plain" man (Genesis 25:27). The Hebrew word "plain" (tam) is translated "integrity" (Genesis 20:5), "perfect" (Job 1:1), or "upright" (Proverbs 10:9) In comparison to his popular, profane, fornicating brother, Jacob was an honest, hardworking, upright man. His reputation as a total deceiver or cheat is undeserved. Bible preachers ought to beware of maligning a man whom God honors.

Jacob's name was changed to Isra-el.

"El" in Hebrew is the word for God. It is used twice in this passage; that is, Jacob wrestled with God.

"for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." The word "power" (sa-rah) means "prevail or contend or have power." The word *sa-rah* is also translated "princess or ruler." It also means "strength or ability" (Hosea 12:3).

Jacob is also called "Jeshurun" in Isaiah 44:1-2. Jeshurun means "upright one" or "blessed one." Albright says the root comes Arabic and can be translated "healing." The Arabic word for healer is *ash-shafi*. Further, the Hebrew word for honesty is *ya-shar*, the root word for Jesuhrun (yasar-oon), depicting someone who is straight, right, straightforward, direct, and upright, and straightforwardness toward man.

The Hebrew word for Israel is "Yisra-el." The root of "yisra" is "sar," which means to grapple with. "El" refers to a godly being, namely the Angel of the Lord in this context. Thus, Yisrael means, "the one who grappled with God," the one who wrestled with (and defeated) the angel — a contrast to Esau/Edom, the person/nation who represented all that was ungodly and wrong in the world (Quora).

It seems that Jacob's name was changed to Israel to imply "Contender with God." Hosea 12 reinforces this interpretation. In his grace, God took a good man that everyone abused and exalted him to sit on a throne beside Him.

The word *Israel* is made up of a verb and a nominative noun, Isra-el. In Daniel, the name Dan-iel means "God judges;" and in "Ezekiel" the name Ezeke-el means "God is my strength." Thus, "Israel" implies that "God contends" or "God prevails" or "God rules."

In the jussive (a strong coaxing, mild command), Israel may mean "Let God heal." In the Genesis 32 account, the benefit of being named "Israel" is that in this wrestling match God wounded Jacob physically but healed Jacob spiritually. It was the Lion who took the initiative in this contest. It was the Lion's desire to bless all along. It was the Lion's grace that enabled Jacob to prevail. But, he could not bless until Jacob yielded to His rule and threw himself at the Lion's feet and grabbed Him with all his might. The Lion won, but so did Earth's champion. The King of beasts got his man. Jacob obtained his blessing. Stunned at his own victory, Jacob named the place "Penuel," "the face of God."

In Hebrew, the word "Israel" begins with a *yod*, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet; and, it ends with the largest letter in the Hebrew alphabet a *lamed*). The Torah begins with "In the beginning" and the Book of Exodus begins with "Now these are the names of the children of Israel." In Genesis, Israel was a single man; In Deuteronomy Israel was a nation.

Likewise, the first step toward spiritual healing begins when one sees himself poor in spirit; that is the *yod* becomes a *lamed* when one humbles himself and lays hold of Heaven's Lion (Matthew 5:3).

Ultimately, the name "Israel" belongs to Jacob's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the True Israel, the True Vine who was wounded at Calvary so you and I might receive the blessing of eternal life. Victorious over death, He rose to be seated at the right hand of God until all things are put under His feet (Acts 2:34-36; 1 Corinthians 15:25). Those who believe in Christ are united to Him and join the messianic community, are pronounced Overcomers (1 John 5:4), and the New "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).

Lesson of the Match

Now I understood the meaning of the match. Any person can make the Lion purr when he strokes him by faith. If only men will stop running and learn the Heel Grabber's ankle lock, they too can be blessed. They can contend with God and prevail. But, most do not desire Him enough. They are afraid to be alone at night with the Lion. Will they have to limp before they cling?

How about you? Have you been playing Escape and Evasion with God? Why not yield your soul to him and be saved? The name "Israel" can mean "right with God." If you want to enter the Lion's kingdom, you must humble yourself and trust Him now. Stop running and yield your heart to him. Those who believe are declared "right with God" (Romans 5:4).

Do you belong to the Lion? Do you have any locked closets which He is not allowed to enter? Maybe he wants total control over your life. He has invested in you and seeks a return on His investment. Why not give him the key to your time, talents, and money. He will not be happy until His rule extends to all that you have and all that you are? Lion kings rule. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Do you have a need, a prayer, a deep longing? Maybe you need to be more persistent. Get alone. Wrestle with God in prayer. Throw a double heel lock on His ankle and don't let him go until you receive the blessing you seek. Maybe your problem is that you do not desire God enough? Persist. Pray it through. You can make the Lion purr when you stroke Him by faith: "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, and **stopped the mouths of lions . . .**" (Hebrews 11:33).

If not already, you will one day be in Jabbok Stadium in a duel with the Heavenly Wrestler? Do you know how to execute a double heel lock? Jacob did!

The point of this passage is that great things come out of wrestling with God and that something can only happen when one agonizes in prayer that they or others might be made perfect and complete in the will of God.

Better yet, pray in Jesus' name. He entered the contest and won the battle. Rest in His work on your behalf.

8. Job - A Look Into Heaven's Council Chambers

Job 1:1



◆ A glimpse into heaven's court provides an important perspective about events on earth. At least it does for those who read the first chapter in the Book of Job.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. **Job**

Job 1:5 And it was so, when the days of *their* feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings *according to the number of them all*: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

Job 1:6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.

Job did not see God, but in the first chapter of the book heaven opens up permitting the reader to peer into this heavenly scene.

Soon thereafter, Job was slammed with reports about camels, sheep, and goats being stolen and his sons and daughters being killed. Where was God during these tragedies?

Before us is Satan giving his report to God, and God raising the topic of Job to Satan. From this chapter we learn the following:

- Satan has to report to God on a regular basis; that he is accountable for his actions and he can do nothing without God's permission.
- That it was God who raised matters concerning Job, not Satan.
- Job was a righteous man who was anything but careless about his duties to God.
- That God put a wall around Job so that Satan could not touch him. Likewise, He has a wall around all His children.
- That God, for the good of Job and his readers, removed that wall of protection permitting Satan to do his deadly work.
- That Satan was limited by the commands of God.
- That God knew Job . . . and that his trials were really a contest between God and Satan — not Job and God.
- That suffering is not always about punishment for sin, but that suffering has a higher purpose in the lives of the elect.
- That we should not judge others thinking that they are suffering because of sin in their life.
- That it is possible to love God and grieve simultaneously
- That like Job had miserable comforters, Christian can have well meaning, miserable comforters.
- That during trials we must guard our tongues and minds and to trust God though we don't understand what is happening to us.

The lesson for us is that nothing can touch us without God's permission; that we do not and cannot understand why bad things happen to good people; that God understands His elect and works for their good — that we need to trust him — like a child reaching out to pet a dog believing it won't bite.

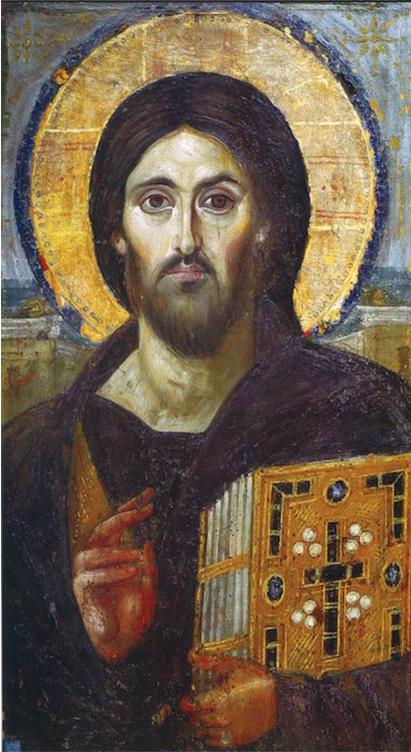
Isaiah 64:8: "We are the clay, and You our potter."

God is the Potter; we are the clay . . . but, there are lumps in the clay.

Trust Him to use our circumstances to remove the lumps and to conform us to the image of Christ.

9. Fire and Smoke at Sinai

Deuteronomy 5:26



◆ Just hearing God causes the lips to tremble and the knees to knock. At least it did for Israel at Mt. Sinai.

5:26 For who *is there* of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we *have*, and lived?

This text does not say Israel saw the Lord, but they did hear Him speak from the fire on the mountain; that is, they heard the Lord issuing the Ten Commandments from Sinai.

This text expresses the wonder of the people hearing God and living to tell about it.

Encountering God is a terrifying, deadly experience.

Hearing from the LORD directly and not being executed was dependent on

- (a) the mediation of Moses;
- (b) accepting the covenant (Exodus 19:5-8);
- (c) the deliberate hiding of God (19:9-10);
- (d) three days of sanctification, cleanings, washing of body and clothes;
- (e) establishing boundaries and limiting man and beast from approaching the LORD (19:8-11);

(f) warning signs and trumpets to keep sinful people at a distance from this holy God (19:12-13); (g) temporary abstinence (fasting) from marital intimacy.

And, when God did appear there was so much lightning, thunder, and fiery storms in the heavens, the people were terrified.

The fundamental truth is that no man in his fallen state cannot see God or hear His voice without immediate, chilling death.

Those who say, "I hear the Lord blah, blah, blah" or that "God spoke to me saying . . ." in an audible voice is a whopper-lie — like building a castle on quicksand. No man hears God and lives.

Enough of this nonsense that God speaks to us today in a still small voice! Hearing God speak to people audibly is not rare, it is non-existent! No man is good enough to hear God. All we need to know about His will is found in the Holy Scriptures.

Let us be content to have His Word in written form. The Bible is the complete and final authority for all matters of faith and life. It is sufficient to make us perfect as we apply its principles by faith. The written Word is all we need to equip us for a life of love.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 The Scripture is "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be complete, equipped for every good work).

Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalms 1:2-3 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither

Stop thinking that you are capable of hearing God's voice! Stop listening for a small, still voice. Pray much, but make decisions by faith in His Word and not by "sight" or "hearing."

There are no people on earth who have the ability or need to hear God; only a weak and feeble people serving a loving and humble God who has spoken to men in history as recorded in His Word – a lighthouse on the stormy shores of this life – a warm, comforting blanket on this cold journey to the Celestial City – a compass to help us find our way on dark nights.

10. A Fellowship Meal with the LORD

Exodus 24:10-11



◆ Seeing God in the mind's eye can be a reward . . . but, will it do you any good?

And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved (praiseworthy) work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.

If you were to see God, what would you see?

The text says, "they saw" some kind of exquisite flooring — a paved work of a sapphire stone as it were a body of heaven in its clearness (purity);" i.e.

They saw the place where the God of Israel stood (Benson), but they did not see a bodily form — not even His feet: Moses says: "Ye saw no similitude" (Deuteronomy 4:12).

"Nothing is described but that which was *under his feet*, for our *conceptions* of God are all *below him*. They saw not so much as God's feet, but at the bottom of the brightness they saw (such as they never saw before or after, and as the footstool or pedestal of it) a most rich and splendid pavement . . ."
(Benson)

“In the act of solemn worship, they perceived that He was present with them, as their Lord and their Deliverer” (Barnes).

The phrase “body of heaven” appears to refer to the essence of heaven—the pavement to the court and His throne.

“Nothing is described but what was under his feet. The sapphires are the pavement under his feet; let us put all the wealth of this world under our feet, and not in our hearts” (Matthew Henry).

The main focus in this text is on the sapphire-pavement under the feet of the LORD as the Host at this supper. The Septuagint version reads, “and they saw the place where the God of Israel stood, and what were under his feet, as the work of a sapphire brick.” Better yet, “polished sapphire-marble stones.”

Declining to describe the form, Moses draws attention to the entry way and then compares the throne room floor as clear and bright as sapphire; i.e. specifically they saw the pre-incarnate glory of the throne room of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sapphires are precious gemstones that are the birthstone for September and are associated with nobility, truth, and faithfulness. On the Mohs hardness scale, Sapphires measure nine (9) in hardness. Sapphires are mainly blue but they come in every color except red. Sapphire is aka Lapis. Lazuli is a precious stone prized for its intense blue color, which comes from the mineral lazurite and often contains flecks of golden pyrite and white calcite.

Google reports Sapphires are found in many locations around the world, with some of the most significant sources being Sri Lanka, Madagascar, Australia, and Myanmar. They can also be found in the United States, primarily in Montana, as well as in Thailand, China, Cambodia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Vietnam.

Blue sapphires are a very valuable gem. Blue is a symbol of His glory, majesty, and transcendence-- a color that dominates His heavenly throne room (Ezekiel 1:26; 10:1).

“The pure blue of the heaven above them lent its influence to help the inner sense to realize the vision which no mortal eye could behold” (Benson).

Isn't the blue sky we enjoy the afterglow of sapphire from His throne room in heaven above?

24:11 And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.

The general rule is that no one is allowed to see God and live, but these men saw the glowing, sapphire-blue reflection of His entranceway and lived to tell about it (Genesis 32:30; Exodus 32:20; Judges 6:22-23, &c.)

“nobles” pertain to the elders of Israel; aged, respected, well-to-do men who encouraged the people to consent and ratify this covenant with the LORD.

This company included seventy (70) blood-sprinkled elders, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and Joshua.

Seventy-five (75) bearded, grey-haired men in all sat at the Lord's table as His guest for this stately banquet – a celebration of covenant ratification.

“He laid not his hand” means that the Holy One did not seize them, hurt them, or injure them; that is, the LORD moderated His holiness and judgment to celebrate a fellowship meal with these flawed nobles struggling to know and accept the YHWH as their Adoni and Master.

Later in history, the LORD killed Uzzah for an unauthorized touching of the ark during its transport to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). So this meal with 70 elders is an extraordinary exhibition of grace demonstrating the desire of YHWH to have fellowship with men.

Little did they know that their work in that day would lay the foundation for the gospel and the fellowship Christians enjoy today.

“As they feasted on the sacrificial meal, the vision of God was made manifest to them. It is impossible to doubt that we have here a precious forecast of the Christian’s highest privilege—the realisation of the presence of God in the sacred feast of the Holy Communion” (Ellicott).

“They saw God, and did eat and drink” is a unique, profound statement that should impress us all -- a fellowship meal (a peace offering) celebrating the benefits of the covenant, and their joy and consent to His rule over them; that is, this is a formal celebration of the covenant agreement. He would be their God, and they would be His people. Isn’t this what the “Last Supper” is all about?

“did eat and drink” — where did all the food and wine come from in this arid, bleached desert? Who prepared it? Who served it? Who arranged the banquet table? What did the scene look like?

Positively, Israel’s elders agreed to have the LORD as their God; to be His people; and to have His law as their law. Negatively, **not** one of these men except Joshua made it to the holy land. They all died in the wilderness because of unbelief including Aaron and Moses – oh, the wonder of it all.

Addendum:

Google reports:

A Heavenly Hue: In Greek Orthodox tradition, the blue color is associated with the heavens, divinity, and the Virgin Mary, who is often depicted wearing blue robes. The blue domes on churches symbolize the divine truth and the sky above, linking the earthly buildings to the spiritual realm.

Warding off the "Evil Eye" (Matiasma): In Greek folk tradition, the color blue, specifically a vibrant cobalt or turquoise shade known as "kyanos,"

is believed to have the power to ward off the "evil eye," a curse caused by jealousy or envy. This belief is still prevalent today, which is why blue eye amulets ("mati") are commonly found throughout Greece.

11. The Angel Confronts Baalim

Numbers 22-34



◆ Seeing the Lord may not be a sign of your goodness, but a sign of God's judgment against you for your sins. At least it was with Baalim.

Baalim is the plural for Baal.

Numbers 22:22-23 And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary

against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.

Balam, the conniving mercenary prophet, met the angel of the Lord on the way to make a reward-contract with the King of Moab to curse Israel.

The Angel of the LORD (Christ) appeared on the road to oppose the avarice prophet, but his ass saw the angel first and shuffled out of the way:

“And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again.”

Only when Baalam felt the crushing pain of his leg trapped against a rock were his eyes opened. Note a few lessons.

- Animals often perceive the presence of God before preachers do.
- Animals are often smarter than men.
- Pain and suffering are tools God uses to open the eyes of the carnal.
- It is easier for an ass to speak to men than it is for men to perceive the presence of God.
- God opens the eyes of rebels so they can see him and the danger ahead.
- The first words of this erring prophet after encountering the angel of the Lord was, "I have sinned" (22:34). Every person coming in contact with God is stunned by his unworthiness.

Want to see God? Be prepared to spend time in confession. Seeing Him is like seeing your reflection in cracked glass; like standing naked on a ladder in a cop's spot light; like vomiting on a doctor after he puts a depressor on your tongue and orders you to say, "aah!"

12. Crisis in Serving the LORD

2 Samuel 6:6

◆ Two common problems surface in this story about serving God.

First Problem – Failure to Follow Instructions

6:6-7 And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

David and the whole nation gathered together at Gibeah to escort the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem – a great vision and great ambition to unite the nation around the worship of the LORD. The “ends” was perfect.

Uzzah, the priest, was commissioned to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. The priests put it on an ox cart. When the cart wobbled on the rocky road, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark, and God slew the man. Thus, the “means” was deeply flawed. The Lord instructed the priest to carry the Ark of the Covenant on to poles . . . and, this rule was broken.

Uzzah did not see God nor touch God, but He did errantly touch the Ark Icon . . . and died. He did not live to tell about it.

We learn the aim was correct . . . but, that the method was incorrect. God instructed the priest to carry the Ark on poles (Exodus 25:14-15). This neglect cost a man his life. The whole celebratory parade stopped. All went home depressed.

The great lesson is *the means is as important as the ends*; that is, we must learn to carry out God’s work in God’s way; i.e., to follow his instructions on how to serve Him from the Word of God.

Second Problem: Failure to Perceive His Majesty

Psalm 24:7 -10 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

After David revived the goal of bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, he experienced a second crisis — the gates of Jerusalem were too small; that is, the nation wasn't properly prepared to receive the icon of the greatness and wonder of their sovereign God.

What a problem! The city gates are too ordinary and too small to receive the King of Glory. The King of Israel has to bow his head and humble Himself to pass under the pillars. So, David ideally orders the gates to "**lift up your heads**" because your arches are too low to receive this exalted King -- a literary device known as an "apostrophe" where by the writer addresses an inanimate object as if it were a person (Psalm 24:7-10).

Literary device or not, the problem remains. Our gates, minds, and hearts are too small to receive such a great King. We need an enlarged capacity to know God and to serve Him.

To summarize, God's people are (1) not always careful to follow the means; that is, in serving God His way – by the instructions of the Scripture; and, (2) not always aware of His majesty; that is, His people serve Him too sloppily, casually, and carelessly.

Side note: When the Puritans worked with the King James appointed translators, they insisted this Bible have a "majesty" of style and theological authority, partly to assert royal power and to replace the common language and politically unpopular Geneva Bible.

While modern translations may be more grammatically accurate, none preserve the majesty of the King James Bible.

13. Isaiah: Seeing the Holy, Holy, Holy God

Isaiah 6:1-6



◆ Getting a glimpse of the glory of the Lord can cause a man to see the ugliness of his own sin. It did with Elijah.

In His temple all cry "Glory!!!" Psalm 29:9.

The phrase "Holy! Holy! Holy" is called the "Trisagion" (tri-sci-on) of the Church generally -- the invocation to worship, and the requiem of the Eastern Church specifically.

Isaiah 6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

How should Christians respond to political defeats and disappointments?

Proverbs 29:2 "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn."

There was a day in Isaiah's life when his political hopes were crushed like berries under the paws of death when his preferred candidate for office suffered a fatal defeat.

Uzziah was a beloved king — a popular prince among the people. From 2 Chronicles 26 we learn the following about the man (809-758 B.C.).

- His 52 year reign brought prosperity and stability to the nation (26:1-3).
- He was a moral, ethical man (26:4).

- God caused the man to prosper and to be a blessing to the nation (26:5).
- He had military success against the Philistines, Arabians, and Moabites (26-6-7).
- The Ammonites paid taxes to his administration giving a boost to the economy (26:8).
- He repaired and rebuilt the towers in Jerusalem increasing its defenses (26:9).
- He increased the water resources of the nation causing a boom in agriculture, farming, and ranching (26:10).
- He repaired the military infrastructure, strengthened the nations defenses, and funded a powerful military (26:11-13).
- He equipped his army with weapons of war by manufacturing shields, bows, swords, slings, spears, helmets, battering rams, catapults, ladders, and torsion equipment (26:14).
- He fortified Jerusalem and manned a police force to protect the nation's capital, and he did all this with the help and power of God (26:15).

Confidence in the administration of Uzziah was high, and the people enjoyed the benefits of an ethical protective king who sought the blessings of the Lord and the best for the people for 52 years.

But, there was a day when the blue skies disappeared and charcoal grey clouds settled in like a winter storm.

The reign of Uzziah was "a time of vigorous and prosperous peace, in which the nation was completely overwhelmed with manifestations of divine love" (K & D).

This success went to Uzziah's head. In his pride, he breached the temple protocol to offer incense to the LORD God — a transgression that violated

the separation of powers ordained by God in Leviticus 9-10 which banned the executive branch from performing acts of the priesthood.

Uzziah lived the rest of days as an ulcerated leper banned by God and separated from men (26:16-23).

What a tragic end to what would have been a very successful career!

Uzziah not only lost his power as a king, he lost his birthright among Hebrews.

Who can describe the surf and the foam, the feelings and emotions, which crashed on the shores of the nation's political life when Uzziah passed into eternity? Confidence turned to shame; hope to fear; joy to grief; abundance to want; calmness to anxiety.

Isaiah 6:1-3 I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

"I saw the Lord" means that Isaiah got a glimpse into the temple proper – into heaven on earth. Voices chanted, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

It was during this depressing political climate, Isaiah says, "I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."

"High and lifted up" is imagery of an Eastern monarch sitting on his throne. "His train filled the temple" portrays a king adorned in royal regalia conducting court while governing the nation.

Under this dark cloud of national mourning grief sucked light out of the skies over Jerusalem. But, the Lord arranged for Isaiah to gaze into the

brightness of the temple with the eye of faith to see in his mind's eye a super sensuous imagery of Himself.

Isaiah saw YHWH sitting upon a majestic throne, clothed in the apparel of a king, with a robe and a train of glorious light which filled the Holy of Holies, the Royal Palace of Yah.

And, "in His palace doth everyone speak of His glory" - (Psalm 129:9).

The lesson is clear: Though Uzziah had lost his throne and the nation experienced a devastating spiritual defeat, God had NOT lost His throne. He was still the "king of the nations" (Jeremiah 10:7) with angels at his beck and call.

Isaiah Gains Perspective about Himself

4-5 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

Dorr post shaking appears to be a sign of God's anger against Uzziah's people.

"The house was filled with smoke" has its prototype in "the smoke as of a furnace" on Sinai — also a sign of God's anger (Exodus 19:18; Revelation 15:8).

Isaiah pronounced six woes upon the nation for their sins – the reason for the shaking and the outpouring of smoke (Isaiah 5:8-9, 11-12, 18-19, 20, 21, 22-23). But, he reserved the seventh woe for himself (6:5): "Woe is me."

- Isaiah 5:8 - Avarice
- Isaiah 5:11 - Intemperance, dissipation, drunkenness
- Isaiah 5:18 - Uninhibited, unrestrained, ab libitum

- Isaiah 5:20 - Confusion, demoralization, confounding
- Isaiah 5:21 - Pride, plumage, arrogance, conceit
- Isaiah 5:22 - Devotion to intoxication and euphoria
- Isaiah 6:5 - Common, profane, unclean, defiled, inappropriate speech

The effect of this vision had a profound impact on the prophet. Not only did the pillars of the temple shake with fear and awe, Isaiah felt the ugliness and shame of Uzziah's leprosy personally. Furthermore, he trembled like a shaking leaf over the stinging condemnation of moral leprosy in his own life,

"Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:6).

The lessons here are many, but we shall look at six of them:

First, understand (stand under) the holiness of the LORD.

Above God's throne stood the seraphims: each one had six wings;

with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

"And one cried to another" refers to angels reciting the holiness of the LORD.' That is, the Seraphim cried to each other in alternate choruses of praise. One cried, "Kadosh" the second repeated it, "Kadosh;" then the third, "Kadosh." Most likely they united in the grand chorus, "Full is all the earth of his glory."

Oh, the shocking impact of hearing the solemn cry of the Seraphim:

"Kadosh! Kadosh! Kadosh!"

If the solid rock door pillars of the temple shook at the Trisagion (tri-sci-yon), so should the knees of the pious.

Using the term "holy" (Kadosh) three times is the Hebrew way of expressing a superlative — or highest degree of perfection. It is the only moral quality of God that is repeated three times in one sentence.

In English, we emphasize the superlative by an exclamation point (!), but the Hebrews used repetition; that is, the Spirit emphasizes the holiness of God by publishing "Kadosh! Kadosh! Kadosh!" The repetition is emphatic, not didactic -- a message that God is separate, special, unique, and more valuable than what the Kor-I-Nor diamond is to men and more special than the Holy Grail to the pious.

Though human analogies fail, here are a few that remind us of God's awesome holiness. "Kadosh! Kadosh! Kadosh!" is like reading a label on a brand of chili, "Hot! Hot! Hot!" Or, "Dangerous, No One Allowed!" Or, "Private: Intruders will be shot!" Or, "Poison: Do Not Touch!" Or, "Not safe for human consumption!" Or, "Secret: Keep Out! Trespasser will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law!" Or, "Gas Masks Required." Or, "Extremely Flammable!" Or, "Radiation Hazard!"

But, God is not only awesome, He is also admirable: "Worship the LORD in the beauty of His holiness!" The whole angelic choir sings, "Worthy is the Lamb" "He is altogether lovely." He is all sweetness and no bitterness; all sunshine and no midnight (Revelation 5:14-18: SS 5:16).

When Christians celebrate a "holy day," they mean it is set apart from other days. It is a day that requires extreme caution and holy perception.

Second, approach God with reverence and awe.

Peter called Christians "to be holy as He is holy" (1 Peter 1:15). Holiness is one of the five calls of God in 1 Peter.

In Isaiah, the angels covered their faces and lower extremities. These are expressions of reverence drawn from our conceptions of civility and modesty. When coming before kings, all are clothed in their finest apparel as a measure of respect.

When artist paint Mary, the Holy Virgin, they do so with her head covered, eyes closed, lips sealed, chin down and with peace on her face – a model of humility and modesty to all men.

That with two wings the angels did fly speaks of readiness to serve the will of Jehovah – a model of how Christian men should be ready to obey Christ the King.

The phrase "the whole earth" reminds us that the mountains, seas, streams, trees, animals, and people, reflect His majesty and glory; that all men have the duty and privilege to reflect on the wonders of our God and to live in the light of His holiness.

That the pillars of the house trembled at His voice is likened to an earthquake that reflects the stunning authority and primacy of the LORD - - a visual presentation of how men should honor and fear His name. When the Bible is read, hearts should tremble, and men should rise and listen.

There is nothing casual and relaxed in this scene. Everything communicates stateliness, honor, formality, royalty, excellence, precision, awe, beauty, and reverence -- the very opposite of "coffee-cup" Christianity and the casual "Donut Church."

Genesis 28:16-22 "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'

Psalms 96:9 O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.

The preferred response is awe and wonder. There are 53 references to "awe," 92 to "amazing," 22 to "astonish," 38 to "reverence," and 109 to "wonder" in the Bible – as the disciples were described as being in "fear and amazement" after Jesus rebuked the wind (Luke 8:25); and as women

“trembling and bewildered” when they looked into the empty tomb (Mark 16:8). Likewise, worship services should be conducted orderly, fearfully, and honorably.

The New Testament teaches that when Christians come together to worship, men should remove their hats to honor Christ. Women veil their heads to memorialize God's law order and His holiness. Dignity is the rule of the hour — "For God is not the author of confusion (disorder), but of peace (harmony), as in all churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 11:1-16; 14:33).

Likewise, the strength and vitality of a nation rests in its devotion to the holy God. A nation courts danger (leprosy) the further it transitions away from a Theocentric society toward an anthropocentric tar pit.

Third, seek to live under the authority of Christ as a kingdom saint.

The true wealth of a nation is its spiritual connectedness to the LORD.

No matter what party gains power in Congress, Christians would do well to seek Christ and His authority, His rule, and His reign over them now — "thy kingdom come;" may men recognize Your authority now!

When we suffer disappointments in the election process, let us remember, "the Lord reigns" and "the wrath of man shall praise Him, and the remainder of wrath shall He restrain" (Psalm 97:1ff; Psalm 76:10).

The great need in America is not political revolution, but spiritual reformation. We are not statist that place our hope in leprous governments. Only a people who see with the eye of faith the Lord in His holy temple and are cleansed by the coals of the brazen altar (the cross) can they have true power. Only a people that know Christ and seek Him can cause a nation to prosper (Isaiah 55:6-7).

Four, know that prosperity is not part of the formula for godliness.

As riches did not create godliness in Uzziah's nation, America's prosperity has not made her holy. Prosperity is the product of holiness, not the root; a crop, not the seed; a fringe benefit of responsible living, not the brick and mortar of a great society.

It is not "the economy, stupid" as president Bill Clinton stated, but the heart of men that needs transformation, regeneration, and reconciliation. (Mark 7:21-23).

As Uzziah was a leper, American politicians are lepers in the sight of a holy God.

Three times the text says God is holy. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" -- a revelation of the unique nature of the LORD. While God is loving and merciful, there is no text that says, "Love, love, love is the LORD of hosts."

When we see that God is holy (personable, pure, beautiful, unstained, wonderfully unique and ethical), we will all fall on our knees and confess, "'Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (6:6-7).

Five, apply the remedy for spiritual leprosy.

As soon as Isaiah heard the angels proclaim, "Kadosh! Kadosh! Kadosh!" he saw his own uncleanness and unfitness to represent the LORD to the nation.

To qualify the man, the Lord sent an angel to the brazen altar to fetch a rock-like coal that burned the sacrifice to touch and cleanse Isaiah's lips. This grand metaphor informs us that God has provided a means of cleansing the soul from leprous-like sins — a coal from the brazen altar -- an icon of the cross, the shed blood, and the sacrifice of Christ for our sins at Calvary.

There is a fountain filled with blood,

Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains:
Lose all their guilty stains,
Lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

Let's not put our confidence in presidents and legislators, but in the cross and the cleansing power of the blood.

"Cruci dum spiro fido." (As long as I breathe, I will remember the cross.)

Six, lay hold of the peace of God boldly and confront the sins of the people.

The sins of our age are many. We are fast descending into the liberal ideal of Sodom and Gomorrah. There are more on the "broad way" than the "narrow way." Tares outnumber the wheat. Goats make more noise than the sheep. Feral felines outnumber domesticated cats. Godless politicians outnumber God's statesmen (Matthew 7:13; 13: 13:24-30).

But, truth is more powerful than the lies of our age. Leaders need correction. Lawless politicians must be rebuked. And, those "in Christ" are the ones to do it. If Christians don't rise up and rebuke corrupt politicians, who will?

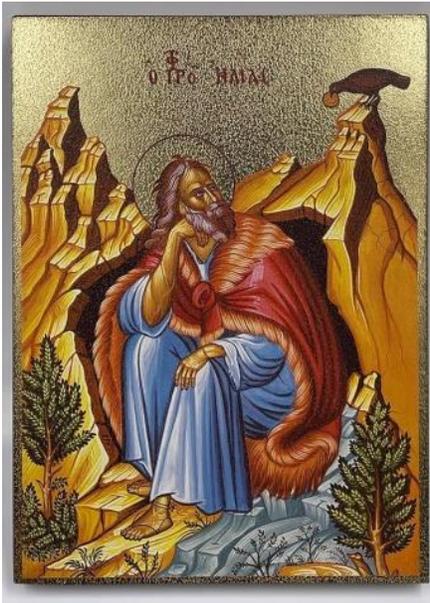
Who is qualified? Whom shall God send to address those who call evil good and good evil? (Isaiah 5:20; 6:8-13) The answer is those in Christ who have been cleansed by coals from the altar can afford to take risks. They can go to the battlefield to address the craziness of our time; to

engage the lawlessness and insanity of men hostile to the law of the LORD God (6:6-7, 8ff) .

"Whom shall I send?" asked the Lord. Hopefully, your answer will be the same as Isaiah, "Here I am. Send me . . . a clean, holy man.

14. Elijah Hearing A Still Small Voice

1 Kings 19:12



◆ Hearing or seeing God at work can help a man find direction for his life. It did for Elijah.

We live in a world of clanging symbols and honking horns. Getting perspective in today's busy world is like trying to read a mural while standing an inch away from the wall. Fake news is in our face.

Elijah, the depressed prophet, was fighting the rage of Ahab and Jezebel, and the general apostasy of the people. Because he needed direction from the Lord, he walked to Mt. Sinai.

And after the earthquake a fire; *but the LORD was not in the fire:* and after the fire a still small voice.

“not in the fire” may refer to lightening or a thunderstorm. Three events of nature pass before him in the mountain cave, in the dark night, the terrors of a storm, and earthquake, and fire. But none of these things persuaded Elijah that God was present ready to speak to him.

Elijah did not see God, but He did hear him speak in “a still, small voice.”

The lesson here is **not** that God speaks to Christians in a still small voice, but that He spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice; **not** that He speaks to men through their feelings, but that He spoke to Elijah, the Founder of the

prophets, audibly. No living man has ever had God speak to him directly. Otherwise, he would be dead.

God did not speak to Elijah in an inferno of fire or in a slapping whirlwind, but in a still small voice. The lesson for Christians *it is in an atmosphere of silence and solitude that the Scripture comes alive.*

The word "still" means "whisper;" and the word "small" means without volume or force – a contrast to the dynamite zeal of Elijah who crushed Baalism with swinging swords amid the screams of apostates.

God can roar like a lion and move men to action, but it is through grace and mercy that He wins hearts. Water is soft, but when it freezes, it can split rocks; that is, His soft, tender love breaks harden hearts.

9-10 What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

The lesson here is that Elijah expected God to inject Himself into political matters with might and muscle; with force and power to crush idolatry. Instead, Elijah learned that it is the peace of God that crushes evil.

Romans 16:20 "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you"

Colossians 3:15: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful"

This peace is an active, guiding benefit of the Spirit that shapes our entire way of living. This involves meditating on Scripture, forgiving others, and constantly letting the peace of God umpire our kinetic emotions.

Elijah learned that God is going to get His will done in His timing and His way and not through the steel sword of justice. The weapons of His

warfare are spiritual and not carnal. The Lord was not in the thunder and lightning but in a the whisper — a gentle voice speaking to the conscience; that is, it is through sweet reasonableness that God wins the hearts of men.

Elijah had to learn the Lord is "merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth"(Exodus 34:6);34:6) — a powerful contrast to Elijah's zealous confrontation of the 400 prophets of Baal who were summarily executed near the Brook Kishon.

15-16 And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.

The Lord calmly assures Elijah the idolatrous nation will not go unpunished. He commissions Elijah to anoint two persons who were destined by Providence to avenge the justice of God: Hazael, king of Syria; Jehu a general of Ahab. Moreover, the Lord ordered Elijah to commission Elisha to lead the seminary of prophets.

It is the duty of kings and generals to execute justice, but it is the duty of prophets to conduct their ministry of grace in peace, calmly, patiently, and accurately — for *it is the peace of God that transforms men.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23 And the very God of **peace** sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, do not be in a hurry. Slow down, meditate on Scripture, and let the peace of God rule in you, over you, and through you. Let the whisper of peace be your compass in this loud, chaotic world.

15. Elisha and His Servant Seeing the Lord's Armies

2 Kings 6

Behind the Scenes of History



◆ Peering into the heavens to see Who controls history helps devout Christians to gain perspective.

This very thing happened to Elisha's servant who was terrified by the Syrian armies that were closing in on him and the prophet. Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!" (2 Kings 6:17 NLT). And in a moment, this Gahazi obtained the power to see behind the supernatural veil and obtain a rare glimpse into the scene behind history. Thus, this story unfolds enabling us to see supernatural events in this story of Elisha and his servant.

Seven Miracles of Elisha

Heaven opens for us so we can obtain a rare glimpse into the invisible world behind the Syrian War against Israel and the Seven Miracles of Elisha – a prophet who had nuke-faith.

Because we are too often impacted by negative circumstances and news, we need to be like a candle waiting for a spark.

Perhaps, the best approach to this marvelous account is to just read it, and let its simple facts stir our hearts toward faith in the sovereignty of God.

Background

Joram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel (the murderers), is the pagan, idolatrous king that rules Israel, the Northern kingdom with its capital in Samaria.

Ben-Hadad, serves Rephidm, the Sun god, with border disputes and political interest in parts of Israel. Because his raiding strategies always seem to be foiled by Joram (King of Israel), Ben-Hadad II (Syrian King) feels there must be a traitor in his military cabinet.

Confronting his military staff, he learns that his movements are reported to King Joram by Elisha the Prophet. Enraged, Ben-Hadad orders a small Syrian force to go to Dothan to arrest Elisha and to bring him back to Syria to be interrogated or worse. And, this is where our story begins:

Miracle One: God reveals to Elisha the military maneuvers of the king of Syria so he could warn the king of Israel.

8 Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp.

9 And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.

10 And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.

Due to esoteric knowledge given to Elisha by a revelation from God Himself, King Joram was able to counter the aggression of the Syrian army. So effective were the counter measures, frustration filled Benhadad's war-room like angry clouds.

11 Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?

12 And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

13 And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.

Benhadad knew, like all politicians, the way to victory is to capture and hamstring God's prophets with threats, imprisonment, and even death.

The Order to Capture Elisha

14 Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

The servant of Elisha trembled with fear seeing the massive Syrian army with its cavalry and chariots surrounding his village. Weakness and fear seized his soul like a hawk catching his prey mid-flight.

15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

The faith of Elisha and the truth all Christians must find

16 And he answered, *Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*

Mark that Elisha did not permit his servant to be governed by fear.

"Fear defeats more people than any other one thing in the world." — Ralph Waldo Emerson

"There is nothing to fear but fear itself."

"Fear is a shadow that saps strength from the soul" (BRS).

"The one who escapes his prison of fears is truly free."

Miracle Two: God answers Elisha's prayer immediately.

17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man . . .

Miracle Three: God opened the eyes of Elisha's servant to see the armies of God behind the scenes of history.

. . . and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

The miracle here is not that angels were present with the prophet, but his young servant was granted spiritual sight to see the angels of God at work behind the scenes of history.

Miracle Four: God answers Elisha's prayer to blind the Syrian army.

18 And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

19 And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.

In the medical field this is known as an amaurotic state. This blindness made the Syrian army helpless wherein Elisha was easily able to lead them to the center of the capital city of Israel while onlookers were mute by the spectacle.

Miracle Five: God answers Elisha's prayer and opens the eyes of the blind Syrian soldiers who are now smack-dab in the middle of the capital of Samaria, the king's palace and Israel's military headquarters.

20 And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

Elisha seems to be in total control of army's fate. Oh, that Christian might realize the destiny of many a man . . . nation . . . and war is determined by their prayers. Prayer is the key that unlocks prison doors.

21 And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?

Miracle Six: God moves in the heart of the king to offer grace and mercy towards Israel's enemies by providing home-cooking for the Syrian army.

22 And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

This is God's capture-and-release program at work. He loves to bestow grace on all men, rich and poor, religious and pagan.

Miracle Seven: The border disputes stopped and there was peace for a time between Syria and Samaria.

23 And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

Lessons for Us

First, this story ought to stir in our hearts a desire to explore prayer as a means of accessing the power of God.

"Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power." R.A. Torrey

Elisha did **not** pray, "Lord, be with us!" He was already with them.

We learn that angels were the manifestation of God's presence with the man of God. Angels assume a character relevant to the age, in this case, chariots of fire. In our time it could be a manifestation of a modern army.

Second, we should contemplate the meaning and power of this Old Testament truth, "*Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*"

The New Testament equivalent of this truth is found in 1 John 4:4 -

"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he (spirit of Christ) who is in you (plural) is greater than he (the spirit of the antichrist) who is in the world;" and in Psalm 91:1, 11 "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. . . . For he will

command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."

Third: Somehow, we need to grasp with the eye of faith that the things we see and feel are not what they appear to be, but that there are real, unseen, hidden angelic-forces for good at work behind the scenes of history.

Consider Joseph's rise to power – from a pit to a palace; David's advancement from holding a staff, to holding a scepter; and Esther's transition -- from being unseen to being a queen.

"If you believe in a God who controls the big things, you have to believe in a God who controls the little things. It is we, of course, to whom things look 'little' or 'big'." –Elisabeth Elliot

"Every disability conceals a vocation, if only we can find it, which will 'turn the necessity to glorious gain.'" — C.S. Lewis

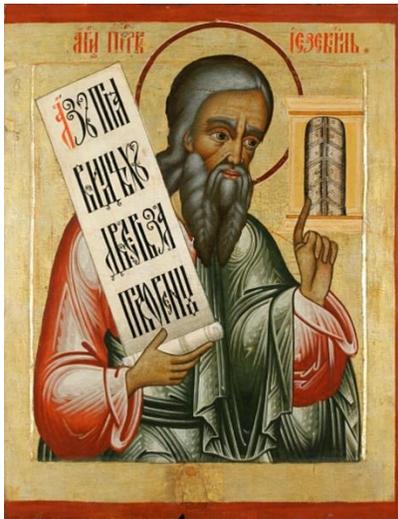
"My trust is in the mercy and wisdom of a kind Providence, who ordereth all things for our good." — Robert E. Lee

Fourth: We would do well to remember mercy and show love to our personal enemies.

Possibly, the greatest miracle of all was when the king of Israel fed his enemies -- a peace flag hoisted on the flag pole of power between two proud kings.

16. Ezekiel's Chariot Vision of Sovereignty in Action

Ezekiel 1



◆ Ezekiel was a prophet and priest from a priestly family who was exiled to Babylon under the deportation in 597 BC – a man whom God was pleased to reveal His will clearly in giant apocalyptic metaphors.

Apocalyptic imagery is not literal. Rather, it is a literary tool that employs the principle of hyperbole to impact the mind with a literal message. Visions like the Valley of Dry Bones (37), Gog and Magog (38-39), and the new temple (40ff) were designed to create hope, faith, and confidence that though temporarily defeated, the remnant would not only survive, but thrive – that God's promises had not failed and that the nation would escape the exile and fulfill their purpose to rebuild Jerusalem and usher in the Messianic era.

A young priest from the family of Aaron, his character is defined by his austere, unwavering commitment to the Lord, deep legal convictions, and an openness to God's unconventional signs – symbols which delivered a message of hope that God would keep His promises to Israel while crushing false hopes of the people immediately returning to Jerusalem.

1:4 And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness *was* about it,

and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.



1:5 Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this *was* their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.

The vision in Ezekiel 1 signifies God's enduring sovereignty and glory, particularly for the exiled people of Israel. It shows that even though they are in Babylon where the exiles did not want to be, God remains on his throne, present with them, and in control of the chaos of nations.

The vision's powerful imagery of a divine throne-chariot, living creatures, and wheels with eyes emphasizes God's transcendence, holiness, and his constant, everywhere-present movement through history.

“And I looked, and, behold” — A statement of Ezekiel being in a prophetic state of ecstasy having the capacity to see and understand the vision.

The vision in Ezekiel 1 is a giant metaphor using icons to convey God's enduring sovereignty and glory — a message needed for the depressed exiles in Babylon who had lost all hope in God's promises.

Matthew Henry has it correct:

These visions seem to have been sent to possess the prophet's mind with great and high thoughts of God.

The vision shows the exiles in Babylon that even though they had lost their land, capital city, and their temple, God had **not** lost His throne: that He remains in power, present with them, and in control of all the jumbled political affairs of the nations.

The vision's powerful imagery of a divine throne-chariot, living creatures, and spinning wheels with eyes signify God's transcendence, holiness, and his omnipresence; that He is still in charge; and, that His purposes will be achieved through this defeated, subjugated people; that though Babylon appeared to hold Israel's future in its hand, Babylon's future was tenuous at best; and, Israel's future was in His sovereign hand . . . that He would bring them back from Babylon to rebuild the temple and their capital city at the end of seventy years of punishment (606-536 BC).

And, He did in 539-536 B.C.

10 As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.

The symbols represent the following about Providence:

- Chariot wheels = omnipresent power and energies at work for the people.
- Eyes = Omniscience, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.
- Beast = inexplicable nature of God.
- Lion = sovereignty, kingliness, nobility, authority, power, fierceness, quickness, decisiveness, and deadliness.
- Ox hoof = strength, work, service, diligence, power, dedication, and ability.
- Man = intelligence and perception.
- Eagles wings = movement, ability, swiftness, transcendence, and all-seeing omniscience.
- Movement in all directions by the Spirit = connections to the divine will.
- Coals of fire . . . brass = intense, fair, just, fierce judgment.

Some see this image as a representation of Christ.

- ✓ Lion: Matthew (Christ as King)
- ✓ Ox: Mark (Christ as servant)
- ✓ Man: Luke (Christ as the Son of man)
- ✓ Eagle: John (Christ as the Son of God)

The great lesson here is that God is sovereign and orchestrating history to fulfill his will (the arrival of the kingdom of God); that is, trust, be patient, be at peace, rest, and obey; that is, sit silently and wrap yourself under the warm quilt of the Lord supreme authority.

For more of Ezekiel's ecstasies see (Ezekiel 8:3; Ezekiel 11:1).

17. Daniel Sees the Ancient of Days

Daniel 7:9-11



◆ In this portion of Scripture, Daniel was permitted to see the “Ancient of Days” and to witness the trial of the ages; that is the final judgment of the beast and His minion, the little horn.

9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne *was* like the fiery flame, and his wheels *as* burning fire.

“I beheld” is used three times in this passage as a testimony verifying the facts of this case and the fate of the beast; that is, Daniel’s testimony is certain, true, and not misleading.

“Ancient of days” — A reference to age expresses the maturity, honesty, and majesty of the Judge.

Garment “white as snow” speaks of purity, noble character, and unadulterated principles of the Judge.

“Hair of wool” speaks of the wisdom and discernment of the Judge.

“Fiery flame” addresses zeal for law, burning justice, and anger against the enemies of God.

“Wheels” represent the investigative knowledge and omniscience of this judge. Because He knows all things, He is qualified to judge matters related to men.

10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

“a fiery stream” represents the glory and majesty and finality of the judgment in this Supreme Court of Heaven.

“thousands ministered to Him” identifies the angelic hosts who serve Him and His cause for justice. The numbers in this Courtroom highlight the importance and interest of heavenly beings in law, cases before the court, and procedures enacted.

“judgment set” refers to the readiness and preparedness of the court to judge ultimate matters before the bench.

“Books were opened” pertains to the records, accounts, facts, and ledgers recording the deeds of the indicted.

11 I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld *even* till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.

“I beheld” reveals that Daniel is a spectator in the gallery of this intense case — a witness and court reporter whose opinion can be trusted.

“voice of great words” speaks to the blasphemy, dishonesty, deception, and duplicity of the beast against the truth; that is, he controlled humanity through fraud, falsehoods, fake news, fictions, and flim flam,

“Because of . . .” draws attention to the blasphemy uttered by the little horn; that is, his lies, slander, and propaganda was the cause before the Court, and as such, it attracted Daniel’s attention.

“I beheld” is used a second time as a reference to his eye witness testimony and the truth of declarations.

“beast was slain” informs us that this blasphemy is a capital offence and Daniel had to wait till the beast received capital punishment for his

crimes against humanity; the beast and little horn appear to represent the final stage of the Roman Empire.

“body destroyed” speaks of final, terminal, justice – execution on the scaffold.

“given to the burning flame” announces the nature of his destruction that this judgment is lethal, total, final, and permanent – a burning at the stake. This end is “ex nihilo in nihilum” (Latin) meaning “from nothing back to nothing.”

Daniel is permitted to see the final judgment of the most evil entity in the history of mankind. The phrase “I beheld” confirms the facts presented in these court proceedings.

The Ancient of Days finds the beast guilty on all charges and it cannot escape the Court’s justice; that is, God’s sentence is a massive gavel-stroke on the seven headed dragon of government that drives the monster into the inferno of eternal fire.

The Son of Man Given the Kingdom

12 As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.

13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed.

The joy of knowing the Son of Man reigns is like a sunrise after a long night –it erases despondency, and brings light, clarity, and hope. This joy comes from knowing the scales of justice are balanced; the evil empire

demolished, order restored, righteousness renewed, and the King of kings and Lord of lords sits on His throne.

18. Micah Sees Shiloh Born in Bethlehem

Micah 1

Micah Receives the Word of the Lord



◆ Micah 1:1 The word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Micah 1:2 Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

Hear is the main requirement of God to men; and, it is not easy for any man to hear correction!

Micah 1:3 For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth.

“Behold” is a command.

The text says, “The word of the LORD came to Micah” and “he saw” the destiny of Samaria and Jerusalem from God.

These were dark days of moral and doctrinal apostasy.

The main message of the book of Micah is a combination of divine judgment upon Israel for the social injustice of their time – “the

transgressions of Jacob;" and, a message of hope for future restoration and peace through God's mercy.

Micah condemns the rich for oppressing the poor and leaders for their corruption. He warns Ahaz and Hezekiah of punishment while simultaneously promising God's ultimate deliverance through the Messiah (Shiloh) (Genesis 49:1), the promised ruler from Bethlehem of Ephratah (South of Jerusalem).

Micah Denounces the Sins of the People

- 1:5-7 Idolatry
- 2:1 Schemes of iniquity
- 2:2 Real estate fraud
- 2:8 Dunning debtors
- 2:9 Greed, illegal wretched eviction of widows from their homes
- 2:11 Supporting false prophets, fake information,
- 3:2 Violence and corruption
- 3:4 Cruel, greedy, vicious capitalism
- 3:5 Commercial war, greed, fraud
- 3:10 Murder, violence, political threats
- 3:11 Religious deceit, self-deception, spiritual pride
- 6:12; 7:2-3 Lies, fraud, violence, bribes and kickbacks.
- 7:5-6 Betrayal, perfidy, infidelity, treachery,

Micah Announces Judgment Upon Israel

Micah 4:10 Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go *even* to Babylon; there

shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.

Micah 6:13-14 Therefore also will I make *thee* sick in smiting thee, in making *thee* desolate because of thy sins. Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down *shall be* in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and *that* which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword.

Micah 7:13 Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.

The Effect of this Vision upon the Prophet Micah

1:8 Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls.

“naked” means being half-dressed in a loin cloth. One of the effects of this Micah seeing the will of God was seeing his own nakedness:

“howl” refers to the growling of wild dogs;

“dragons” could refer to the hissing of snakes or other odious beasts;

“owls” appears to refer to the screams of a mourning woman.

Still want to see God?

So alarming was this vision that Micah mourned and howled like jackals and ostriches. He tore his prophetic robe into shreds and wailed with only the bare necessities on his thin body.

The negative effects of such insight left Micah exposed — like a woman having her secrets stripped away leaving her naked to the eyes of judgment. Here is a bare man beating his chest and wailing like a coyote over his own sins . . . and the sins of the people. Like Elijah, Micah was made to see that he too was a man of unclean lips living among a people

of unclean lips – children of wrath under the judgment of Almighty God (Ephesians 2:1-3).

There are no great men of God in America; there are only weak, feeble men who serve a great, merciful God.

Micah 7:1 Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage: *there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the firstripe fruit.*

Biblical people had to save their harvest to last at least a year. Sometimes, farmers ate up their last supply of bread just before the new harvest; i.e. that had to harvest crops hungry.

Micah's Insight into the Kingdom of God

Micah 4:1-8 But in the last days it shall come to pass, *that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it . . .*

Rather than blinding Micah with blazing light, he gives him a candle of hope to challenge the darkness—

a glimpse of the kingdom of God and His Son Who is from everlasting to everlasting.

Micah leaves us with hope for a future kingdom of peace and justice for the faithful remnant — a lighthouse near a stormy sea — a bridge over troubled waters; a candle of hope during the darkness of apostasy.

Micah's Insight into the Promised Messiah

5:2-6 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren*

shall return unto the children of Israel. And he (the ruler) shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this *man* shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land . . .

Micah does not leave the Hebrews cursing the darkness. He leaves the people with a candle of hope.

“But thou” personifies the village of Bethlehem (House of Bread). Boaz, Naomi, Ruth lived in Bethlehem and King David was born in this village.

“And he (the ruler) shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD” — that is, in the authority, power and power of God

“in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God” refers to knowledge, faithfulness, goodness, dignity and nobility of a king. (a quality of God that many casual, coffee-cup Christians have lost sight of).

Note the contrast between mini-Bethlehem and the Mega-Messiah; the earthly, temporal city in Judea and the heavenly Christ from Eternity — the Babe from little Bethlehem of Judea whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting, shall establish God’s kingdom on earth; that is, the earthly, temporal nature of Bethlehem is contrasted with and eternal, everlasting nativity.

The Nicene Creed of the Church expresses the article of faith as “Begotten of His Father before all worlds” — a statement that Jesus is the unique Son of God, of the same substance as the Father, and that He is the eternal King and hope of mankind. Micah informs us that though Bethlehem of Judea was a tiny, insignificant village in Judaea, the great Savior would come out of eternity, from everlasting to everlasting, to bring salvation and to establish the kingdom of God forever.

Marks of Messiah

- 4:10 He will be born of a woman.

- 5:2 He will rule over Israel.
- 5:2 His origin is from eternity.
- 5:4 He will feed his flock like a good Shepherd.
- 5:4 He will rule by the power and majesty of God as a virtuous dictator
- 5:4 He will have global dominance over the nations
- 5:4 He shall be great to the ends of the earth in noteworthy praise
- 5:5 His rule is characterized by peace and security

Micah's Insight into the Dew of the Lord

5:7 And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.

“Dew from the Lord” and “showers upon grass” are metaphors for refreshment for thirsty souls through His salvation. Thus, the remnant is showered with the dew of grace from Heaven’s Dew.

Jesus is the Dew of the Lord that renews hope – the soft, cool refreshing drops of blue seeping gently into parched hearts by the breath of faith.

- **Ruler of Israel:** The Messiah will be a ruler in Israel, and his kingdom will be established over the restored people of God.
- **Rule of peace:** The messianic kingdom will bring peace and justice to the world, and the faithful remnant will triumph over oppressors (Micah 5:4-5, 7-14)

Micah 6:6, 8 Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

The dew of the Lord refreshes hearts dried out by the inferno of sin burning within souls. **No God in history has ever required so little** — not sacrifice, not taxes, not rigorous painful devotion, but the simple development of three pedals of virtue: justice, mercy, and humility.

The Source of Refreshing Dew

Micah 7:18 Who *is* a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy.

The gods of men don't pardon; they demand, order, and command. The dew of the Lord that revives men on this sun-bleached earth is pardon, forgiveness, patience, tenderness, and mercy.

Micah saw the dew of the Lord like a shower falling on a wasteland; like a seed pushing through the soil; like pleasing harmony in a symphony; like the sun-kissed light of sunrise breaking through dark chaos of night — Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1-2).

19. Zechariah Sees the LORD's Favor

Zechariah 1:8



◆ I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that *were* in the bottom; and behind him *were there* red horses, speckled, and white.

“I saw” is used twice in chapter one. “by night” may refer to wee early hours of the morning (3:00 AM) when the mind is in a rest state able to receive insights into the will of God. This hour is 12 hours separated from the

time that our Lord died on the cross at 3:00 PM.

Negatively, this is also called “the Devil’s hour” for he too is a work trying to capture the mind. In Zechariah’ case, he was a man that only had a mind for the Lord.

God arranged for Zechariah to see the Angel of the LORD; that is, images of Christ as a “man riding upon a red horse.” There is nothing here suggesting these are dreams. Zechariah is awake and in an ecstatic state capable of receiving Divine revelation from the Lord – His first in a series of “inspired” revelations.

The LORD uses Zechariah to kick start the reconstruction of the temple (520-516 BC). Lower than a snake’s belly, the people listened to Zechariah with hope, determination, and inspiration.

A man like a warrior sat on a red horse, in the midst of this shady myrtle-grove. This is none other than the Captain of the LORD of hosts protecting and providing peace and power to the people. Though the remnant was in a depressed condition, Christ was present in their midst working to strength His people to complete the second temple. Behind him were angels employed by him; that is, the LORD was with these people helping them to re-start their Herculian temple project.

12 Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?

Behind the scenes, Zechariah hears the Angel of the LORD pray to The LORD of Hosts regarding the consummation of the curse on God's people. The LORD of Hosts answers:

15-16 And I am very sore displeased with the heathen *that are at ease*: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.

"Then lifted I up mine eyes and saw" (1:18) — Zechariah employs the term "eyes" 14 times in his book — not the eyes of his body, but the eyes of his mind, his inner eye; i.e. Zechariah's soul was in an ecstatic state seeing the interplay taking place between the Father and the Son regarding His glorious plans for Jerusalem (520 BC).

While few, if any, Christian will experience a prophetic ecstatic state, any or all can develop an inner eye that perceives God and His will by faith.

God is not speaking to men from heaven in the Christian era. That God speaks to men today through dreams or inner voices is fantasy. His Word is complete and sufficient for us . . . but, we can certainly pray that the eyes of our mind would be able to understand His Revelation and that the

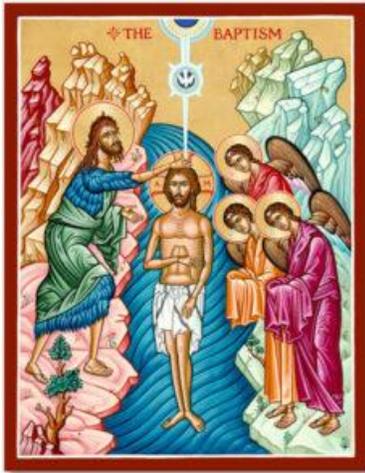
Lord will show us, "Wonderful things we know not" (Jeremiah 33:3 and Psalm 119:18).

"Lord, open my eyes to see the wonders in Your Word. Give me understanding so I may learn Your commands and apply them to my life. May Your truth fill my mind and heart. May others be blessed by what I am and what I do. Amen!"

Zechariah saw the light breaking through the darkness, and the people had hope. When the light broke through the night, these weak people started to rebuild the second temple.

20. The Heavens Open and the Father Speaks

Mark 1:9-11.



◆ And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; 11 and a voice came out of the heavens: "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased." (NASB)

In this account of Jesus' life we see the heaven's open up and the Spirit descending on the Son of God in the form of a dove.

When the heavens opened after Elijah prayed in 2 Kings 1, out came lightning and death; likewise in Noah day. The heavens opened out and out came the waters of death; but, no so at Jesus's baptism.

"heaven's opening" are rare in Biblical history. Apparently, both Jesus and John saw this disclosure.

When the heavens opened at Jesus' baptism, we do not see fire, thunder, or cloudbursts of deadly water; we see the Spirit in the form of a dove — imagery of peace and an important public announcement.

The dove is an historical icon of peace, gentleness, and harmlessness. Everything about this scene conveys peace, harmony, calm, conciliation, acceptance, endorsement, and sanction.

A voice is heard: "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased." While spoken directly to Jesus, the message is a public proclamation regarding the inauguration of the ministry of the Son of God.

God announcing the arrival of His Son is a declaration that the Son of God was on earth representing the will of Heaven; a confirmation of the Son's relationship to the Father; a testimony regarding the Father's deep love for the Son.

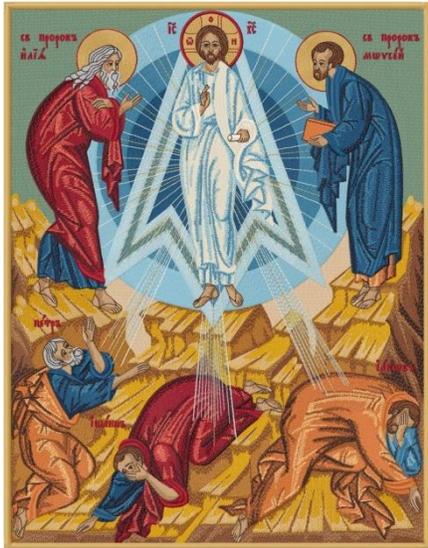
At Jesus' transfiguration, the Father added, "Hear him!" (Mark 9:7). Thus, the order from heaven echoes through the centuries: Hear Him! Hear Him! Hear Him!

The reason for this baptism and the meaning of it is for another time.

Negatively, this account is a reminder that men have difficulty hearing the Son . . . that if Heaven opened up today, men would not listen; and a reminder of the inexcusable sin of Jews recklessly rejecting and killing the Son – as foolhardy as driving blindfolded on an LA highway; or playing with matches in a sun stroked forest.

21. Witnessing the Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-9



◆ Peter, James, and John were privileged to see Heaven descend on Christ; that is, they saw Heaven come to earth to declare the greatness of the Son. But, their initial jubilation suddenly turned to terror.

Three miracles occur: (1) the transfiguration of Christ; (2) the appearance of Moses and Elijah with the Lord; (3) the voice of the Father speaking out of the cloud.

The Transfiguration of the Son

Matthew 17:1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,

“After six days” from the events in chapter 16.

“an high mountain” probably **not** Mt. Tabor, but a mountain located somewhere near Mt. Hermon or Caesarea Philippi.

“Peter, James, and John” were the elite among the elite – three chosen witnesses which could later testify to others about this glorious event.

2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

The elect were permitted to see the Lord Jesus in His pre-incarnate state; that is, in His heavenly glory and radiance — the brightness and beauty He possessed before His incarnation and what He would become after His ascension to the Father (Philippians 2:5).

The word “metamorphoo” means to change or transform the appearance of a thing — **not** the substance of the object. We get the word “metamorphosis” from this Greek source. Luke does not use the word, but he does describe the effect, “the fashion of His countenance became other than it had been” (Luke 9:29).

“his face did shine as the sun” is a definitive simile expressing the nature of His radiance – an expression describing the supremacy and beauty of our Lord. This is **not** a poetic metaphor spoken by a literary genius, but an accurate, factual, legal description by the eye-witnesses. Matthew, Mark, and Luke did **not** see the transfiguration. They received testimony from Peter, James, and John after our Lord’s resurrection.

Science informs us the Sun’s brightness is staggering — it radiates about 3.828×10^{26} *watts* of power, making it the most dominant light source in our solar system.

Estimates suggest the Sun produces around **35.73 octillion lumens** (that’s 35,730,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 lumens) — that is 35.73 with 24 zeros after it.

How do you describe the radiance of the Sun? Poets refer to this star in the sky as "gleaming spikes of gold dust," "arrows of sunlight," "lances of sunlight," or "shafts of light" that penetrate the environment.

The light of the Sun is like a torch in the sky; like a diamond shining from every facet; like a festival of lights in the dark.

One composer stated the significance of the Sun this way:

“The Sun’s brightness is a cosmic heartbeat, flooding Earth with energy and light. It is a furnace of brilliance, so powerful that it defines day itself, turning darkness into life.

Others put it this way:

The Sun is a golden monarch, seated high upon the sky's throne, its brilliance spilling like liquid fire across the canvas of the world. It is a chorus of light, each ray a singer proclaiming life's renewal. Its brightness is not mere illumination, but a heartbeat of the cosmos, a flame that paints shadows into retreat and crowns the day with glory.

The Sun outshines everything in the sky. Moreover, all created things owe their life to the Sun. How much more do we owe our life to the Son of God?

“In Him is life; and His life is the light of men” (John 1:2-5).

The Appearance of Moses and Elijah

3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

“behold” means to stop, look, and consider what happened.

If seeing Jesus sparkle like sunbeams off shattered glass was not enough, the disciples see Moses and Elijah having a discussion with Christ. Intuitively, they recognized these two stars of Biblical history. Moreover, the Jewish mind connected Moses and Elijah to the appearance of the Christ – that Jewish belief turned into literal reality on this day (Matthew 11:14; Mark 6:15; Luke 16:31; 24:27)

This disciples did not see Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Alexander the Great; Napoleon, Thomas Jefferson, or Abraham Lincoln talking with Christ as these piddle-beings have nothing in common with the Son.

Think of the wonder of having two greats talking with Christ: Moses the great lawgiver; and Elijah the greatest of the prophets! Jesus is the subjective expression of the law; and, He is the subject of all prophecy.

Both of these men shared a common thread in their ministry: Both typified and foreshadowed the coming of Christ.

Both of these men shared a common thread in their death. No man knows where Moses was buried, and Elijah disappeared in a chariot in the sky (Deuteronomy 34:6; 2 Kings 2:11).

What were they talking about? Of Jesus being the subjective expression of the law? Of Christ being the subject of prophecy? Of Moses' prediction that a "prophet like unto him should come in the latter days to whom all righteous men will bow (Deuteronomy 18:18)? Or about his work of turning, "the hearts of the fathers to the children" (Malachi 4:5)?

We can only guess!

4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

Peter's positive, sanguine response shows how highly the Jews regarded Moses and Elijah.

The fact that Peter wanted to build three tabernacles shows us that Peter had *not* yet grasped the supremacy and greatness of Christ. He is not a way to the Father. He is **the** Way; He is not a prophet among many, He is the holy, unique, Son of God.

In Peter's mind building a memorial to honor Moses, Elijah, and Christ seemed very appropriate . . . but, his human ambition was interrupted by the Father.

The Voice of the Father

5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

The particle "behold" is used in an imperative sense; that is, stop, look, see, and perceive what's happening.

A bright cloud overshadowed the three witnesses to hide the appearance of the Father. No man can see God directly and live. Afterward, they would recall the “cloudy pillar” which had descended on the first Tabernacle (Exodus 33:9) and the “cloud that filled the house of the Lord on the dedication of Solomon’s Temple” (1 Kings 8:10).

The lesson for Christians is that the humanity of Christ was the true tabernacle of God and that the LORD was tabernacling among men in and through the Son (John 1:14).

The elite heard a voice saying, “This is my beloved Son” — the same message the Father gave at Jesus baptism — a message they heard for the first time.

The Father did **not** say these are my servants Moses and Elijah.

The focus is on the Son and the greatness of His Being Who is superior in importance, rank, status, character, and position than Moses and Elijah combined.

In drawing their attention **away** from Moses and Elijah and “shining the spotlight” on Jesus,” the Father revealed the priority of Jesus and His pleasure with the Son.

Moses was a servant; Elijah was a servant; but, Jesus is the Master of the House.

The Father gives one command, “Hear Him!” Hear Him and be saved; Hear Him and be holy; Hear Him and be wise.

The word “hear” is used 550 times in Scripture. But hearing Jesus seems to be one of the most difficult duties men have on earth. They can hear friends, teachers, professors, news reporters, and congressmen, but they can’t seem to hear the Son.

The Disciples Reaction

6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

The reaction of the apostles reveals the appropriate response to hearing from God! Two words describe their response: the verb “afraid” (phobia) and the adverb “sore” (exceedingly). This “fear” is not respect, but panic and terror. So emphatic was the voice of God they thought they were going to die.

They did **not** reach out and try to touch God, jump up and down like kangaroos, or jibber-jabber like babbler birds. They were afraid, terrified, and stricken with fear . . . so much so, they fell on their face — not as an act of worship but because they were “scared to death;” that is, they felt like criminals captured in a spotlight; like a bird caught in a trap; like a deer in the headlights.

Seeing God rarely results in joy or “laughter.” Due to His power and holiness, contact with God can be frightening.

7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

Trembling with shock, only the touch of Jesus and his comforting command, “Be not afraid,” could restore strength and peace to His terror-stricken disciples.

8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

The three disciples emerged from this crisis better men seeing no man but Jesus — the essence of spiritual health.

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

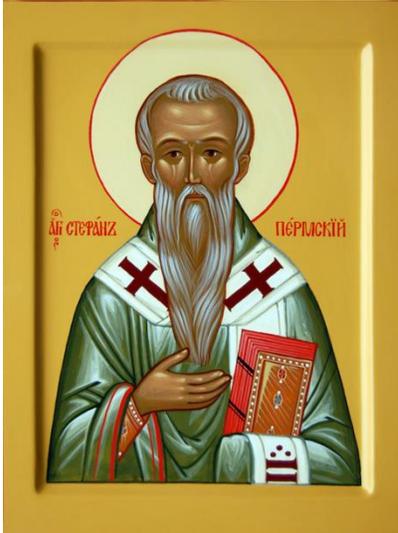
On the way down the mountain, Jesus commanded Peter, James, and John not to discuss this experience with any of the other disciples because (1) it

would have stirred jealousy and disbelief among the twelve; and (2) what they saw could not be fully appreciated until after Jesus rose from the dead – that He the unique Son of God; the Savior of the world greater than Moses or Elijah; the pre-eminent, most important Being in history; and Heaven’s Champion that overcomes Satan, sin, and death.

If the Father spoke from heaven today, what would He say? I think His message would be the same: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **hear ye him.**”

22. Stephen Sees Christ in Heaven

Acts 7:55-56



◆ Stephen saw the Lord just before he entered Paradise — like staring into the heart of a star.

The book of Acts is **not** the acts of the apostles, but the acts of our Lord. Before us is the only picture of martyrdom in the New Testament.

Before us is a Christian man who saw heaven’s light and lived long enough to tell us about it.

54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with *their* teeth.

Stephen saw the Jews as rebels and not as “white knights;” predators, and not victims; a nation of sinners, and not a nation of saints.

The lesson is clear: failure to coddle the Jews and treat them as special; calling them sinners and not God’s chosen people can get you killed as is the case here.

55-56 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

“being full of the Holy Spirit” informs us that Stephen was a believing, justified, regenerated man. Further, the expression suggests a continuous state of being filled with the Spirit and **not** a onetime experience.

Q: What do men full of the Spirit do? Stephen “looked up stedfastly into heaven.”

Spirit-filled men talk about Christ, not themselves, not political problems, and not about how much money they made on earth.

The aorist, active participle “stedfastly” means “to stretch” and supposes intensity, sincerity, and fervency; that is, his eyes were fixed on Heaven like a magnet. Perceiving his danger the effect his preaching produced, and that the Sanhedrin would not protect him, he looked to Heaven for a remedy . . . and, it was provided to him.

The lesson for us is that when our lives are threatened with danger, we should look up for protection.

Trusting Heaven’s councils, Stephen was not disappointed. He saw the glory of God – the brightness and splendor of heavenly light . . . the icon of God’s presence . . . a supernatural manifestation of Divine attendance . . . the kind of peaceful bliss dying Christians often experience . . . something beyond faith and a dream . . . a glorious transition from darkness into the light of His presence (Matthew 16:27; 24:30).

So real and tangible was this experience Stephen spoke saying, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

“heavens opened” convey a transitional, supernatural power for earthly eyes to see heavenly reality. He experienced a portal into the heavens beyond the dome.

“the Son of Man” denotes Stephen saw the sovereign, highly-exalted Christ standing in the throne room of heaven.

“standing” and not sitting suggests our Lord’s intense interest in this whole affair. The crisis did not escape our Lord’s attention. Stephen was not alone. Jesus stood by him, above him, and for him. And, He stands with all saints in the final moments of life.

57-58 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

The only man in this contest that had composure was Stephen. Contrast the peace of Stephen with the anger, wrath, and hostility of Sanhedrin, government officials.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

God empowered Stephen to see through a portal into heaven. And he was supernaturally translated out of the physical realm into the spiritual realm, where he saw things as they are in heaven (John MacArthur).

Stephen prays to Christ as God. “Lord Jesus” implies that Stephen had fully grasped the Divine nature and the supreme authority of Christ; that Jesus was His Savior and Master. Divinity is so intertwined in Jesus, Stephen prays to Christ because our Lord hears prayers and answers them.

“receive my spirit” denotes that man is more than a biological creature — a living spirit which has a self-conscious soul. Moreover, Stephen knew where his soul was going — into the glorious presence of the Savior — to “Paradise.”

Moreover, his loud prayer that God might forgive his executioners shows that Stephen had sat at our Lord’s feet and studied His grace — “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

It should be noted what Stephen did not see. He did **not** see fire or dark clouds of judgment, St. Peter’s Golden Gates, or a whirlwind of wrath.

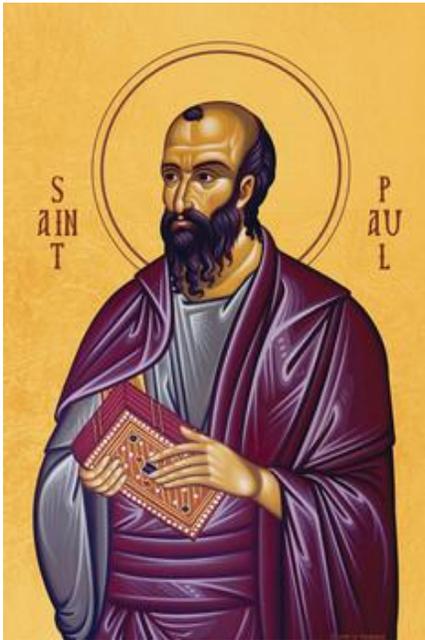
Rather, he saw and felt the warm embrace of Heaven's tender love and concern.

You get the idea that Stephen looked up into the baby-blue sky and saw the light of the Lord and that his death was a natural, smooth transition into the sapphire lighted throne room of our Lord (Exodus 24).

Finally, the martyrdom of Stephen is a lesson on how to die well. (1) Be filled with the Spirit; (2) forgive all those who have trespassed against you; and (3) keeping looking at heaven until you see Christ.

23. The Apostle Paul Sees Into the Third Heaven

2 Corinthians 12:1-4



◆ 1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

Due to criticism about his qualifications to be an ambassador for Christ, the Apostle felt constrained to vindicate his character and qualifications to be a minister of Christ.

The subject is “visions” and “revelations.” A vision (opatasia) is something seen either with the human eye or with mind’s eye. From this Greek word we get the words “optic” and “ophthalmology.” — something so real it impresses one’s mind just like going to a movie theater for the first time except it is not non=fiction experience.

The word “revelations” (apokalupsis) refers to the content, subject, fact, or truth unveiled – something that one cannot learn about God, providence, or heaven from nature.

The “expedient” is preceded by the adverb “not” (ou) nullifying the main verb. The present participle “profitable” (sumphero) stresses the idea of “helpful or “profitable;” that is, St. Paul’s prophetic experience was not helpful for others because they did not have the spirituality to understand or appreciate Paul’ existential experience.

Moreover, many of Paul's critics were involved in Gnosticism and Merkaba Mysticism trying to manufacture portals into heaven. Consequently, it was not profitable to them for Paul to share his own mystic experience. Nevertheless, he does so here out of necessity to defend His apostleship to the Corinthians.

2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

"I knew" expresses Paul's existential account of an actual, spiritual experience.

"a man in Christ" indicates that Paul is speaking as a Christian in third person to soften his swaggering testimony.

2 Corinthians was written around 55-57 AD; so, "fourteen years ago" would be a few years after Paul's conversion around 35-37 AD. Thus, this event occurred around 42-44 AD — an event which coincides with the St. Paul's departure from Jerusalem (Acts 9:30) and his arrival at Antioch (Acts 11:26) — unrecorded history (Galatians 2:2).

"(whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)" reflects an experience so real Paul could not distinguish between a prophet's ecstasy and a human phenomenon.

"Third heaven:" The Hebrews recognized two heavens: sky below the clouds and sky above the clouds under the firmament. St. Paul thinks of himself as passing beyond the lower sky, beyond the firmament of heaven, into the third or yet higher heaven, where the presence of God is manifested.

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

The repetition of the sentence, “I knew such a man . . . ” is a literary Hebraism — a repetition of a statement for emphasis; that is, Paul is trying to look at this experience objectively and not subjectively.

4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Paul speaks in third person. He does not describe what he saw in this portal. He can't. Words failed him.

St. Paul calls the “third heaven” “Paradise” — a theological Hebraism depicting the dwelling place of righteous souls; the reproduction of the unseen beauty of the Garden of Eden, Paradise Restored (Luke 23:43).

The apostle John saw the fountain containing the water of life flowing about the throne of God, overflowing its banks — John's way of describing the reign of eternal life in the kingdom of God (Revelation 2:7; Revelation 22:1-2)

“Unspeakable words” appears to refer to the lack of appropriate words to describe this phenomenon. Such sublime experiences call for the most accurate artistic expressions. But, Paul the lawyer did not have any appropriate descriptives in his vocabulary; that is, his experience was impossible to put into words.

In saying, “which it is not lawful for a man to utter,” Paul seems to be saying “it is not possible;” that is, there are no words in the Greek, Hebrew, or English language available to describe the wonder and beauty of Paradise. Webster fails us. Lexicons like BDAG and Liddell & Scott (LSJ) for Classical Greek are like using a first grade reader to explain Einstein's theory of relativity, or bringing a butter knife to a sword fight, or employing a paper umbrella in a hailstorm, or using a popsicle stick as a crane for constructing a skyscraper.

Consequently, Paul makes no attempt to describe the third heaven.

2 Corinthians 12:5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

“of such a one” refers to St. Paul’s mystical experience; that is, he is still looking outside of himself and His transcendence objectively.

Paul could have boasted to others of his spiritual experience, but that would **not** have been profitable for the saints; rather, he boasted in his weaknesses – weaknesses given him to counterbalance the euphoria of his heavenly vision – infirmities to keep him humble and to prevent the growth of spiritual pride.

Moreover, the nature of Paul’s dynamic, blinding conversion, should be noted here:

“ . . . near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven . . . And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice . . .

Note that those who experienced a heavenly visitation died at the worse or were blinded, or crippled at best.

Searching questions

A Warning to Preachers: You have the privilege of walking in the heavenlies from where Scripture came from, and you see things people in the pew can’t see nor have the capacity to grasp. Be humble is a command to every preacher. Be patient and avoid spiritual pride. God had a remedy for Paul, and He has one for you . . . and you may not like it.

Q: Want to see into heaven? If you did, you’d probably be walking around on crutches or being pushed around in a wheelchair.

His strength is made perfect in weaknesses.

Oh, the dangers of spiritual pride!

2 Corinthians 12:5 Of such an one will I glory (third person): yet of myself I will not glory (first personal pronoun), but in mine infirmities.

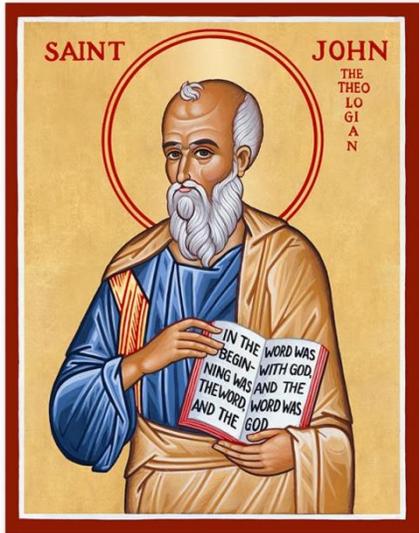
Note the use of the first person and second person pronouns in verse five.

Note the difference between the old Paul of fourteen years ago, with his youth, health, zeal, and abundance of revelations; and the new Paul of the present — feebler, weaker, older, wiser and sadder — worn out with cares and sorrows, the daily rush of life and its ever-growing anxieties regarding the state of the churches.

Q: Still want it all: great health, a gorgeous wife (husband), lovely children, a satisfying, prestigious job, lots of money, a big house, all the latest gadgets, and an abundance of Bible knowledge? Relax. It ain't gonna happen!

His strength is made perfect in weakness.

24. John's Vision of the Glorified Christ



◆ The entire Book of Revelation records John interactions between heaven and earth. We will only look at two of them.

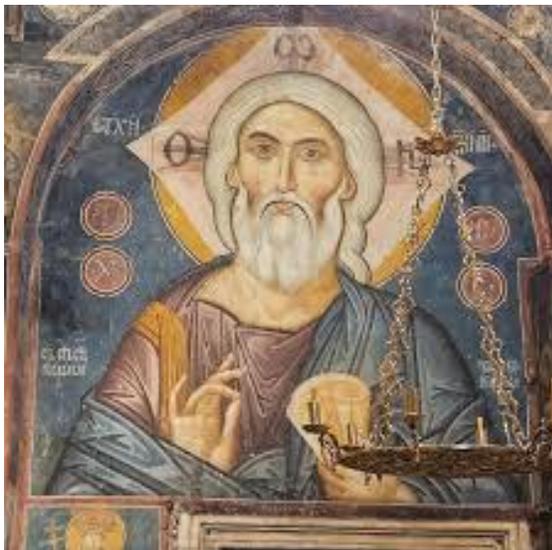
Being in a state of ecstasy, John saw a vision of the Lord – a requisite to understand the nature and authority of the highly-exalted Christ.

Still want to see God? When John saw the glorified Christ, he fell at his feet as a corpse – the only reasonable answer to such a vision.

If we don't collapse after looking at the vision of the highly-exalted Christ, metaphorically speaking, something is desperately wrong.

Revelation One

The Vision of the High Priest



◆ Revelation 1:10-11 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto

Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

“In the Spirit” refers to a spiritual State, a condition necessary to receive revelation. Ezekiel uses the same phrase “in the Spirit” (37:1).

The “Lord’s Day” is Sunday. It refers to the first day of the week; that is, to the “First-day Sabbath” (*mian sabbatou*), the true Sabbath, the restored Sabbath mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. Early Christians recognized Sunday as a holy day. It was the day that Jesus rose from the dead proving himself to be the Lord over all negative forces operating upon man. It is, therefore, appropriate for Christians to meet on Sunday and to keep the “First-day Sabbath” holy as unto the Lord.

“On the Lord’s day” and the “day of the Lord,” are equivalent in English, but not so in Greek. In Greek (ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ: the word “Lord” is in an adjectival position and refers to a day which belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Scripture refers to the “day of Jehovah,” the word “Lord” is in the genitive. In 1 Corinthians 11:20, Paul refers to the “Lord’s supper” (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) where again the word “Lord” is in the adjectival position. The use of “Lord” as an adjective implies something instituted. In the latter, it is the supper; in the former, it is a day. The “Lord’s Day” refers to Sunday[1]--the day Jesus rose victorious from the dead proving that He is indeed Lord over death.

In Christian history, Sunday appropriately replaced the inferior Saturday “Sabbath” and became the “day of rest” for believers. But, as the values of humanists took over the culture, and because Christians lack this conviction, Sunday has shamefully lost its sanctity in society.

John heard a voice like a trumpet-- clear, piercing, commanding attention.

Christ identified Himself as “first and the last,” and “the beginning and the end.” He is not one among many. He is not just a religious teacher. Jesus is the Creator and Consummator of history. YHWH is called the “first and the last”; therefore, this statement identifies Jesus as Yahweh (Isaiah 41:4). Only Yahweh is Savior, but since Jesus manifested his power

over death by virtue of His resurrection, then Jesus must be Yahweh and Yeshua. All others are imposters. There is only one, true absolute, unchanging God (See the Shema: Deuteronomy 6:4).

The book would be a scroll. "See," "write," and "send" are the duties of a prophet.

John now pens a description of Christ in all His glory as He is in Heaven as our Great High Priest.

We are on holy ground.

The truth be known, the church's understanding of our Lord is two sizes too small. The remedy for this cramped view is slow, persistent, thoughtful rumination on the exalted Christ.

Let the rays of sunshine in this passage come in and gently stroke your mind.

Revelation 1:12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

The church's imagery is drawn from Israel's most sacred symbol. The OT candlestick had seven stems — a sign the church is the new Israel and stewards of God's revelation about Himself to mankind.

The imagery here presents each church as a candelabra with a purpose of shedding light on the Lord Jesus Christ. Each church is a trustee of the gospel, a light upon a hill. This is similar to Paul's teaching that each church is a pillar of truth. Should the light fail, the church will be removed (1 Timothy 3:15).

Israel's most sacred symbols are transferred to the Church of Jesus Christ. The church is the appointed steward of Hebrew symbols. These icons are identified with the church, the true Israel of God composed of the spiritually responsive among the Jews and the spiritually responsive

among the Gentiles. Together, they form the family of God, the true Israel, aka the Church of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the blood-bought church is contrasted with the "synagogue of Satan." The "synagogue of Satan" is composed of circumcised, unbelieving Hebrews. These cultists have no right to claim Israel's sacred images or think of themselves as "God's chosen people" because they reject the gospel announced to the nation(s) through Jesus the Messiah.

It is more appropriate for Christians to light a ceremonial-candelabra than it is for Christ-rejecting "Jews" to do so. We must remember that the church is composed of true believers, Jews and Gentiles, who constitute the restored "tabernacle of David," the true Israel of God (Acts 15:15).

Revelation 1:13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the waist with a golden girdle.

While the candlesticks are impressive, John's eye focuses on the Son of man in the middle of the light fest.

Jesus was in the center of the candlesticks. Theology, not anthropology, is John's grand focus. Christ, not man, occupies center stage. Enough of man in the church! Let us see the Christ of God!

John beholds the Lord Jesus Christ, not as a disembodied spirit, but Christ in his resurrected, glorified body.

He likens Him to the mysterious "Son of Man," a title taken from Daniel's vision (7:13ff) — a Messianic reference to the glorious apocalyptic Christ.

John described Jesus' garments, not to give information, but to impart inspiration!

John's description of our Lord's clothing is not a literal picture of Jesus, but a symbolic representation of Christ's Regal, Judicial, Legislative, and Priestly Authority. Selah!

This is King Jesus, the crowned, glorified Sovereign; Jesus, the High Priest of His people; Jesus, the Judge of All Mankind serving in the judicial temple metroplex which sheltered the great candelabra.

Revelation 1:14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

White “like wool” suggests, pure, indefectible wisdom that comes from a righteous life. Jesus possesses greater sagacity than an Eastern sage or room full of PHDs. In Scriptural terms, “A greater than Solomon is here!”

Wake up! Christ incarnate, not the Boston Tea Party, is the great event of history.

Furthermore, the symbol emphasizes deity – the Divine nature that the Son of Man shares with the mysterious personality titled “the Ancient of Days,” the Second Person of the Triune Spirit (Matthew 12:42; Daniel 7:9).

“White as snow” suggests holiness and purity that comes from heaven -- a blanket of intense white with sunbeams bouncing off the ice crystals that causes *photokeratitis* (temporary blindness) to the gallery.

His eyes like “a flame of fire” portray burning intensity and penetrating perception. This reference reveals the omniscient Jesus as Judge of all mankind. He sees all and knows all – past, present, and future. The witness-Judge enters the courtroom. Court is in session. He knows the facts of each case as well as applicable law. And, He is ready and able to judge all that is contrary to His holy character. Selah!

Revelation 1:15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

This is star-clad symbolic-language, not a literal description of our Lord’s feet walking on coals of fire.

Brass represents judgment (study the brazen altar). The idea is of uncompromising, unyielding, unwavering integrity -- the ability to

prosecute complex cases in the Supreme Court of Heaven. Quite possibly, the imagery is designed to show the strength of holiness and purity of Christ. The Holy One is ready to purify His people.

As a “faithful witness,” He casts the first stone. He is serious about holiness, about love, and about the need for gospel proclamation (Deuteronomy 17:7).

The phrase, “Sound of many waters,” is imagery for unmistakable, indomitable, and regal authority. His masculine voice commands the attention of every living person, but especially the church which is called to reverence the Word of God.

The vision of the glorified Christ is not a picture of a passive Savior sitting at the right hand of God waiting for His reign to begin. He is not some effeminate caricature sitting on a cushion of strawberries serving cotton candy to children at this circus on earth. We see a manly Christ robed in splendor actively directing, judging, rebuking, enabling, and rewarding His people. Judgment must begin at the house of God and He does so with bone-crushing strength and anvil-like convictions (1 Peter 4:17).

Revelation 1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

The “seven stars” are angels, ministering spirits ready to serve the interests of Christ towards the church.

“as the sun shineth in his strength” is not poetry, but an accurate description of our Lord’s glory. The Sun is the brightest luminary in our solar system, the cosmic heartbeat, flooding Earth with energy and light. It is a roaring furnace of dazzling luminosity, so powerful that it drives away darkness defining the very definition of day.

This is an armed priest with "praise in his mouth and a double edged sword in his right hand" (Psalm 49:6). But, much more! He is Heaven's High Priest executing authority. Only kings leading their armies to war would be fully armed with a sword and buckle. But, Christ is the King-Priest. This King-Priest has a two-edged sword in His mouth, the means of His conquest is the Word of God that pierces, divides, severs, and slays.

The message behind the imagery demands unconditional surrender or death.

The Word of God is His only weapon, and it is sufficient to conquer the world (19:5). He speaks and it is done. He commands and all must obey!

The war for dominion on earth cannot be won with military weapons, but by ideas -- the Word of God -- the Sword of the Lord. The war is not a physical fight or a war of economics, but a spiritual battle for the hearts and minds and souls of men through gospel proclamation.

Let us learn a lesson:

There is a time to pick up the sword and defend one's life and property, but this is not the emphasis here.

It behooves every believer to enter the coliseum in the contest for hearts and to conquer adversaries with the Word of God. Unlike Islam, Christians do not win souls through force and intimidation, but through the art of gentle persuasion. We convince, but do not coerce. We admonish, but we do not punish. We challenge, but we do not impinge on the rights of others. Force is the way of tyrants; "sweet reasonableness" is the way of Christ. Citing facts and statistics in a public forum is good, but quoting the Word of God cracks the deadwood.

Humanists criticize Christians for quoting Bible verses in politics, and unfortunately many believers have laid down their swords in public debate. Let us not do the same. Guns, clubs, and brass knuckles are not

the answer for political differences. The Word of God is our only offensive weapon. Let us memorize His Word and be ready to wield its power to bring clarity to the moral issues of our time.

How can we describe the glory of Christ? John does so by comparing the brilliance of His appearance with the blistering rays of the Sun at high noon. This is not “sweet Jesus” hugging lambs and smiling at children, but the Lord Christ with salt on His tongue and a gavel of judicial authority in His hand.

Revelation 1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

This is the same response the three elite disciples had at the transfiguration in Matthew 17.

Unlike a teenager who might have said, “Wow!” or “Cool,” John felt a blood-curdling scream of wonderment, and then fell awe-silent at his feet like a dead man; like a frozen lake at midnight; like a desert under the stars; like the silence of a sealed tomb.

His response is an amazing reaction considering John walked with Christ for three and a half years during His earthly ministry. During our Lord’s sojourn on earth, John never fell to the ground in stunning awe – with the exception of our Lord’s transfiguration in Matthew 17.

When St. John saw His Lord in His highly exalted state in great glory and great power, fear seized his soul and John collapsed to the earth as a dead man! Falling was **not** just a proper reaction to Christ. It was the **only** response John could render. Any other response would be an act of insanity!

So overwhelming was this scene that John had to be strengthened by a touch and a comforting word. It does not seem like much, but it was His Word and His touch.

As “first and last,” Christ reminded the original readers that He ordained life, and that He outlasted death.

What was true for the seven churches applies to us. In order to succeed in our mission, we need to see the ascended Christ with the eye of faith. **The need of the hour is a fresh vision of the Sovereign Christ in His present risen life.**

Revelation 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

The rehearsing of the history of Christ by the risen Lord was designed to provide comfort to John who was shocked and overwhelmed by the vision; and, to instruct us that the hope of the world rests in the One man who conquered death.

Religion is ultimately about man’s fundamental problem — death. Every man is going to die! Because Christ solved man’s fundamental problem through His death, burial, and resurrection, we have hope. John received assurance that the Christ he saw in his vision was the same Christ he knew on earth. It was like a cold drink on a hot day to the shocked apostle.

Keys are symbols of authority. They are used for unlocking doors and for solving mysteries. Because Christ is the only religious, political leader that has conquered death, He alone has the keys that unlock the doors of hell and death (Isaiah 22:22).

Christ, not Caesar, has the ability to solve the problems of mankind. Christ, not Caesar has authority over death . . . and, for this reason true believers place their hope in Christ, not the State; in the Savior, not science; in the king, not the swings and trappings of politics.

Christians confront the powers of darkness from a position of authority as ambassadors of Christ. Care not what man (a human judge) may say, act on His authority like a soldier receiving orders from his commander.

Know who you are and exercise your heavenly appointment to act with bold authority as His servant on earth.

In going before a federal judge, the defendant said, "Unless your authority is greater than the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ who endowed me with unalienable rights, I demand you release me immediately or I will be forced to arrest your bond." The judge ordered his release (January 2008).

Revelation Five



◆ If you were to enter heaven, what would you see?

John did and his description of this scene is as bright as the sun – beaming, glistening, and dazzling. It can't be read all at once or one will experience spiritual blindness.

One must take his time . . . days even weeks.

The Lamb and the Scroll

"The final vision of the universe," says William Barclay, "is a universe praising Christ; and it is our privilege to lend our voices and our lives to this vast chorus of praise, for the chorus is necessarily incomplete so long as there is one voice missing from it."

In eternal glory, all will be occupied with the greatness of Another and will sing: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).

Angels do not sing songs of redemption; only men are redeemed.

John is mystically transported into the throne room of the glorified Christ, and we are privileged to read about it.

Revelation 5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

This drama unfolds in the theater of Heaven's Courtroom. The One seated in glory and majesty upon the throne is none other than the Sovereign LORD God Almighty. In a rare and precious moment, and with unparalleled skill, John the revelator draws our attention to a scroll held in the right hand of His Majesty -- a scroll sealed with seven seals.

The scroll: There are many theories as to what this scroll represents. I favor the view that this scroll is the Last Will and Testament of the Living God who orders the events of history which ushers in of His eternal kingdom.

In the ancient Roman world the "Last Will and Testament" was sealed with seven seals and attested by seven witnesses. The execution of a will assumed the death of the testator; and while God does not die, early Christian faith makes much of the inheritance of believers. Viewed in this way, the scroll stands as the symbol of the promised kingdom which was sealed but not executed (1 Peter 1:4). The scroll contains God's redemptive plan for the denouncement of human history, the overthrow of evil, and the gathering of a redeemed people into the kingdom of God. No small task . . . who can possibly execute such a grand plan?

Ezekiel's scroll comes to mind (Ezekiel 2): Full of woe, lament, and mourning, it had writing on both sides suggesting fullness of judgment. The fact that the scroll had writing on both sides may represent heaven's perspective on one side and earth's perspective on the other.

John enters Heaven's Courtroom: Court is in session. The judge has a sealed, legal document in his right hand attesting to the authority of the instrument. We are left to ponder, "What's in the scroll?"

Augustine's City of God saw history as following God's redemptive plan which will culminate in God's Kingdom. Fourteen hundred years later, out of the "enlightenment," emerged optimistic man who envisioned the utopian State. Super positive evolutionary speculators see the progress of mankind. These dreamers envision a totalitarian, communistic, equality-forced paradise on earth that brings misery to mankind. Others claim we cannot even know the meaning and goal of history. The fact that the scroll is sealed may infer that Christ alone has the key to the meaning and destiny of history.

Revelation 5:2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

After seeing the Eternal One with book in hand, a prominent angel challenges heaven, earth, and hell with the question, "Who is worthy (able) to break the seals and open the scroll?" The gravity of the moment shuts every mouth. An eerie silence fills the room.

In silence, the world breathes slow,

A hidden rhythm we rarely know.

No words, no sound, yet all is clear—

The wonder of silence draws us near.

John looked . . . and listened intently. He is no longer seated in the audience; he has become an actor, a participant on stage in this pageant. He is a man, but more than a man. John is the Seer of Patmos. He knows it. He understands he has been given a privilege rarely bestowed on the best of holy men. He knows he is God's spokesman in the crisis that has befallen the seven churches. He is standing on stage before the Fountain Head of Knowledge and knows he must gain perspective for himself and the churches he loves.

Revelation 5:3-4 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept

much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

In the silence, John struggles with the meaning of the vision and the angelic challenge. Weighed down, he feels that it is His prophetic duty to do something. He can't stand idly by in this emergency and do nothing. John is an Israelite that believed God must right wrongs upon the earth. He is God's man and says to himself, "This is my experience. I have seen heaven's throne and I have heard Heaven's challenge. My authority is based on my experience in the presence of Almighty God. Listen to me."

At this moment in the drama John makes an observation: of all the wise men that had ever lived, and of all the kings that had ever reigned, and of all the military generals that had ever organized a campaign, no champion could be found among men worthy to accept the commission.

Swelling with emotion, John burst into tears. His weeping breaks the silence in the Courtroom. What a cosmic crisis! John identifies fully with the struggle of humanity and the want of righteous men among us. He "wept much!" This is John's way of telling us that even the best among us has failed. All are weak. All are frail. All have sinned. All leaders are deeply flawed as a ship with hidden leaks. Man is not as great as boosters claim. Instead of hearing, "Yes, we can," he realizes, **no** man can! "There is none righteous, no not one." Man needs a Redeemer, a Savior, and a fearless Champion that can execute the will of Almighty God!

In his weeping, the seer of Patmos reveals his pastor's heart. He is no hireling who flees when the thief cometh. He is truly God's gift to the seven churches of Asia Minor. His plight is one in which all good pastors find themselves – unable to move men to higher ground. John's crying reveals the anguish in his heart. He doesn't know what to do. The problems of the seven churches are not illusory. They are real, substantial, and terrifying. He loves his people. He hurts for them, and he can't leave them. He wants to provide relief for their suffering, but he has no remedy. The agony and tears of their distress compels him to search

for the meaning of the suffering of the saints in Asia Minor. Tired, with callouses on his hands and stripes on his back, he carries the burden of these churches in his heart like a sack of bricks. Pastor John is perplexed. He doesn't know what to do . . . or what to say to comfort his people. He has no power to solve the problems of his flock. John breaks into tears like a dam breaking open.

Revelation 5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

God rewards the apostle for his passion over the seven churches. "Stop weeping," orders a courtier. "Look!" advises a presbyter. There is One. There is one Man in history that has not sinned and who has the authority to take the scroll, break the seals, and execute the will of God. "Look!" shouts the presbyter. "See!" the Champion. He is the Lion King, the King of Beasts, David's Greater David, the descendent of the Giant Slayer, Who is called "Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." He was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Galilee, and challenged the power structures of three governments in Judea. He was in the Beginning with God, was God, and is God. He marched alone against our enemies and conquered them by virtue of his historical accomplishments at the cross. He is able to open the Scroll!

John perceives what an exalted place the historical the Christ plays in this drama and the destiny of history. The Jesus he knew on earth is the Lion King in this dramatic play. Jesus is not a supporting actor, but the central figure of history. Jesus is not just a man or a misunderstood teacher or one of many religious teachers or a path to God. Jesus is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega, the Savior and Lord in this pageant. He is the Judge and Executor of the will of God on the throne in this Courtroom.

With great skill John informs us that Christianity is not based on subjective speculations about salvation like all the superfluous religions

of mankind. Salvation is deeply rooted in Messianic history, in, through, and by Israel's Lion. Despite the darkness caused by Adam's fall, hope for eternal life shines from the vortex of history which is the literal, physical, material, historical death, burial, and resurrection of Israel's Messiah. Judah was called a baby lion (a lion's whelp), but in this drama the narrator directs our attention to the majesty of the King of Beasts, the root of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Moreover, his nail-pierced hands provide proof of claim that He is Lord over death and the Savior of mankind.

Revelation 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

I beheld: John narrates the story. He is no longer in the audience, he is on stage as an actor in this drama. Turning to see this regal creature, John expects to see a roaring lion. Instead, he beholds a little Lamb standing in the middle of the throne. The Champion is announced as a Lion, but He is seen as a Lamb. Five wounds mar His little frame.

A Lamb: As an Israelite familiar with the OT, John expected God to right all wrongs and to judge sinners. Now, the prophet gains insight into how God begins to set things straight. Redemption is not accomplished by mere might and law alone, but by mercy and grace.

It was not by the throne, but by the cross Christ atoned for sin. The redemptive love of God made the cross and the shed blood of the Lamb the means of salvation. In this manifestation of grace there was released in history the greatest power that humanity can ever know.

It was not the Lamb in His pristine beauty that won salvation, but the Lamb in his weakness, the sacrificed Lamb in His bloody ordeal at the cross that saves souls; that saves civilization from complete decay.

Conquest over the world is not accomplished by unlimited military coercion, but by the invincible power of the Lamb's sacrificial love.

Out of love, He left heaven's glory and faced the judgment of the cross for us. His wounds are evidence that the price was paid, that redemption is complete.

John is telling us that it is love that saves sinners; love that cleanses men; love that justifies and sanctifies; love that transports weary sinners off the island of Adam's sin to Heaven's shores; love that enables struggling Pilgrims to endure the hostility of sinners in their journey to the City of God.

"It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.

Life trials will seem so small, when we see Christ.

One glimpse of his dear face, all trials will erase.

It will be worth it all when we see Christ."

Judah was a lion's whelp, and the Lion is a Messianic figure in Jewish literature.

Mankind needs a Lion to tear man's enemies into pieces. And, He did. The work of the Lion King was the salvation of God's people (Isaiah 11:9). Singlehandedly, He crushed man's greatest enemies: Satan, sin, and death.

Man needs victory over principalities and powers . . . over Roman legions and arrogant Caesars . . . over struggles with proud and evil men. Man's need is not more effort to do better, or more work performed in order to be greater. Man needs a Champion who will rescue sinners. That Lion-Champion-Redeemer came in the form of a Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

John is **not** telling us that Christ will reign over mankind in some purported millennium, but that He is installed NOW as Messianic King (Hebrews 1:3).

Instead of telling his readers that Christ sits at the right hand of God, John paints a picture with the brush of his pen on the canvas of our minds. The final victory of Messiah is but an extension of the rule He now enjoys by virtue of the victory already won. In the end, He will destroy all rule and power that crushes men (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

Seven horns: A horn is a symbol of strength. The seven horns represent the Lamb's fullness of power.

Seven eyes: The seven eyes denote Christ's omniscience, perception, intensity, and intelligence (Ezekiel. 4:10). Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Together, the seven horns and seven eyes represent the Spirit of God. They do not refer to seven different spirits, but to the completeness and sufficiency of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is inseparable from Christ because the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Colossians 2:8-10). We see the seven characteristics of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2-3:

- The Spirit of the Lord
- The Spirit of wisdom
- The Spirit of understanding
- The Spirit of counsel
- The Spirit of power
- The Spirit of Knowledge
- The Spirit of the fear of the Lord

Before John is the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of God proceeding from the Lamb, and the Lamb proceeding from the Father. This is John's way of confirming —

“the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26).

Revelation 5:7-8 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.

What kind of person would dare approach the Judge in this Court and take this prized scroll out of His hand? Before us is dramatic imagery depicting perfect harmonious interaction between the Father and the Son.

The great question in this drama is, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to lose the seals thereof?" With the gauntlet thrown down, Heaven's Champion accepts the mission.

This is no ordinary lamb. When the Lamb stands up angelic hosts fall down. One day all of creation will fall prostrate at his feet; some will do so willingly, others will bow under the power of His Sovereignty.

With instruments in hand and hearts in tune, heaven erupts with refrains of praise to the Lamb. Until the final battle, heaven decorates their Champion with thunderclaps of praise.

The first war and last war in Scripture is about worship. Join the winning side and worship the Lamb! Bow the knee today, and you will stand with Him tomorrow (Romans 10:9, 10).

This scene supports the view that the elders and beast are angels. Before us are angelic beings with harps. The instruments of praise provide sweet sounds for the ears. Vials are opened and sweet perfumes delight the senses. The bottles of perfume are the prayers of the saints – sweeter than *Jean Patour Joie Parfum*. The term "saint" is broader than "converted Jews." It encompasses the whole family of God where there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: but all are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

Revelation 5:9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

“A new song” is a fresh composition for this special occasion-- a new world-order based on God’s Law-word (Isaiah 42:9). The Kingdom is inaugurated. New names are given (2:17; 3:12); new songs are sung (5:9; 14:2); a new heavens and a new earth are created (21:1); a newborn Jerusalem appears (21:2); and, all things are made fresh (21:5).

Worthy: The word “worthy” informs us of Jesus' qualifications to be the Savior of humanity, and his accomplishments through the cross.

Slain: The term “slain” is only used in the apocalypse and it is a reference to Isaiah 53:6.

The word “ransom” or “redeemed” means “to purchase.” The background is the picture of a slave being purchased from the market place by large sums of money. The precious merchandise are men from every tribe, language, people and nation. The only currency accepted in the spirit world is the precious blood of the Lamb (1 Peter 1:19).

The Lamb is worthy of worship because of who He is (5:6). He is the Lion-Lamb, the Man of steel and velvet, tough and tender.

He has "seven horns" which testify to His complete power. He has "seven eyes" which speak of His superior wisdom. It is the integrity of the Lamb that qualifies Him for the task of redemption. Not only does He know what to do, He has the power to do it, and the character to sustain it.

The Lamb is worthy of worship, because of the work He accomplished (Revelation 5:9): He is the slain Lamb whose throat was cut. The metaphor is intended to remind the reader of the Lamb whose blood was smeared on the doorpost to protect families from the death angel who struck all the firstborn of Egypt on the night of the Passover. It was **not** the Babe in

Bethlehem, **nor** the Prophet on the mount, but the slaughtered Lamb that accomplished redemption.

It is **not** the crown, but the cross that gains freedom for sinners. It is his death, **not** his life, which makes a prince out of a pauper, a king out of a slave. Is it any wonder the courtiers of heaven burst into accolades of praise singing, "Thou art worthy?"

Elegantly crowned and luxuriously robed are those who have been rescued by the Champion, the Lion-Lamb.

The Lamb is worthy of worship because of the wealth He possesses: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand; saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing' " (5:1).

Revelation 5:10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Textual variances in this verse impact the interpretation. Some MSS have a present tense. But the verb is an aorist. The "us" should be translated "they." The NASB has it correct: "Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God . . ."

The phrase "shall reign" should be translated "they shall reign on the earth." The tense is a present tense with future usage (Robertson). In the Lamb's triumph, the people of God share in the benefits of conquest.

This is the second time in the book John refers to the people of God as a royal priesthood. The presbytery is still speaking. They are praising God for His marvelous accomplishments. He took the redeemed, made them a kingdom, and appointed them priests; and "They shall reign on the earth for a thousand years" (20:6).

Peter called the church a “royal priesthood.” The people of God are not ones over whom He reigns, but people who actually share in His reign. To share in his reign means the people of God can enjoy the benefits of His rule now! Furthermore, the people are made priests. Being a priest refers to the priesthood and the privilege of access to God. Any suggestion the reign of the saints belongs to the future is negated by the fact the redeemed are called kings and priests now!

The significance of the song is that Christ by His shed blood on the cross has brought into existence a new humanity—a redeemed people. Therefore, his redemptive work must include the breaking of the seals and the opening of the scroll so that the Kingdom may be established and promises fulfilled. In breaking the seals, both salvation and judgment are revealed.

Revelation 5:11-12 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

John continues to narrate the story. From the Greek word “number” (arithmos) we obtain the word “arithmetic.” The word for “thousands” is “myriads” which specifies a countless number above ten thousand. The seven churches learn that their small, weak work will be successful and as result of their sacrifice an incalculable number of people will come into the fold who will join this choir of praise to honor the glorious Lamb. Before us are not impoverished saints crushed by Roman imperialism, but happy victors praising their Lion-King. This is Paradise.

The word “worthy” is the Greek word *axios*. In classical Greek, the term was used to describe a coin that balanced the opposing weight on the scales. In balancing the scale, the coin was called “fitting” or “worthy” as consideration in the purchase. Thus, our Lord measured up to the

Herculean task of redemption; that is, redemption called for a righteous man, a perfect man—a powerful man who could defeat sin, Satan, and death. Christ was fitted for the task. He achieved what no other man could accomplish. Thus, in balancing the scales of justice, heaven's throng breaks out into accolades of praise that focus on His worth. Only our Lord could balance the scale.

Our ascription of worth does not make Him worthy. He is worthy by virtue of Who He is and What He accomplished in history. And, in a mindless world, it is the privilege of the saints to contemplate Christ as their greatest asset. All life is an act of receiving. However, in worship men give to Him, not to enrich Him, but to delight in Him. The great question is not whether the Lamb is worthy, but will men esteem Him as such? When His redeemed ones realize His worth, and acknowledge this with harmonized hearts, He is honored and they become whole.

The following is a seven-fold inscription of Christ's worthiness that only the redeemed can sing. The virtues are arranged under a single article (the) indicating that they are a complete aggregate belonging to God and the Lamb.

His Power: The Lord showed his power by commanding winds and sea to obey Him; by turning water into wine; by multiplying the loaves and fishes; by raising Lazarus from the dead. But, He also restrained His power. When struck by the soldiers, He gave His back to be a plowed field. He permitted soldiers to bind him to the cross and strip him of His clothing. He could have called legions of angels to His assistance, but He did not. The exercise of His meekness might cause some to wrongly conclude that Christ was weak. Lambs are weak. But, this Lion-Lamb restrained his power in order to defeat the father of lies and to break the vice-grip of the grave by virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection. Obedient unto death, the Father raised Him from the dead and granted Him all authority as Son and Heir of the Father's kingdom.

Lord Acton once said, "Power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Few men can be trusted with power. The Stalins of this world have demonstrated this too often. But, our Lord is able to handle power and use it for good. Because He is good and wise, He can be trusted with all power. "The scepter of universal sovereignty is held in a nail-pierced hand." Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive power.

His Riches: As the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the wealth of heaven and earth are His. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge coalesce in Him. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He fashioned gold and silver by His spoken word: "Let the dry land appear, and it was so."

He is not only rich, He is the Great Giver. He uses His wealth to better the lives of others. The Lamb became poor that we might be made rich. He tasted poverty below that we might possess riches above. We were dressed in rags of unrighteousness, but He clothed us with the white linen of righteousness – more valuable than the finest Gucci, Prada, or Dior. Paul announces that in the gospel we are blessed with "all spiritual blessings" (Ephesians one). Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive riches.

His Wisdom: Education does not make a man wise. Educated people are often the biggest fools on the planet. Wisdom is the correct use of knowledge. Not only does Christ have all knowledge, but He has all wisdom. Creation was assigned to Him. By His wisdom He spoke the stars into existence . . . and earth with its lava core, cool crusts, mountains, and oceans. He created all the animals, and man who is "wonderfully made."

Who has not marveled at the engineering of the human thumb, or eye, or ear or the laminin--those microscopic bio-proteins that download information to 40 billions cells assigning each its unique function. We are born totally ignorant and have to grow in knowledge; but, our Lord has never learned anything. He is the wellspring of all knowledge. In eternity, we will all confess that everything we learned was from Him. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive wisdom.

His Strength: As humans, we face a constant dilemma; either, we do not know what to do (lack of wisdom), or we do not have the ability to do it (a lack of strength). Most men don't know how to be a millionaire. Of those that do, most do not have the investment capital to run a business entity that could create such wealth. Christ not only knows what to do, He has the ability and resources to save men from sin and to make them de jure members of the Kingdom of God. Omnipotence rests in the bosom of a gentle Sage. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive strength.

A Christian was once criticized for his faith. "The trouble with you Christians," mocked the critic, "is that you use Jesus Christ as a crutch." "You've got it all wrong," responded the believer, "He's my whole wheelchair."

His Honor: In Jesus' trial before King Herod, Luke informs us that Herod's brute police force "set him at nought (nothing)" (Luke 23:11). Before Herod's court was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of the Nations--the most perfect, pure man that ever walked the earth. Having weighed him in their balances, they considered him as dust on the scales -- a big fat zero.

Herod honored wealth, but Christ was just a poor rabbi from Galilee. Herod honored political power, but the Nazarene exercised no authority in the Roman political system. In fact, our Lord wasn't even a Roman citizen. Herod honored strength and power, but Christ sat in shackles silent as a lamb. Herod estimated Christ's value as "nothing."

But, to the Christian, Christ is our everything!! He is the Alpha and Omega, our All in all! Our risen Lord has ascended to the right hand of the Father and now reigns as Lord of lords and King of kings. The issue of course, is not whether Christ is the Central Figure of History, but whether men will recognize Him as such . . . or set his value as nothing.

The One Who is heaven's praise was cursed among men. He who is crowned with glory before the angels was marked with a crown of thorns

here below. The One whose holy train fills the temple and caused the angels to shout, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty," was stripped of His clothing on earth and beaten with whips of leather and steel. The One who represents the perfections of Almighty God was rejected by men, condemned to death, and sentenced to a criminal's fate. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive honor.

Isaiah says of him, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:6).

Fortunately, John the Seer sets the record straight. Some men deserve honor for what they know. Others for what they do or for what they are. Christ deserves honor because of all three reasons. He stooped so low and lost so much in order that we might be raised higher and gain more. He is worthy of honor and it is our privilege to lend our voices to this heavenly chorus.

His Glory: In coming to earth, our Lord divested Himself of His royal robes of majesty. The One Who littered heaven with His beauty, emptied Himself to become a man. Without complaint, He endured the hardships of being a man. There was "no beauty that we should delight in Him." As Heaven's Ambassador, He endured humiliation, ridicule, and insult among common men in order to complete the task of redemption. Despite the difficulty of His mission, the Son was obedient unto death, even the death and shame of the cross. At Calvary, "he bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken of God and afflicted." Out of the shame and ordeal of the cross He satisfied the claims of divine justice and became our salvation! By His stripes we are healed. The despised Christ of history is Heaven's Glory and Heaven's Prize. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive honor (Isaiah 53:1-6; Philippians 2:5-12).

His Blessing: The word "blessing" means "a good word" or "praise." He taught us to bless and not curse, to love and not hate, to give and not steal. He cursed no man. He could say to a bereaved father and mother,

“Weep not,” and then proceed to raise their daughter off a sick bed. In the midst of death and grief, Christ announced that He is “the resurrection and the life.” And, then Lazarus bounded out of the tomb to the astonishment and comfort of family and friends. He even prayed for the forgiveness of those ignorant soldiers who nailed Him to the tree. He gave all and took nothing. Yet among men He received the curse. Today, His name is a common swear word. But, among the redeemed His name is associated with all that is sweet, tender, and good.

“Jesus,” there is something about that name, the sweetest name I know. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive blessing (Luke 8:52).

Revelation 5:13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

The song is addressed to the Lamb and to the One on the throne. Here are the raw materials for Trinitarian Theology. John was a solid monotheist, yet He ascribes worship to the Lamb and to the One on the throne. Because of this kind of language in Scripture the church framed Trinitarian Theology: “one God existing in three persons.”

The whole of creation joins in singing the new song. The poetic language describes the universality of the redemption accomplished by the Son. We are never more whole than when we sing of the glories of Christ. Sane people, as Thomas, examine the claims of Christ using the rules of evidence and conclude that He is “Lord” and “God.” It is an act of insanity to reject Him because unbelief does not square with reality.

This Pastor from Patmos comforts the seven churches and informs them that their work in the Province of Asia was not in vain; that it was a vital stanza in the composition of history; that it added to heaven’s mission

which is the honor and glory of Him that sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever more.

Revelation 5:14 And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

All of heaven breaks into praise and adoration of the Almighty and the Lamb. These majestic creatures in heaven model for us how we should respond on earth to the glories of Christ. Praise glorifies God, and beautifies us. Praise is the reason for our existence. Our whole purpose on earth is to be a creature in God's choir and add to the adorations of the One on the throne. Praise is a return on the Father's investment for our salvation in and through His Son. When we praise God, we fulfill our reason for being. Heaven loves it; Hell hates it. Praise is to God, what complaining is to the Devil . . . and it is praise that releases His power to show us the salvation of God (Psalm 50:23).

Agno dum Spiro Jubilate.

(As long as I have breath, I will rejoice in the Lamb).

For more on John's visions see Stockton, *A Commentary on Revelation, [Standing Firm in our Time](#), 2020 2.0, in E-books at Nike Insights / Publications.*

Revelation 6

Souls Under the Altar

The Fifth Seal

Revelation 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

We don't know what heaven is like, but John sees the apostles and martyrs in heaven **as souls under the altar** – one of the few visions into heaven itself. Such a vision is as rare as diamonds on the sidewalk and is therefore described iconically.

Suddenly, the scene switches from earth to heaven. Summers says this seal introduces us to the reason of judgment. The four horsemen represent actual judgments on the earth. Now we understand why these judgments were released. The chief reason for Rome's judgment was its persecution of God's people. And, the main reason for God's judgment on any nation is its pernicious treatment of the church.

The altar: Is this the Brazen altar or the altar of incense? Some authors think it is the brazen altar, others say it is the golden altar. The brazen altar was a place where blood was poured for libations (Leviticus 4:7). The imagery portrays saints martyred in the name of their God whose souls were spilled like blood on the altar of service (Philippians 4:7). Since the saints pray, the altar could be the golden altar.

The problem, however, is easily resolved when we realize **there is only one altar in heaven**. The two altars in the earthly tabernacle symbolize two aspects of one reality in the heavenly temple. The brass altar typifies the work of Christ on earth for sinners at the cross, and the golden altar typifies the work of Christ in heaven for saints interceding for them.

The souls mentioned are actual martyrs, the apostles and other disciples, who confronted the evils of the State with a penetrating message offensive to Roman rulers. These souls were killed because of the word of God, but the imagery here informs the original readers that the apostles and early martyrs are safe and secure in the presence of God – safe because of the Lord's accomplishments at Calvary (the altar).

These souls are the martyrs of the first century who were accused of crimes against the State; i.e., the apostles. This would be a comfort to the

first century Christians and it would answer their questions about the status of martyred leaders.

But, in another sense they represent all believers who have suffered at the whims of authoritarian regimes. Ladd agreed saying these souls represent the entire church. The warning of an impending danger to the seven churches is now understood: *Persecution of Christians will continue throughout the age until Christ returns*. Sheep are easy targets for powerful tyrants.

“**Witness**” (testimony) is an accusative noun, not a verb. They held “the witness” (testimony), that is, they venerated the gospel of Christ. It is likely they accepted the gospel and were put to death because of their devotion to Christ and their unwillingness to conform to the totalitarian demands of Caesar’s officials — men who believed in the total submission of the total man to total government. No man can serve two masters: God and Government; King Jesus and Caesar; The Ten Commandments of God and the civil statutes of man.

Revelation 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The word “**dwell**” is qualitative, not quantitative.

Behind this prayer is our Lord’s question, “Will not God avenge His elect who cry out day and night . . . ?” (Luke 18:7).

Like Abel’s blood that screamed for retribution, these souls cry for vengeance. Cain’s hatred of righteous Abel has expanded to incite governments to slaughter Christians who proclaim Christ as King, redemption by blood, and who resist the monolithic powers of the State. The martyrs are baffled by God’s moratorium on judgment. God’s delays weigh heavily upon the hearts of truth seekers (Genesis 5:10; Psalm 13:1ff).

The fact that some decry judgment saying it is unchristian is remarkable. God's throne is a throne of holiness as well as mercy. God acts according to law as well as grace. While Christians as a group have been called to express love, it does not mean they cannot cry out for justice from the One who has the duty to judge the sins of men. There is a place for imprecatory prayers. The issue among Christians is never, "Should justice prevail?" but, "Why does God take so long to dispense justice?"

Revelation 6:11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

The white robe is a symbol of "blessedness," "rest," and "acceptance." The need is for patience. The message given to the martyrs is also intended for us. Christians grieve over the foolishness of political leaders and the crimes committed by officials. We are called to endure the hostility of man toward man knowing that God will act judicially against the sins of tyrants in his own time. Wearing a white robe represents the Christian's cardinal duty to seek righteousness in this present evil age.

This group of martyrs are a category and will be dealt with as a whole, not individually. John wants his readers to know that the martyrs of the first century are in heaven, accepted by God, clothed in white, secure by the blood of Christ (the altar), and at rest in His presence.

Rest: Furthermore, John wants his readers to know that persecution will continue throughout this evil age and they should not be surprised by periods of profanity in history. God's delay is really the silence before the storm. The thunder of judgment will come.

Revelation Seven

The Vision of the Great Multitude

Before us is another rare insight into heaven wherein John is able to see living souls.

Revelation 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

“After this” (meta tauta): John was given another vision of hope and encouragement. The 144,000 are living souls on earth. The innumerable multitude from every tribe and nation are souls in heaven, before the throne, and before the lamb. The fact that they are gloriously “clothed in robes” means that they are not naked; that God has provided all that they need for salvation; that departed saints are righteous in His sight.

“Standing before the throne” refers to the clarity of their faith in the sovereignty and authority of Christ.

“Before the Lamb” identifies their trust in Christ as the Lamb sacrificed on Calvary.

“clothed with white robes” assures the readers that the sins of men are forgiven; that believers are righteous in His sight; and that the departed are fully accepted in the Beloved — a comfort for living men conscious of the sins and defects. Their faith and hope has become an existential reality.

“Palms in their hands” represent joy and celebration — a relationship to the Feast of Tabernacles. This group is **not** sealed for protection because *they have safely arrived on the other side of the great sea in the presence of God.*

The **“great multitude”** is also a picture of the church triumphant — the true Israel of God. They relate to the 144,000 in that they are members of the same family. They differ from the 144,000 in that they are not on earth, but in heaven. “This group is not sealed for protection because it

has passed beyond the need of protection. They have been victorious in trial” (Summers, 1951, p. 151).

Revelation 7:10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

Who are these people? These are people in heaven — departed saints who have tasted the grace of God and the wonder of salvation. United, they sing to God and attribute their deliverance to God and to the Lamb.

Revelation 7:11-13 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

We receive more confirmation that this heavenly host is in heaven because the angels and elders and four beasts agree with this song of salvation and fall on their faces and say, “Amen!”

Revelation 7:13-14 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

To make sure the identity of the multitude is clearly understood, the angel queries John about this congregation. It is a question and answered in time for the Seer.

John confesses ignorance but also expresses confidence that he will be enlightened. The question is asked, not because the angel did not know the answer, but because John and his readers needed to know the answer.

This multitude is identified as those who have come out of the great tribulation, who have washed their robes and been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. This is none other than the Church Triumphant.

What is this tribulation? There is little unity among Bible interpreters as to the correct answer.

The futurists say this is “the great tribulation” which is yet future to our time. But, this view assigns a theological schematic to “the Great Tribulation” which is a product of modern times. Such a graphic is **not** what the angel had in mind.

Another view is that the “great tribulation” refers to the difficulties that all men face on earth or life itself. This view is determined by the context, the *hunger and thirst and heat* mentioned in verses 15-17. This view is correct.

The correct view is that the “Great Tribulation” is the ordeal of death which all Christians face.

We live in an “evil age” that is characterized by trials and tribulations (Galatians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:1ff). Every period in history has its unique battles and struggles which test the faith and character of the redeemed.

The great tribulation, then, is **not** some supposed future seven-year period of global suffering at the end of this age, *but the affliction and adversities of this life caused by one’s identification with the cause of Christ*; that is, the Christian-human experience, particularly the rigors of death.

The death-experience of Christians is a fiery ordeal that tests the souls of all men. Death is an enemy and life’s most bitter experience—**the great tribulation for all men**. Whether it is a death by stroke, or heart attack, or cancer, or some strange accident, death is never welcome and seldom easy.

Therefore, the great tribulation must be viewed as the trials of this pilgrim journey we call “life,” and the trial of crossing “the River Jordan during the flood season” which is **a metaphor for “death.”**

The angel identifies God's people: (a) They are clothed (justification); (b) they are washed (regeneration & sanctification); and (c) they survive the great tribulation by resurrection because of their faith, conviction, and obedience (preservation, resurrection, and glorification).

Revelation 7:15-17 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

We have an interesting reversal in this passage. The redeeming Lamb on His glorious Throne as Executor of God's Last Will and Testament is here portrayed as the caring, providing Shepherd. Christ's flock in heaven is protected from every adversity. Every need is supplied. The feast is so great every sorrow is forgotten.

Look at the blessings of the redeemed:

Location: "before the throne."

Occupation: "serve him night and day."

Communion: He shall "dwell among them."

Protection: no more hunger or thirst or exposure to the elements.

Provision: He "shall feed them."

Salvation: They are led to the "living fountains of waters."

Satisfaction: Every tear is wiped away.

In conclusion, before John discusses the great acts of judgment that come on nations during the church age, he assures his readers that God's people, the church militant (those fighting for the gospel on earth) are

known by God and protected by Him; that is, they are secure even in rip tides of God's electrical storms. The church triumphant (those resting in heaven) have crossed the great divide and are now enjoying the presence and fullness of Christ. This glory has been made possible by the victory of the Lamb. No wonder the Great Multitude bursts into their forte, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!"

References

Publications