

## 9

# Symbolic Insight

We learn in many different ways. On my first day of grad school, we were told that some of our professors would not teach us in the same way we were familiar with. They would not present material in a didactic way using information, facts, and linear thinking – one, two, three. Instead they would be using picture language and stories in a more circular way.

I had no idea how that would really work until I sat in classes taught by professors with different ethnic backgrounds. I found it frustrating because my brain didn't seem to want to work in that way. But *knowing* can be communicated in numerous ways: words, stories, poetry, symbolic images, facial movement, body actions, drawings, colors, sounds, movement, etc.

In fact, much of what we know cannot be fully expressed except through various art forms and symbolic pictures or picture language. Symbolic images can quickly portray an abstraction that would take hours to describe. They help us communicate our feelings, moods, emotions, and values.

↳ *Notice when you hear someone using symbolic or picture language.*

For example, how would you explain *love*? While love is a primary value and experience for us, we can't describe it as yellow and weighing ten pounds. It takes a story – using symbolic images – to communicate what love is.

Here is how Scottish poet Robert Burns carries us into his experience of love:

O, my luve's like a red, red rose; That's newly sprung in June. O, my luve is like the  
melodie; That's sweetly played in tune.

In this chapter, I want us to look at the symbolic meaning of some of the word pictures mentioned in our Key Scriptures in Chapter 1. In particular, I want to focus on these seven images: 1) the garden, 2) the trees, 3) the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, 4) the water of life, 5) a flowing river, 6) the Lamb, 7) the throne of God. But first I need to help you understand a bit about the importance of symbolic awareness.

## Picture Language

Picture language appears to be the one common language we all share. According to French priest Ernest Dimnet,<sup>41</sup> we experience the presence of pictorial images first, then our ideas follow.

When you and your friends are trying to decide where to go to eat, I am guessing that you often think of an image of some type of food you enjoy before you choose the restaurant.

Perhaps this is why God deliberately obscures His messages in “dark sayings,” that is, He uses picture language in puzzles, enigmas, or knotted messages that we need to unravel like we do a proverb or a riddle (see Num 12:6-8). When Jesus walked the earth, he often used picture language too.

- I speak to them in parables, because, while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand (Matt 13:13).

The essence of picture language or symbolic language is this: something concrete is used to make present something not easily perceived. To help us understand invisible spiritual realities, in his teaching Jesus often used ordinary tangible things – fire, trees, fish, candles, seeds, bread, wine, houses, rocks, wind. For example, He often explained the kingdom of God using natural things like this one:

*The Kingdom is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all others seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches (Matt 13:31-32).*

Have you noticed that some things cannot be understood until they are clothed in picture language? Fairy tales, poetry, science fiction, fantasy, art, and architecture also use this type of communication. So do dreams and visions.

### Symbolic awareness

Origen, one of the greatest Christian thinkers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, viewed dreams, visions, and divine inspiration as an essential part of the way God reveals things to us, giving us knowledge and understanding through symbolic awareness.

A symbol evokes an emotional response. Charged with emotional energy, a symbolic image becomes a message capable of delivering a profound religious idea or concept through our senses – imparting a religious symbolic experience.

A friend of mine dreamed of potatoes. I asked him what potatoes meant to him. He said, “Money.” This is how his family made their income; they grew potatoes and sold them. The Lord used his dream to show him his problem: he was worrying about money.

---

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Dimnet (1866–1954), a French priest, writer, and lecturer, wrote *The Art of Thinking* (Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1928).

A fish could represent many things depending on the dreamer: the feeding of the five thousand; Jesus Christ or Christianity; something from the depths of the unconscious; the healing Christ living in the ocean of the heart. For me, growing up in a commercial fishing family, the fish might symbolize my family's livelihood or my father who smelled of fish every evening.

### ↳ *What would a fish mean to you symbolically?*

Here is what a fish in his dream meant to author Eric Metaxas: "I was ice-fishing ... I looked into the large hole we'd cut into the ice and saw the snout of a fish poking out. I reached down and picked it up ... In the dazzlingly bright sunlight shining ... onto the bronze-colored fish, it appeared positively golden ... It was a living golden fish, as though I were in a fairy tale.

Right in the dream, I suddenly understood that this golden fish was Ichthys – Jesus Christ Son of God, Our Savior. Right then, I realized He was real ... at long last my search was over. I was flooded with joy."<sup>42</sup>

Our lives are filled with symbols – wedding rings, baby shoes, family heirlooms, photo albums, personal mementoes and keepsakes, trophies, souvenirs, relics, Easter lilies, apple pies, patriotic emblems. These special objects are important to us because they evoke an emotional response deep within us. By embodying invisible truths and experiences in symbolic form, these material objects make present to us another unseen reality.<sup>43</sup>

## Religious symbolic experience

God is able to speak directly to us through symbolic experiences. Jesus relies upon it to convey eternal truths. Why? Because religious symbolic experience is capable of empowering us with vision and purpose, mediating the presence of God, and imparting spiritual gifts, revelation, and healing to us.

One day I told God that I was going to plan another trip to Germany, and if I was wrong He needed to show me. That night I dreamed I was on an airplane, but the flight attendant came up to me and said, "We just ran out of fish dinners." What do you think God was trying to show me through my dream?

The enigmas in dreams have a close affinity to those things which are signified in an allegoric or hidden sense in the Scriptures ... since the force of reason by itself is not powerful enough for getting at truth – Basil the Great.<sup>44</sup>

My friend Ralph Nault<sup>45</sup> suggested God deliberately uses symbolic images because He wants to reach our heart where faith resides. "Symbolic language speaks directly to my heart, bypassing my mind and intellect, in a way that God can get through to me without my logic and reason getting in the way."

<sup>42</sup> Eric Metaxas, *The Golden Fish: How God woke me up in a dream*. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june/golden-fish-eric-metaxas.html>, posted 5/30/2013.

<sup>43</sup> Judith A. & Gerald R. Doctor, *Dream Treasure: Learning the Language of Heaven* (2011), 191.

<sup>44</sup> Basil the Great (330–379) was a bishop and an influential theologian who supported the *Nicene Creed*. He is remembered as a father of communal monasticism in Eastern Christianity.

<sup>45</sup> Ralph Nault (1932–2022) was an author, speaker, and spiritual father to many. He wrote and taught extensively on how to be led by the Holy Spirit.

However, many people in the Western world have lost touch with religious symbolic experience. De-symbolized, we do not know how to allow the symbolic material in our dreams—or in the Bible—to come alive with meaning. The result: a head knowledge of God, rather than experiencing God through dreams, visions, and prophecy.

☞ *Have you experienced a dream that gave you understanding about something?*

## Symbolic Meaning of Images in Key Scriptures

As you review some of the key Scriptures referenced in Chapter 1, notice the river that flowed out of Eden to water the garden. At the end of the Sacred Text, notice this river is mentioned again. And ask yourself, what is this flowing river? What does it mean to me?

- And the Lord God planted a *garden* toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every *tree* that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; *the tree of life* also in the midst of the garden, and *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. Now a *river* flowed out of Eden to water the garden (Gen 2:7-10).
- The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen 2:15-17).
- And He who sits on the *throne* said, “Behold I am making all things new” ... And He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the *spring of the water of life* without cost” (Revelation 21:5-6).
- Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the *tree of life* (Rev 22:14).
- He showed me a *river of the water of life*, clear as crystal, coming from the *throne of God and of the Lamb* ... and on either side of the river was the *tree of life*, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month (Rev 22:1-2).

It is vitally important that we grasp the inner meaning of each of these images because it will help us to become more fully alive and drink from the water of life that is promised. We can ask God to give us spiritual insight/revelation if we want to understand these invisible realities in the spiritual world.

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. ... Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. ... She is a tree of life to your soul – Prov 3:13, 16-18.

### How to unlock the meaning of symbolic images

When we want to get a better understanding of the symbolic meaning of an image in our Sacred Text, we first identify its Characteristics and Functions. Then we look at other Scriptures that are using the same image, i.e., I call this our Contexts.

Then drawing from our Context, we apply the characteristics and functions of the image to something that is invisible in order to suggest its possible meanings. I may also look up the

image in a dictionary of symbols<sup>46</sup> because it often enriches my understanding. You may come up with your own ideas that God brings to you.

Most importantly, we rely upon the witness of the Holy Spirit in our spirit, if we are understanding it rightly. In Christian dream work, we call this “the Aha.”

## 1) The Garden

Let’s start with the garden. We all love a beautiful garden. Yes, I know that in Germany the garden refers to what we in America call our yard, our backyard, or our front yard. Nevertheless we all enjoy our gardens and our yards.

Interesting to me, our Creator God put a garden in His creation story. Why? Why was the garden important? What is the garden a symbol of, in the spiritual dimension?

### What are the characteristics and functions of a garden?

A garden is a plot of ground, usually near a house, where flowers, shrubs, vegetables, fruits, or herbs are cultivated.

### Contexts

- And the Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden (Gen 2:8).
- Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden (Gen 2:10).
- The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Gen 2:15).
- If you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday. And the Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your soul in scorched places and give strength to your bones. And you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail (Isa 58:10-11).
- For you are God’s field [garden; land] (1 Cor 3:9).

### Symbolic meaning of the garden

The garden of Eden is a symbol of the primal, sin-free condition of humanity before Adam’s fall. Today for me, it is a symbol of the heavenly paradise, the new Jerusalem, or the kingdom of God within us. But the question is, why did God put his man, Adam, in charge of caring for it?

The garden also is a symbol of the development of our inner life. We are God’s garden (field); the garden belongs to Him by right of creation and redemption. We are not our own; however, seeds must be planted and watered, then God causes the increase and growth within us (Matt 13:23).

### ↳ *Who does your garden belong to?*

- And you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God (1 Cor 3:23)

---

<sup>46</sup> *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols* (Chiron Publications, 1986).

- Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20).

## 2) *The Trees in the Garden*

In the Garden story, you noticed the mention of trees that are pleasing to the sight, and the other specific trees with names on them, i.e., the *tree of life* and the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.

Shortly we will focus on the two named trees, because they are key not only to what happened in the garden but to our lives today, but first let's look at a tree as a symbol.

### **What are the characteristics and functions of a tree?**

A tree is a thriving tall plant with a trunk and branches made of wood. It has four main parts: roots, trunk, branches, leaves. A tree usually produces some type of flower and bears fruit that we eat in the right season, such as apples.

### **Contexts**

- And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9).
- How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked ... But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither, and in whatever he does, he prospers (Ps 1:1-3).

### **Symbolic meaning of a tree**

For me, a tree symbolizes the living structure and development of my inner self, whether or not I have grown and will bear fruit in life. It can also represent my whole external life or my family tree.

✎ *If you were to draw a tree to visibly represent your inner development, what would your tree look like?*

## 3) *Tree of Life and Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil*

Now let's look at the centerpiece of our Creation story: the two named trees in the garden. The main problem was the choice of which tree to eat from. One tree would bring Adam life, the other, death.

### **What are the characteristics and function of each tree?**

It is essential that we fully understand the difference between these two trees if we want to experience the fullness and satisfaction our Creator offers us. These trees were placed in the Garden in light of His eternal purpose for us.

It says in our contexts that eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil will kill us, but if we eat from the tree of life, we will bear fruit.

## Contexts

- And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9).
- And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen 2:16-17).
- He showed me *a river of the water of life*, clear as crystal, coming from the *throne of God and of the Lamb* ... and on either side of the river was *the tree of life*, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month (Rev 22:1-2).

## Symbolic meaning of these two trees

Think about this: We all grew up in a culture that taught us what was good and what was evil according to their way of thinking. Many of us also learned a set of good and evil rules in our churches or religious institutions. But when we have a conversion or rebirth experience, whose rules do we live by then? Is there a change in who we follow?

In the first covenant God made with Moses on Mt. Sinai, God’s rules were written on a tablet of stone: rules about what to do and don’t do. Much of the Old Testament is about the struggle of God’s people to obey them. They were unable to follow the laws of Moses – the laws of good and evil. Over and over they failed, yet God in His mercy promised something new to happen:

- Behold, I will do something new, Now it will spring forth; Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert (Is 43:19).
- ‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah’ (Jer 31:31).

This New Covenant is a spiritual covenant! St. Paul explains that the Spirit of the living God will write His words for us on the tablets of our human hearts. He also tells us that we are adequate to serve this New Covenant, even though we unable to keep the old.

And more importantly, St. Paul says that the letter (the law of Moses) kills, but the Spiritual Covenant will give us life. He refers to the Old Covenant, the letters engraved on stone, as a ministry of death, a ministry of condemnation, and not like the new covenant, which is a ministry of the Spirit of life and liberty.

- ❖ I encourage you to read 2 Corinthians chapter three over and over, until God gives you insight and revelation of the difference between these two covenants.

## The tearing of the veil

It will help you to understand this if you consider what happened in the Tabernacle when Jesus died: the veil or curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was torn in two! This means that anyone can now access this sacred place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Before, only the High Priest could enter there once a year. Now, because of the perfect sacrifice by the Lamb, we are invited to enter the Holy of Holies.

☞ *What does the following Scripture mean to you? What does the veil symbolize?*

- But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away (2 Cor 3:15-16).

### **Two different covenants**

In my experience, whenever I start *to accuse or defend myself*, the veil has gone back over my heart and I am unable to know what the Lord is writing on my heart at that moment. As soon as I turn back to the Lord, applying my faith, the veil is removed and I can once again know what God has put in my heart. I thank You, my Lord, that you have made it so clear in your Sacred Text!

- They show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them (Rom 2:15).

For me, these two trees are symbols of the two covenants. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is for people who want to follow the law of Moses, but the tree of life is for people who want to follow Jesus Christ.

They are symbolic pictures of two radically different ways of functioning. In the first way, we learn all the laws and try to keep them. In the second way, we apply our faith and trust in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ and obtain His righteousness as a gift!

- For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).
- Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:6).

☞ *Why do you think our Creator God planted both trees in the garden?*

☞ *Which covenant do you want to serve?*

### **What happened when Adam ate from the tree of knowledge?**

Adam's environment, the Garden of Eden – the place God dwelled in and communicated with his man, Adam – can be thought of as Paradise. It was a place without sin and its consequences.

Before Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he was able to commune with God, perhaps discussing the naming and care of the animals. Through his spirit, Adam sensed God, knew His voice. He had a very keen awareness of God.

But after Adam's disobedience, his spirit died, i.e., his spirit was cut off from communication with God. Notice his death was *not* physical, but spiritual!

The death of his spirit cut off communication between his human spirit and God. His spirit was incapacitated, no longer able to commune with God. Do you remember that death is the cessation of communication with our environment?

Since then, every human being has inherited this corrupted seed from Adam. This is why we must experience a spiritual re-birth so our spirit can be quickened and we can eat from the tree of life again.

Additionally, God's man, Adam, lost the authority God had given him over the earth – he gave it to the evil tempter, Satan. But the second Man, Jesus Christ, has given it back to us. Because of Him, we can become overcomers.



↳ *Why do you think Adam chose to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil?*

## 4) The Water of Life

And of course every garden needs water! Without it, the garden does not grow and blossom. In fact, it dries up and disappoints us. Every summer here in Florida we are flooded with tropical rains, but come winter and spring, the farmers here are beginning to pray for rain.

### What are the characteristics and functions of water?

Water is a colorless, transparent, odorless liquid that forms the seas, lakes, rivers, and rain, and is the basis of the fluids of all living organisms. Without a drink of water, our bodies will dry up and die. Water also is used to cause the growth of our gardens, but the Scriptures use it as a symbolic image of something far more powerful.

### Contexts

- He showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 22:1).
- If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you the living water (John 4:10).
- For I will *pour out water* on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will *pour out My Spirit* on your offspring, and My blessing on your descendants (Isa 44:3).
- If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘from his innermost being [“belly”] shall flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37-39).

In the Greek, “belly” refers to a hollow, a cavity, i.e., the abdomen. You may hear someone say they know something in their gut, perhaps like a sixth sense. This is where we look when we want to be led by the Holy Spirit. What do we sense there: any intuitive knowing, a red or green light going off, the peace of God? We do not look to our natural reasoning.

### Symbolic meaning of the water of life

As a universal symbol, water represents life; without water, there is no life. The Bible speaks of the water of life in the spiritual sense.<sup>47</sup>

Water can refer to bodily, emotional, and spiritual cleansing; the power of renewal; spiritual rebirth; spiritual life; the abundance of possibilities.<sup>48</sup>

Within the context of the above scriptures, water is used to symbolize something that is living and invisible, that which is spiritual, that which contains spiritual life, i.e., the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>47</sup> Tom Chetwynd, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (1982).

<sup>48</sup> *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols* (Chiron Publications, 1986).

When our friend Ralph Nault asked God what his ministry was, he received a vision of a boy carrying two water jugs – a water boy. Then God said to him, “You are to give people a drink of living water.”

↳ *What is the meaning of the water of life or living water to you?*

↳ *How do you get a drink of living water?*

## 5) The Flowing River

Now for the river; it is a special symbolic image too. In the Garden story, the river provided the water for the growth of the garden. Over the years I have listened to many people’s dreams with a river in them.

### What are the characteristics and functions of a river?

A river is a natural stream of water that empties into another body of water, usually carrying water down from higher areas to a lower point, ending at an ocean or an inland sea. A river’s most important characteristic is that it is constantly being changed by new water rushing in. It can also be a barrier to going somewhere.

But what do you think it means symbolically?

You can never step into the same river twice. – Heraclitus<sup>49</sup>

### Contexts

- Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden (*Gen 2:10*).
- You give them to drink of the river of Your delights, for with You is the fountain of life (*Ps 36:8*).
- “He who believes in me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’” But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (*John 7:38-39*).
- He showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb (*Rev 22:1*).

Findings from science are revealing that we are more like a river than anything frozen in time and space. – Deepak Chopra<sup>50</sup>

### Symbolic meaning of the river

The images of rivers used in literature and films help us understand their many symbolic meanings. For instance, a river can be calm, flooded, or even dried up. Or we can drown in the river (*drown in despair*), float on it, or be carried along by it.

---

<sup>49</sup> Heraclitus, (c. 540 BC–c. 480 BC) was a Greek philosopher who believed the world was governed by a law of perpetual change, or Logos, which he symbolized by fire.

<sup>50</sup> Deepak Chopra, *Quantum Healing*, p. 48.

Here are some symbolic meanings of a river: the creative power of nature; a picture of life; the process of life; the flow of events in our life; our destiny; river of forgetfulness. A river also can represent our emotions or the flow of life itself with its twists and turns of fortune.

A symbolic dictionary says a river has often been seen as a deity (God's life), or perpetual renewal.<sup>51</sup> One scripture tells us the flowing river is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

### ***My husband recently dreamed about a river***

*I was in a river with other people, flowing along with the current. Then suddenly I am in a building stairway, with a constricted feeling. I did not know what happened to the river—did it stop, flow under the building, or make a sudden turn – but it was gone. Just as suddenly I was back in the river again, heading for some town in New Hampshire.*

When we chatted about his dream, he said he felt very pleased as he was flowing along with the current and very distressed when he didn't know how to get back into the river. I asked him about what New Hampshire meant to him. Remembering the state motto is *Live Free or Die*, it didn't take him long to understand the meaning of God's symbolic images to him through a dream.

↳ ***Why do you think the Holy Spirit gave him this dream?***

How do you understand the meaning of this symbol? For me, the river is a symbolic picture of God's Spirit flowing through me.

↳ ***What does it mean to you to flow with the Spirit of Life?***

It only takes a mustard seed of faith, and you too can flow with the Spirit of God! Do you want to? If so, you need to let go of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and eat from the tree of life.

## **6) The Lamb**

### **What are the characteristics and functions of a Lamb?**

A lamb is a baby sheep; a gentle or sweet person; or someone who is easily fooled because of inexperience. A lamb usually is thought of as innocence and purity, its coat being white as snow. Under the Old Covenant, an innocent lamb was sacrificed and its blood was used to cover the sins of the people.

#### **Context**

- Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- You were redeemed with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless (1 Pet 1:18-19).

---

<sup>51</sup> *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols.*

- Saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” ... “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever” ... “Amen” (Rev 5:12-14).
- For the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life (Rev 7:17).
- He showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb ... on either side of the river was the tree of life (Rev 22:1-2).

## Symbolic meaning of the lamb

In our context, the lamb represents Jesus Christ as the sacrificial lamb who gave his blood to cover our sins. In so doing, he removed every barrier between God and us. Jesus was the innocent lamb of God who was sent to give us life. And because of his sacrifice, he has been given a high position, higher than the angels.

☞ *Can you see that Jesus Christ is the sacrificial lamb given to us of God?*

## 7) The Throne of God

### What are the characteristics and functions of a throne?

A ceremonial chair for a sovereign, bishop, or similar figure to rule, govern, and reign from.

### Context

- And because he [David] was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon His throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:30-31)
- But of the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom’ (Heb 1:8).
- Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find help in the time of need (Heb. 4:16).
- He showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 22:1).
- And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold I am making all things new” ... And He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost” (Rev 21:5-6).
- And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face and His name shall be on their foreheads (Rev 22:3-4).

### Understanding the symbol of the throne

The throne is a symbol that tells us there is an invisible but spiritual ruler in the sacred realm. From these scriptures we also can understand the power of the One who sits on the throne: Our Creator God. He is the one who made this world and everything in it.

Even at a human level, as we watched the events surrounding the death of Queen Elizabeth, we were deeply touched by the honor and reverence of the people in the U.K. for the throne and its deceased Queen and newly crowned King.

☞ *Who is on the throne in your life? Who do you honor and serve with joy and gladness of heart?*

## **Other scriptures using symbolic images**

Here are a few more scriptures that use symbolic imagery to help us understand spiritual realities of life and death that we cannot grasp with our intellects. You can read them as facts or as symbolic truths of something that is incomprehensible to your natural mind.

☞ *Can you identify the symbolic images related to life or death in the following?*

- I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever (John 6:51).
- My people have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer 2:13).
- To deliver you from the way of evil ... From those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who delight in doing evils ... nor do they reach the paths of life (Prov 2:13-14, 19).
- Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death (Luke 1:78-79).
- Set down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones ... and lo, they were very dry. “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord’” (Ezek 37:1-2, 4).
- And breath came into them and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ... “I will put my Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land” (Ezek 37:10, 14).
- For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it. But the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be uprooted from it (Prov 2:21-22).
- The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day (Prov 4:18).
- Jesus spoke, saying, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).
- But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him ... shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life (John 4:14).
- They will not hunger or thirst ... He who has compassion on them will lead them, and will guide them to springs of water (Isa 49:10).

## **Symbolic understanding of the images from the above scriptures**

- ◆ Bread— spiritual nourishment, the bread of life. Jesus Christ and His word are the source of our spiritual nourishment, i.e., that which will strengthen, energize, and nourish our entire being.
- ◆ Broken cisterns—a cistern is a holding place for water, but when it is broken, the water leaks out.

- ◆ Darkness—shade or a shadow; gloom; shrouding like a cloud; black; asleep; failure to recognize; spiritual dullness; morally underdeveloped; death, misfortune, evil spirits, or mystery.<sup>52</sup> What is unknown; things we are unaware of; depression; confusion; feelings of evil; secrets we hide from our self or others, or things we don't want to know about. Things we do under cover of darkness.<sup>53</sup>
- ◆ Dawn—a symbol of hope, youth, the abundance of possibilities, and new beginnings.<sup>54</sup>
- ◆ Dry Bones—bones that have lost the life that was once in them.
- ◆ Fountain—cleansing, purification, and blessing. Also can symbolize deep secrets and access to hidden springs and sources.
- ◆ Land—something our Creator gives us after we have matured. It is a realm or an area that we are anointed to minister in. It brings great satisfaction and joy when we work the land He has given us. It gives meaning and purpose to our life.

✎ *See Acts 26:18 and ask yourself, what does that inheritance mean to you?*

- ◆ Light—the “life” (energy) of God that is alive within us. The light symbolizes the kind of life Jesus Christ contains and offers us. To shine; luminous, illumination; transparent; to shed rays.
- ◆ Shadow—the opposite of light; the illusion of something that is real. In various cultures it is related to death. In depth psychology, it represents the totality of the unconscious layers of our personality which can be transformed and integrated into our consciousness in the process of becoming a whole individual. In dreams, a person of our same sex can be thought of as a shadow figure.<sup>55</sup>
- ◆ Springs—a source of life and vitality that lies below the surface of reality; a source of wisdom accessible to us from down inside of us.
- ◆ Water gushing forth—the life-force of man; feeling energy.
- ◆ Well of water—access to one's deepest resources of life; the source of one's well-being. Refreshing and purifying waters.

## 9 My Story

### *Eating from the wrong tree*

Seven years after experiencing the Lord, my inner joy and peace were gone. No matter what I did, I couldn't find it again. So I cried out to God, “I don't know what is wrong; please send someone to teach me!”

---

<sup>52</sup> *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols* (Chiron Publications, 1986).

<sup>53</sup> Tony Crisp, *Dream Dictionary* (A Dell Book, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols*.

<sup>55</sup> *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols*.

On a bitter cold night in Boston, MA, I was introduced to a Catholic lay evangelist from northern Vermont. As I shook his hand that January evening, the Holy Spirit leaped inside me! Suddenly, I knew this man of God had answers for me.

The next day as I was sweeping my kitchen floor, I found myself praying, “Lord, would you send that man to my house? He knows something about walking with you that I do not know.”

An hour later, I heard a knock on the door; there stood this very man and his wife. “The Lord told me to come,” he said as they entered my home.

### **A vision—eating from the wrong tree**

Praying with me, he saw a vision: a tree with all of the bad branches cut off one side. “I know what this means,” he said, “someone is living off the wrong tree.” Then he quietly proceeded to curse the tree, much like Jesus did to the barren fig tree in the Gospels (see Mark 11:13-14, 21).

Thus, I began to learn why I had lost my joy. I was eating from the wrong tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, not the tree of life. I was doing just what the early believers had done: revert back to trying to keep some laws. St. Paul had warned about this in his letter to the church in the province of Galatia (see Galatians 5:1).

### **A vision—chained to a mountaintop**

The next month, the man of God stops by again. As he prays with me, he sees another vision. This time it is a mountain with a chain wrapped around it and hanging down the side. Someone is trapped by the chain, and another is hanging on to end of the chain, calling out, “help, help.”

Not knowing what the vision meant, he begins to pray for the people to be set free. Then he stops and says, “I see an eagle carrying the people and taking them down to the ground.”

He explains he doesn’t know what the vision is about, so I would have to seek God for its meaning. I did. Six months later, I understood: After receiving Jesus and the Holy Spirit through faith, I’d gone back to the law; in fact I was bound by a spirit of legalism. Remember, Mount Sinai was where Moses was given the Ten Commandments.

## **Reflection point**

- ◆ What will you take away from this chapter?
- ◆ Did you see what I wrote about your innermost being, your belly?
- ◆ Meditate on this Scripture: “*If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.*”
- ◆ Are you thirsty? Do you need a drink of living water? (see Isaiah 55:1).

## **Your Response**

⇒ Which best symbolizes a human being: a sculpture or a river?

- ⇒ Draw a picture to represent the “life” that is within you. The life within me is like a ...  
(finish sentence and draw it)
- ⇒ Or draw a tree to represent your inner or outer life.
- ⇒ How do the two trees in the Garden differ from each other?
- ⇒ How can you know which tree you are eating from?
- ⇒ What did the One sitting on the throne promise?
- ⇒ Draw a river to represent the flow of God’s life within you. Which way is the flow of life moving within you? Forward, towards life? Or backwards, towards death?
- ⇒ Do you know what it means to flow with the Holy Spirit?