

Beauties of the Truth

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The Setting of the Vision of Ezekiel's Temple

The vision of Ezekiel's temple is the most prominent part of his prophecy. It covers the last nine chapters of the book and is the focal point of his entire message. This remarkable book covers a span of 20 years, from the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity (1:1, 2) to the vision of the temple in the fourteenth year after the fall of Jerusalem and the removal of Zedekiah (40:1).

Appropriately enough, the burden of the book is punishment for sin and redemption. After discussing the punishments for Judah's captivity (chapters 4-24) and the judgments against surrounding nations (chapters 25-32), the prophet predicts the restoration of sovereignty to the oppressed people (chapters 33-39) before he highlights the return of their worship of Jehovah (chapters 40-48).

Ezekiel sees three visions of God. In the first chapter he sees the glory of the Almighty, in chapters eight through eleven he witnesses God as the stern, yet just, judge. In this closing vision he sees him as the one who again claims Israel's worship as his just and righteous due.

THE DATING OF THE VISION

Great care is given by the prophet to state the date of the vision precise to the day, month and year. This prophecy is still early in the period of servitude, which began when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem in the days of King Jehoiakim (Daniel 1:1). The year may be significant, as it was 33 years (19 plus 14) from the start of the servitude - the same as the age of Jesus when he was crucified at Calvary.* Both that sacrifice and the temple vision relate to the grand theme of redemption and restoration.

The date of the vision is significant. We are uncertain whether the first month of the civil year (Tishri) or the religious year (Nisan) is meant. The tenth day of both months were important days for the Hebrews. On the tenth of Nisan each family was to select a lamb for the Passover sacrifice. On the tenth of Tishri they celebrated the Day of Atonement.

We suggest it was the civil year for the following reasons. Having no temple or altar on which to sacrifice, it is unlikely there was any selection of lambs during the Babylonian captivity. Since religious observances were kept only partially, if at all, there was little need for a religious year while they were in Chaldea. On the other hand, the Day of Atonement, whether observed with sacrifices or not, was the very symbol of redemption and essential for the cleansing of their houses of worship for the functions of temple or tabernacle.

Thus, by giving the vision on the Day of Atonement, Jehovah is stressing that this new and visionary temple would be clean and acceptable to him for the worship of his people.

THE LOCATION OF THE VISION

Verse two says Ezekiel was transported in spirit to a high mountain in Israel where he could view restored Jerusalem on the south. The usual perspective for one to get an overview of the holy city is on the Mount of Olives to the *east*. The only mount that fits the description of Ezekiel is Mount Scopus, the site of the Hadassah Hospital today.

Scopus is the Latin name of the mount given by the Roman general Titus when he established his siege and came against Jerusalem in 70 AD. The name literally means "Lookout Mountain" because of its commanding view of the city. This mount is identified by most scholars with the biblical Nob. This mount also served as a lookout for the Assyrians in their unsuccessful assault in the days of Hezekiah (Isaiah 10:32).

Nob is appropriate not only because of its location as a lookout, but also because it was a priestly city. It was here that David sought food for his men from the high priest Ahimelech, and here that Saul, in retaliation, slaughtered all the priests that were there.

As distinct from the usual vantage point on the Mount of Olives, the choice of this mount shows the viewpoint to be presented by Ezekiel is different than usual. That it was a priestly city may indicate the panorama can be best appreciated by the antitypical priests. Its use by the forces of Titus and previously by the Assyrians connects it further with a scene of judgment.

THE MAN IN BRONZE

We are given little description of the lone actor in the vision other than that "his appearance was as the appearance of brass" (verse 3). The same description is found of "men" three other times in the Bible. In the first chapter of Ezekiel four living creatures are similarly depicted. The angel who communed with Daniel, presumably Gabriel, has arms and feet like polished brass (Daniel 10:6). In the first chapter of Revelation the Lord himself is described as having feet like fine brass (Revelation 1:15). In all these cases the ones bearing this description are heavenly or spirit beings. Evidently then, the one doing the measuring in the temple vision is also a spirit being, either an angel or, more likely, the Lord himself.

There is an inclination among some Bible Students, in appreciation of his clear expositions of biblical truths, to apply the man in Ezekiel 40 to Charles Taze Russell. The two views are related. The Lord uses human agencies to carry forth his work, and it is often not wrong for them to use the same title of office as the Lord himself. For

instance, in Luke 12:37 the Lord himself serves his people meat in due season at his return, whereas in Matthew 24:45 this work is done by the “wise and faithful servant”

This principle is delineated in Revelation 1:1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.” This revelation, like most truths, originates with God who gives it to his Son to distribute through chosen “angels” or messengers. In the case of Revelation, these messengers are the angels to the seven churches of the second and third chapters.

THE MEASURING REED

The measuring reed in the hand of the man in bronze is cut at six cubits, each being an ordinary (probably Babylonian) cubit plus a hand-breadth. There have been many estimates of the length of these so-called “royal cubits,” from 15 to 25 inches. There is a method of inferring the approximate measure in the last chapter of this prophecy.

Chapter 48 deals with the division of the land among the twelve tribes. Here, as opposed to recognizing natural boundaries, the land is neatly sliced into twelve portions running east to west. Seven tribes are in the north, five in the south, and between them is a special allotment of land for the priests, Levites, and the city. This allotment measures 25,000 x 25,000, and the unit of measure may be the six cubit reed mentioned above. Within this allotment the depth of the portions for the priests and Levites are each 10,000 measures. If we assume the tribal allotments were also 10,000 measures deep, the entire depth of land from north to south would be 145,000 reeds ($12 \times 10,000 + 25,000 = 145,000$).

The northern border is given as Hazar-Enan, at the cross road between the highway from Damascus to Hethlon, south to Hamath (verse 1). The present city best matching this description is Baniyas (the Caesarea Phillipi of the New Testament) at the southern base of Mt. Hermon.

On the south we have Tamar, Kadesh, and the River of Egypt (verse 28, NAS). Tamar is the biblical En-Gedi (2 Chronicles 20:2). These three points delineate a diagonal line from the middle of the Dead Sea to the southern rim of the Mediterranean Sea.

Thus the distance from the most northern point to the most southern is approximately 250 miles. We can determine the approximate length of the cubit by dividing 250 miles into 145,000 measures, each measure containing six cubits (each cubit extended by a hand breadth, Ezekiel 40:5). This yields a reed length of 9.1 feet, and a cubit length of 18.2 inches. (Another argument against a cubit of 25 inches is that the reed would be over 12 feet long. A man holding a 12-foot rod would be more awkward than if the rod were nine feet.)

STANDING IN THE GATE

Ezekiel 40:3 says the man in bronze “stood in the gate.” We are not told which gate, and the temple had six of them (three to the inner court, three to the outer court). Though it is tempting to think of this as the eastern gate (since that was the gate by which the glory of the Lord entered), probably it was the northern gate, since Ezekiel could see it in vision from his prospect on the northern mount.

The gates here are not ordinary doors, but buildings with multiple rooms for the guards who supervised entrance thereto. The gates were also places of meditation and communion (Ezekiel 44:2, 3). Another function of city gates is that they provided a place for the judges of the city to sit and hold court. Each of these functions is appropriate in this vision. The thought of our verse is that the Lord meets with Ezekiel at the place of communication.

EZEKIEL'S COMMISSION

“And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 40:4).

Though the vision was for Ezekiel's eyes alone, it was not just for his personal information. He was commissioned to show all he had seen to the house of Israel. And though Ezekiel is writing from Babylon, he does not confine his message to Judea but includes all twelve tribes. This is evident also from the land promises of the final chapter.

However, though he was to communicate all he saw to the entire Hebrew populace, it was not to be done in one message, nor all parts given to all of the exiles. There are further details to this commission in Ezekiel 43:10, 11. “Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof. and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them”

The vision was to be shared in two parts. First, he was to give an overall description of the temple for the purpose of producing repentance. Then, and only to those in whom repentance was found, he was to give the further details of the services. The overall vision can be subdivided into five sections: (1) the structure itself (40:4-43:9), (2) the servants of the temple (44), (3) the services of the temple (44, 45), (4) the river from the temple (47), and (5) the land division of restored Israel (48). The reiteration of Ezekiel's commission comes at the transition point between the first two sections. (There is one notable exception: the description of the altar is placed in section two.)

The question might be asked how the description of a physical structure, with precise and intricate measures, could be expected to lead to the emotion of repentance. One merely needs to put himself in the position of a sincere Jewish exile. After the initial shock of deportation, the Israeli community adapted well to life in Babylon. Many became prosperous. Business enterprises were permitted and encouraged. Some, notably Daniel and his three friends, had risen to high positions in government. In fact it was so comfortable that when permitted to return by Cyrus, only a small percent accepted the invitation. Life was not all that bad, in fact it was more comfortable than suffering the rigors of a pioneer and returning.

But one thing was absent. To the sincere Israelite, this one thing meant everything. There was no temple of Jehovah in Babylon. Thus Daniel prayed three times a day with his face toward Jerusalem. To them, true worship involved regular visits to the place where God had put his name (1 Kings 9:3; 11:36). The vision of Ezekiel, with a restored temple even greater than that of Solomon, was designed to awaken this renewed desire to serve God in his place and in his ways.

Those who were not so moved were not deemed worthy of hearing the details of the temple worship. Those who did show repentance were to be given both the details of temple service and the promises of restoration to their land, and identification with the river of blessing that would reach all the families of the earth.

The same is true today with telling others of God's plan. We should freely give forth the general outline of that plan with its core message of redemption and restitution for all people. But the deeper truths of personal worship and responsibility, the message of consecration and what it entails, is only for those who show this

repentance.

With this background, the further study of the details of Ezekiel's temple "and all the laws thereof, and all the forms thereof," will surely bring a blessing to the careful student of God's word. This message is for the development of the church of Christ. Speaking of the new Jerusalem, John writes "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Revelation 21:22).

- *Carl Hagensick*

*A close calculation may raise a difficulty here. The fall of Zedekiah was actually 18 years after the first captivity, and thence to the temple vision in the "fourteenth" year after the fall of Zedekiah would be an additional interval of 13 years. The result would be 31 rather than 33 years. - David Rice

Trials

It seems to me that God tries or tests not our weaknesses but our strengths, not our weak points but our strong points. Isn't this reasonable? A teacher does not test his pupils until they have been instructed and have learned their lessons. The higher the education the more difficult the examination. The greater our strengths, the greater our trials along those lines may be. The trials we have are evidences that we are making progress, that we have advanced, that God sees in us something worthy of testing and proving. We read in Job 23:10, "But he knoweth the way that I take. When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Fiery trials do not produce or create the "gold" in our characters. They simply remove the dross and purify and make manifest the golden traits that are already there, that have already been developed. As we read in 1 Peter 1:7, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor and glory." Our trials should encourage and not discourage us.

How thankful we are that God's testings are always just and reasonable, not beyond our ability. We read in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

The Diaglott uses the word "trial" instead of "temptation" Strange to say, this text has been a source of great discouragement to some in the narrow way because it appears to say that there is a way to escape every temptation. If the Lord has provided a way of escape, surely the child of God will take it. Thus it appears to teach that we should be able to escape every temptation. Naturally, the one who has been tempted and has fallen under the temptation becomes discouraged. Satan, who engineered the temptation in the first place, now subtly suggests: "Did not the Lord promise a way of escape? See, he failed you. You cannot rely on his promises." Or Satan may suggest a variation of this: "The Lord has promised his children a way of escape. Since none was provided for you, you are obviously not a child of God."

Let us, as Jesus did, dispose of Satan by citing scriptures. In this case the Diaglott rendition of the text reads:

“No trial has assailed you, except what belongs to man; and God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.”

There we have it! “He will direct the issue. “ He will direct that the issue or result will be for our good. When we have failed under a temptation or trial - and which of us has not - and another set of similar circumstances occurs, we are instantly on our guard And this time we do not fail. With each victory we gain strength and assurance and maturity.

The experience of Peter provides a classic example of this principle. Just before his crucifixion Jesus knew that Satan was going to make an attempt against Simon Peter. Jesus warned Peter, saying, “Simon, Simon; behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” Then he reassured Peter, saying, “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.”

Notice here that Jesus did not pray that Peter would successfully resist Satan’s temptation or escape it. He knew that Peter would not resist but would fall under that temptation. He told him so, saying, “I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me” (Luke 22:31, 32, 34).

You would think that this forewarning would enable Peter to collect his thoughts, be on the alert, and steel himself with determination not to fail! But even this forewarning did not provide a “way of escape” for Peter. No “way of escape” was provided but the Lord did “direct the issue” Jesus knew that Peter's failure would be extremely discouraging to one so fiercely loyal as he was; that he might lose faith in himself and thenceforth consider himself unfit to be a follower of the Master; that Satan would suggest these things to Peter's mind and seek to sift him out. So Jesus prayed that his “faith fail not”

Jesus' prayer was answered. Peter's ignominious failure cut him to the heart. He wept bitterly. Then he felt very humble. He remembered his Master's words: “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32). The experience converted this impetuous, reckless and self-assured man into an apostle of meekness and quietness - a tower of strength to the early Church. When the time of martyrdom came for this rugged saint, it is said that he ran to meet his executioner as if, by this gesture, he might wipe out that act of cowardice so many years before when he ran away!

It was this same Peter who from his wealth of experience wrote to us, to you and to me: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” -1 Peter 4:12, 13

- *Robert Seklemian*

Jephthah's Daughter

The story of Jephthah in Judges 11 is quite peculiar. How are we to excuse an army captain who heartlessly offers his daughter in exchange for victory in a war against the Amorites? The account begins in Judges 11, verse 30:

“And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering (vs. 34). And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house and behold his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances and she was his only child (vs. 39). And it came to pass at the end of two months that she returned unto her father who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.”

When Jephthah says “Whatsoever cometh forth from my house to meet me,” the verb is masculine. Since he had no sons, he obviously was not thinking about a human being. But now he is confronted with the unexpected: the first thing out of his house is his daughter. Is he prepared to offer her as a burnt offering as he had vowed?

Jephthah had complete faith in God, which is why he is listed as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11:32. His word is his bond so what he has vowed he will pay. His daughter similarly shows complete devotion to fulfilling a promise made to God, whatever it may be. So did Jephthah offer his daughter as a burnt offering? Certainly NOT! But what could he do? He could substitute money.



Jephthah's Daughter Coming to Meet Her Father

Leviticus 27:2 reads, “Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the Lord by thy estimation.” Then follow the rules concerning the exchange of money for people. It even describes the exchange of money for an unclean beast because only clean male animals could be sacrificed as a burnt offering. The law was clear: humans were never offered in fire. “Whosoever ... giveth any of his seed unto Molech [the fire god] shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones” (Leviticus 20-2).

So Jephthah had two options: (1) He could redeem his daughter with money according to the rules of Leviticus 27, or (2) He could give his daughter to the service of the sanctuary. He selected the second option. He had said, “Whosoever comes forth ... shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up. “ In his mind substituting money would not be right '

So what really happened to his daughter? She remained unmarried and had no children. This was a heavy penalty in Israel. All the women prayed that they might be the mother of that “seed” which was to bless Israel.

Jephthah's daughter never had that chance. Being barren was considered a curse from God. Being a mother was a great blessing. Of course the daughter remained alive.

Although verse 40 says “The daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah this is the only place where this Hebrew word is translated “lament “ The word means to “give praise” (margin: “to talk with”). Jephthah gave his daughter to the Lord just as Hannah gave her son Samuel to the Lord.

Jephthah’s vow meant a life without a husband for his daughter, and that affected him in a very direct way. Since she was his only child, there was none to continue his line. His name must perish out of Israel. That, too, was a heavy penalty.

All this happened because of a vow uttered rashly. We can commend Jephthah for being as good as his word. Would we do as well? Have we ever said, “If only thus and so, I'll do such and such?” But did we do it? Maybe not. Starting today, let's be more careful with our words. “It is a snare to utter a vow rashly, and not until later inquire whether we can fulfill it” (Proverbs 20:25). Those who are walking in the footsteps of the Master ought to be as good as their word.

- *Michael Nekora*

Matriarch Prophecies

In view of the fact that the Hebrew nation has been known as “the children of Israel,” a closer look should be given to the children of Jacob from which the nation took its name. Since Chapters 29 and 30 of Genesis record the early history of these twelve sons of Jacob, it follows that their history, in some way, corresponds with the history of the nation descended from them.

Let it be noted that in addition to the naming of the twelve sons, Genesis 29 and 30 record the circumstances which gave rise to each of their names. In each birth there is a reason given for the names they received, and their mother's comments at the time have been preserved as a record for us.

Jacob's **first son** was Reuben, born to him of Leah. Upon this son, Leah said these words, “Surely the Lord has looked upon my affliction” (Genesis 29:32). The **second son** was also born of Leah and his name was Simeon. The reason she named him so was “the Lord hath heard that I was hated” (Genesis 29:33).

The resemblance between these two comments by Leah and what was recorded in Exodus about the sufferings of Israel in Egypt is at once brought to our minds. First, we read that “God looked upon the children of Israel” (Exodus 2:5). Then to Moses he said “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt” (Exodus 3:7). Corresponding with the words of Leah when Simeon was born, God adds “I have heard their cry” (Exodus 3:7).

It is surely more than coincidence that at the births of Israel's first two sons their mother should have spoken of “affliction,” which she plainly said the Lord had “looked upon~” and “heard,” and that these same words are used in the Scriptures that describe the first stage in the natural history of the children of Israel who were described as “hated” and “afflicted” by the Egyptians. When the Lord told Moses he had seen the affliction of his people and heard their cry, did he not have in mind these very words that were spoken by Leah so many years before?

Jacob's **third son** by Leah was Levi. When he was born Leah said “This time will my husband be joined to me” (Genesis 29:34). These words point forward to the beginning of Israel's national history. One might ask when

God was “joined” to Israel and became her husband. It was on the eve of their leaving Egypt, in the night of the Passover, when the Lamb was slain and its blood shed and sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of the homes of Israel. It was then that God entered into covenant relationship with Israel and became her “husband” It was at the antitypical Passover that God “joined” to us, his children, and has become one with us in Christ.

Jacob's *fourth son* was Judah, also born of Leah. When he was born Leah said “Now will I praise the Lord” (Genesis 29:35). As her words at Levi's birth carried us back to the Passover, her words at Judah's birth bring us forward to Israel's crossing of the Red Sea, where they celebrated God's victory over their foes with much singing and praise to God.

Next came Dan, born of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. At his birth Rachel said “God hath judged me” (Genesis 30:6). If we have been correct in our interpretation so far, then these words of Rachel carry us prophetically to the early experiences of Israel in the wilderness. “God hath judged me” points to the displeasure and wrath of God against Israel for their murmurings during this time.

At the birth of Naphtali, *the sixth son*, also of Bilhah, Rachel exclaims “With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed” (Genesis 30:8). This, too, corresponds with Israel's natural history. The very thing we read after God “judged” Israel for their sin at Merribah was their conflict or wrestling with Amalek. It is interesting that the same word used at Naphtali's birth by Rachel is used to describe the wrestling between Israel and Amalek. “And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel *prevailed*, and when he let down his hand Amalek *prevailed*” (Exodus 17: 11).

What the mother had to say at the births of the *seventh and eighth sons* of Jacob may be connected with the births of the *ninth and tenth sons*. At the birth of Gad, whose mother was Zilpah, Leah's handmaid, it was said “A troop cometh” (Genesis 30:11). This agrees with Israel's history also, for after their wilderness experiences and the crossing of Jordan a “troop” had indeed met them - the seven nations of Canaanites who opposed them. At the birth of Asher these words were uttered by his mother Zilpah: “Happy am I” (Genesis 30:13), and foretells Israel's joy at overcoming their enemies.

When Jacob's *ninth and tenth sons*, Issachar and Zebulun, were born, Leah explained “God hath given me my hire” and “God hath endued me with a good dowry” (Genesis 30:18, 20). These two statements foretell Israel's occupation of the land, their goodly inheritance which God endowed to them.

There was an interval before the **last two sons** were born. They were both born to Jacob by his beloved wife Rachel. Her words at the birth of Joseph were “God hath taken away my reproach * “ How fitting that this new development of Jacobs lineage, this new beginning of his seed by his beloved wife, corresponds so beautifully with the new beginning of the nation when they had crossed Jordan into the new land, after every male was circumcised. The Lord then said “This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you”

Rachel spoke prophetically at Joseph's birth, “The Lord shall add to me another son” This happened some years later, when Rachel gave birth to a second son at the time of her death. “And it came to pass that as her soul was departing that she called him “Benoni, the son of my sorrow.” But his father called him “Benjamin, the son of my right hand” Israel, as a nation, endured much sorrow until the kingship of David and Solomon, when typically it became “the son of my right hand * “ In the grander picture Israel as the restored and blessed nation will become in truth “the son of my right hand”

GROUPED BY THEIR MOTHERS

Thus the words spoken by the mothers of Jacob's twelve sons were prophetic intimations of the history of Israel from its beginning in Egypt to its glory with Solomon and the ultimate glory of the kingdom. To complete our study, we call attention to the grouping of Jacobs sons under their different mothers. These correspond with the groupings of the outstanding events in the history of Israel.

The *first four sons* were born of Leah, Jacob's first wife, and her description of each son points to Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Rachel's description of the *fifth and six sons*, born of Bilhah, point to Israel's experience in the wilderness. Leah's words at the birth of the *seventh and eighth*, born of Zilpah, the handmaid of Leah, and the *ninth and tenth*, born of Leah, prophesied of the enjoyment of the promised land. The *eleventh and twelfth* were separated from all the others, being born of Rachel. Her words at their births point forward to the establishment of the Kingdom.

The words of these mothers were surely guided by God, through the influence of the holy Spirit. These words carry their prophetic utterance to our very day. Truly, we can see the divine inspiration of the Scriptures!

- George Eldridge

LEAH	Reuben Simeon Levi Judah	Behold a son Hearing Joiner Praise
BILHAH	Dan Naphtali	Judged Wrestling
ZILPAH	Gad Asher	Troop Happy
LEAH	Issachar Zebulun (Dinah)	Reward Habitation Vindication
RACHEL	Joseph Benjamin	Increaser Pain, sorrow

The Empty Tomb

The empty tomb is a theological conundrum. We cannot use it to prove anything really, nor can we use it to disprove anything.

Yet if Jesus' body lay entombed there, how difficult it would be for the disciples to believe in the resurrection. The instances when the disciples witnessed Jesus' power to raise the dead always involved a body being raised. Therefore, for the disciples to believe Christ was raised from the dead required the body not be present in the tomb. It would have been an insurmountable obstacle to their faith, in that time and place.

The disciples during this period often associated the resurrection with the body. Remember Thomas was absent when our Lord first appeared to the disciples. What a time to be absent! He apparently believed in the resurrection of the body. Remember what he said, "Except I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

Perhaps he felt hurt and left out at being the last to witness the resurrection, but he was being a little hard about this whole matter. By his demand he insinuated that the others had not made these identifying observations and that therefore they were possibly deceived. If he did not believe the witness of the resurrection by the disciples, he should have believed Jesus' testimony in Mark 9:31, "They will kill him; and when he has been killed, He will rise three days later." His position was extreme, perhaps even stubborn. He melted immediately when our Lord appeared, but the Lord insisted on meeting his terms.

Thomas was wrong in demanding to see Jesus raised in a similar human body. How easily the church later was led astray in believing the resurrection of the body. That is the first mistake to take root in the church - The Apostle's Creed, while correct in every other matter, errs in this matter - stating "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Paul says, "Thou fool ... God *giveth it a body* as it hath pleased him, and to every seed its own body" (1 Corinthians 15:36, 38).

NO WITNESSES

We have no witnesses as to what happened to Jesus' body. None. The story starts with the empty tomb. All we have is Acts 2:31, "His soul was not left in hades, neither his flesh did see corruption" The women and later Mary were witnesses of the empty tomb. Peter and John took pains to confirm the fact that the tomb was empty. Also the soldiers who guarded the tomb were witnesses to the tomb being empty.

SPICES WASTED BUT APPRECIATED

When Jesus was buried they put about 100 pounds of spices on his body. The sisters apparently were coming to add more spices according to Mark's account (Mark 16:1). When they arrived they met the angels who said "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is risen"

When Peter and John arrived they saw Jesus' linen grave clothes there, but the linen head napkin was all rolled up in a place by itself No mention is made of the spices. The living don't need spices. At any rate his body never needed spices because God's Word made it clear it would not corrupt. However, the spices are not mentioned even though they would normally have been poured over or under the grave garments.

The women came to honor Jesus; he honored them with the news of the resurrection. They were the first to hear

the angel and to see Jesus. "Them that honor me I will honor." Here was a surprising move to decentralize from a clergy-laity arrangement as it later became. All the faithful believers in Jesus, some 500, were witnesses of his resurrection. Jesus only appeared to the faithful. No others. That is important.

Jesus could have appeared to Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, Caesar, the Roman Senate - he would have put the fear of God into their hearts. But he did not. Why? Christ wanted only true believers to be witnesses. To the wicked he says, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes ... seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee" (Psalm 50:16, 17). No enemy was a witness. This is wise from another standpoint - the Devil had no way to misrepresent matters by reporting false information. They simply had no information on the resurrection.

THE PROBLEM OF THE EMPTY TOMB

The empty tomb was bad news for Jesus' enemies. They had it guarded to prevent the body from being carried away. The body was gone. That prevented them from showing Jesus' dead body as proof that no resurrection had taken place, yet - notice - they did not send out a search party to find the body. In a small community it would be hard to hide a body. They were in a difficult position, but there is no indication that they believed his body was stolen. They bribed the guards to spread the rumor that the "disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept" (Matthew 28:13). (How could they know what happened if they were sleeping?) The soldiers probably heard the angel say "He is risen" So they knew it was useless to search for the body. The empty tomb troubles the enemy.

The empty tomb puzzled Mary. She supposed someone did take Jesus' body. When she met Jesus she thought he was a gardener. When he asked her why she was crying she said, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away" (John 20:15). She believed the tomb was empty and Jesus was still dead. She wanted to find the body. There was no body to find. The empty tomb troubled Mary.

The empty tomb posed a problem for Jesus. He had to show that he was risen without his former body. This was difficult because he was made alive a "lifegiving spirit" and his disciples were looking for a flesh and blood Jesus (1 Peter 3:18, 1 Corinth. 15:45).

The proof of the resurrection is not the empty tomb. It is his witnesses and his word. Last of all he was seen of Paul as one born out of due season, shining above the sun at noonday. - *Gene Burns*

The Trial of Faith

The Edomite saint [a classical title for Job] must have looked into birds' nests when he used the comparison, "I said, I shall die in my nest" (Job 29:18). That is what a good many people say. They build each a nest for himself, and not for a summer, but for a life. They say that they shall die in it after many years of enjoyment of it. But they need the treatment the mother bird gives her young. Her first step is to make the nest uncomfortable. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest" (Deuteronomy 32:11), she mixes the thorny outside with the downy inside. So God, by his testing providences, makes the place of rest one of unrest to us, and thus lures us out to trust ourselves to his care and guidance over untried ways. And so he brings us to a stronger, maturer, more useful life. The wind roots the tree deeper in the soil. The stormy waves cause the anchor to take a stronger grip. There are advantages in disadvantages. Disappointments have proven God's best appointments. Financial ruin has proved a man's salvation. Sickness has brought many highest health"

- *Dr G. Hallock, R3351*

Financial Statement

Beauties of the Truth 1997 Financial Statement

\$2365.20	Balance January 1, 1997
1597.00	Donations
30.41	Interest
<u>- 2690.40</u>	Expenses
\$1302.21	Balance December 31, 1997