

luminary continues to pour forth cures for the faithful, by driving away diseases. The gift of his miracles always fits the needs of those who seek his assistance. While he is a marvellous helper for those in afflictions, he is particularly called upon by those in peril at sea.



Saint Phokas

The following miracle is recorded in regard to this saint, narrated by Leo the Pontian. "A manly and courageous Christian, named Persinakios, was apprehended by the Saracens. This capture occurred during the years when their leader was Malsava. Persinakios was fettered with irons. The Saracens bound his hands behind his back and cast him down to the ground. Finding himself in dire straits, he invoked the saint and said, 'O holy Martyr Phokas, have mercy on me and rescue me from these painful punishments and bonds.' Having uttered this entreaty, he lost consciousness for a little while. Behold! He saw the saint in the garb of a priest, addressing him and saying, 'Rise, rise up, and flee!' Persinakios was roused and found himself free of his iron fetters and bonds. He, therefore, took flight and gave thanks to God and His saint."⁵

**On the 23rd of July,
the holy Church commemorates
the holy Prophet EZEKIEL.⁶**

Prophet Ezekiel, a priest, an initiate of the mysteries, a giver of laws, an all-wise prophet, and an emulator of the Master, in that he partook of sufferings; and now he has been shown to be His heir.⁷ The prophet's name, Ezekiel, means "God strengthens," was of the priestly tribe. He was the son of the Zadokite Priest Bouzei from the city of Arira. Ezekiel grew up during the reign of the Judaeen King Josias (Josiah 640-609 B.C.). The exilic twenty-two year ministry of Ezekiel, who combined both the offices of Prophet and Priest, spanned from 595 [Ez. 1:2] until 572

⁵ This excerpt of one miracle, presented in *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), was originally recorded in the *Synaxaristes* of the Athonite Monastery of Dionysiou.

⁶ July 21st, according to the Slavonic Calendar.

⁷ July 23rd, Orthros Canon, Ode Nine, Mode Plagal Four.

[Ez. 29:17], and was a by-product of earlier political and religious policies that were generally reigns of evil and terror. He was reared in Jerusalem and may have already entered upon priestly work before he was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. As a member of the Zadok family, he was among the aristocracy taken into captivity.

This influential and otherworldly visionary was a married priest [Ez. 1:3; 24:16-18]. He found himself a widower on the day of the siege of Jerusalem. **“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, behold, I take from thee the desire of thine eyes by violence: thou shalt not lament, neither shalt thou weep [Ez. 24:15, 16].’”**

Saint Jerome (ca. 342-420) comments, “The prophet’s wife died in the morning, for the Lord had previously told him that in that day he should open his mouth, and speak, and no longer keep silence. Mark well, that while his wife was living he was not at liberty to admonish the people. His wife died, the bond of wedlock broken, and without the least hesitation he constantly devoted himself to the prophetic office.”⁸ It is generally believed that he took up the prophetic ministry at about thirty years old while in Babylon.



Prophet Ezekiel

It was revealed to the prophet that on the very day his wife, the desire of his eyes, should die “by violence” (literally, in battle array) [Ez. 24:16], the armies of Babylon would lay siege against Jerusalem. Though Ezekiel’s sadness at the death symbolizes the grief of God at the sin of Jerusalem, the prophet was commanded not to grieve her death. He was to steel himself for this tragedy, even as God had prepared Himself for the death of His beloved city.

Saint Gregory the Great and Dialogist (ca. 540-604) reminds us that Ezekiel was brought to Babylon in the second wave of deportation. Thus, “when Prophet Ezekiel was prophesying, many years of captivity had elapsed. Of those who had been led into exile they had already suffered death in the

⁸ Saint Jerome, *Letters and Select Works: Against Jovinianus*, Book I, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd Ser., Vol. 6, p. 371. [Hereinafter, Nicene.]

flesh, so that the prophet came to speak to their sons.”⁹ He lived in his own home in northern Mesopotamia, near the Chobar (Chebar) River, amid a colony of fellow banished Judaeans, in a place called Tel-Abid. Later, we shall see that his home was used periodically as a meeting-place for the leader of his community [Ez. 8:1; 14:1].

The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church (in Greek) also mentions episodes that are not recorded in the Old Testament. The prophet gave a paradoxical portent to the people, in which they were instructed to give heed to the Babylonian river Chobar. When the exiles see the Chobar dry, then would the sickle of desolation come against Babylon; but if they should see the river rise, then they could hope to return to Jerusalem.

The holy prophet lived among the exiles who were accustomed to flock about him. It came to pass, once, when a great many of the exiles congregated about him, that the Babylonians suspected they might rebel. Thus, they made ready to go up against the Hebrews in order to destroy them. At the same time, the exiles feared the Babylonians might rise up against them and slay them. However, the prophet halted the flow of the river. This enabled the Hebrews to enter and pass over to the other side; and thus they were delivered. The Babylonians, on the other hand, dared to pursue them; and the river resumed flowing and drowned them.

By his prayer, the prophet, for the life and consolation of some starving Hebrews, vouchsafed them plenteous fish. This same prophet, once, when the natives were hurting the Israelite people, presented himself to their rulers and worked wonders before them, ushering in great fear upon them. Thus they ceased harming Israel.

At Babylon, the prophet rebuked the tribe of Gad which thought they were keeping the Law of the Lord; yet, in reality, they were impious toward Him. How were they chastised? Ezekiel caused serpents to slay their infants and cattle. He also foretold that because of them the people of Israel would not return to Jerusalem, but would remain under the Medes, until they left off their spiritual delusion and wickedness. For this reason, the tribe of Gad, unable to bear up, slew this blessed prophet, deeming him their opponent and censurer.¹⁰

⁹ Saint Gregory the Great, *The Homilies of Saint Gregory the Great: On the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. by T. Gray and edited by J. Cownie (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1990), Book One, “Homily XI,” p. 129.

¹⁰ Though certain events described herein are not found in canonical Scripture, apocryphal stories found in the fathers and in the rabbinical writings record his death as a result of rebuking a prince of his own nation for idolatry, and that he was buried in the tomb of Shem and Arphaxad. See “The Holy Prophet Ezekiel,” *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church*, 5th ed., Vol. 7, trans. and edited from the Greek by the

Bishop Nikolai Velimirović (d. 1956) records that “the Jews bound him to the tails of horses and he was torn asunder.”¹¹ Thereupon, they continued bowing down before the idols. The people of Israel buried Prophet Ezekiel in the field of Thur, in the tomb of Arphaxad [Gen. 10:24], which is actually a double cave. Bishop Nikolai also adds that the prophet was buried in the self-same place in which Shem the son of Noah [Gen. 10:1, 21] was buried.¹²

Our prophet uttered the word of God from Babylon, the land of the destroyers of Jerusalem and the temple. Thus, God was shown to act independently of Jerusalem and His temple. The Prophet Ezekiel, a strong ecclesiastic sent into exile, was prevented from officiating in the visible temple at Jerusalem. But he transferred his service to the spiritual temple in Babylon, where he undertook his prophetic and pastoral ministry. His style of delivering prophecies is often in parables [Ez. 20:49].

In outward appearance, the Prophet Ezekiel is marked by a large head, but in due proportion with his bodily size. He had a withered and dry countenance, framed with a thick and bushy beard that was pointed and long. His prophetic writings comprise forty-eight chapters. He is assigned as third among the Major Prophets.¹³

Historical Background

King Manasses of Juda (r. 698-643 B.C.) helped determine his people's future lot and condemnation when he led them astray and sanctioned the worship of the Canaanite deity Baal as the official religion of the realm. Unless unfeigned repentance followed, irrevocable doom was decreed by God through His prophets: “Behold, I will bring calamities upon Jerusalem and Juda, so that both the ears of everyone that hears shall tingle.... I will wipe Jerusalem as a jar is wiped, and turned upside down in the wiping. And I will reject the remnant of My inheritance, and will deliver them into the hands of their enemies; and they shall be for a plunder and for a spoil to all their enemies.... Moreover, Manasses shed very much innocent blood, until he filled Jerusalem with it from one end to the other, besides his sins with which he caused Juda to sin, in doing evil in the eyes of the Lord [4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 21: 12-16]; and the Lord would not pardon it [4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 24:3, 4].”

¹⁰(...continued)

Holy Apostles Convent (Athens, Greece: Archimandrite Matthew Langes, Pub., 1979), pp. 448-451.

¹¹ Bishop Nikolai Velimirović, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, s.v. “July 21st.”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “The Holy Prophet Ezekiel,” *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church*, p. 451.

As we said, it was during the reign of Josias that Ezekiel came to manhood. Josias' piety is exemplified when he cleansed Jerusalem and Juda of idolatrous objects [2 Chr. 34:3, 7]. He even extended his purge to the idols of the north, into the territory of fallen Israel. At twenty-six, Josias commanded the repair of the house of the Lord, which was carried out under the supervision of Hilkiah (Chelkias), the high priest. It was then that a copy of the book of the Law was discovered [2 Chr. 34:14, 15]. When a scribe read it to the king, Josias perceived how far his people had departed and hearkened not to the words of the Lord. Thus, this gave new impetus for Josias' reforms that were already in place. In 609 B. C., when Josias attempted to block Pharaoh Neco (Necho) II (609-594 B.C.) of Egypt as he marched north to assist Assyria in her fight with Babylon, he perceived this campaign as a threat to his realm's security. Though Josias was gravely injured by archers in a battle at Megiddo, still he returned and reposed in Jerusalem—where all those of the city and Juda lamented him greatly [2 Chr. 35:23-25].

The people of the land then took Josias' son, Joachaz (Jehoahaz, 609 B.C.), and made him king over Jerusalem; but he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Pharaoh Neco, however, bound him that he might not reign, and made his half-brother Joakim (Jehoiakim, 609-598 B.C.) ruler. Joachaz was then taken to Egypt where he died [2 Chr. 36:1-4].

Joakim did that which was evil the sight of the Lord [2 Chr. 36:5].¹⁴ In 605 B.C., at Carchemish on the Euphrates, Nebuchadnezzar attacked and was victorious against the combined Assyrian and Egyptian forces. The Babylonians then pushed southward and invaded Juda where they deported a group of young nobles [4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 24:1, 2; 2 Chr. 36:6]. Joakim was his servant for three years, but then he turned and revolted against Nebuchadnezzar. Moreover, Joakim, favoring the Egyptians, ignored Prophet Jeremias' warnings to submit to the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar retaliated against the king.

"And the Lord sent against him [Joakim] the bands of the Chaldaeans, and the bands of Syria, and the bands of Moab, and the bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them into the land of Juda to prevail against it, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by His servants the prophets. Moreover, it was the purpose of the Lord concerning Juda to remove them from His presence...[4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 24:1-3], for all the innocent blood which Joakim shed, for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; yet the Lord would not utterly destroy them [2 Chr. 36:5]."

¹⁴ Joakim or Jehoiakim was twenty-five years of age at the beginning of his reign, which lasted eleven years in Jerusalem [4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 23:36].

Nebuchadnezzar then bound Joakim "with brazen fetters, and carried him away to Babylon. And he carried away a part of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon, where he put them in his temple in Babylon [2 Chr. 36:7]." We are then told that Joakim slept with his fathers, and that his son Jechonias (Joachim or Jehoichin) ruled in his stead. "And the king of Egypt came no more out of his land: for the king of Babylon took away all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the river of Egypt as far as the river Euphrates [4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 24:7, 8]."

When Jechonias (598 B.C.), at eighteen years old, succeeded his father Joakim (609-598 B.C.)¹⁵ as king of Juda, he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Only after three months, when Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.) and his servants besieged Jerusalem, Jechonias surrendered and went forth to the king of Babylon with his servants, his mother Nestha, and his princes and eunuchs.

Nebuchadnezzar then "brought forth thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut up all the golden vessels which Solomon the king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord.... And he carried away the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all the captains, and the mighty men, taking captive ten thousand prisoners, and every artificer and smith, and only the poor of the land were left [4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 24:13, 14]." Among the captives was the holy Ezekiel, a priest [Ez. 1:1-3].

The king of Babylon installed Sedekias (Zedekiah, 597-586), Jechonias' paternal uncle, as king in his stead. He was merely a puppet king whom Nebuchadnezzar made swear an oath that he would remain loyal [2 Chr. 36:13], yet he was never fully accepted as king. Though he had been deposed and carried off to Babylon, Jechonias remained the recognized king by Babylon. Meanwhile, Sedekias "was not ashamed before the Prophet Jeremias, nor because of the word of the Lord [2 Chr. 36:11]." In addition, "All the great men of Juda, and the priests, and the people of the land transgressed abundantly in the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord which was in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent by the hand of His prophets, rising early and sending His messengers, for He spared His people, and His sanctuary. Nevertheless, they sneered at God's messengers, and set at nought His words, and mocked His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose up against His people, till there was no remedy [2 Chr. 36:14-16]."

In the parable of the lioness and her whelps [Ez. 19:1-9], the prophet mourns for the princes of Israel. The bereaved lioness [Ez. 19:2] is Israel. The first young lion is the captive Joachaz [4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 23:31-33], who was

¹⁵ See 4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 24:8.

removed by Pharaoh Neco. A second lion is the prince of Juda, Jechonias (Joachim or Jehoichin) [4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 24:8-16].

The prophet also compares Israel to a vine [Ez. 19:10, 11], which was plucked and cast down. She was exposed to the drying blasts of the east wind [Ez. 19:12], that is, Babylon. Transplanted by reason of captivity and mass deportation, she now dwells in the wilderness [Ez. 19:13]. The branch wherein the destroying fire issued was Sedekias and his irresponsible policies, including the breaching of the covenant of the Lord [Ez. 17:15].

From the foregoing we see that the Prophet Ezekiel lived during a period of great international unrest, in addition to widespread immorality and apostasy in Juda. The collapse of the kingdom of Juda brought about the termination of the Davidic dynasty. The Jews, therefore, had to be made to believe that the promises of the Lord to Abraham and David would find their fulfillment later.

Our Prophet Ezekiel was commissioned by the Lord to admonish and to comfort His deported people. The Lord spoke to him, **"Son of man, receive into thy heart all the words that I have spoken to thee, and hear *them* with thine ears. And go thy way, go into the captivity, to the children of thy people, and thou shalt speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus saith the Lord'; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear** [Ez. 3:10, 11]." Saint Gregory the Great writes: "They had come from Jerusalem to Babylon. And what is Jerusalem save the vision of peace, and what is Babylon if not confusion?... But even those who have fallen from the state of righteousness into evil actions must not despair, because, behold, the prophet is sent to the transmigration at Babylon!"¹⁶

Imminent Judgment upon God's People

The Prophet Ezekiel prophesies [Ez. 11:1-4] against those political leaders who misled the people and encouraged the inhabitants to build homes at a time when the prophets were warning them of an imminent Babylonian invasion. As Ezekiel prophesies against the corrupt leaders, one of them, Phaltias dies [Ez. 11:13]. His demise certainly served to authenticate and substantiate Ezekiel's message as prophetic. Ezekiel, on the other hand, is astounded and jolted by it, fearing that God might destroy all the remnant of Israel. Yet, his prophecy of judgment is followed by one of hope. Thus says the Lord: **"I will cast them off among the nations, and will disperse them into every land, yet will I be to them for a little sanctuary in the countries which they shall enter** [Ez. 11:16]." Moreover, he adds, **"Thus saith the**

¹⁶ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Prophet Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily X(22), p. 118.

Lord, I will take them from the heathen, and gather them out of the lands wherein I have scattered them, and will give them the land of Israel [Ez. 11:17].”

Between Chapters 16 and 23, the theme of God as the spurned husband and His marriage bond with His two adulterous wives, Juda and Israel, is taken up by Ezekiel. In Chapter 16, the prophet speaks of the foundling Jerusalem. The prophet then introduces what is viewed as a radical idea among his people: he tells them that they cannot rely on their past history and ancestry. **“Thus saith the Lord to Jerusalem: ‘Thy root and thy birth are of the land of Canaan: thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother a Chettite [Ez. 16:1-3].”** This passages tells us how the city came into being. Jerusalem, a Jebusite city and member of the Amorite league against Jesus (Joshua) of Navee, has its origins from the Amorites and the Hittites in the land of Canaan.

“Thou didst trust in thy beauty, and didst go awhoring because of thy renown, and didst pour out thy fornication on every passerby [Ez. 16:15].” The nymphomaniac escapades of Jerusalem are then enumerated. They include whoring after idols, taking the Lord’s gold and silver and making male images and committing whoredoms with them, and setting the Lord’s oil, incense, and bread before them.

Saint Ephraim the Syrian (ca. 306-383) comments: “The daughter of Sion repaid God with evil for the immensity of His grace. The Father had washed her from her blood, but she defiled His Son with her spitting [cf. Ez. 16:9; Mt. 26:67]. The Father had clothed her with fine linen and purple, but she clothed Him with garments of mockery [cf. Ez. 16:10, 13; Mt. 27:28]. He had placed a crown of glory on her head, but she plaited a crown of thorns for Him [cf. Ez. 16:12; Mt. 27:29]. He had nourished her with choicest food and honey, but she gave Him gall [cf. Ez. 16:13; Mt. 27:34]. He had given her pure wine, but she offered Him vinegar (soaked) in a sponge [cf. Jn. 19:29]. The One Who had introduced her into cities, she drove out into the desert [cf. Mt. 14:13]. The One Who had put shoes on her feet, she made hasten barefoot toward Golgotha [cf. Ez. 16:10; Mt. 27:33]. The One Who had girded her loins with sapphire, she pierced in the side with a lance [cf. Ez. 16:10, 11; Jn. 19:34]. When she had outraged the servants (of God) and killed the prophets, she was led into captivity to Babylon; and when the time of her punishment was completed, her return (from captivity) took place.”¹⁷

Saint Jerome says that “in Ezekiel, God speaks to Jerusalem: ‘Thou wast perfect through My beauty [cf. Ez. 16:14].’ And this is the meaning of the text: ‘Thou wast perfect not through your own works, not through your

¹⁷ Saint Ephraim the Syrian, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 269.

own knowledge and the boasting of your heart, but through My beauty which I had put on you freely through My mercy.' Finally, He says to her later on, when she is saved, not through her own merit but through His mercy: **'And I will remember My covenant made with thee in the days of thine infancy, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant [Ez. 16:60].'**"¹⁸

The Prophet Ezekiel, when addressing Jerusalem, finds that she has fallen into a novel form of fornication, saying, **"She has even given rewards to all that went awhoring after her, and thou hast given rewards to all thy lovers, yea, thou didst load them with rewards, that they should come to thee from every side for thy fornication [Ez. 16:33]."** Saint Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) explains that "even the one who has committed fornication in this fashion God calls back again. For the captivity which took place was not so much by way of vengeance, as for the purpose of conversion and amendment; since if God had wished to punish them outright, He would not again have brought them back to their home. He would not have established their city and their temple in greater splendor than before.... Now if God did not exclude from repentance her who had many times committed fornication, much more will He embrace thy soul...."¹⁹

Saint Gregory the Great writes of the great dispensation of divine providence: "Though the Lord was so wroth with His people, nevertheless He was not wholly enraged. For if He was not angered, He would by no means have sent the people into captivity; and if He had been wholly enraged, He would not have sent His chosen one (Ezekiel) into captivity with them. But divine compassion acts so that from the very same thing whereby He chastises the carnal, from that the increase of virtue is conferred on the spiritual. And when He purges the former by tribulation, He arouses the latter from association with the oppressors to deserve greater things. And He is so wroth with the unjust that He nevertheless comforts their hearts through the fellowship of the just, lest, should He abandon them altogether, no one would return after sins to pardon."²⁰

In Chapter 23, the prophet presents us with the story of two adulterous sisters. They went awhoring in Egypt in their youth: **"There, their breasts fell; there, they lost their virginity [Ez. 23:3]."** Saint Gregory the Dialogist tells us: "For indeed breasts are pressed in Egypt, when the will of the human soul is prostituted to the base desires of this world. Teats of virginity are

¹⁸ Saint Jerome, *Dogmatic and Polemical Works: Against the Pelagians*, The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 53 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, n.d.), pp. 338, 339. [Hereinafter FC.]

¹⁹ Saint John Chrysostom, "Letters to the Fallen Theodore," Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st Ser., IX:103.

²⁰ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily I," p. 20.

bruised in Egypt, when the natural senses, still whole in themselves, are vitiated by the corruption of assailing concupiscence.”²¹ And **“their names were Oola the elder, and Ooliba her sister: and they were Mine, and bore sons and daughters, and as for their names, Samaria was Oola, and Jerusalem was Ooliba [Ez. 23:4].”** Oola (signifying “hers is a tent”) and Ooliba (“My tent is in her”) are unfaithful from the start; yet Jerusalem’s behavior is especially base. She saw and had the example of her sister’s fornication and the judgment that followed. Nevertheless, she proves herself far more incorrigible. **“She doted upon the sons of the Assyrians, princes and captains, her neighbors, clothed with fine linen, horsemen riding on horses; they were all choice young men....And she doted upon them as soon as she saw them, and sent forth messengers to them into the land of the Chaldaeans. And the sons of Babylon came to her, into the bed of rest; and they defiled her in her fornication, and she was defiled by them. And she exposed her fornication, and exposed her shame. And My soul was alienated from her, even as My soul was alienated from her sister [Ez. 23:11-18].”** Great judgment awaits the lewd and sordid prostitutes Samaria and Jerusalem. Though Jerusalem witnessed the consequences of Samaria’s prostitution when she fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., she had not learned from her sister’s experience. She chose to engage in more lustful, degrading, and vulgar liaisons. Those whom Samaria and Jerusalem dallied with and wooed into relations would now judge them, that is, Assyria and Babylonia. They would judge them with the judgment reserved for an adulteress and murderess, according to the Mosaic Law, that is, death by stoning [Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22]. Such “stoning” would be executed upon the two sisters: **“Stone them with the stones of a multitude, and pierce them with their swords. They shall slay their sons and their daughters, and shall burn up their houses [Ez. 23:47].”** Hence, **“Your ungodliness shall be recompensed upon you, and ye shall bear the guilt of your devices; and ye shall know that I am the Lord [Ez. 23:48].”** Though Israel failed to sanctify the name of the Lord among the nations, the Lord would prevent the profaning of His name among the nations [Ez. 20:9, 44].

The Ministry of Prophet Ezekiel, “The Son of Man”

The Prophet Ezekiel declares: **“And I heard Him speaking to me. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, I send thee forth to the house of Israel [Ez. 2:3].”** The prophet will be addressed as “son of man” (Heb. *ben’adam*)

²¹ Saint Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, Part III, Ch. XXVIII, Nicene, 2nd Ser., XII:58.

some ninety times in the book, truly emphasizing his humanity. In the Old Testament, this phrase appears only once elsewhere when used to address



Prophet Ezekiel

Prophet Daniel [Dan. 8:17]. Saint Jerome, speaking of the prophet's title, "Son of man," says, "Ezekiel is properly a type of the Savior.... In Ezekiel, after almost every twenty or thirty verses, it says regularly, 'The words of the Lord came to the Prophet Ezekiel.' Someone may ask: Why is that so frequently repeated in the prophecy? Because the Holy Spirit certainly descended upon the prophet, but again withdrew from him. Thus this indicates that the Holy Spirit departed from him and came back to him again."²²

The appellation "son of man," according to Saint Gregory the Dialogist, is employed because "divine government, before advancing a soul by gifts, recalls to it the memory of its infirmity, lest it be puffed up for the virtues it has received; such as when the Prophet Ezekiel, before being led to the contemplation of heavenly things, is first called a 'son of man.' It is as though the Lord plainly admonished him,

saying, 'When thou penetratest the highest things, remember that thou art a man.'"²³

"Son of man, I send thee forth to the house of Israel, to the provoking ones, who have provoked Me, they and their fathers to this day [Ez. 2:2, 3]."

Speaking of the rebelliousness of the children of Israel, the Dialogist says, "Behold! There is one sin of pride, because they violated the covenant, and another of obstinacy, because, even to this day, they provoke Him.... Since, indeed, those to whom the prophet are sent are of such great wickedness and such great obstinacy, who would not then see that the person of the prophet avails to be despised by such froward men? But—behold!—authority is given to his person when he is told: **'And thou shalt say to them, "Thus**

²² Saint Jerome, "Homily 75," *Homilies 60-96 On The Psalms*, Vol. 2, FC, 2nd ed. 57:130, 131.

²³ Saint Gregory, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, Part IV, Nicene, 2nd Ser., XII:72.

saith the Lord.” Whether then indeed they shall hear or fear, for it is a provoking house, yet they shall know that thou art a prophet in the midst of them [Ez. 2:4, 5].”²⁴

In the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, we read: “By frequent hearing, it is to be hoped that some will be made ashamed—and at least do some good action, and avoid some wicked one.... Perhaps they will hear and submit.... Indeed, to this day men have not heard; for while they seem to have heard, they have not heard aright, as appears by their having left the one and only true God, and by their having been drawn into destructive and dangerous heresies.”²⁵

Saint Gregory the Great speaks of the prophet’s duty: “They shall know that a prophet was among them in order that, hearing Ezekiel’s preaching, two results may issue so that they lack no excuse: either they would be helped to rise or they would be condemned by themselves.”²⁶ The prophet is admonished: “**Be not afraid of their words** [Ez. 2:6],” even though he dwells “**in the midst of scorpions** [Ez. 2:6].” Saint Gregory warns that “scorpions attack by caressing and then strike with the tail. They do not bite frontally, but injure from behind.... They are at the same time unbelievers and destroyers and scorpions, because they do not believe in what they have heard of God. They, furthermore, subvert those whom they can from good conduct. They also strike with hidden machinations those whom they do not avail to deflect.”²⁷ “**Be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their countenance, for it is a provoking house** [Ez. 2:6].” The saint says that “if it were said plainly, we would hear, ‘They ought to be afraid lest they should provoke Me by their actions.’ They have provoked God to anger, yet He forbears.”²⁸

Saint Gregory the Dialogist gives warning, saying, “Thus, it is needful that he himself not commit wrong, which is wont to provoke the fury of the Creator against the people. For this reason, it goes on to say, ‘**And thou, son of man, hear Him that speaks to thee; be not thou provoking, as the provoking house** [Ez. 2:8].’ That is, ‘Do not thyself do the wicked things which thou seest done lest thou thyself shouldest commit the sin thou art sent to forbid.’... Blessed Ezekiel, who is sent to prophesy, is forbidden to be provoking (that is, to have disobeyed when he was sent to preach).... For as the wicked provoke God because they speak evil or do evil, thus the good sometimes anger Him because they silence the good.... Thus, the good provoke

²⁴ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, “Homily IX,” pp. 96, 97.

²⁵ *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Book II, §II, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, VII:398.

²⁶ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, “Homily IX,” p. 98.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

God at the same time as the wicked because they do not censure wicked deeds; for by their silence, they give license for their commission.”²⁹

“Open thy mouth, and eat what I shall give thee. And I looked, and behold, a hand stretched out to me, and in it a volume of a book. And He unrolled it before me: and the front and the back in it were written upon...[Ez. 2:8-10].” Now when the volume of the book was unrolled before him, “the front and the back were written upon [Ez. 2:10].” Customarily, parchment was written only on the inside. Evidently, this roll was filled with coming sorrows. He took in the contents, so he might “receive into his heart all the words [Ez. 2:10],” and better impart its contents to his listeners. Note he ate first and then would speak, meaning he would appropriate God’s words first prior to imparting them to others. Saint Gregory the Great observes, “Since the prophet was to have many obscure and intricate things, it is not said to him of the sacred book ‘drink’ but ‘eat’; that is, ‘Study and understand, that is, first chew and then swallow down.’”³⁰

“And there was written in it lamentation, and melody, and woe [Ez. 2:10].” Saint Ambrose (ca. 339-397), Bishop of Milan, comments, “Two things sad and one pleasant, for he shall be saved in the future who has wept most in this age.”³¹

Saint Gregory the Dialogist says that “following the usage of holy Writ, which is almost always wont to place a song in good fortune, we here receive the song chanted on behalf of the good part.... ‘Woe,’ however, in holy Writ is usually understood of the eternal rather than the present grief.... ‘Lamentations,’ ...the repentance of sinners is written here. A ‘song’ truly because there are proclaimed the joys of the righteous. ‘Woe’ indeed because there is expressed the condemnation of the wicked. Therefore, in order that thou mayest punish sins, read the ‘laments’ which are written in this roll.”³²

Saint Gregory continues: “As the order of preachers is signified by the prophet, so the pages of holy Writ are meant by the book which he received. For the rolled book is the obscure speech of holy Writ which is enveloped in profundity of sayings, so that it is not easily pierced by the understanding of all. But the book is spread out before the prophet because the obscurity of holy Writ is opened for the preachers.”³³ We are then informed by Saint Gregory that “truth” spread out this rolled book.... “Of this book it is also added, ‘and it was written within and without.’ For the book of holy Writ is written within

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 105, 106.

³⁰ Ibid., Book One, “Homily X,” p. 110.

³¹ Saint Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance*, Book II, Ch. VI. Nicene, 2nd Ser., X:352.

³² Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, “Homily IX,” p. 108.

³³ Ibid.

by allegory, and without by history. Within through spiritual understanding, but without through the plain sense of the letter still befitting the weak. Within because it promises invisible things, without because it arranges the visible by rightness of its statutes. Within because it offers heavenly things, but without because it presents earthly things as they are contemptible, to be had for use or to be shunned from desire."³⁴

"So He opened my mouth, and caused me to eat the volume [Ez. 3:2]." *The scroll placed by the hand of the Lord in thy mouth sweetened thy heart* [Ez. 3:3].³⁵ Saint Gregory reveals that "Almighty God, as it were, as often as He offers His hand to the mouth of our hearts, so often opens our understanding and instills the food of holy Writ into our senses. Therefore, He feeds us with the book when by imparting He opens our perception to holy Scriptures and fills our thoughts to overflowing with its sweetness."³⁶

"I take the word 'belly,'" writes Saint Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-ca. 395), "as a convenient term to praise our Lord's body....When the great Ezekiel opened his mouth, He put in it the book's scroll full of letters on each side: '**Son of man, thy mouth shall eat, and thy belly shall be filled with this volume that is given to thee** [Ez. 3:3].' The rational part of the soul in which is placed the divine teachings is named 'belly.'...If a greater authority must be given from the divine Scriptures, we state what our Lord said to those who believed in Him. 'The *one* who believeth in Me, even as the Scripture said—rivers of living water shall flow out of his belly [Jn. 7:38].'"³⁷

"And He said to me, 'Son of man, go thy way, and go unto the house of Israel, and speak My words to them [Ez. 3:4]."

"For thou art not sent to a people of hard speech, but to the house of Israel; neither to many nations of other speech and other tongues, nor of harsh language, whose words thou wouldest not understand; although if I had sent thee to such, they would have hearkened to thee [Ez. 3:5, 6]."

Saint Gregory, Pope of Rome, writes: "In the very beginning of this command, whereby the prophet is sent to preach, the calling of the Gentiles and the banishment of the Israelites is clearly meant....The obedience of the Gentiles is openly declared, they who would one day follow without delay the voices of the preachers."³⁸

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Orthros Canon, Ode Four, Mode Plagal Four.

³⁶ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book X, "Homily X," p. 111.

³⁷ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1987), "Homily Fourteen," p. 251.

³⁸ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily X," p. 115.

"The house of Israel will not be willing to hearken to thee, for they will not hearken to Me; for all the house of Israel are stubborn and hardhearted [Ez. 3:7]."

Continuing, Saint Gregory says, "The hardness of the Jews is meant, who both understand and yet refuse to follow the words of the preachers. But the unknown tongue of the Gentiles did not cause a delay to obedience, although it was foreign to the communication of the Law. For it is well said, 'They will not hearken to thee, because they will not hearken to Me,' in accordance with what is written: 'The *one* who heareth you heareth Me, and the *one* who rejecteth you rejecteth Me, and the *one* who rejecteth Me rejecteth the *One* Who sent Me forth [Lk. 10:16].'"³⁹

"And, behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and I will strengthen thy power against their power. And it shall be continually stronger than a rock. Be not afraid of them, neither be dismayed at their faces, because it is a provoking house [Ez. 3:8, 9]."

"The Lord here and elsewhere," according to Saint Jerome, "says to the prophets that He has made their face a brazen city and a stone of adamant and an iron pillar [Jer. 1:18; Ez. 8, 9], to the end that they shall not be afraid of the insults of the people, but shall, by the sternness of their looks, discompose the effrontery of those who sneered at them."⁴⁰

The Calling and Early Visions of the Prophet

Since the prophet was numbered among the second wave of deportees in 598 B.C., his book opens up in Babylon. He would spend the remainder of his life among the exiles in the vicinity of the Chobar River. Only in visions would he return occasionally to witness the appalling conduct of those left behind in Jerusalem. "When the temple," comments Saint Chrysostom, "was burned and they all had been led off to Babylon, Daniel and Ezekiel saw no holy of holies and stood beside no altar. But even though they were in the middle of a barbarian land and in the midst of unclean transgressors of the Law, they were filled with the Spirit and foretold the future, predicting events far more numerous and marvellous than those prophesied by their predecessors. And they saw divine visions insofar as it was possible for them to see."⁴¹

1. Prophet Ezekiel's Opening Vision [Ez. 1]:

"And it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, that I was in the midst of the captivity by the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Saint Jerome, "Letter LXVI," Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:137.

⁴¹ Saint John Chrysostom, "Discourse VI," *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, FC, 68:161.

river of Chobar; and the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month; this was the fifth year of the captivity of King Joakim. And the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans, by the river of Chobar; and the hand of the Lord was upon me [Ez. 1:1-3].”

The prophet places emphasis on chronology (thirteen times) throughout his writings. He opens his book by dating it from the deportation of King Joakim (Jehoiakim, r. 609-598/597) to Babylon in June of 597 B.C. His first message was received between June/July 593 or, according to modern reckoning, the 31st day of the month of July, in the year 593 B.C.⁴² The river Chobar is a canal, which is mentioned in Babylonian records. It flows southeast from its fork above Babylon, through Nippur, and rejoins the Euphrates near Erech.

Saint Gregory the Great makes the following observation: “Why has a man who had not hitherto spoken thus begin by saying, ‘**And it came to pass in the thirtieth year** [Ez. 1:1]’? For the word ‘and’ is a conjunction, and we know that a word is not conjoined save to a precedent word.... It happens that interior things are conjoined in the minds of prophets with exterior things, insofar as they see both at the same time, and they simultaneously hear the word within and speak the word without.... Therefore, he continued the words which he proclaimed from his inner vision.... For he joins that which he begins to say outwardly as if that too is from without which he sees within.”⁴³

“Moreover,” says Saint Gregory, “in order that the nature of the authority in his prophecy may be shown, the prophet is described as being of mature years.”⁴⁴ He then adds, “It may be the intention to define some mystery in the prophet’s age, because also in the thirtieth year of His age the Lord came to the river Jordan [Mt. 3:17].”⁴⁵ Saint Jerome concurs with this idea that “thirty was the perfect age of man; and when we read in Ezekiel, ‘in the thirtieth year, while I was among the exiles,’ a mystical meaning is contained within thirty.”⁴⁶

Returning to Saint Gregory the Great, he informs us that “the actual Hebrew words are of great value to us for the interpretation of the mystery. For Chobar, being interpreted, means ‘heaviness’; Ezekiel, ‘the fortitude of

⁴² The fifth day of the fourth month..., fifth year of the exile would be the 31st day of the month of July, in the year 593, according to the lunar calendar, with the year beginning in the spring.

⁴³ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, “Homily I,” pp. 21, 22.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Book One, “Homily II,” p. 23.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Saint Jerome, “Homily 84,” *60-96 On The Psalms, Volume 2*, FC, 2nd ed., 57:191, 192.

God'; Buzi, 'despised' or 'scorned'; Chaldaï 'taking captive' or 'like demons.' Therefore, Ezekiel arrived beside the river Chobar (signifying 'heaviness') which aptly describes the human race. For it flows from the source to death, and is a burden to itself through sins it both perpetrates and carries.... Ezekiel arrives because the fortitude of the Lord, through the mystery of His incarnation, deigned to approach humankind as it bore the burden of its sins, which from its source flowed daily toward death.... Ezekiel is the son of Buzi, because the only-begotten Son of God deigned to be incarnate from that people which the Lord shunned because of the guilt of their treachery. Therefore, the fortitude of God is born of contempt or scorn.... Indeed, Ezekiel came to the land of the Chaldaeans, being interpreted means, 'taking captive' or 'like demons.' For wicked men who themselves perpetrate iniquities, and inveigle others by persuasion to iniquity, are sure takers of captives. They, also, are rightly designated 'as demons,' because those who seduce others to iniquity, by coaxing, take upon themselves the ministry of demons for wicked purposes—although they are not demons by nature. Therefore, the fortitude of God came to the land of the Chaldaeans. For the Only-begotten of the Father appeared among those who had themselves stooped to sin, and who had taken captives and seduced others to sin."⁴⁷

Saint Chrysostom, commenting on these verses, says, "Prophet Ezekiel stood by the river Chobar, as the Prophet Daniel in his day stood beside the Tigris [Dan. 10:4]. For whenever God is going to reveal some sight beyond all expectation to His servants, He leads them out of the cities to a place free from tumult. He does this so that their souls may not be upset by any sight or sound; so that, while their whole being enjoys full peace and tranquility, they may occupy themselves with contemplating the things He shows them."⁴⁸

Now when Ezekiel was among the exiles by the river, the heavens opened, and he saw divine visions. According to Saint Jerome, "Ezekiel saw, but others did not see. Let no one imagine that the heavens opened in the simple, physical sense. No, we ourselves, who are sitting here now, see the heavens opened or closed according to our different degrees of worthiness. Full faith opens the heavens; doubt closes them."⁴⁹

"And the hand of the Lord was upon me [Ez. 1:3]," as explained by Saint Gregory the Great, means "the hand or the arm of the Lord signifies the Son, for by Him all things were made. For the hand of the Lord, which

⁴⁷ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily II," pp. 23, 24.

⁴⁸ Saint John Chrysostom, "Homily III," *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, FC, 72:106.

⁴⁹ Saint Jerome, "Homily 75," *60-96 On The Psalms, Volume 2*, FC, 57:129.

through divinity is not made but begotten, is made from humanity, that it may cleanse the wounds of the human race. Therefore, the prophet recognized the incarnation of the Only-begotten when he saw the hand of the Lord made above him."⁵⁰

"And I looked, and, behold, a sweeping wind was coming from the north, and a great cloud on it; and brightness was round about it and a gleaming fire, and, in the midst of it, as the appearance of amber, in the midst of the fire, and brightness in it [Ez. 1:4]."

This may be interpreted on several levels. Saint Dionysios the Areopagite (1st C.) says, "The celestial beings are represented at times in the word of God as clouds. This is to show that the holy and intelligent beings are filled in a transcendent way with hidden light. Directly and without arrogance they have been first to receive this light; and as intermediaries, they have generously passed it on so far as possible to those next to them."⁵¹

Saint Gregory the Dialogist on the other hand points out two other levels of understanding: the coming judgment upon Juda, and the coming of Christ: "The numbness of the evil spirit is not ineptly called by the name of the north which fetters with cold. Prophet Esaias bears witness, declaring that the devil had spoken saying, 'I will sit on a lofty mount, on the lofty mountains toward the north [Is. 14:13].'...The Prophet Ezekiel, therefore, perceiving what will finally come to pass, saw the whirlwind come from the north, because at the end of time the evil spirit will strongly attack the minds of men with its numbing....The evil spirit is aptly named the whirlwind. For a whirlwind shakes and overthrows a building which it touches."⁵² Saint Gregory believes that the prophet perceived the ruin of Judaea. "Therefore the whirlwind from the north came when the evil spirit shook the life of the Judaeans people in his temptation. Then it rightly added, **'and a great cloud on it [Ez. 1:4].'** This great cloud was their ignorance; for, although seeing Him, they denied the Savior of the human race, Whom they had expected through understanding the Law and the prophets. When they look now upon His virtues and miracles, now upon His sufferings, a great cloud from the north comes upon the hearts of the faithless, because from the cold of the sin."⁵³

Speaking of the **"great cloud,"** Saint Gregory adds that, "at the judgment, when all sins return at once before the eyes, then enters the gloom of wretched thought from the prospect of imminent damnation. Hence it is added, **'and a great cloud.'** For then, from the memory of sins, the gloom of

⁵⁰ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily II," p. 24.

⁵¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works: The Celestial Hierarchy* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987), Ch. 15, p. 188.

⁵² Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily II," p. 25.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

blindness weighs down the perception of the mind, when the wicked are not permitted to look upon the only-begotten Son of God....Hence it is openly stated, 'and a fire infolding it.' For, indeed, the fire of judgment, which consumes the lofty heaven and the earth, will not permit sinners to stand upright in their pride, but envelopes those whom beyond doubt it shatters in the damnation of their punishment."⁵⁴

"**And brightness in it [Ez. 1:4].**' Because," continues Saint Gregory the Dialogist, "'as the lightning cometh forth from the east and appeareth as far as the west, so also shall be the coming of the Son of Man [Mt. 24:27].' No one is then allowed to lie hidden from the judgment in his mind, because he is pervaded by the very lightning of the Judge. Of this it is straightway added: **'And in the midst of it, as it were the appearance of amber, in the midst of the fire [Ez. 1:4].**' For our Savior Himself—sitting above the angels and archangels and all the powers—Who, as if in the likeness of amber, one from each and in each nature, both remained God with the Father and for our salvation became mortal with men, will then be seen in His terrifying power; and the fire of judgment will serve for Him as the punishment of the wicked.... For 'fire,' in this case," says Saint Gregory, "denotes despitefulness of mind....Judaea, therefore, blinded by the cloud of its ignorance, soon burst forth before the wickedness of persecution, and was wrapped in its own fire. Judaea entwined itself in the snare of wickedness through that same cruelty by which it was inflamed."⁵⁵ Continuing his theme on the "brightness," Saint Gregory writes: "For when the persecution came to pass in Judaea, the holy preaching of the apostles was dispersed throughout the world."

Now what is meant by "**the appearance of amber**" but Christ Jesus, the Mediator of God and men? "For amber," says Saint Gregory, "comes from gold and silver. When gold and silver are mixed in amber, the silver waxes to brightness but the gold pales in its sheen. The one increases in splendor, the other is tempered from its radiance. Therefore, our nature is joined to the nature of divinity in the only-begotten Son of God; in which unity, humanity burgeoned in the glory of majesty, but divinity tempered the power of its splendor for human eyes, in that human nature was made more glorious."⁵⁶

2. The Four Living Creatures [Ez. 1]:

"**And in the midst as it were the likeness of four living creatures [Ez. 1:5].**"

"Whether in the midst of the amber or of the fire," remarks Saint Gregory the Dialogist, "its says there was in the midst thereof **'as it were the**

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

likeness of four living creatures [Ez. 1:5].’ There is no reason not to understand that these four living creatures, surely the four evangelists, were strengthened in the power of faith from the incarnation of this same Lord, although afflicted by many tribulations in the fire of persecution.”⁵⁷

“And this was their appearance: the likeness of a Man was upon them. And each one had four faces, and each one had four wings [Ez. 1:5, 6].”

Saint Gregory the Dialogist inquires, “A little later on when these four holy creatures are described as distinguished by individual images, so that one is likened to a man, one to a lion, one to an ox, and one to an eagle, why does it at the same time say of all of them that there was the likeness of a Man in them?” Answering, he says, “But what Man is described here, save Him of Whom it is written: ‘Who, existing in the form of God, deemed it not a prize



Tetramorph

to be seized to be equal with God; but He emptied Himself and took *the* form of a slave, and came to be in *the* likeness of men [Phil. 2:6, 7]’? Accordingly, these creatures, in order to avail to rise to the virtue of sanctity, strive toward the likeness of this Man. For they would not have been holy if they had not possessed the likeness of this Man.”⁵⁸

“And each one *had* four faces, and each one *had* four wings [Ez. 1:6].” Saint Chrysostom asks, “What, then, did Ezekiel see? ‘Behold, a cloud came from the north, enveloped in brightness and flashing fire! And in the midst of it, something gleamed like electrum, and brightness was in it. Also in the midst was the likeness of four living creatures. They looked like this: They were tall and frightening. The backs of the four were filled with eyes set in a circle. Over their heads something like a firmament could be seen, fearful as the appearance of crystal, spread out over their heads from on high. Each had two wings covering its body. Above the firmament there appeared to be a sapphire stone with what looked like a throne upon it. And upon the throne was

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 29, 30.

seated One Who had the appearance of a Man. Upwards from what resembled His waist, I saw what appeared to be electrum; downwards from what resembled His waist, I saw what looked like fire. The splendor which surrounded Him was like the rainbow which is seen in the clouds on a rainy day.' And because Ezekiel wished to show that neither he...nor those heavenly powers approached the divine essence itself and in its pure state, he went on to say, 'This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.' Do you see...God's accommodation of condescension? There is no reason other than this that the heavenly powers hide themselves with their wings, though they are wiser, more knowledgeable, and purer than we."⁵⁹

Saint Kyril (ca. 315-386), Patriarch of Jerusalem (from 349), warns,



Christ in Glory

"Learn, then, that it is impossible to comprehend God's nature.... Tell me what is the nature of the cherubim, and then consider Him Who has His throne upon them. But Ezekiel the prophet has produced a description of them, as far as that is possible, saying that each one has four faces [Ez. 1:6]: one of a man, another of a lion, a third of an eagle, and a fourth of a calf. Indeed, each one has four wings and eyes on every side; and beneath each is a wheel of four parts. Yet, after the

description of the prophet, we still cannot comprehend what we read. But if we cannot comprehend the throne which he has described, how will we be able to comprehend Him Who sits thereon, the invisible and ineffable God? It is impossible to examine closely into the nature of God; but, for His works which we see, we can offer Him praise and glory."⁶⁰

Saint Jerome says, "Ezekiel, in fact, describes the cherubim as creatures with four wings on four sides and with four faces, of which God is the charioteer. 'It was Ezekiel who saw the glorious vision, which was shown

⁵⁹ Saint John Chrysostom, "Homily III," *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, FC, 72:106, 107.

⁶⁰ Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catechesis IX," *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem Catechesis*, Vol. 1, FC, 61:186.

him upon the chariot of the cherubim [Eccl. Sirach 49:8].’ The cherubim are also a symbol of the store of knowledge. Again, the cherubim symbolize the nature of the lion, the sovereign nature reigning over its passions, the nature of man as rational, the nature of the bullcalf in work, the nature of the eagle in contemplation—in speculation that elevates us among the virtues.”⁶¹

Saint Epiphanius of Salamis explains that “the four living creatures with four forms stand announcing the coming of Christ. There is the form of the man for one of them, because Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem, as the Evangelist Matthew tells us. There is the form of the lion for another, as Mark proclaims Him as having come from the Jordan, like the royal lion, as it is written for another: ‘Behold, he shall come up as a lion from Jordan [Jer. 27: 44 LXX].’⁶² There is the form of the bull for another, because Luke proclaims—and not only him but also all the evangelists—that at the appointed time, until the ninth hour, He, as the ox, was sacrificed on the Cross for the world. There is the form of the eagle for the last, because John proclaims the Logos that has come down from heaven and become flesh and has gone to heaven like an eagle, for a complete resurrection, full of the divine nature.”⁶³

Although the early Church fathers generally agree that the four living creatures symbolized the evangelists, there was a diversity of opinion about which creature represented a particular Gospel writer. Saint Irenaeus (ca. 130-ca. 200), Bishop of Lyons, thought that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were prefigured by the man, the eagle, the calf, and the lion respectively.⁶⁴ Saints Jerome and Gregory the Dialogist prefer the order of man, lion, calf, and eagle. Bede the Venerable (ca. 673-735) consistently followed the order lion, man, calf, eagle.⁶⁵

Saint Jerome writes: “The four-faced creature (tetramorph) that we met in the Apocalypse of Saint John [Rev. 4:6-8], and in the beginning of Ezekiel’s prophecy,...has also special significance for the Gospels: in Matthew, this human being has the face of a man, in Luke an ox, in John an eagle, in Mark the lion crying in the desert.”⁶⁶

Saint Hippolytus observes that “the one tetramorph had four figures; because each figure is a Gospel, it appears in a fourfold fashion. The first

⁶¹ Saint Jerome, “Homily 7,” *Homilies 1-59 On the Psalms*, FC, 48:54.

⁶² Jer. 49:19 KJV.

⁶³ Saint Epiphanius, *On Weights and Measures*, I.8-10; *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Louvain, Belgium, 1903), 461:40, 41; *Ezekiel, Daniel*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament XIII (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p. 5 [hereinafter referred to as ACC].

⁶⁴ *Adv. Haer.* 3, 11, 8 (SC 211:160. 175-170, 236).

⁶⁵ *In Apocalypsin* (P.L. 93:144A-B); *In Lucam* (CCSL 120: 6, 68-10, 22).

⁶⁶ Saint Jerome, “Homily 75(1),” *60-96 On The Psalms, Volume 2*, FC, 57:121.

figure, which was like an ox, indicates the priestly glory of Jesus. This is what Luke depicts. The second, which was like a lion, indicates leadership and the regal nature of the lion 'of the tribe of Juda.' This is what Matthew depicts. The third was like a human and shows the Son's capacity for suffering and the lowly nature of humanity. This is what Mark shows. However, the fourth, the



Six-winged Seraph

eagle, teaches the secret of His power and might Who flies up to the Father's heaven. This is John's message."⁶⁷

"What," asks Saint Gregory the Dialogist, "is expressed by faces if not knowledge, and what by wings if not flight? For each is known by its face, and bodies are raised by wings to the heights of the birds. Therefore, the face pertains to faith, the wing to contemplation.... Truly because we are lifted above ourselves by contemplation we are, as it were, raised in the air. Therefore, everyone has four faces, because if you ask what Matthew perceives of the incarnation of the Lord, he surely perceives the same as the Evangelists Mark, Luke, and John; and it is the same with each toward the others.... Therefore, each one has four faces because the knowledge of faith,

by which they are known of God, is the same in one as simultaneously in four. Then whatever you will find in one, you will duly see in all four at the same time."⁶⁸ That each had four wings, he interprets for us saying, "The face of the evangelist pertains to the humanity of the Lord, and the wing to His divinity, because they turn, as it were, their face toward Him Whom they see in the body. And when they proclaim that He is uncircumscribed and incorporeal in His divinity, they are lifted by means of the wings of contemplation as if into the air."⁶⁹

"And their legs were straight [Ez. 1:7]." Saint Gregory, working from the Vulgate, reads "legs" as "feet," and comments, "What is meant by

⁶⁷ Saint Hippolytos, "Fragment I"; *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1827), 1.2:183; ACC, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily III," pp. 31, 32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

feet, if not the course of actions? Therefore, the feet of the four living creatures are described as straight, because the works of the holy evangelists and of all the saints, for the hunting down of iniquity, are not bent back. But those who are turned back to the evils of the world, which they have left behind, do not have straight feet.”⁷⁰

“And their feet were winged, and there were sparks, like gleaming brass, and their wings were light [Ez. 1:7].” Saint Gregory the Dialogist, filled with love, interprets in his brilliant exegesis not only what the Priest Ezekiel beheld but also what applies to our own circumstances. “The metal of brass is exceedingly sonorous. And the voices of preachers are rightly likened to brass because ‘their sound went forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world [Ps. 18:4].’ Then brass is fittingly described as glowing, for the life of the preachers resounds and burns. For it burns with desire; it resounds with the Word.”⁷¹

Saint Dionysios observes: “The feet are nimble in movement and speed in that perpetual journey to the divine things. Hence, the Logos of God has fashioned wings on the feet of intelligent beings, for wings signify uplifting speed, the climb to heaven, the ever-upward journey whose constant upward thrust rises above all earthly longing. The lightness of wings symbolizes the freedom from all worldly attraction, their pure and untrammelled rising toward the heights. The bare feet and body signify detachment, freedom, independence, the fact of being untarnished by anything external, the greatest possible conformity to the divine simplicity.”⁷²

“And the hand of a Man was under their wings on their four sides [Ez. 1:8].” “In this passage,” writes Saint Gregory, “the four sides may be received as the four regions of the world, namely the east, the west, the north, and the south, because the preaching of the saints by God’s command went out



Prophet Ezekiel

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁷² Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works: The Celestial Hierarchy* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987), trans. by Colm Luibheid, Ch. 15(3); ACC, loc. cit.

into all the corners of the world. Furthermore, we can surely take the four sides to mean the four principal virtues from which all the other virtues spring, namely prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance."⁷³ But if a "Man" is here taken to mean our Savior, "They had the hands of a Man under their wings, because if God had not become Man, Who has lifted the minds of the preachers to the heavens, those creatures which appear would not have flown....Therefore, His hand upholds our hearts; His hand lifts us in contemplation."⁷⁴

"And the faces of those four turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward [Ez. 1:9]." "When the winged creatures," explains Saint Gregory, "namely the holy preachers, go, they in no wise turn back because they pass from earthly acts to spiritual things, so that they do not return to that which they have left behind."⁷⁵

"And the likeness of their faces was the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right to the four, and the face of a calf on the left to the four, and the face of an eagle to the four [Ez. 1:10]." Saint Dionysios the Areopagite writes: "The form of a lion must be regarded as typifying their power of sovereignty, strength, and indomitableness, and the ardent striving upward with all their powers to that most hidden, ineffable, mysterious divine unity, and the covering of the intellectual footprints (the lion was said by the ancients to erase his footprints with his tail), and the mystically modest concealment of the way leading to divine union through the divine illumination. The figure of the ox signifies strength and vigor and the opening of the intellectual furrows to the reception of fertilizing showers; and the horns signify the guarding and unconquerable power. The form of the eagle signifies royalty and high soaring and swiftness of flight and the eager seizing of that food which renews their strength, discretion, and ease of movement and skill, with strong intensity of vision which has the power to gaze unhindered, directly and unflinchingly upon the full and brilliant splendor of the brightness of the divine Sun."⁷⁶

Through the sacred Spirit of prophecy, the winged creatures are minutely described. The very subtlety of the presentation reveals, according to Saint Gregory the Dialogist, that "the persons of the evangelists are meant thereby, and the discourse of God leaves no doubt in our minds. The preface of each Gospel avers that these four winged creatures denote the four holy

⁷³ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily III," p. 34.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

⁷⁶ Saint Dionysios the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Surrey, England: The Shrine of Wisdom, 1965), Ch. XV, p. 64.

evangelists. Matthew, who began from the generations of men, is justly represented as a man. Mark, because of the crying in the wilderness, is rightly indicated by a lion. Luke, because he started from a sacrifice, is well described as an ox. John, indeed, because he commences with the divinity of the Word (Logos), is worthily signified by an eagle....But because all the elect are members of our Savior, for our Savior is Head of all the elect, in that His members are thereby depicted, there is no obstacle to even Him being signified in all these. For the only-begotten Son of God Himself truly became Man; He deigned to die like an ox as a sacrifice for our salvation; He, through the virtue of fortitude, rose as a lion....Furthermore, ascending into heaven after His resurrection, He was borne aloft to the heights like an eagle....He is therefore wholly within us at the same time, Who became a Man by being born, an ox in dying, a lion in rising again, and an eagle in ascending to the heavens.

“Truly every one of the elect, perfect in the way of God, is a man, an ox, a lion, and an eagle at the same time....Therefore, everyone who is perfect in reason is a man. And since he mortifies himself of the desires of this world, he is an ox. In that by this, his self-same mortification, he possesses the fortitude of composure in all adversities, he is a lion. Because truly he uprightly contemplates those things which are celestial and eternal, he is an eagle. Since each of the just is formed as a man through reason, an ox through the sacrifice of mortification, a lion through the fortitude of composure, and an eagle indeed through contemplation, all of the perfect can be symbolized by these holy creatures. This we say to show that all that was said about the four living creatures also pertains to the members of the elect.”⁷⁷

Saint Gregory the Great then asks, “But why are the four said to have a man and a lion on the right side, and an ox on the left?...And, again, we must ask why the eagle is said to be not on the right, nor the left, but above these four.” The saint answers with the Lord’s revelation, saying, “We have joys on the right and sorrows on the left. We describe as our left that which we consider to be adverse. As we said before, the incarnation is represented by the man, the Passion by the ox, and the resurrection of our Creator by the lion. All were gladdened by the incarnation of the only-begotten Son, whereby we are saved; truly, the holy apostles, the first of the elect, were saddened by His death, and rejoiced anew in His resurrection. Therefore, since His nativity and His resurrection proffered joy to His disciples, who were saddened by His Passion, the man and the lion are described as being on the right, and truly the ox on the left. The holy evangelists rejoiced in His humanity and were encouraged by His resurrection, but were saddened by His Passion....The ox is to the left, because His (Christ’s) death laid them low for a moment in

⁷⁷ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, “Homily IV,” pp. 40, 41.

faithlessness. The place of the eagle is rightly defined...above them, since, whether it denotes His ascension or because it declares the Word of the Father to be with God the Father, in the virtue of contemplation, he surpasses the other evangelists."⁷⁸

"And the four had their wings spread out above; each one had two joined to one another, and two covered their bodies [Ez. 1:11]." Saint Gregory gives us the significance of the wings: "Their faces and their wings are described as stretched upward because the whole attention, the entire contemplation of the holy creatures, is directed above themselves, in order that it may attain that which it seeks in the heavens."⁷⁹ Continuing, he cautions us, "It is incumbent on us to seek with diligent inquiry what are the four wings of the elect, two of which are stretched above and joined, and two of which, indeed, cover their bodies. If we keenly ponder, we find the four to be virtues which lift every winged creature from earthly acts, namely, love and hope in the future, but fear and penitence from the past....The two wings are joined above when love and hope lift the hearts of the elect on high and consecrate them to holy things; but two wings cover their bodies when fear and penitence hide their past sins from the sight of the eternal Judge....We cover our sins when we place good deeds atop evil acts."⁸⁰ It is written that the two pinions (wings) of every one were joined. Saint Gregory explains that "the joined wings of the holy creatures are love and hope, but the two which cover their bodies, fear and penitence, are not joined one to another....The two wings of each are joined, and they are not two, because through love and hope their desire is one, but that which they deplore is different."⁸¹

"And each one went straight forward, wherever the Spirit was going they went, and turned not back [Ez. 1:12]." Saint Gregory: "They turned not when they went, because all the elect thus aim for the good, in order that they may not revert to the perpetration of evil."⁸² We too must do the same. "Indeed, every righteous man who scrutinizes his life and diligently ponders how much he grows toward the good each day, or perchance how much he falls short of the good, because he places himself before his eyes, he walks before his face, since he vigilantly watches whether he rises or falls....Therefore, in all which we do, we ought zealously to examine ourselves inwardly and outwardly, in order that, emulating the winged creatures; we may be present to ourselves and always walk before our face,

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 41, 42.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁸² Ibid., Book One, "Homily V," p. 48.

having as our helper the Only-begotten of the Father, Jesus Christ, our Lord.”⁸³

Moreover, Saint Gregory adds that “the living creatures shown signify either our Savior or His four evangelists and all the perfect. Indeed, the virtue of these living creatures is still more subtly expressed, so that even we, although infirm and contemptible, may be stretched to imitate them, as far as we can, by the Lord’s gift of grace.”⁸⁴

“And in the midst of the living creatures *there was an appearance as of burning coals of fire, as an appearance of lamps turning among the living creatures, not only the light of the fire but also out of the fire came forth lightning* [Ez. 1:13, 14].” Saint Gregory explains that “the fire appears running to and from amid the living creatures, because if these winged beings did not receive heat from the fire of truth, they would not burn into the likeness of coals and lamps. The Holy Spirit is wont to be meant by the name ‘fire.’ ... The Holy Spirit is said to run to and fro, as the brightness of fire amid the living creatures, and lightning to go forth out of the fire; because filling up the universal Church in the hearts of the elect, He sends out from Himself flames of love, so that, like lightning, He may strike listless hearts through terror and kindle them with His own love.”⁸⁵

The appearance of the living creatures is compared with burning coals of fire and lamps. Saint Gregory informs us that “whoever touches a coal is burned, because he who cleaves to a holy man, from his constancy of vision, his use of speech, the example of his deeds, he accepts to be kindled with love for the truth.... A man who leads a good life in secret, but is of very little help for the advancement of another, is a coal. But he who, placed in imitation of sanctity, shows forth to many the light of righteousness is a lamp, because he both burns for himself and shines for others.”⁸⁶

“The sacred creatures,” according to Saint Gregory, “also go and return in another sense. For they go when they are sent to instill the grace of the heavenly gift in preaching. And in order that they may attract others to the Faith, they work wonders before the eyes of unbelievers. But they return and render these to the virtue of almighty God. They do not ascribe their actions to themselves. For when they perform amazing deeds, they are lightning, because they shock, terrify, illumine, and kindle the hearts of the watchers.... Therefore, the living creatures go and return like flashes of lightning, because after the saints work miracles among men, after they kindle the hearts

⁸³ Ibid., Book One, “Homilies IV and V,” pp. 44, 46.

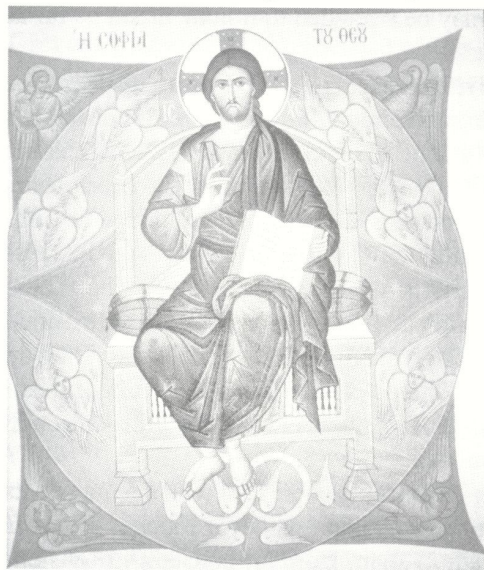
⁸⁴ Ibid., Book One, “Homily V,” p. 47.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 48, 49.

of their hearers with scattered light, they return to give glory to their Creator, in order to render praise to Him through Whom they know how to do such things.”⁸⁷

“And I looked, and, behold, the four *had each one wheel on the ground near the living creatures* [Ez. 1:15].”



The Wisdom of God

“What does a wheel signify?” asks Saint Gregory. “Is it not holy Writ, which...rolls from every direction, because it proceeds straight and humble amid adversity and prosperity alike? For the circle of its precepts is now above, now below: to the more perfect, those precepts which are spoken spiritually; and for the feeble, according with the letter. And those precepts which little children understand literally, learned men lift above through spiritual intelligence.”⁸⁸ And, “Therefore, the wheel is, as it were, drawn along the ground because it adapts with humble

speech to children while imparting spiritual truth to adults; and it lifts, as it were, its orbit to the height and there rises again where it was seen to touch the ground a little before.”⁸⁹

Saint Gregory then says that “the Prophet Ezekiel saw in a figure the glory of the holy and universal Church and of the evangelists through the likeness of the four creatures....If we must accept the sacred creatures as the evangelists alone,...there is still something else which we must consider. For the holy prophet perceived that these very words, which he proffered wrapped in obscurities, were spread out not for the Jewish people but for the Gentiles....Therefore, speaking to us, he must describe first the sacred creatures and then the wheel because we, coming by God’s grace to the Faith, did not learn the Gospel through the Law but the Law through the Gospel.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 52, 53.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Book One, “Homily VI,” p. 54.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

Saint Basil the Great (ca. 330-379) writes: “‘The voice of Thy thunder in the wheel [Ps. 76:18].’ That the Gospel is thunder is made evident by the disciples who were given a new name by the Lord and called ‘the sons of thunder [Mk. 3:17].’ Therefore, the voice of such thunder is not in any chance person, but only in one who is worthy to be called a wheel. That is, whoever is stretching forward—like a wheel, touching the earth with a small part of itself—is really such as that wheel was, about which Ezekiel saw [Ez. 1:15].”⁹¹

“And the appearance of the wheels was as the appearance of beryl, and the four had one likeness. And their work was as it were a wheel in a wheel [Ez. 1:16].”

“The word ‘Tarshish’ (beryl) has many meanings as commonly used in Scripture,” Saint Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330-ca. 395) informs us: “It is often used in a negative way, while on the other hand, it frequently takes on a divine, noble significance....The great Ezekiel expresses one form of this divine vision when describing the divine theophany, **‘the appearance of the wheels was as the appearance of beryl [Ez. 1:16].’** Those who know Hebrew say that ‘Tarshish,’ as used here in prophecy, signifies anything spiritual and incorporeal which lacks color.”⁹²

What is meant by the revolving wheels and the divers wings? Saint Ambrose (ca. 339-397), Bishop of Milan (374), remarks that “the Prophet Ezekiel saw a wheel running within a wheel, which certainly does not refer to any appearance to the bodily sight, but to the grace of each Testament. For the life of the saints is polished, and so consistent with itself that later portions agree with the former. The wheel, then, within a wheel, is life under the Law, life under grace; inasmuch as Jews are within the Church, the Law is included in grace. For he is within the Church who is a Jew secretly; and circumcision of the heart is a sacrament within the Church. But it is that Jewry which is within the Church of which it is written: ‘In Judaea is God known [Ps. 75:1]’; therefore as wheel runs within wheel, so in like manner the wings were still, and the wings were flying.”⁹³

Elsewhere, Saint Ambrose writes: “One wheel runs within another and is not impeded. For a life lived without any offense is a rounded life, whatever the sufferings in which it is lived, and even within such it runs like a wheel. The Law runs within grace, and the keeping of the Law lies within the course

⁹¹ Saint Basil, “Homily 13 on Psalm 28,” *Exegetic Homilies: A Psalm of David at the Finishing of the Tabernacle*, FC, 46:201.

⁹² Saint Gregory of Nyssa, “Homily Fourteen,” *Song of Songs*, p. 249.

⁹³ Saint Ambrose, *Letters and Select Works: Of the Holy Spirit*, Book III, Ch. XXI, Nicene, 2nd Ser., X:157.

of God's mercy: the more it rolls, the more it gains approval."⁹⁴ Saint Jerome also affirms: "We read, '**And one wheel within the other** [Ez. 1:16].' The two wheels are the New and Old Testaments; the Old moves within the New and the New within the Old."⁹⁵

"Why," asks Saint Gregory the Dialogist, "is it that when one wheel was mentioned a little later it is added 'as it were a wheel in the midst of a wheel,' unless that the New Testament lay hidden by allegory in the letter of the Old Testament? Hence, also this same wheel which appeared by the sacred creatures is described as having four faces, because holy Writ is divided into four parts through both Testaments. Indeed the Old Testament is divided into the Law and the prophets, and truly the New into the Gospels and the acts and sayings of the apostles.

"Therefore, the wheel has four faces because first it perceived the sins amid the peoples which must be restrained by the Law, then it observed through the prophets, more subtly indeed through the Gospel, and finally it observed through the apostles the things which must be stopped in the sins of men. It can also be understood that the wheel has four faces because, spread through the grace of prophecy, holy Writ is made known to the four corners of the world. Hence, this same wheel is well said first to have appeared by the sacred creatures, and then to have had four faces, because if the Law did not accord with the Gospel it would not be made known in the four corners of the world."⁹⁶

"They went on their four sides. They turned not as they went, neither did their backs turn. And they were high. And I beheld them, and their backs were full of eyes round about [Ez. 1:17, 18]." Saint Gregory the Great: "The living creatures of heaven are described as full of eyes round about and within [Rev. 4:6]."⁹⁷

Saint Gregory the Dialogist tells us that "the prophet here is speaking of the sacred creatures. Each of the perfect are undoubtedly meant thereby.... Then the bodies of the sacred creatures are described as full of eyes because the action of the saints is circumspect on every side, zealously discerning the good and sagaciously guarding against evils."⁹⁸ He then explains the significance of the stature, height, and dread (awesome) appearance of the wheel, saying, "Truly, the height is the promise of the heavenly kingdom. This is attained when all the corruption of mortal life is subjugated.... Stature is in the

⁹⁴ Idem, *Seven Exegetical Works: Jacob and the Happy Life*, Book One, FC, 65:178.

⁹⁵ Saint Jerome, "Homily 10," *Homilies 1-59 On the Psalms*, FC, 48:75; cf. "Letter 53.9," *P.L.* 22:548(280).

⁹⁶ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily VI," p. 59.

⁹⁷ Saint Gregory, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, Part III, Ch. IV, Nicene, 2nd Ser., XII:27.

⁹⁸ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily VII," p. 65.

righteousness of preaching, height in the loftiness of the heavenly promise, but a dreadful appearance in the threats and terrors of subsequent punishment. Therefore, holy Writ has stature because it directs conduct to uprightness, that the minds of hearers may not be bent to earthly desires. It has height because it promises the joys of eternal life in the heavenly kingdom. Furthermore, it has a dreadful appearance because it threatens all the wicked with the punishments of hell. Therefore, it shows its stature in the edification of conduct, it shows its height in the promise of rewards, and it shows its dreadful appearance in the terrors of punishment."⁹⁹

Saint Jerome tells us, concisely, that "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the Lord's team of four, the true cherubim or store of knowledge: With them the whole body is full of eyes [Ez. 1:18]; they glitter as sparks [Ez. 1:7]; they run and return like lightning [Ez. 1:14]; their feet are straight feet [Ez. 1:7], and lifted up; their backs also are winged, ready to fly in all directions. They hold together each by each and are interwoven one with another [Ez. 1:11]: like wheels within wheels they roll along [Ez. 1:16] and go whithersoever the breath of the Holy Spirit wafts them [Ez. 1:20]."¹⁰⁰ And what does Ezekiel say? "'Wherever the Spirit wished to go, there the wheels went [Ez. 1:20, 21].' There they went, they did not turn when they moved. At the same time, ponder carefully that it means they did not turn back, but always went forward. Forgetting what was behind, they strained forward to what was before. **'They were full of eyes [Ez. 1:16].'** All these wheels were full of the light of God."¹⁰¹

"And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures lifted themselves off the earth, the wheels were lifted off [Ez. 1:19]." Saint Gregory the Dialogist interprets this passage for us: "The living creatures go when the saints understand from holy Writ how to lead a moral life. Truly, the living creatures are lifted up from the earth when the saints raise themselves in contemplation."¹⁰² And, **"Wherever the cloud happened to be, there was the spirit ready to go: the wheels went and were lifted up with them; because the Spirit of life was in the wheels [Ez. 1:20]."** The wheels follow the Spirit because the words of holy Writ, as has often been said already, grow through the intellect according to the perception of the reader."¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ibid., Book One, "Homily VI," p. 62.

¹⁰⁰ Saint Jerome, "Letter LIII," *Letters*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:101.

¹⁰¹ Idem, "Homily 25," *Homilies 1-59 On the Psalms*, FC, 48:199, 200.

¹⁰² Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily VII," p. 68.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 69.

“When those went, *the wheels went*; and when those stood, *the wheels stood*; and when those lifted themselves off the earth, they were lifted off with them, for the Spirit of life was in the wheels [Ez. 1:21].”

Saint Gregory: “When he who distributes well earthly goods and exerts himself in works of pity for the benefit of his neighbor, the wheels progress. When he who stands fast in the Faith against all adversaries, the wheels also stand still. When he who suspends himself on the contemplation of God and despises all earthly things, the wheels are lifted up too. Each advances to the heights insofar as holy Writ speaks to him. Thus the sacred creatures go for the benefit of their neighbor, they stand to guard themselves, and they are lifted to the contemplation of God. The wheels,” observes Saint Gregory the Dialogist, “keep pace, they stand, they are lifted up, because the holy text when sought is so found as he becomes by whom it is sought. So, have you advanced to the active life? It goes with you. Have you attained to detachment and constancy of spirit? It stands with you. Have you arrived at the contemplative life by the grace of God? It flies with you. And again it is added **‘the Spirit of life was in the wheels [Ez. 1:21].’** For this reason the Spirit of life is twice said to be in the wheels, because there are two Testaments of holy Writ, both of which the Spirit of God wished to be written in order to set us free from the death of the soul; or indeed because there are two precepts of charity, namely love of God and love of our neighbor, whereby the sayings of holy Writ quicken us. Therefore, it is said a second time that the Spirit of life was in the wheels because we receive the love of God and of our neighbor in the divine sayings.”¹⁰⁴

“And the likeness over the heads of the living creatures was as a firmament, as the appearance of crystal, spread out over their wings above [Ez. 1:22].”

“In the vision of the Prophet Ezekiel,” says Saint Jerome, “there is seen above the cherubim a crystal stretched forth [Ez. 1:22], that is, the compressed and denser waters.”¹⁰⁵

“These words,” according to the Dialogist, “can be, by God’s grace, expounded in two modes. For the heavenly powers may be understood by the name of the firmament. This firmament is rightly said to be as the appearance of crystal. Though crystal is indeed exceedingly strong, yet it is fastened together from water. The angelic nature, when it received free will at its creation—whether it wished to persevere in humility and remain with the presence of almighty God, or yield to pride and fall from blessedness, became like unto water. However, when others were falling, the holy angels persisted

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 72, 73.

¹⁰⁵ Saint Jerome, “Letter LXIX,” *Letters*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:145.

in their blessedness and received this as a gift, that they could by no means fall, their nature within them, because it surely cannot be inconstantly led, is hardened as if into the strength of crystal."¹⁰⁶...And, "This crystal is said to be terrible to behold and stretched above the heads of the sacred creatures because those angelic powers which stand in the presence of almighty God are terrible and fearsome to us who are fixed in this corruption. Their joys now, because they surpass the perception of our minds, are described as being above the heads of the sacred creatures....It is possible, however, figuratively, to recognize in the name of the firmament our Savior Himself....Crystal, as was said, congeals from water and becomes solid. Truly, we know how great is the mobility of water. For the body of our Savior, Who submitted even unto death in suffering, was in a sense like unto water, because in being born, in growing, in becoming weary, in being thirsty, in being hungry, in dying, He rapidly passed through the moments of time to His Passion....Through the glory of His resurrection, He recovered...as it were, hardened in the manner of crystal from water."¹⁰⁷

"And their wings were spread out under the firmament, reaching one to the other; two wings to each, covering their bodies [Ez. 1:23]." "The wings," continues the Dialogist, "of their virtues under the firmament are straight when the good which one has he gives to the other."¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, he says that "what Ezekiel called 'wings' the Apostle Peter named as 'received grace [cf. 1 Pe. 4:10].'" And when the prophet describes their wings as spread out straight, the one toward the other, the shepherd of the Church describes 'as each one received a gift, minister the same to one another, as good stewards of the diversified grace of God [1 Pe. 4:10].'" For our wings are not now straight if they are merely bent back for our own good;...(and) a wing of virtue when stretched in giving to a neighbor will not be straight if it is lacking in humility....In these words, it is understood that the wings joined one to another were the same as those covering their bodies."¹⁰⁹

"And I heard the sound of their wings when they went, as the sound of much water...[Ez. 1:24]." "In holy Writ," we are told by the Dialogist, "waters are wont to signify peoples. Thus, it is said by John, 'The waters...are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues [Rev. 17:15].'"...As we said already, the wings of the sacred creatures are the virtues of the saints. Why then does the prophet hear the noise of wings like the noise of many waters, save that from the righteousness of almighty God those wings

¹⁰⁶ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily VII," p. 73.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 76

of the virtues which before sounded among the saints, now spread abroad by preaching, resound in the speech of many peoples? When the Lord was incarnate, suffered and rose again, the winged creatures were few because, rarely, there emerged those who desired heavenly things and raised themselves to the heights on the wings of their virtues. But after the proclamation of His divinity went forth throughout the world, who avails to say, to guess how many weak, how many converted prostitutes, how many aged virgins ascended to the heavens through faith, through hope, through love?"¹¹⁰

"And when they stood, their wings were let down [Ez. 1:24]." Saint Gregory the Dialogist explains that "the sacred creatures stand when, intent in contemplation, they ponder the things which are of God. But their wings are let down because when they gaze on the lofty judgments of God their own virtues are worthless."¹¹¹

"And lo! a voice from above the firmament [Ez. 1:25]." When the voice," continues Saint Gregory, "comes from above the firmament, the living creatures stand and let down their wings because when the minds of the saints, in intent contemplation, consider the power of their Creator, the virtues which they possess become worthless to their spirits; and the more humble they become, the greater is that height in them which resounds above the angels.... Also they may let down their wings when the voice speaks from above the firmament, namely, they may be humbled insofar as they know when they gaze on heavenly things which cannot be comprehended by them."¹¹²

"And I perceived the sound of the wings of the living creatures clapping one to the other, and the sound of the wheels was near them, and the sound of the earthquake [Ez. 3:13]."

"And the Spirit lifted me, and took me up, and I went in the impulse of my spirit [Ez. 3:13]." Saint Gregory declares, "We said above that the Testaments of holy Writ are meant by the wheels. So the noise of the wheels is the speech of the Testaments, and it is heard after the noise of the sacred creatures' wings because, the speech of the preachers being received, when the virtues of the saints fly to the pursuit of higher things, and impel each other to progress, the posture of Holy Church is raised up, so that the pages of the sacred Testaments are read throughout the world. Then where the holy Gospel is, where the sayings of the apostles are, there the Law and prophets resound. Therefore, the noise of the wheels follows the noise of the wings because, after the miracles of the saints, the words of holy Writ are heard... without hindrance within Holy Church. These wheels follow the sacred

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Book One, "Homily VIII," p. 78.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 83.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 84, 85.

creatures because, as was said above, after the lives of the saints came to honor, the sayings of the Testaments too appeared to men for veneration.”¹¹³

Saint Gregory remarks that “the noise of a ‘great commotion’ (in the Septuagint ‘earthquake’) is not repeated to no purpose. For there are two great commotions whereby our hearts are moved: for one commotion is from fear, the other from charity; the one ensues from the lamentation of the penitent, the other from the fervor of those who love.”¹¹⁴

*The effulgence of the Godhead Who sitteth upon the cherubim, O glorious and divinely eloquent Ezekiel, made thee radiant, appearing to thee.*¹¹⁵

3. The Appearance of a Man [Ez. 1]:

“Above the firmament that was over their head, there was as the appearance of a sapphire stone, and the likeness of a throne upon it; and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as an appearance of a Man above [Ez. 1:26].”

“What,” asks the Dialogist, “does the throne signify if not those angelic virtues which surpass even the angels themselves by the dignity of a higher place? For since angels are called messengers, and angels often come to announce certain things to men, thrones are never said to be sent to perform the function of a messenger, because the Creator of all sits far above them. Saint Paul mentioned thrones before the ranks of angels, which he realized they surpassed [cf. Col. 1:16]. Then a throne is aptly likened to the sapphire stone, since the sapphire is of heaven’s color. Therefore the virtues of the heavenly beings are meant by the sapphire stone because these spirits, above whom sits almighty God, possess



Tetramorphs “singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, crying, and saying....” Christ with Celestial Host: (Top) Seraphim; (R.) Dominions, Powers, Authorities, Principalities; (L.) Angels, Archangels, Thrones, and Cherubim.

¹¹³ Ibid., Book One, “Homily X,” pp. 124, 125.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

¹¹⁵ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode Three, Mode Plagal Four.

the dignity of a superior place in the heavens. Above the throne, truly the likeness of a Man because even above those virtues which outrank the very angels is the glory of our Savior. It must be noted therefore which order is preserved. Above the sacred creatures is the firmament, then the throne, then a Man is described. Now this is because there are angels above the saints still living in this corruption of the body; and above the angels higher angelic powers close to God, and above the powers close to God is exalted the Mediator of God and man, the Man Christ Jesus."¹¹⁶

Saint Gregory then poses a question: "If the firmament signifies the Lord, and the sapphire stone and the likeness of the throne those highest angelic powers, how are they to be believed to be above the firmament, namely, above the Lord?...The Only-begotten of the Father, incarnate, insofar as He became Man, was below the angels as it is written of Him: 'Thou hast made Him a little lower than the angels [Ps. 8:5].' But rising again and ascending to the heavens, He sits above all the angelic powers as once more it is written of Him: 'All things hast Thou subjected under His feet [Ps. 8:8], ' as He Himself says, 'All authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth [Mt. 28:18].'"¹¹⁷

"And I saw as it were the resemblance of amber from the appearance of the loins and upwards, and from the appearance of the loins and under I saw an appearance of fire, and the brightness thereof round about [Ez. 1:27]."

Saint Dionysios the Areopagite reminds us that "the word of God attributes to the heavenly beings the form of bronze, of electrum, of multicolored stones. If it does so, the reason lies in the fact that electrum, which contains gold and silver, symbolizes both the incorruptible, priceless, unfailling, and unpolluted radiance of gold as well as the gleam, the gloss, the splendor, and the heavenly glow of silver. As for bronze, it recalls either fire or gold.... With regard to the multicolored stones [Rev. 4:3; 21:19-21], these must be taken to work symbolically as follows: white for light, red for fire, yellow for gold, green for youthful vitality."¹¹⁸

Saint Jerome observes, "The leg, just as the thighs, usually connotes inordinate desire. In fact, even in Ezekiel, God, upward from what resembled His waist, seemed like electrum; from His waist downward, He was like fire

¹¹⁶ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily IX," pp. 86, 87.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 89.

¹¹⁸ Saint Dionysios the Areopagite, *The Complete Works: The Celestial Hierarchy*, loc. cit.

[Ez. 1:27, 28]. Whatever is above is gold; whatever is below is ready for...Gehenna."¹¹⁹

Why is it that the appearance of the Man on the throne is seen as the resemblance of amber? As said above by Saint Gregory the Dialogist, "The brightness of gold is tempered by the silver; and the appearance of silver is brightened by the splendor of gold. In our Savior, then, the natures of His divinity and humanity are united and joined without confusion; so that, through His humanity, the splendor of His divinity could be tempered for our eyes and, through His divinity, the human nature in Him could grow bright; and when exalted, human nature could possess a radiance beyond that which was created."¹²⁰

Continuing, Saint Gregory the Dialogist asks, "Why is it that the Mediator of God and man, Jesus Christ, is described as having the appearance of inward fire round about from His loins upward, and the resemblance of fire shining round about from His loins even downward?...What is expressed by loins if not the offspring of mortality?...Truly, the Virgin Mary came from Abraham's loins, she in whose womb the Only-begotten of the Father deigned to become incarnate through the Holy Spirit. What therefore is this inward fire which, in this appearance of a Man, was shown to the prophet, burns from His loins upwards round about, but below his loins shines not as an inward fire but round about, if not that before the incarnation of our only-begotten Savior only Judaea possessed the ardor of His love within her? After the incarnation His fire shone round about her, because it shed the brightness of the Holy Spirit on the nations of the entire world....Truly, the fire shines from His loins downward and round about, because after He took flesh of the Virgin, the gifts of the Holy Spirit spread far and wide amid the human race. It must be noted that the fire is described as being from the loins upward and round about, not extrinsic but intrinsic because the flame of love...among the elect and spiritual men replenished Judaea everywhere within her borders. It did not depart outside because it did not spread itself to the multitude of the Gentiles. This flame of fervor was shortly seen to shine round about, because the love of almighty God began to burgeon in all the nations throughout the world."¹²¹

Further on, Saint Gregory adds, "This can, however, be understood another way in that our Savior and God, Jesus Christ, through His humanity, was made known to mankind. This is the One Who in His divinity was known to the angels, and was even before the incarnation. Then He shines for us from His loins downward round about, He Whose inward fire burns from His loins

¹¹⁹ Saint Jerome, "Homily 56," *Homilies 1-59 On the Psalms*, FC, 48:407.

¹²⁰ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily VIII," p. 89.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 90.

upward in heaven. This is because those heavenly spirits perceive Him in His divinity, and they are kindled by the fires of His love. We who love Him for His assumed humanity, while still placed in this corruptible life, have the radiance of that fire without. He, therefore, is One upon the throne Who has the fire inwardly above His loins among the angels, and the fire below His loins and round about among men. This is because in everything which is loved by the angels, through everything which is desired by men, He is One Who burns in the hearts of those who love."¹²²

The hymnographers of the holy Orthodox Church exalt God's birth-giver, Mary, as His throne. Thus, we chant with them, *Thou art the throne of the glory of God which Ezekiel mystically beheld, for thou didst receive into thine all-pure womb the Son of God Who is equally enthroned with the Father and the Spirit, and didst hold Him in thy maternal arms.*¹²³ *We raise our voices to thee as the angel, "Rejoice, thou throne of God upon which Ezekiel beheld the Lord in the likeness of Man borne aloft by the cherubim [Ez. 1:26, 27]."*¹²⁴

With Saint Joseph the Hymnographer (810-886), we say, *Rejoice, ...fiery throne of the Almighty [Ez. 1:26, 27; Dan. 7:9],*¹²⁵ and *Rejoice, fiery chariot of the Logos [Ez. 1:15-28; 4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 2:11].*¹²⁶ And, *Rejoice, fiery throne, more glorious by far than the living creatures with four faces [Ez. 1:5, 6].*¹²⁷

A. The Appearance of the Rainbow: "As the appearance of the bow when it is in the cloud in days of rain [Ez. 1:28]."

Saint Gregory tells us that "almighty God placed the rainbow between Himself and mankind as a sign that He would not again destroy the world by a flood [Gen. 9:13-15]. Therefore, the color of water and fire are manifest simultaneously in this same rainbow because it is partly blue, partly ruddy, to bear witness to both judgments, namely, in the making and the other made, but not yet further executed, for indeed the world will be burnt in the fire of judgment, but will not again be washed away by the water of a flood."¹²⁸

The Dialogist then asks, "Why did the prophet perceive the fire shining from the loins of the Man seated on the throne as the appearance of the rainbow when it was in the cloud on a rainy day?" He answers, "If we

¹²² Ibid., p. 91.

¹²³ December 9th, Unexpected Joy Icon of the Theotokos, Orthros Canon I, Ode Nine, Mode Four.

¹²⁴ October 1st, Protection of the Theotokos, Orthros Canon, Ode Six, Mode Four.

¹²⁵ *Triodion*, Saturday of the Akathist, Ode One, Mode Four.

¹²⁶ *Triodion*, Saturday of Akathist, Orthros Canon, Ode Five, Mode Four, by Saint Joseph the Hymnographer.

¹²⁷ March 25th, Annunciation, Lity of Great Compline, Mode One.

¹²⁸ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily VIII," p. 91.

ourselves focus on the vision which we proclaimed, we see how the rainbow signifies the Spirit. For, as I said before, water and fire appear in the rainbow. And after the coming of the Mediator, the virtue of the Holy Spirit shone forth in the human race, insofar as He washed the elect of God with the water of Baptism and kindled them with the fire of divine love. For a rainbow with mixed colors of water and fire at the same time is placed in the cloud for propitiation, when Truth says, 'Unless one should be born of water and of the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God [Jn. 3:5].' This rainbow is in the cloud on a rainy day because it is shown in the divine incarnation, in the effusion of preaching, so that the hearts of believers may be summoned to pardon, by the Lord's mercy. For we do not unfittingly understand the flesh of our Savior as a cloud, of which it is said through the Psalmist: 'Who appointeth the clouds for His ascent [Ps. 103:3].' He appointed the cloud His ascent because He Who in His divinity is everywhere present ascended in the flesh to the heavens."¹²⁹

B. The Appearance of the Likeness of the Glory of the Lord: "So was the form of the brightness round about [Ez. 1:28]. "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord [Ez. 2:1]."

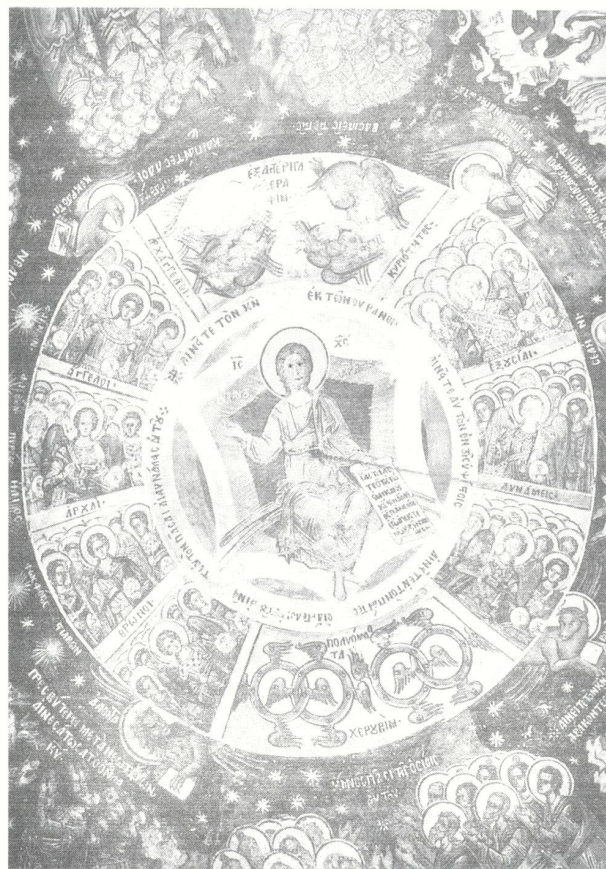
Saint Irenaeos tell us that "the prophets saw the dispensations of God in part, but not actually God Himself. For when Prophet Ezekiel had seen the vision of God, and the cherubim, and their wheels, and when he had recounted the mystery of the whole of that progression, and had beheld the likeness of a throne above them, and upon the throne a likeness as of the figure of a Man, and things which were upon His loins as the figure of amber, and what was below like the sight of fire, and when he set forth all the rest of the vision of the thrones, lest anyone should happen to think that in those visions he had actually seen God, he added, '**This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord [Ez. 2:1].**'"¹³⁰

Saint Kyril of Jerusalem catechizes us, saying, "It is impossible to see God with the eyes of the flesh; for what is incorporeal cannot fall under bodily sight. The only-begotten Son of God bears witness to this when He says, 'No one hath seen God at any time [Jn. 1:18].' One might gather from the passage in Ezekiel that he saw Him, but what does Scripture actually say? 'He saw **"the likeness of the glory of the Lord [Ez. 2:1],"**' not the Lord Himself, but the likeness of His glory merely, not the glory itself as it really is. Yet, on beholding the likeness of His glory, and not the glory itself, he fell to the earth in fear. But if the vision of the likeness of the glory inspired the prophets with

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 91, 92.

¹³⁰ Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, Ch. LXXXII, Ante-Nicene, I:490, 491.

fear and trepidation, any man attempting to look at God Himself would surely lose his life, according to the saying, 'No one shall see My face and live [Ex.



"Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest....Praise Him, all ye His angels; praise Him, all ye His hosts [Ps. 148]."

33:20]. '...But why wonder that Ezekiel fell down on seeing the likeness of the glory? For when Gabriel, the servant of God, appeared to Daniel [Dan. 10:5-18], the prophet was struck with fear at once and fell on his face; and the prophet did not dare to speak until the angel had taken a form like a man. Now, if the sight of Gabriel caused the prophet to tremble, if God had been seen as He is, would not all have perished? It is impossible then to perceive the divine nature with bodily eyes; but from His divine works we may gain some impression of His power, according to the words of Solomon: 'For by the greatness and beauty

of the creatures proportionally the Maker of them is seen [Wis. of Solomon 13:5].'"¹³¹

Saint Gregory the Great says, "Beholding what the grace of the Holy Spirit does in the whole world, Ezekiel says, 'This was the appearance of the brightness round about [cf. Ez. 1:28].' Indeed, wishing to contemplate what glory of this same Holy Spirit persists within, but not availing as he was, the prophet adds, '**And this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord** [Ez. 2:1].' He does not say 'the vision of the glory,' but 'of the

¹³¹ Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis IX, *Catechesis, Volume I.*, 61:185, 186.

likeness of the glory,' in order that it be shown forsooth that however great the will with which the human mind shall have striven, even though it prunes the phantoms of bodily images from its meditation, even if it puts away all circumscribed spirits from the eyes of the heart, yet still clad in mortal flesh it cannot avail to see the glory of God as it is; but whatever of that glory shines in the mind is the likeness and not the glory itself. There that preacher who was snatched to the third heaven said, 'For now we see by means of a mirror, darkly...[1 Cor. 13:12].'"¹³²

"And I saw and fell upon my face, and heard the voice of one speaking. And He said to me, 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak to thee [Ez. 2:1].'" The prophet falls on his face. Saint Gregory the Dialogist asks, "What then would have become of this man if he had seen the Lord's glory as it is, who seeing the likeness of that glory, but unable to bear it, fell upon his face? In this matter, we must think with deep sorrow and ponder with tears to what wretchedness and weakness we have fallen who cannot bear that very good which we were created to behold.... Since we cannot see this likeness through the Spirit of prophecy, we must continually acknowledge it and punctiliously contemplate it in holy Writ, in divine counsels, and in spiritual concepts."¹³³

"And the Spirit came upon me, and took me up, and raised me, and set me on my feet [Ez. 2:2]."

"Behold," says Saint Gregory the Dialogist, "the divine voice commanded the prophet as he lay, and bade him rise. But Ezekiel could by no means have risen if the Spirit of almighty God had not entered into him, because by the grace of almighty God we can indeed try to perform good works but cannot carry them through unless He Who commands us helps."¹³⁴ The Dialogist bids us to note that "first the likeness of the glory of the Lord appears to cast Ezekiel down; thereafter, He bids him rise, and then He sends the Spirit of superabundant grace and raises him and sets him on his feet.... The Spirit, therefore, fills us with Himself and raises us and sets us on our feet, so that we who lay prostrate in penitence for our guilt then stand upright in good works."¹³⁵

Shining with the radiance of piety, O prophet, thou wast vouchsafed to behold Him Who appeared of old to Moses in the fire and the bush, and who mystically taught thee ineffable things.¹³⁶ Thou hast been shown to be a prophet

¹³² Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily VIII," p. 92.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 93.

¹³⁴ Ibid., Book One, "Homily IX," p. 94.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 94, 95.

¹³⁶ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Orthros Canon, Ode Nine, Mode Plagal Four.

of God, O wondrous Ezekiel, and hast proclaimed unto all the incarnation of the Lord.¹³⁷



*Prophet Ezekiel:
"The hand of the Lord
came upon me."*

4. The Prophet is Made a Watchman [Ez. 3:14-20]:

"And the Spirit lifted me, and took me up [Ez. 3:14a]." Why does it first say "lifted" and then "took up"? Saint Gregory the Great explains that "took up" denotes "held continuously." Further, "There are some whom the Spirit lifts but does not take up, whose intellect reaches for spiritual things, but their way of life, remaining in carnal acts, does not harmonize with the intellect.... Now the Prophet Ezekiel was lifted up by understanding and equally taken up in his way of life."¹³⁸

"And I went in the impulse of my spirit; and the hand of the Lord was mighty upon me [Ez. 3:14b].

"Then I passed through the air and came into the captivity, and went round to them that dwelt by the river of Chobar who were there; and I sat there seven days, conversant in the midst of them [Ez. 3:15]."

We are reminded by Saint Chrysostom that "others also 'passed through the air,' as the Apostle Philip when he found himself at Azotus [Acts 8:40], and also Prophet Abbakoum [Bel 1:36]."¹³⁹

The prophet tarried there seven days, mourning in the midst of them. "It should be noted," comments Saint Gregory the Great, "with what compassion the holy prophet unites with the captive people, and joins in their sorrow by sitting with them mourning.... And that speech is freely accepted by the hearer which is offered by the preacher with compassion of spirit.... Thus, the prophet first sat with the captive people and showed himself mourning in their midst, so that when in condescending through the

¹³⁷ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Kontakion, Mode Four.

¹³⁸ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, "Homily X," pp. 126, 127.

¹³⁹ Saint Chrysostom, "Homily XIX," *Homilies on Acts*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XI:123.

grace of charity he represented himself to them as gentle, and forthwith he held them through the firmness of the word.”¹⁴⁰

“And after the seven days the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man: I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel; and thou shalt hear a word of My mouth, and shalt threaten them from Me [Ez. 3:17].’” Saint Gregory the Great says, “A watchman always stands on a height, so that he can perceive from afar whatever is to come. Whoever is placed as watchman of a people must stand on a height through life, so that he can benefit from foresight.”¹⁴¹

“When I say to the wicked, ‘Thou shalt surely die,’ and thou hast not warned him, to give warning to the wicked, to turn from his ways, that he should live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand [Ez. 3:18].” Saint Gregory the Great asks, “What is to be observed by us in these words? The blood of the dying is required at the hand of the watchman, because the sin of the inferior is imputed to the guilt of the superior if he remained silent.”¹⁴²

“But if thou shouldest warn the wicked, and he should turn not from his wickedness and from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, and thou shalt deliver thy soul [Ez. 3:19].

“And when the righteous turns away from his righteousness, and commits a trespass, and I shall bring punishment before him, he shall die, because thou didst not warn him. He shall even die in his sins, because his righteousness shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thy hand [Ez. 3:20].” Here Saint Gregory warns us: “This is greatly to be pondered by us whenever we commit sin and vainly recall to memory our good actions. In the perpetration of evils there is no security in past good works.”¹⁴³

5. The Vision in the Plain Prefigures a Prophecy for the Nations [Ez. 3:22-24]:

“And the hand of the Lord came upon me; and He said to me, ‘Arise, and go forth into the plain, and there shalt thou be spoken to [Ez. 3:22].’” Saint Gregory the Great observes: “The Lord first spoke to His prophet in the midst of the Israelites, and yet then says, ‘Go forth into the plain, and there shalt thou be spoken to.’ Why? Because He deigned first to shed the grace of His prophecy on Judaea and then to show it forth to the

¹⁴⁰ Saint Gregory, *Homilies of the Book of Ezekiel*, Book One, “Homily XI,” p. 129.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 137.

breadth of the nations. For the Gentiles are not ineptly designated by the plain which stretches far and wide, in the whole world.”¹⁴⁴

“And I arose, and went forth to the plain. And, behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, according to the vision, and according to the glory of the Lord which I saw by the river of Chobar. And I fell on my face [Ez. 3:23].”

Saint Anthony the Great (ca. 251-356) reminds us that “when Ezekiel saw four living creatures, each with four faces, all showing the glory of the Lord, he was not in a city or a village but outside in a plain; for God said to him, ‘**Arise, and go forth into the plain, and there thou shalt be spoken to [Ez. 3:22].**’ In general, such visions and revelations were given to the saints only in mountains and the wilderness.”¹⁴⁵

Saint Gregory the Great says, “Ezekiel saw in the plain the glory of the Lord which he had seen beside the Chobar in the midst of the Israelites, because that same divine majesty of His appeared to the Gentiles which had before shown itself to the elect among the people of the Jews by the revelation of the Spirit.”¹⁴⁶

Then follows, **“‘And I fell on my face. Then the Spirit came upon me, and set me on my feet [Ez. 3:23, 24].’** When we humbly prostrate before God,” says Saint Gregory, “when we know ourselves to be dust and ashes, when we ponder the weakness of our proper condition and do not adopt a stance of stiffness and pride, almighty God, through His Spirit, raises us and sets us upon our feet; so that we who humbly lay and lie through the awareness of our infirmity afterward in good works, as it were, stand upon our feet through righteousness. We ask, why is this done in the plain by the prophet? Is it not to indicate specially that the Holy Spirit would be given to the elect of the Gentiles?...”¹⁴⁷

The Prophet is Bound

As a Sign for the End Times [Ez. 3:24-27]

“‘Then the Spirit came upon me, and set me on my feet, and spoke to me, and said to me, “Go in, and shut thyself up in the midst of thy house [Ez. 3:24].”’

“Why is it,” asks Saint Gregory the Great, “that the prophet is led from the midst of the people of Israel to the plain, and afterward called from the plain to his house, unless the grace of preaching was removed from the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., Book One, “Homily XII,” p. 142.

¹⁴⁵ *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, 5th ed. (London, UK: Faber and Faber Limited, 1973), p. 49.

¹⁴⁶ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, loc. cit.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 142, 143.

people of the Jews and scattered among the breadth of the Gentiles? Nevertheless, at the end of the world, when the Jews return to the Faith, as the prophet is led back to his house, so preaching will again have its habitation among his people, the preaching which now shines on the plain among the diverse nations.... The prophet is commanded to be shut in his house, because, in the time of Antichrist, the converted mass of the Jews will be restrained by harsh tribulation by the nations which have remained in infidelity. Thus, it is written: 'But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles; and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months [Rev. 11:2].'¹⁴⁸

"And thou, son of man, behold, bonds are prepared for thee, and they shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not come forth out of the midst of them [Ez. 3:25]."

"Also I will bind thy tongue, and thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover, because it is a provoking house [Ez. 3:26]."

Ezekiel is told to enter and shut himself in his house where he would be bound. The Lord foretold that he would intermittently leave him dumb lest he reprove the exiles. At length the Lord would endow him again with speech: **"But when I speak to thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say to them 'Thus saith the Lord, he that hears, let him hear; and he that is disobedient, let him be disobedient, because it is a provoking house [Ez. 3:27].'"** Thus, he remained mute but not utterly speechless. He spoke to the people when God opened His mouth in order to deliver messages [Ez. 11:25; 14:1; 20:1].

Saint Gregory explains: "If we follow these words through the order of figurative exposition, the prophet receives bands in his house and is bound, because, in the latter days when Judaea has believed, he perceives the most severe persecutions in the time of Antichrist; so that her ministers of iniquity will not receive preaching; but in resisting them, she will conceal them with fetters of deception. And he does not go out among them because his preaching does not reach the hearts of the wicked when his tongue, bound by the tribulations of the good, is silent. For there will then be many of the faithless Jews who will persecute these same Jews who have believed. Thus, it is to be noted what is also said here, that the prophet will bear fetters in his own house in order indeed to indicate that, although he has been faithful, he will bear the tribulation of persecution at the hands of his own Jewish race.... When Enoch

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 143.

and Elias preach, many of the Jews who then remain faithless will return to recognition of the truth."¹⁴⁹

Saint Gregory continues: "For then, as at the last day, the mouth of the prophet is opened when, in the preaching of Enoch and Elias, the prophecy of holy Writ is recognized by the Jews returning to the Faith and referring to Christ."¹⁵⁰ Then, "The prophet is led from the plain to the house in order that he who speaks from God, after he has gone out to speak abroad for the good of his neighbors, from humility is always led back to examine the secrets of his own heart."¹⁵¹

"It is needful," says Saint Gregory, "that we consider each and every sinner the more wretched when we see them abandoned in their sin without the scourge.... So he who turns away from the Lord and prospers comes the nearer to perdition the more he is found a stranger to the zeal of discipline.... Thus, also, Juda herself, since she saw the people of Israel sent away in their passions, kindled with the impurity of fornication. Because she saw the adulterous flourish in her perversity, she herself did not fear to commit worse sins and to withdraw from her union with the Lord, as from the marriage bed of her lawful Husband.... Even though evil men are tolerated for a long time, they suddenly fall down and the weak behold their punishments lest they imitate the guilt that they consider unpunished."¹⁵²

The Prophet Provides Signs of the Coming Siege of Jerusalem [Ez. 4, 5:1-13]

The prophet is made to play a type of "fool for God." Remaining in his home, the people came to him and received God's messages through the prophet's pantomimes and dramatizations. His acting out of symbolic acts was to forewarn the people of approaching judgment. His monodramas included the taking of a brick, portraying Jerusalem upon it, and then setting his face against it or playing out war games against the city [Ez. 4:1-3]. The prophet is then commanded to lie upon his left side for 140 days [Ez. 4:4] and then 190 days [Ez. 4:5], so that he might bear the iniquities of the house of Israel. Having accomplished this, he was to lie forty days on his right side and bear the iniquities of the house of Juda, wherein one day was for a year [Ez. 4:6]. He was then commanded to cut his hair and his beard [Ez. 5:1], as a symbol of the outcome.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 143, 144.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 149.

1. The Brick with Jerusalem Depicted thereon:

“And thou, son of man, take thee a brick, and thou shalt set it before thy face, and shalt portray on it the city, *even Jerusalem*. And thou shalt besiege it, and build works against it, and throw up a mound round about it, and pitch camps against it, and set up engines round about. And take thou to thyself an iron pan, and thou shalt set it *for* an iron wall between thee and the city: and thou shalt set thy face against it, and it shall be in a siege, and thou shalt besiege it. This is a sign to the children of Israel [Ez. 4:1-3].”

Saint Gregory the Great reveals that we have here a mystery mingled with historical fact. **“Take a brick [Ez. 4:1],”** which he interprets as “a tile,” means that “every teacher, when he accepts any earthly hearer of the teaching of heavenly words takes a tile. The tile is as the earthly heart of a neighbor. **‘And thou shalt set it before the face [Ez. 4:1],’** surely so that you may guard his life and understanding with intent mind. **‘And thou shalt portray on it the city, *even Jerusalem* [Ez. 4:1],’** so that it may become clear to him what are the heavenly joys from the vision of peace. So Jerusalem is, as it were, drawn on the tile when the earthly mind has begun to recognize what are those joys of inward peace, and to strive after the perception of the glory of the heavenly kingdom.”¹⁵³

“And thou shalt besiege it, and build works against it, and throw up a mound round about it, and pitch camps against it, and set up engines round about [Ez. 4:2].” Saint Gregory continues: “Insofar as the vision of peace is now described, it is needful that the wars of temptations be proclaimed to him. For in order that he may avail to attain to those eternal joys of peace, he must undoubtedly sustain many struggles of tribulations.”¹⁵⁴

“And take thou to thyself an iron pan, and thou shalt set it for an iron wall between thee and the city [Ez. 4:3].” Saint Gregory comments: “Since iron is a strong metal and food is fried in a pan, what is meant by the iron pan if not the strong frying pan of spiritual zeal? For all the spiritual zeal of the teacher fries the soul because it is greatly tormented when it sees the weak abandon eternal things and delight in earthly joys.... But why is it that he places this pan between himself and the city as a wall of iron, save that this same strong zeal which is now at work in the mind of the teacher will be a witness on the day of the final judgment between him and the soul for which he is zealous against vices? So that even if he who is taught is unwilling to

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 152.

hear, yet, the teacher, by reason of his zeal, will not be answerable for the negligence of the hearer.”¹⁵⁵

Saint Gregory, continuing, writes: “Then follows, ‘**And thou shalt besiege it** [Ez. 4:3].’ The teacher lays siege against the soul of the hearer when he proclaims that traps of temptations may be laid in everything which happens in this life, so that when the mind is everywhere fearful and circumspect, the more timidly it lives, the more vigilant it becomes. ‘**This is a sign to the children of Israel** [Ez. 4:3].’ Now in regard to what the prophet did, whether this was in regard to the siege which happened, even as it is written, or in regard to the mystery which is daily enacted by the teacher for each soul, he proclaimed it by doing that which he did for a sign to the house of Israel. Because just as the house of Israel physically underwent a siege, so each soul which now begins to serve almighty God perceives the traps of the evil spirits laying siege to it.”¹⁵⁶

2. The Prophet Lies On His Side:

“So thou shalt set thy face to the siege of Jerusalem, and shalt strengthen thine arm, and shalt prophesy against it. And, behold, I have prepared bonds for thee, and thou mayest not turn thee from one side to the other, until the days of thy siege shall be accomplished [Ez. 4:7, 8].” While the prophet is acting out the siege, he is not necessarily confined to lie on his side twenty-four hours each day. We read in the remainder of the chapter of his preparing meals and baking. The prophet was to eat bread made from a mixture of several grains: “Take thou also to thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and bread-corn; and thou shalt cast them into one earthen vessel, and shalt make them into loaves for thyself; and thou shalt eat them a hundred and ninety days, according to the number of the days *during* which thou sleepest on thy side [Ez. 4:9].” He would ration two pints of water (the sixth part of a hin [Ez. 4:11]) and one-half pound of bread (twenty shekels [Ez. 4:10]) for his daily sustenance. This diet would depict the famine, for He says, “Behold, I break the support of bread in Jerusalem, and they shall eat bread by weight and in want, and shall drink water by measure, and in a state of ruin, that they may want bread and water...[Ez. 4:16].”

In addition to his beggarly fare, Ezekiel was to bake his rationed bread over a fire made unclean from human waste: “Thou shalt bake them before their eyes in man’s dung [Ez. 4:12].” However, the ever-faithful and dutiful priest says, “Not so, Lord God of Israel: surely my soul has not been defiled with uncleanness, nor have I eaten that which died of itself or was

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 153, 154.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 155, 156.

torn of beasts from my birth until now, neither has any corrupt flesh entered into my mouth [Ez. 4:14].” Hence, God allows him to use the common fuel of oxen dung as a substitute for human excrement [Ez. 4:15]. This partaking of defiled food foretold how the captives would eat the defiled foods of the nations to where they would be banished.

Saint Paulinus (353/354-431), Bishop of Nola of Nola (409), explains to us that “this hotchpotch...of loaves of affliction which the Prophet Ezekiel was ordered to make for himself from various kinds of vegetables and cereals represented the confusion of the Jews, who were unmindful of God and ‘changed His glory into the likeness of a calf that eateth grass [Ps. 105:21].’ The prophet was ordered to bake the loaves on the dung of oxen; and, when they had been baked, to eat them by measure under the foul ashes amidst the tears of captivity [Ez. 4:10-15]. This was so they might foresee the punishment, which was to befall their wickedness, physically designated in the prophet. It was done, too, that they might even then return to the Lord...in repentance.”¹⁵⁷

3. The Prophet Shaves as a Sign of Jerusalem’s Future Defilement and Humiliation:

“And thou, son of man, take thee a sword sharper than a barber’s razor. Thou shalt procure it for thyself, and shalt bring it upon thy head, and upon thy beard. And thou shalt take a pair of scales, and shalt separate the hair [Ez. 5:1].” The priest is commanded to do thus, contrary to a prohibition given to Moses [Lev. 21:4, 5]. Hair, as a token of consecration, meant that it was expressly forbidden by the Law for the priests to shave either the head or the beard. “But Ezekiel,” comments Saint Jerome, “shaves his head as a type of that Jerusalem which has been a harlot, a sign that whatever in her is devoid of sense and life must be removed.”¹⁵⁸

Thus Ezekiel’s dramatizations continue when he shaves his head and beard. Separating the hair, he is told: “A fourth part thou shalt burn in the fire in the midst of the city, at the fulfilment of the days of the siege. And thou shalt take a fourth part, and burn it up in the midst of her. And a fourth part thou shalt cut with a sword round about it. And a fourth part thou shalt scatter to the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them [Ez. 5:2].” In his person, Ezekiel the priest became the symbol of the defilement and humiliation of the people of Juda. The portions of hair symbolized the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and suggests the calamities that shall befall them, that

¹⁵⁷ Saint Paulinus, “Letter 23,” *Letters of Saint Paulinus of Nola, Volume 2*, Ancient Christian Writers (NY, NY: Newman Press, n.d.), 36:8. [Hereinafter ACW.]

¹⁵⁸ Saint Jerome, “Letter LXX,” *Letters*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:149.

is, death by fire, sword, pestilence, and famine [Ez. 5:12]. A portion would then be scattered to the winds.

Nonetheless, the prophet is told, **"Thou shalt take thence a few in number, and shalt wrap them in the fold of thy garment. And thou shalt take of these again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them up with fire; from thence shall come forth fire...[Ez. 5:3, 4]."** This seems to denote the preservation of a few, but even from these few He shall still cast some into the fire and consume them. Hence, not all the exiles shall be saved; but still many shall be purged as through a kind of fire of purification. Saints Ephraim the Syrian and Jerome believe that this image in no way refers to those left behind in the land, but to those deported to Babylon.¹⁵⁹

"Thus saith the Lord, 'Because your occasion for sin has been taken from the nations round about you, and ye have not walked in My statutes, nor kept Mine ordinances, nay, ye have not even done according to the ordinances of the nations round about you....Behold, I am against thee...[Ez. 5:7, 8].'" They are charged with surpassing the negligence of those who are far inferior. They are not even sobered by the example of others. Jerusalem has become so wicked that she does not even follow the common laws of the nations about her. During the siege, some would resort to cannibalism. **"Therefore the fathers shall eat their children in the midst of thee, and children shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and I will scatter all that are left of thee to every wind [Ez. 5:10]."** Punishment was certain. **"My wrath and Mine anger shall be accomplished upon them: and thou shalt know that I the Lord have spoken in My jealousy, when I have accomplished Mine anger upon them [Ez. 5:13]."**

The Vision of the Temple Abominations [Ez. 8]

"And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the fifth month, on the fifth day of the month...[Ez. 8:1]." The date is August/September 592 B.C. or, according to modern reckoning, the 17th day of the month of September, in the year 592 when the prophet beheld the vision of the abominations that took place in the temple. It will be his second dated message. **"I was sitting in the house, and the elders of Juda were sitting before me; and the hand of the Lord came upon me. And I looked, and, behold, the likeness of a Man: from His loins and downwards there was fire, and from His loins upwards there was as the appearance of amber. And He stretched forth the likeness of a hand, and took me up by the crown of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and sky, and brought me to**

¹⁵⁹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Ezekiel 1-28*, trans. by James Martin, Vol. 9, 1st ed., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1989), p. 85.

Jerusalem, in a vision of God, to the porch of the gate that looks to the north, where was the pillar of the Purchaser. And, behold, the glory of the Lord God of Israel was there, according to the vision which I saw in the plain. And He said to me, 'Son of man, lift up thine eyes toward the north.' So I lifted up mine eyes toward the north; and behold, I looked from the north toward the eastern gate. And He said to me, 'Son of man, hast thou seen what these do? They commit great abominations here so that I should keep away from My sanctuary: and thou shalt see yet greater iniquities [Ez. 8:1-6].'"

Saint Isaac of Syria (d. ca. 700) tells us that "Ezekiel arrived in Jerusalem by supernatural means, and it was by divine revelation that he was made a witness of the renewal that was to come."¹⁶⁰ *Wholly in awe, thou wast once translated to the holy city, where thou wast taught divine mysteries through revelation, learning to chant, "O God of our fathers, blessed art Thou!"*¹⁶¹

Why is he translated to the temple? According to Saint Chrysostom, "God indicates the justice of their having to suffer all these things, which also in the Old Testament was His wont. He defended Himself to Abraham, and to Lot, and to Noah, and also to Ezekiel in like manner when He caused him who dwelt in Babylon to see men's evil deeds in Jerusalem."¹⁶²

"And He brought me to the porch of the court. And He said to me, 'Son of man, dig'; so I dug, and behold a door. And He said to me, 'Go in, and behold the iniquities which they practise here.' So I went in and looked, and beheld vain abominations, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon them round about. And seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and Jechonias the son of Saphan stood in their presence in the midst of them, and each one held his censer in his hand; and the smoke of the incense went up. And He said to me, 'Thou hast seen, son of man, what the elders of the house of Israel do, each one of them in their secret chamber, because they have said, "The Lord sees not; the Lord has forsaken the earth [Ez. 8:7-12]."'"

Saint Gregory the Great explains: "Now, by Ezekiel, are personified men in authority; by the wall is signified the hardness of their subordinates. And what is digging of a wall, but opening the hardness of the heart by sharp inquisitions? When he had dug into that wall there appeared a door, because when hardness of heart is pierced either by careful questioning or by

¹⁶⁰ *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, p. 221.

¹⁶¹ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Orthros Canon, Ode Seven, Mode Plagal Four.

¹⁶² Saint Chrysostom, "Homily XLIII," *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, Nicene, 1st Ser., X:274.

seasonable reproofs, there is shown as it were a kind of door, through which may appear the interior of the thoughts in him who is reproofed.”¹⁶³

“And He said to me, ‘Thou shalt see yet greater iniquities which these do.’ And...behold, there were women sitting there lamenting for Thannuz (an idol). And He said to me, ‘Son of man, thou hast seen; but thou shalt yet see evil practises greater than these [Ez. 8:13-15].’”

According to Saint Jerome, Thannuz or Tammuz, as he calls it, was Adonis.¹⁶⁴ One source explains that Tammuz was actually the popular Babylonian god of vegetation and fertility. Part of the ceremony devoted to insuring a return of the growing season consisted in mourning over Tammuz, who in the barren time of the year was said to have died.¹⁶⁵

“And He brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord, and at the entrance of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty men with their back parts toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces turned the opposite way; and these were worshipping the sun. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, thou hast seen this. Is it a little thing to the house of Juda (for Juda is interpreted “Confession”¹⁶⁶) to practise the iniquities which they have practised here? For they have filled the land with iniquity. And, behold, these are as scorers. Therefore will I deal with them in wrath. Mine eye shall not spare, nor will I have any mercy [Ez. 8:16-18].’”

The Mark on the Forehead, The Sign of the Cross [Ez. 9]

“And He cried in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, ‘The judgment of the city has drawn nigh’; and each had the weapon of destruction in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the high gate that looks toward the north, and each one’s axe was in his hand; and there was one man in the midst of them clothed with a long robe down to the feet, and a sapphire girdle was on his loins. And they came in and stood near the brazen altar. And the glory of God of Israel, that was upon them, went up from the cherubs to the porch of the house. And He called the man that was clothed with the long robe,...and said to him, ‘Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that groan and that grieve for all the iniquities that are done in the midst of them.’ And He said to the first in my hearing, ‘Go after him into

¹⁶³ Saint Gregory, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, Part II, Ch. X, Nicene, 2nd Ser., XII:20.

¹⁶⁴ Saint Jerome, “Letter LVII,” *Letters*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:121.

¹⁶⁵ Herbert Lockyer, Dr., *All the Parables of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 73.

¹⁶⁶ *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Book II, §VII, ¶ LX, Ante-Nicene, VII:423.

the city, and smite; and let not your eyes spare, and have no mercy. Slay utterly old man and youths, and virgins, and infants, and women; but ye not nigh any on whom is the mark. Begin at My sanctuary [Ez. 9:1-6].”

Saint Dionysios the Areopagite informs us that angels of a second rank receive enlightenment from the Divinity through the beings of the first rank. “The one first initiated in this, after the cherubim, was the one whose loins were girt in sapphire and who wore a full-length cloak as a symbol of the hierarch [Ez. 9:2; 10:6-8]. He in turn announced the divine decision to other angels, those who carry the axes, and he did so on the instructions of the Deity Who is the source of order. To the one, the orders were to traverse all of Jerusalem and to put a mark on the foreheads of the innocent.”¹⁶⁷

According to Saint Cyprian (d. 258), Bishop of Carthage, “Those can only escape who have been newly born and signed with the sign of Christ....Moreover, what this mark is, and in what part of the body it is placed, God sets forth in another place, saying, ‘**Set a mark on the foreheads of the men that groan and that grieve for all the iniquities that are done in the midst of them** [Ez. 9:4].’ And that the sign pertains to the Passion and blood of Christ, and that whoever is found with this sign is kept safe and unharmed, is also proved by God’s testimony: ‘And the blood shall be for a sign to you on the houses in which ye are; and I will see the blood, and will protect you; and there shall not be on you the plague of destruction, when I smite in the land of Egypt [Ex. 12:13].’...So also, when the world shall begin to be desolated and smitten, whoever is found in the blood and the sign of Christ alone shall escape.”¹⁶⁸ Elsewhere, Saint Cyprian explains that “in this sign of the Cross is salvation for all people who are marked on their foreheads (that is, baptized).”¹⁶⁹

Saint Jerome explains the mystical significance of numbers, saying that “three hundred contains the symbol of the crucifixion. The letter T is the sign for this number, whence Ezekiel says, ‘Mark THAV on the foreheads of those who moan; and kill not any marked with THAV.’ No one marked with the sign of the Cross on his forehead can be struck by the devil; he is not able to efface this sign, only sin can.”¹⁷⁰ THAV, the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which in its classical pre-exilic form was shaped like an X, the

¹⁶⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works: The Celestial Hierarchy*, Ch. 8, p. 169.

¹⁶⁸ Saint Cyprian, *Treatise IV, On the Lord’s Prayer*, Ante-Nicene, V:464.

¹⁶⁹ Idem, *The Treatises of Cyprian*, Ante-Nicene, V:525.

¹⁷⁰ Saint Jerome, “Homily 84(X),” 60-96 *On The Psalms*, Volume 2, FC, 2nd ed., 57:191.

Greeks borrowed from the Semitic alphabet of the Phoenicians, only modifying its shape into a vertical cross.¹⁷¹

Upon examining this passage [Ez. 9:4], Saint Chrysostom concludes that "anyone who entertains godly sorrow will thence reap a great advantage,... 'for the sorrow in accordance with the will of God worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world worketh death [2 Cor. 7:10].' For although the sinners are justly punished, God wills that we should condole with them, and not rejoice or insult; for God does not take pleasure in their punishment nor does He will the death of the sinner [Ez. 18:32]. Thus, it is right that we mourn for this very thing."¹⁷²

"I fell upon my face, and cried out, and said, 'Alas, O Lord! Wilt Thou destroy the remnant of Israel, in pouring out Thy wrath upon Jerusalem [Ez. 9:8]?" The prophet prays for his people "and did not prevail," says Saint Chrysostom, "since their wickedness availed more." The saint speaks in Ezekiel's person, bewailing, "'Thou badest me,' he says, 'to eat upon dung, and I ate upon it (that is, food baked on it) [Ez. 4:12, 15]. Thou badest me, and I lay upon one side [Ez. 4:4, 6]. Thou badest me go out through a hole in the wall, bearing a burden, and I went out [Ez. 12:5]. Thou tookest away my wife, and badest me that I not mourn, and I did not mourn, but bore it with fortitude [Ez. 24:15, 16]. Ten thousand other things have I wrought for their sake: I entreat for them, and dost Thou not comply?' God says, 'Not from despising thee do I do this,'¹⁷³ but on account of their many sins, I do not accept thy supplication.' He then adds, **"Though these three men should be in the midst of it, Noe (Noah), and Daniel, and Job, they alone should be delivered by their righteousness," saith the Lord [Ez. 14:14]."**¹⁷⁴

"And, behold, the man clothed with the long robe, and girt with the girdle about his loins, answered and said, 'I have done as Thou didst command me [Ez. 9:11].'"

The Vision of the Glory of the Lord Leaving Jerusalem [Ez. 10]

"Then I looked, and, behold, over the firmament that was above the head of the cherubs there was a likeness of a throne over them, as a sapphire stone. And He said to the man clothed with the long robe, 'Go in

¹⁷¹ William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 28 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Pub., 1986), pp. 144, 145.

¹⁷² Saint Chrysostom, *Concerning the Statues*, Nicene, 1st Ser., IX:462.

¹⁷³ Saint Chrysostom, "Homily I," *Homilies on Thessalonians*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XIII:326, 327.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

between the wheels that are under the cherubs, and fill thy hands with coals of fire from between the cherubs, and scatter *them* over the city.' And he went in my sight. And the cherubs stood on the right hand of the house, as the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the Lord departed from the cherubs to the porch of the house; and the cloud filled the house, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord. And the sound of the cherubs' wings was heard as far as the outer court, as the voice of God Saddai speaking [Ez. 10:1-5]."

Saint Gregory of Nyssa comments that "the Prophet Ezekiel sees the King of Glory sitting upon His exalted, lofty throne. His throne is set above the stars and resembles the throne of the Most High."¹⁷⁵

Saint Jerome explains that "where we read, 'God of heaven,' the Hebrew has Saddai; hence, we may gather that the words of Ezekiel, 'I heard the voice of the Lord Saddai speaking [cf. Ez. 10:5],' mean that he heard the voice of the Lord, the God of heaven, speaking, since the translation of Saddai is 'the God of heaven.'"¹⁷⁶

"And I saw the cherubs *having* the likeness of men's hands under their wings. And I saw, and behold, four wheels stood by the cherubs, one wheel by each cherub. And the appearance of the wheels was as the appearance of a carbuncle stone. And *as for* their appearance, *there was* one likeness to the four, as if there should be a wheel in the midst of a wheel. When they went, they went on their four sides (parts). They turned not when they went, for whichever way the first head looked, they went; and they turned not as they went. And their backs and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about the four wheels. And these wheels were called Gelgel in my hearing [Ez. 10:8-13]."



"A wheel in the midst of a wheel
[Ez. 8:10]."

¹⁷⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, "Homily Fourteen," *Song of Songs*, p. 254.

¹⁷⁶ Saint Jerome, "Homily 68," *60-96 On The Psalms, Volume 2, FC*, 2nd ed., 57:82.

"We read," says Blessed Jerome, "in Ezekiel [Ez. 10:13] that the wheels, those which revolve, to them he called, 'gelgel,' which means 'revelation, revelation.' 'Gel' means revelation, gelgel, 'revelation, revelation'; for the wheel, with just a slight part of its base seemingly touching the ground, the whole of it whirls up to heaven."¹⁷⁷



A Many-eyed Cherub

"Then the glory of the Lord departed from the house, and went up on the cherubs. And the cherubs lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went forth, the wheels were also beside them, and they stood at the entrance of the front gate of the house of the Lord; and the glory of the God of Israel was upon them above [Ez. 10:18, 19]." Saint Jerome believes that "according to Ezekiel, the cherubim, after leaving the temple, founded the Church of the Lord."¹⁷⁸

Judgment Against the Nations [Ez. 25]

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C., those nations that took part or harbored malignant glee as onlookers upon the day of Jacob's trouble were admonished they were not exempt from divine judgment and retribution. Hence, those that rejoiced against the Lord's sanctuary because it was profaned and exulted that the land of Israel was laid waste would be delivered up to their enemies. For thus says the Lord (to the children of Ammon), **"Because thou hast clapped thy hands, and stamped with thy foot, and heartily rejoiced against the land of Israel; therefore I will stretch out My hand against thee..."**[Ez. 25:2-6]."

Similar warnings of destruction were also pronounced upon Moab [Ez. 25:8-11], Idumaea [Ez. 25:12-14], Philistia [Ez. 25:15-17], Sor (Tyre) [Ez. 26:1-28:1], Sidon [Ez. 28:20-24], and Egypt [Ez. 29:1-32:32].

Saint Chrysostom comments that "Ezekiel says that the Moabites were punished because they rejoiced over the Israelites, and that certain others were

¹⁷⁷ Saint Jerome, *1-59 On The Psalms*, Vol. 1, Vol. 48.

¹⁷⁸ Saint Jerome, "Letter CVIII," *Letters*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:200.

saved because they mourned over the misfortunes of their neighbors.”¹⁷⁹ Elsewhere, he remarks, “Ezekiel makes this an accusation against those who had not grieved for the afflicted. What sayest thou, O prophet? God punishes, and shall I grieve for those that He is punishing? Yea verily, for God Himself Who punishes wishes this; since neither does He Himself wish to punish. Nay, even He Himself grieves when punishing—then be not thou glad at it.... Why, the thing we ought to grieve for is this: that they were found worthy of punishment.... Though it be in order to their health that they are punished, nevertheless, let us show a brotherly feeling, a fatherly disposition.”¹⁸⁰

The Vision of the Dry Bones

[Ez. 37]

“And the hand of the Lord came upon me, and the Lord brought me forth by the Spirit, and set me in the midst of the plain, and it was full of human bones. And He led me round about them every way; and, behold, there were very many on the face of the plain, very dry. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, will these bones live?’ and I said, ‘O Lord God, Thou knowest this.’ And He said to me, ‘Prophesy upon these bones, and thou shalt say to them, “Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord to these bones,



The Vision of the Dry Bones

‘Behold, I will bring upon you the breath of life. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and will spread skin upon you, and will put My Spirit into you, and ye shall live. And ye shall know that I am the Lord [Ez. 37:1-6].’”

That there will be a certain fulfillment of prophecy, Saint Justin Martyr (ca. 100-ca. 165) affirms, and says that Christ “shall come from heaven with glory, accompanied by His angelic host, when also He shall raise the bodies of all who have lived, and shall clothe those of the worthy with immortality,

¹⁷⁹ Saint Chrysostom, “Homily LV,” *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint John*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XIV:199, 200.

¹⁸⁰ Idem, “Homily XLIII,” *Homilies on Acts*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XI:266.

and shall send those of the wicked, endued with eternal sensibility, into everlasting fire with the wicked devils. And that these things also have been foretold as yet to be, we will prove. For by Ezekiel the prophet it was said, ‘So I prophesied as the Lord commanded me. And it came to pass while I was prophesying, that, behold, there was a shaking, and the bones approached each one to his joint. And I looked, and behold, sinews and flesh grew upon them, and skin came upon them above: but there was no breath in them [Ez. 37:7, 8].’¹⁸¹



“Thus saith the Lord: ‘Come from the four winds, and breathe upon these dead men, and let them live [Ez. 37:9].’”

the prophet “leapt in the Spirit of prophecy over all the intervening time, with its vast duration. He stands, by his powers of foresight, in the actual moment of the resurrection, and, as if he had really gazed on what is still to come, brings it in his description before our eyes. He saw a mighty plain, unfolded to an endless distance before him, and vast heaps of bones upon it flung at random, some this way, some that. And then, under an impulse from God, those bones began to move and group themselves with their fellows that they once owned, and adhere to the familiar sockets, and then clothe themselves with muscle, flesh, and skin. . . . The Spirit in fact was giving life and movement to everything that lay there.”¹⁸³

Saint Ambrose of Milan tells us “how the prophet shows that there was hearing and movement in the bones before the Spirit of life was poured upon

The holy Irenaeos, citing this passage of the Ezekiel [Ez. 37:13, 14] as proof of the resurrection, maintains that the same God Who created us will also raise us up: “For in this passage we at once perceive that the Creator (*Demiurge*) is vivifying our dead bodies, and promising resurrection to them, and resuscitating them from their sepulchers and tombs.”¹⁸²

Saint Gregory of Nyssa informs us that the

¹⁸¹ Saint Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. LII, Ante-Nicene, I:180.

¹⁸² Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Ch. XV, Ante-Nicene, I:543.

¹⁸³ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., V:461.

them. For above, the dry bones are bidden to hear—as if they had the sense of hearing—and upon hearing each of them came to its own joint....Great is the loving-kindness of the Lord, that the prophet is taken as a witness of the future resurrection, that we, too, might see it with his eyes. For all could not be taken as witnesses, for upon such a holy man and so great a prophet there comes neither falsehood nor error.”¹⁸⁴

Sant Jerome observes how “it is wonderful how he addresses the dry bones, bones that were able to heart the Word of God before they had nerves, flesh, skin, and life-giving breath.”¹⁸⁵

Saint Aphrahat (early 4th C.) informs us that “through the Prophet Ezekiel, the resurrection of the dead was manifestly shown....And when Ezekiel spoke, there was a shaking and a noise, and the bones were gathered together, even those that were broken and crushed into pieces. And when the prophet saw them, he was astonished, for they came together from all sides; and each bone received its fellow, and each joint approached its fellow-joint; and they ordered themselves, one on another. And their dryness was made moist, and the joints were united by the ligatures, and the blood grew warm in the arteries, and skin was stretched over the flesh, and hair grew up according to its nature. But they lay prostrate and there was no breath in them.

“Then again He commanded the prophet, and said to him:—‘**Prophecy to the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, “Thus saith the Lord: ‘Come from the four winds, and breathe upon these dead men, and let them live.”’ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath of life entered into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, a very great congregation [Ez. 37:7-10].’** But why, my beloved, was it that those dead did not rise because of the one word spoken through Ezekiel, and why was not their resurrection, both of bones and spirit, accomplished (through that one word)? For lo, by one word the bones were fitted together, and by another the spirit came! It was in order that full perfection might be left for our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with one utterance and one word will raise up at the last day every body of man. For it was not the word that was insufficient, but its bearer was inferior.”¹⁸⁶

“It is clear,” contends Saint John of Damascus (ca. 675-ca. 749), “that souls do not lie in the grave, but the bodies, thus, the blessed Ezekiel says [Ez.

¹⁸⁴ Saint Ambrose, *On Belief in the Resurrection*, Book II, ¶¶71-74, Nicene, 2nd Ser., X:185.

¹⁸⁵ Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 11.37.1-14; Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953), 75:513 [hereinafter CCSL]; ACC, p. 123.

¹⁸⁶ Saint Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., XIII:379.

37:7]. And later he teaches how the spirit came back when they were bid-den."¹⁸⁷

"And the Lord spoke to me, saying, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. And they say, 'Our bones are become dry, our hope has perished, we are quite spent.' Therefore prophesy and say. 'Thus saith the Lord: 'Behold, I will open your tombs, and will bring you up out of your tombs, and will bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, that I may bring up My people from their graves. And I will put My Spirit within you, and ye shall live, and I will place you upon your own land. And ye shall know that I am the Lord. I have spoken, and will do it,' saith the Lord [Ez. 37:11-14].'"

The Vision of the Temple [Ez. 40]

"And it came to pass in the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, in the first month, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the taking of the city, in that day the hand of the Lord was upon me, and brought me in a vision of God into the land of Israel, and set me on a very high mountain, and upon it there was as it were the frame of a city before me [Ez. 40:1, 2]."

The prophet's last dated message, the thirteenth, took place between March/April 573 or, according to modern reckoning, the 28th day of the month of April, in the year 573.

Commenting on this city, Saint Gregory the Great says, "Obviously, it is by no means possible to accept the building of this city according to the letter. For a little later, he adds that this same building measured one reed of six cubits and a hand-breadth, the gate thereof fourteen cubits, and the fronts of this gate he says are sixty cubits. All these things cannot be literally true....Reason does not allow belief that that which contains is less than that which is contained. But in holy Writ those things which can be accepted according to the history are very frequently to be understood spiritually, so that faith in the truth of history is retained and spiritual understanding is derived from the mysteries of allegory....Hence, he speaks spiritually about the city which he spiritually contemplates."¹⁸⁸

"The hand of the Lord was upon me. And set me on a very high mountain [Ez. 40:1, 2]." Saint Gregory comments: "Therefore, Whom does

¹⁸⁷ Saint John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book III, Ch. XXVII, Nicene, 2nd Ser., IX:100.

¹⁸⁸ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book Two, "Homily I," pp. 158, 159.

the high mountain signify if not the Mediator of God and man, the Man Jesus Christ?...The mountain is very high, because even though it is of the earth through the substance of its humanity, yet it is incomprehensible from the height of its divinity.”¹⁸⁹

“**‘And upon it there was as it were the building of a city before me [Ez. 40:2 Vulg.].’**”

“It should be noted,” continues Saint Gregory, “that it does not say, ‘upon which there was the building,’ but ‘as the building,’ in order plainly to show that all these things were said of the building not of a physical but a spiritual city.”¹⁹⁰

The Virgin Theotokos is prefigured in this vision, and we chant at the prophet’s divine office: *Thou wast shown to be an animate temple of God, O most blessed God-bearer, and thou hast mystically learned the measure of the Church.*¹⁹¹

“And he brought me in thither, and, behold, there was a Man, and the appearance of Him was as the appearance of shining brass [Ez. 40:3].”

“He was a Man,” writes Saint Ambrose, “for a type of the body that was to be assumed was thus shown. He was a Man....Therefore, Christ in a type measures Jerusalem.”¹⁹²

Saint Gregory the Great also says that “the Lord is rightly indicated by the Man and the mountain because He Himself decides all things by judging within Holy Church....But we must inquire why it says of this Man, ‘Whose appearance was like the appearance of brass.’ We all know that the metal of brass is extremely durable and altogether sonorous. So why is it that the appearance of the Mediator of God and man is likened to the appearance of brass, save that the only-begotten Son—taking the form of a servant—through the glory of His resurrection, turns the fragility of human flesh toward eternity, because in Him the flesh was already more infinitely durable?...Why is it that His very incarnation is likened to sounding metal, save that by this same assumption of our humanity He resounded to all with the glory of His majesty?...And preaching while in His flesh would be as it were a reverberation of brass.”¹⁹³

“And in His hand was a builder’s line, and a measuring reed; and He stood at the gate [Ez. 40:3].” Saint Gregory identifies builders as holy

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Orthros Canon, Ode Seven, Mode Plagal Four.

¹⁹² Saint Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith*, Book V, Ch. XIX, Nicene, 2nd Ser., X:313, 314.

¹⁹³ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book Two, “Homily I,” p. 164.

teachers. "The line is in His hand, that is, the preaching is in action."¹⁹⁴ Saint Jerome observes that "as far as the measuring line is concerned, these are the angels who minister at the command of God, or Moses and all the prophets and the apostles who built the city of God and the assistants and ministers at the will of the Lord." And, "This Man spoke to the prophet. In His hand was the measuring stick. His face was like the sky, and He held in His hand a reed. The Man Who spoke to Ezekiel was the true master builder, Whom Paul the apostle imitated, when he said, 'As a wise architect, I have laid a foundation [1 Cor. 3:10].'"¹⁹⁵

"And He stood at the gate [Ez. 40:3]."

"Whoever stands in the gate is partly inside, but partly outside," observes Saint Gregory, "because a glimpse of Him is seen from without, part is hidden within. Therefore, our Savior, incarnate for us in His mercy, stood, as it were, in the gate before human eyes, because through His humanity He appeared visible, and in His divinity remained unseen."¹⁹⁶

"And behold a wall round about the house without, and in the Man's hand a reed [Ez. 40:5]."

Saint Gregory says: "All the prophets, who before the Lord appeared in the flesh, were not only sent to construct the Faith by prophesying but also to be the bulwark of our wall. Therefore, in Holy Church, the Lord was placed as a wall for us and the prophets as its bulwark. This is because in the construction of the Faith their words came to us, whom He Himself placed first, and then the bulwark, since we who were called from the nations would by no means have accepted the saying of His prophets, if we had not first recognized the Lord. And it is to be noted that this wall of the spiritual building is said to be on the outside.... Why was it necessary to say on the outside when it is never customary to place a wall inside?... What is clearly shown in this saying, save the divine incarnation? Then the wall inside for us is God, but the wall outside is the God-Man."¹⁹⁷

"And behold a wall round about the house without, and in the Man's hand a reed, the measure of it was six cubits by the cubit, and a span. And He measured across the front wall; the breadth was equal to the reed, and the length of it equal to the reed [Ez. 40:5]."

"The reed," we are told by Saint Gregory the Great, "signifies holy Writ. And what is expressed by six cubits if not the active life, because God

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 165-167.

¹⁹⁵ Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 12.40.1-4; CCSL, 75:553, 554; ACC, p. 127.

¹⁹⁶ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book Two, "Homily I," pp. 167, 168.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., Book Two, "Homily II," p. 173.

completed all His works on the sixth day. Truly the handbreadth, which is said to be in addition to the six cubits, is from the seventh, but still falls short of a cubit. Therefore, the active life is signified by six cubits and the contemplative by the handbreadth, because we complete the former by works, but even when we strive concerning the latter, we hardly avail to attain even very little.”¹⁹⁸

“And He entered by seven steps into the gate that looks eastward, and He measured across the porch of the gate equal to the reed [Ez. 40:6].” Saint Gregory declares: “Truly,” Who else is symbolized by the appellation ‘gate’ if not our Lord and Savior Himself Who became for us the Door of the heavenly kingdom?...If, therefore, the Shepherd enters by the door, and is Himself the Door and the Shepherd, He undoubtedly enters through Himself....We must then ask how He Himself enters and enters through Himself? The body, that is, Holy Church, rejoices in this her Head. So when all the elect attain to life, because His members enter into Him through Him, He Himself enters into Himself through Himself. It is He Himself in His members Who enters, He is Himself the Head to Whom the entering members attain....Now this gate looks toward the east, because it signifies Him Who journeys for us to the source of life....And the steps of this gate are the virtues.”¹⁹⁹ Saint Gregory observes, “The gate is approached by seven steps, because the entrance of the heavenly life is opened to us through the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit [Is. 11:2, 3].”²⁰⁰

Saint Gregory discusses the dimensions, saying, “This chamber is said to measure one reed in length and one reed in breadth [Ez. 40:7]. Each chamber is as long as it can be broad, because a mind kindled with heavenly desire will have as much love for the drawing in of its neighbor as it shows long-suffering in the expectation of God, and patiently bears the delays of length, because the breadth of its charity widens it in the progress of a neighbor.”²⁰¹

“And the porch five cubits [Ez. 40:7].” There are five cubits between the chambers. Because those who still do not rise from the five outward senses to mystical understanding—when they are among those who burn with the spirit of love—as if remaining between the chambers, they progress in the construction of Faith and are not disunited from the measurement of the heavenly building....Their persistent imperfection is indicated in that they are described not by six cubits but by five.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 174, 175.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., Book Two, “Homily III,” pp. 180, 181.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Book Two, “Homily VII,” pp. 235, 236.

²⁰¹ Ibid., Book Two, “Homily III,” p. 184.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 185.

“And the porch of the gateway (near the porch of the gate) eight cubits, and the posts thereof two cubits; and the porch of the gate was inward [Ez. 40:9].” Saint Gregory: “The inner porch measures eight cubits because through the light which follows after seven days, the breadth of eternity is opened to us.”²⁰³

“And He measured the breadth of the door of the gateway, ten cubits, and the breadth of the gateway thirteen cubits [Ez. 40:11].”

“Now,” says Saint Gregory, “that we are under grace, when the commands of the Decalogue are more truly kept, everyone who has come to the Faith recognizes the mysteries of the Holy Trinity.”²⁰⁴

“And He measured the gate from the wall of one chamber to the wall of the other chamber. The breadth was twenty-five cubits, the one gate over against the other gate [Ez. 40:13].” Saint Gregory then says: “‘He measured the gate from its roof to the roof of a chamber, in breadth five and twenty cubits.’ For we are endowed with the five senses of the flesh—namely, sight, taste, smell, hearing, and touch. Then truly the number five, when squared, rises to twenty-five.... When, therefore, the spirit is filled with fear of almighty God, it is needful that our five senses serve us as humble attendants in the good work.... The five senses are squared when what is done by them daily in good works is multiplied by progress.”²⁰⁵ Furthermore, “In the passage,” explains Saint Gregory, “**‘the one gate over against the other gate [Ez. 40:13],’** the word ‘against’ is not placed for contrariety but for straightness.... Truly, in the knowledge of almighty God, our first door is faith and, second, His appearance to which we attain by walking in faith.... Therefore, door is against door because through the entrance of faith is opened the entrance of the vision of God.”²⁰⁶

“And the open space of the gate without to the open space of the porch of the gate within was fifty cubits [Ez. 40:15].” Saint Gregory says, “Surely eternal rest is signified by the number fifty.”²⁰⁷ And, “The number fifty signifies repose, because each fiftieth year was given to the ancient nation for rest; thus, it was called a jubilee.”²⁰⁸

“And He brought me into the inner court, and, behold, there were chambers, and peristyles round about the court, thirty chambers within the ranges of columns [Ez. 40:17].”

²⁰³ Ibid., Book Two, “Homily IV,” p. 194.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 200.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., Book Two, “Homily V,” p. 209.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 213.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Book Two, “Homily VII,” p. 233.

Saint Gregory asks, "What is meant by these treasure-chambers?" He answers, saying, "The number ten is always taken to mean perfection because the custody of the Law is contained within ten precepts....Therefore, these same treasuries are said to number thirty, so that when ten is multiplied by three the life and the tongue of the teacher may be confirmed in the Trinity."²⁰⁹

"And the porticoes were behind the gates; according to the length of the gates, was the lower peristyle [Ez. 40:18]." Saint Gregory compares the lives of the Gentiles with those of their teachers. "The pavement is lower, so that all the hearers may realize that the preachers far surpass them through their merits."²¹⁰

"And He measured the breadth of the court, from the open space of the outer gate inwards to the open space of the gate looking outwards: a hundred cubits was the distance to the place of the gate looking eastward. And He brought me to the north [Ez. 40:19]." "A hundred rightly signifies great perfection," remarks Saint Gregory.²¹¹

"And behold a gate looking northwards belonging to the outer court, and He measured it, both the length of it and the breadth; and the chambers, three on this side and three on that [Ez. 40:20, 21]." Continuing, he says, "The gate has three chambers on this side and three on that, since everything the Creator says about the Trinity, through the New Testament, He also shows forth from the Old."²¹²

Summing it up, Saint Gregory notices that "the gate looking northward is said to have all the features which the gate to the east has, namely, windows of contemplation, a porch of humility, and engravings of good deeds."²¹³ He continues, "It may be asked why the outer gates of this building are said to number not four but three. This question would rightly be posed if the prophet had seen not a spiritual but a corporeal building. For Holy Church, that is, the spiritual building, in order to attain secret joys, has only three gates, namely, faith, hope, and charity; the one to the east, the second to the north, and the third to the south, (respectively)....Three gates open on the inner court because faith, hope, and charity lead to secret joys."²¹⁴

After the gates to the east, north, and south have been separately described, why are each of the gates of the inner court, to the south, the east, and the north, presented again? "If we understand the gates as holy preachers," says Saint Gregory, "we must know that the Church is one in the

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Book Two, "Homily VI," p. 219.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 220.

²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 225, 226.

²¹² Ibid., Book Two, "Homily VII," p. 232.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 234.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 239.

preachers of the Old and New Testaments. Then the gates have seven or eight steps, because they preach in unison the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit, but proclaim the eighth step as the reward of eternal recompense.... So what can we say the outer gates were, if not the ancient fathers who knew through the precepts of the Law how to guard the works of the people rather than their hearts? Thus, we may understand the inner gates to be the preachers of Holy Church who guard the hearts of their disciples with spiritual admonitions lest they should delight at least in their thoughts in the evils which they do not commit. The former are said to be approached by seven steps. But an ascent of eight steps is mentioned of the latter, because the seventh day was for the veneration of the Law. And, in the New Testament, the eighth day is for the sacrament, namely, that called the Lord's, which is third from the Passion (Friday); but the eighth is from the Creation because it also follows the seventh."²¹⁵

Saint Jerome observes that "we reach the top by eight steps, for what satisfies the number eight for us is the mystery of the Gospel. Even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard Him in this way no longer, which is understood to be according to the flesh."²¹⁶

Saint Gregory identifies the gates: "The east gate, however, may also stand for the Lord, the south for Judaea, and the north for the converted Gentiles."²¹⁷

"Its chambers and its doorways, and its porches at the second gate served as a drain [Ez. 40:38]."

"The treasure-chambers are the hearts of the teachers," says Saint Gregory, "which preserve the riches of learning. Then the forefronts of the gates are the words and works of the preachers."²¹⁸ The second gate served as a drain ["there they shall wash the whole-burnt-offering" Ez. 40:38 Alex.]. Continuing, he says, "They washed the holocaust; then those who through faith devoted themselves to the Lord in the holy conversation became a holocaust to the Lord."²¹⁹

"And behind the drain for the whole-burnt-offerings at the north gate, two tables eastward behind the second gate; and behind the porch of the gate two tables eastward [Ez. 40:40]."

²¹⁵ Ibid., Book Two, "Homily VIII," p. 246.

²¹⁶ Saint Jerome, Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 12.40.32-34; CCSL, 75:580; ACC, p. 136.

²¹⁷ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book Two, "Homily VII," loc. cit.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

‘Four on one side and four on the other side behind the gate; upon them they kill the victims, in front of the eight tables of sacrifices [Ez. 40:41].’

Let the inner gate be for us the New Testament, but the outer gate the Old Testament, because the former opens the spiritual understanding and the latter guarded the letter of holy Writ for minds still ignorant of history. Then there are two tables on this side: and, on that, because in the love of God, faith and life must necessarily be held; but in love of neighbor patience and kindness must be zealously preserved....Moreover, the outer gate, namely, the Law, has two sides, the spiritual fathers and the worldly people. There are two tables for each of these because it has doctrine and prophecy among the spiritual fathers, and circumcision and sacrifice among the worldly people....The tables of the inner gate have the whole-burnt-offering, because in the virtues of the New Testament we burn everything, as it were, by a holocaust when we forsake all that is of this world. But the tables of the outer gate hold the sacrifice, but not the whole-burnt-offering, because the precepts of the Law enjoin that tithes be given, but not that all things be forsaken.”²²⁰

“And there were four tables of hewn stone for whole-burnt-offerings [Ez. 40:42].”

“Our gate has four tables in the inner porch, because Holy Church was instructed by the preaching of four evangelists,” writes Saint Gregory. “Two of them are said to be on this side and two on that: because two evangelists bore witness also to what they saw concerning the Lord; and two reported what they learned by listening to their sermons.”²²¹

“And He brought me into the inner court, and behold there were two chambers in the inner court, one behind the gate looking to the north, turning southward, and one behind the southern gate, but which looks to the north [Ez. 40:44].” Saint Gregory the Great understands that two things are mentioned, namely, “the inner gate and outside this the inner court so that this same court is both outside and inside....For Holy Church has two lives, the one which she leads temporarily, the other which she receives for eternity.”²²²

“The east gate,” he continues, “denotes faith, the north gate hope, and the south gate charity. Therefore, these treasure-chambers are reported to be between the east and the north gates and to face south, because the hearts of the saints, which glow with the fires of holy charity, placed amid faith and hope look south. Moreover, this same east gate is said to look north, because,

²²⁰ Ibid., Book Two, “Homily IX,” pp. 259, 260.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 262.

²²² Ibid., Book Two, “Homily X,” p. 276.

indeed, all our sins are unloosed for us at Baptism, but while we still live here, we also after faith very often turn away to sins. And like the east gate, when even after conceiving faith, our life to some extent grows numb in the chill of guilt and it faces north."²²³

Continuing, he says, "But the north gate can denote the Gentiles, the south gate the Jews, and the east gate the Lord Himself.... It is to be noted that these same treasure-chambers are said to be between the north and the east gates, because after the divine incarnation a multitude of nations came to the Faith; and between these faithful peoples and the mysteries of the divine incarnation, which they inwardly value, rise the hearts of those who love."²²⁴

Moving onward, Saint Gregory states: "Truly, it is to be observed that the east gate is described as being between the south and north gates, because our Lord was born of the Jews and soon led the Church into His Faith from the Gentiles. Then He appeared, as it were, between the south and the north gates because He came from the former and converted the latter to His service. Hence, it is well said that this same east gate looks north because the Lord, when born, forsook the Synagogue and gathered the multitude of Gentiles."²²⁵

"And He said to me, 'This chamber that looks to the south, is for the priests that keep the charge of the house [Ez. 40:45]."

"And the chamber that looks to the north is for the priests that keep the charge of the altar. They are the sons of Sadduc, those of the tribe of Levi who draw near to the Lord to serve Him [Ez. 40:46]."

Saint Gregory comments, "We must first ask who are the priests of the major order, whether those who watch in the wards of the temple or those who watch over the ministry of the altar?... It is clearly shown that the priests of higher rank are those who watch in the wards of the temple, because surely they minister in the altar which is within. But those who watch by the altar, which is before the face of the temple, are inferiors inasmuch as they minister in the outer area.... Who then are the priests who guard the temple of God, save those who by praying, preaching, and keeping watch with spiritual actions defend Holy Church from the incursions of evil spirits, from the persuasion of the wicked, and from the errors of heretics?"²²⁶

"Thus the priests of higher rank, who watch in the wards of the temple, look only to the south because, engaged solely in spiritual studies, they are always zealously intent upon what belongs to the love of God," says Saint Gregory. "But the priests of the lower order, who are in charge of the

²²³ Ibid., pp. 277, 278.

²²⁴ Ibid., pp. 278, 279.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 279.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 280.

examination of the sins of transgressors, also direct their gaze to the north so that they may see what cold of listlessness is in the minds of sinners and, converting this with the words of reproof to groans of penitence, they, as it were, burn flesh on the altar of the Lord.”²²⁷

“And the windows were latticed, giving light round about to the three stories, so as to look through. And the house and the parts adjoining were planked round about, and so was the floor, and from the floor up to the windows, and the window shutters folded back in three parts for one to look through [Ez. 41:16].”

“In this temple,” says Saint Gregory, “the windows are the priests and the watchmen who shed the light of holy preaching on the people of the faithful.”²²⁸

“Moreover He brought me to the gate looking eastward, and led me forth [Ez. 43:1].” Saint Jerome comments here that “when His face is revealed and we contemplate the glory of God, we are reformed in the image of the Creator.”²²⁹

“And the glory of the Lord came into the house, by the way of the gate looking eastward. And the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the house of the Lord was full of glory [Ez. 43:4, 5].” Then the prophet heard, “Son of man, thou hast seen the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, in which My name shall dwell in the midst of the house of Israel for ever; and the house of Israel shall no more profane My holy name, they and their princes, by their fornication, or by the murders of their princes in the midst of them, when they set My doorposts by their doorposts, and My thresholds near to their thresholds: and they made My wall as it were joining Myself and them, and they profaned My holy name with their iniquities which they wrought: and I destroyed them in My wrath and with slaughter. And now let them put away from Me their fornication, and the murders of their princes, and I will dwell in the midst of them forever. And thou, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may cease from their sins; and show its aspect and the arrangement of it. And they shall bear their punishment for all the things that they have done: and thou shalt describe the house, and its entrances, and the plan thereof, and all its ordinances, and thou shalt make known to them all the regulations of it, and describe them before them: and they shall keep all My commandments, and all My

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 281.

²²⁸ Ibid., Book One, “Homily XI,” p. 140.

²²⁹ Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 13.43.1-9; CCSL, 75:623; ACC, pp. 139, 140.

ordinances, and do them. And thou shalt shew the plan of the house on the top of the mountain: all its limits round about shall be most holy [Ez. 43:6-12]."

Saint Jerome observes that "the earth shone with His glory, which really takes place at the coming of Christ, when the sound of the apostles goes forth into the whole earth and their words to the ends of the world....The prophet is overwhelmed, as he says, 'immediately the Spirit raised me up. Behold I who had earlier glimpsed the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east, now saw the house of the Lord filled with His glory, and I heard a voice speaking as someone speaking to me from inside the house.' Then the prophet observes a dividing wall. It is a very short wall that divides the sacrifices of the priests and the place for the mystery of the body and blood of Christ. Then the prophet hears that the Lord will dwell among them forever. Indeed, not at all for a short time as in the Synagogue. But the Lord promises to dwell in the Church of Christ forever. For the house and the law of all the teachings of God, as well as the city that is built on top of the mountain, are to be believed from what is written. A city on a hill cannot be hid. Indeed, there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,²³⁰ which clearly refers to the Church of God."²³¹

"And these are the measures of the altar by the cubit of a cubit and a span, the cavity shall be a cubit deep, and a cubit shall be the breadth, and the border on the rim of it round about shall be a span [Ez. 43:13]." Why a trench in the altar? Saint Gregory explains, "It is rightly enjoined on Ezekiel that in the altar of God a trench be made, to wit, that in it the whole-burnt-offerings laid on the altar might be preserved [Ez. 43:13]. For, if there were not a trench in the altar, the passing breeze would scatter every sacrifice that it might find there....And what is the trench of the altar, but the patience of good men, which, while it humbles the mind to endure adversities, shows it to be placed low down after the manner of a ditch? And this same trench is directed to be of one cubit, because, if patience fails not, the measure of unity is preserved."²³²

The Prince and the East Gate [Ez. 44]

"Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary that looks eastward; and it was shut. And the Lord said to me, 'This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no one shall pass

²³⁰ Ps. 45:5 Vulg.

²³¹ Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, 13.43.1-12; 16.43; CCSL, 75:623, 624, 626, 629; ACC, p. 140.

²³² Saint Gregory, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, Part III, Ch. IX, Nicene, 2nd Ser., XII:30.

through it; for the Lord God of Israel shall enter by it, and it shall be shut. For the Prince, He shall sit in it, to eat bread before the Lord; He shall go in by the way of the porch of the gate, and shall go forth by the way of the same [Ez. 44:1-3].”

“There will be no other prince in the house but He,” writes Saint Justin Martyr. “For He is the chosen Priest and eternal King, the Christ, inasmuch as He is the Son of God. And do not suppose that Esaias or the other prophets speak of sacrifices of blood or libations being presented at the altar on His second advent, but of true and spiritual praises and giving of thanks.”²³³

Saint Jerome writes: “Christ Himself is a virgin, and His Mother is also a virgin; yea, though she is His Mother, she is a virgin still. For Jesus has entered in through the closed doors....She is the east gate, spoken of by the Prophet Ezekiel, always shut and always shining; and either concealing or revealing the holy of holies. And through her ‘the Sun of righteousness [Mal. 4:2],’ our ‘high priest after the order of Melchisedek [Heb. 5:10],’ goes in and out....Let my critics explain to me how Jesus can have entered in through closed doors [Jn. 20:19], when He allowed His hands and His side to be handled, and showed that He had bones and flesh [Jn. 20:27], thus proving that His was a true body and no mere phantom of one, and I will explain how the holy Mary can be at once a mother and a virgin. A mother before she was wedded, she remained a virgin after bearing her Son. Therefore, as I was going to say, the virgin Christ and the virgin Mary have dedicated in themselves the firstfruits of virginity for both sexes.”²³⁴ Elsewhere, he comments, “This gate is not opened, moreover, except to the Priest. Even so the Testament, both Old and New, has always been closed; it has not been opened except to the Savior. He it is Who has the key.”²³⁵

“She,” writes Saint John of Damascus, “is really and truly Mother of God, Lady, and Mistress of all created things, being accounted both handmaid and Mother of the Creator. And just as at His conception He had kept her who conceived Him a virgin, so also at His birth did He maintain her virginity intact, because He alone passed through her and kept her shut [Ez. 44:2]. While the conception was by hearing (the Annunciation), the birth was through the customary way out in bringing forth children (ἡ γέννησις διὰ τῆς συνήθους τῶν τικτομένων ἐξόδου),...for it was not impossible for Him to pass through the gate without breaking its seals.”²³⁶

²³³ Saint Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. CXVIII, Ante-Nicene, I:258.

²³⁴ Saint Jerome, “Letter XLVIII,” *Letters*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:78, 79.

²³⁵ Idem, “Homily 19,” *Homilies 1-59 On the Psalms*, FC, 48:152.

²³⁶ Saint John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book Four, Ch. 14, FC, 37:365; P.G. 94:276AB, p. 1161.

During the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, Saint John the Damascene chants: *We have seen, O pure Mother, the dim figures of the Logos and the shades that are past; and now that He has newly appeared from the closed gate [Ez. 44:1], we who are counted worthy to behold the Light of truth, as is meet and right, bless thy womb.*²³⁷

**Rejoice, for Alone Art Thou the Gateway
And Portal That God the Logos Traversed!**²³⁸

It would be unthinkable to pass by this favorite theme of Orthodoxy's hymnographers. Saint Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople (ca. 634-ca. 733), identifies for us the Virgin in the writings of the prophets. He chants to the Theotokos: *O pastors and teachers, assembling, let us praise the all-pure Mother of the good Shepherd, the golden candlestick, the light-bearing cloud, who is more spacious than the heavens, the animate tabernacle, the fiery throne of the Master, the golden jar that held the Manna, the gate of the Logos that was shut.*²³⁹

Saint Andrew (ca. 660-740), Archbishop of Gortyna, in Crete, master canon-writer, chants at the service of the Virgin's conception by Saint Anna, *"The voices of the prophets proclaimed from afar the Maiden whom I [Saint Anna] have conceived, to be the mountain and the impassible gate!"*²⁴⁰

Saint Theodore of Studios (759-826), in his divine hymns, also tells us how the Virgin was foreshadowed: *Thou art the gate that Ezekiel the prophet saw of old [Ez. 44:1-3], through which none has ever passed, save God alone; and in our hymns, O Theotokos Virgin, we magnify thee.*²⁴¹ And, *Thou art the gate, pure Lady, through which One alone has passed: Jesus, Adam's Creator and thy Son, going in and out, yet not breaking the seal of thy virginity.*²⁴²

The God-inspired Saint Theophanes the hymnographer, confessor, and Bishop of Nicaea (d. 845), also chants: *The prophet saw thee as an impassable gate, O all-pure Virgin, that only One passed through.*²⁴³ The prolific hymn-

²³⁷ December 25th, Nativity of our Lord, Orthros Canon, Ode Nine, Mode One.

²³⁸ Extract of the Canon of the Akathist Hymn, Ode Three, Mode Four.

²³⁹ October 26th, Saint Demetrios, extract from Lity, Theotokion, Mode Plagal One.

²⁴⁰ December 9th, Conception of the Virgin Mary by Righteous Anna, Orthros Canon I, Ode Five, Mode One.

²⁴¹ *Triodion*, Monday in the Sixth Week, Heirmos of Orthros Canon, Ode Nine, Mode One.

²⁴² *Triodion*, Sunday of the Last Judgment, Orthros Theotokion, Ode Six, Mode Plagal Two.

²⁴³ December 1st, Prophet Nahum, extract of Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode Seven, Mode Plagal One.

writer, Saint Joseph, also calls the Virgin the gate that is unentered.²⁴⁴ Imploring her intercession, he prays to her, thus: *Thou art the gate of God that is closed, through which the Lord alone has passed* [Ez. 44:1-3].²⁴⁵

At the Feast of the Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple, we sing the hymn of Saint George of Nikomedia: *Behold, the gate that looks toward the east* [Ez. 44:1-3].²⁴⁶ Within the divine service to the Prophet Ezekiel, Holy Church chants: *Wholly illumined, O divinely inspired one, thou didst prophesy the Virgin as the most hymned door facing the east,*²⁴⁷ because with prophetic eyes Thy prophet, O Benefactor, beheld the pure one as a meadow, an entry-way of virginity preserved for Thee.²⁴⁸ Truly, Ezekiel beheld the radiant and divine portal through which the Lord hath passed, keeping it closed,²⁴⁹ though it was in an image that he beheld the true Virgin Mother, the most splendid portal, the mediatrix between God and men.²⁵⁰ Why had the Savior taken flesh of her? *The all-divine Logos desired to save human nature; and He issued forth from the portal of the Virgin, arrayed in flesh through her.*²⁵¹

Thus, we understand the symbols of the closed gate as pertaining to her ever-virginity. This truly is an ineffable wonder that the seals of her virginity remained intact before, during, and after childbirth. *A new wonder, worthy of God! For the Lord visibly passeth through the closed gate of the Virgin. He was naked at His entry, but was seen to be God incarnate at His coming forth; yet her door remaineth closed.*²⁵² And, again, *Here is a wonder new and fitting for God, for the Lord plainly passeth through the closed gateway of the Virgin. God was bare of flesh when He went in, and He*

²⁴⁴ *Pentecostarion*, Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode Six, Mode Four; and the Theotokion of the same Orthros Canon, Ode Six, Mode Four.

²⁴⁵ *Triodion*, Friday in the Second Week, Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode Eight, Mode Four, by Saint Joseph.

²⁴⁶ November 21st, The Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple, extract from Lity, Mode One.

²⁴⁷ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode One, Mode Plagal Four.

²⁴⁸ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode Three, Mode Plagal Four.

²⁴⁹ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode Four, Mode Plagal Four.

²⁵⁰ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode Six, Mode Plagal Four.

²⁵¹ July 23rd, Prophet Ezekiel, extract of Theotokion of Orthros Canon, Ode Seven, Mode Plagal Four.

²⁵² *Anastasimatarion*, Heirmos of Orthros Canon of the Resurrection, Ode Nine, Mode Three.

*appeared wearing flesh when He came out; and the gate remains closed, and we magnify this same as being ineffably the Mother of God.*²⁵³ Thus, Prophet Ezekiel discerned her to be *the dwelling place of God.*²⁵⁴

Laws Governing Priests

The prophet is then told that when the priests, the Levites (meaning “accepted”), the sons of Sadduc (meaning “just”),²⁵⁵ keep the sanctuary and enter the gates of the inner court, they are to don linen robes. They are prohibited from wearing woollen garments when they minister at the gate of the inner court [Ez. 44:17]. But when they go out into the outer court to the people, they are to take off the robes in which they are ministering, and lay them in the sacristy. Saint Gregory comments, “Woollen garments are thicker. When the priest approaches the holy ministry, when through compunction he enters within, he must needs be vested in a finer understanding, as with a linen garment. But when he goes outside to the people, it behooves him to lay aside the garments in which he has ministered within. It behooves him to appear to the people dressed in other clothing, because if he restrains himself in the rigor of his compunction, if he perseveres in the solemnity which he held at the time of prayer, he does not admit to accept the words of external things. And what is the flock to do about necessities if its shepherd refuses to hear and ponder what this present time requires? Therefore, a priest going out before the people dons thicker garments, so as to compose the habit of his mind for the benefit of his sons—even to bear earthly cares.”²⁵⁶

But Ezekiel also writes concerning the erring Levites: **“But as for the Levites who departed far from Me when Israel went astray from Me after their imaginations, they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall minister in My sanctuary, being porters at the gates of the house, and serving the house: they shall slay the victims and the whole-burnt-offerings for the people, and they shall stand before the people to minister to them. Because they ministered to them before their idols, and it became to the house of Israel a punishment of iniquity; therefore have I lifted up My hand against them,” saith the Lord God. ‘And they shall not draw nigh to Me to minister to Me in the priests’ office, nor to approach the holy things of the children of Israel, nor to approach My holy of holies: but they shall**

²⁵³ Sunday Midnight Office, Heirmos of Canon to the Holy Trinity, Ode Nine, Mode Three.

²⁵⁴ Sunday Midnight Office, Canon to the Holy Trinity, Theotokion of Ode Five, Mode Plagal One.

²⁵⁵ Saint Gregory, *Homilies on the Book of Ezekiel*, Book Two, “Homily X,” pp. 281, 282.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Book One, “Homily XII,” p. 141.

bear their reproach for the error wherein they erred. They shall bring them to keep the charges of the house, for all the service of it, and for all that they shall do [Ez. 44:11-14].”

Saint Gregory the Great observes that “no one does more harm in the Church than he who has the title or rank of holiness and acts in an evil way.”²⁵⁷ Saint Jerome asks, “How is it that the book of Ezekiel, where a description is given of the future Church and the heavenly Jerusalem, the priests who have sinned are degraded to the rank of sacristans and doorkeepers, and although they are in the temple of God, that is, on the right hand, they are not among the rams but among the poorest of the sheep?”²⁵⁸

The Vision of the Living Waters of the Temple Prefigure Baptism [Ez. 47]

After the Prophet Ezekiel saw the entrance of the glory of the Lord, he was shown water proceeding from the temple. The “water issued from under the porch eastward, for the front of the house looked eastward; and the water came down from the right side, from the south to the altar....It was water of a fountain [Ez. 47:1-4].”

This water, he is told “goes forth to Galilee that lies eastward, and it is gone down to Arabia, and has reached as far as to the sea to the outlet of the water; and it shall heal the waters. And it shall come to pass, that every animal of living and moving creatures, all on which the river shall come, shall live. And there shall be there very many fish; for this water shall go thither, and it shall heal them, and they shall live. Everything on which the river shall come shall live. And the fishers shall stand there from Ingadin to Enagallim. It shall be a place to spread out nets upon; it shall be distinct. And the fishes thereof shall be as the fishes of the great sea, a very great multitude [Ez. 47:8-10].”

These words signify the Jordan River and the Mystery of Holy Baptism. Hear Saint Ephraim who says, “Out of the stream when the fishers came up [Ez. 47:10], He was baptized and came up Who encloses all things in His net; out of the stream the fish whereof Simon took,²⁵⁹ out of it the Fisher of men came up, and took him.”²⁶⁰

Saint Jerome comments, “The first living creatures came out of the waters; and believers soar out of the laver with wings to heaven. Man is formed out of clay [Gen. 2:7], and God holds the mystic waters in the hollow

²⁵⁷ Saint Gregory, *Pastoral Care*, 1.2; Ancient Christian Writers (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press), 11:24; ACC, p. 144.

²⁵⁸ Saint Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:409; ACC, p. 144.

²⁵⁹ Mt. 17:24-27; Mt. 14:19; Mk. 1:17.

²⁶⁰ Saint Ephraim (Ephraim Syrus), *Hymns on the Nativity*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., XIII:230.

of His hand [cf. Is. 40:12]. In Eden a garden is planted, and a fountain in the midst of it parts into four heads [Gen. 2:8,10]. This is the same fountain which Ezekiel later on describes as issuing out of the temple and flowing toward the rising of the sun, until it heals the bitter waters and quickens those that are dead [Ez. 47:1,8]. When the world falls into sin, nothing but a flood of waters can cleanse it again.²⁶¹

“But at the outlet of the water, and the turn of it, and where it overflows its banks, they shall not heal at all; they are given to salt. And every fruit tree shall grow by the river, even on the bank of it on this side and on that side. They shall not grow old upon it, neither shall their fruit fail. They shall bring forth the firstfruits of their early crop, for these their waters come forth of the sanctuary. And their fruit shall be for meat, and their foliage for health [Ez. 47:11, 12].” The Lord came as the fountain of life to sweeten the sea, the bitter sea, the Dead Sea,” says Blessed Jerome. “That is why, according to Ezekiel [Ez. 47:1-12], a spring of living water issues out from the temple of the Lord and flows to the Dead Sea that contained in it no living creature. Not even tiny fish could live in it—nothing with life. From the temple of the Lord, that is, from His bosom, the Savior came forth and sweetened the Dead Sea and the bitter waters.”²⁶²

Messages of Admonition

Together with his messages, signs, and prophesies, Ezekiel delivered important warnings to both his own people and future generations.

1. **“The soul that sins, it shall die [Ez. 18:4].”**

The prophet is careful to place emphasis on individual responsibility. **“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, what mean ye by this parable among the children of Israel saying, ‘The fathers have eaten unripe grapes, and the children’s teeth have been set on edge?’ As I live,’ saith the Lord, ‘surely this parable shall no more be spoken in Israel. For all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son, they are Mine; the soul that sins, it shall die [Ez. 18:1-4].’”**

This popular proverb among the Hebrews expressed their resentment of what they viewed as God’s displaced judgment upon them. Many felt they inherited blame for the sins of previous generations. They had a false concept for whose sinfulness and guilt they were now suffering. It was considered a matter of course by people at that time that children were simply a continuation of their parents’ existence. Moreover, they heard that He is a jealous God **“recompensing the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and**

²⁶¹ Saint Jerome, “Letter LXIX,” *Letters*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:145.

²⁶² Saint Jerome, “Homily 10,” *Homilies 1-59 On the Psalms*, FC, 48:76.

fourth generation to them that hate Me [Ez. 20:5],” and that “He will not clear the guilty, bringing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and to the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation [Ex. 34:7].” This is true only when the succeeding generations choose to perpetuate the sins of their predecessors. Children who do not practise their predecessors’ perversity and waywardness shall not be liable. Each generation shall be accountable for its own sin. Hear this: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, and the sons shall not be put to death for the fathers; each shall be put to death for his own sin [Deut. 24:18].”

Speaking of death wherein not only the flesh but also the soul dies, Saint Ambrose explains that the soul that sins, it shall die; for it dies to the Lord, through the weakness not of nature but of guilt. But this death is not the discharge from this life, but a fall through error.²⁶³ Elsewhere, Saint Ambrose writes that even the soul may die: “**The soul that sins shall die** [Ez. 18:20].’ The immortality of God’s nature is one thing, that of ours is another. Things perishable are not to be compared to things divine. The Godhead is the one only Substance that death cannot touch, and therefore it is that the apostle says, ‘Our Lord Jesus Christ alone hath immortality [cf. 1 Tim. 6:16],’ though knowing both the human soul and angels to be immortal, declared that God only had immortality. An angel is not absolutely immortal; their immortality depends on the will of the Creator.”²⁶⁴

Saint Bede adds, “The life, in truth, of the flesh is the soul; the life of the soul is God. The death of the body is to lose its life-giving spirit; the death of the soul is to lose God.”²⁶⁵

2. “**I gave them commandments that were not good** [Ez. 20:25].”

On another occasion, Prophet Ezekiel spoke at length to the elders concerning Israel’s rebelliousness. “**And it came to pass in the seventh year, on the fifteenth day of the month, there came men of the elders of the house of Israel to inquire of the Lord** [Ez. 20:1].” The date is July/August 591 B.C. or, according to modern reckoning, the 14th day of the month of August, in the year 591, and it is the prophet’s third dated message. The text is silent with regard to the exact nature of the elders’ inquiry. Nonetheless, the nature of the question can be gathered from the answer, which response was given to them by the Lord through His prophet. The prophet then outlines, historically, the rebelliousness of Israel from the days when she was in Egypt.

²⁶³ Saint Ambrose, *On Belief in the Resurrection*, Book II, ¶ 36, Nicene, 2nd Ser., X:179.

²⁶⁴ Idem, *Of the Christian Faith*, Book III, Ch. III, Nicene, 2nd Ser., X:245.

²⁶⁵ The Venerable Bede, “Commentary on 1 John,” *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, Cistercian Studies Series: No. 82, pp. 192, 193.

The prophet then tells them that the Lord gave them commandments that were not good, and ordinances in which they should die [cf. Ez. 20:25].

"At first," comments Saint Irenaeos, "God deemed it sufficient to inscribe the natural law, or the Decalogue, upon the hearts of men. But afterward He found it necessary to bridle, with the yoke of the Mosaic Law, the desires of the Jews who were abusing their liberty. He even added some special commands, because of the hardness of their hearts."²⁶⁶

Saint Chrysostom says, "He laid upon them a multitude of laws with a view to restrain their license. And to convince you that these laws contributed not to any virtue, but were given to them as a sort of curb, providing them with an occasion of perpetual labor, hear what the prophet says concerning them: **'I gave them commandments that were not good, and ordinances in which they should not live [Ez. 20:25].'** What means, 'not good'? Such as did not much contribute toward virtue."²⁶⁷

Regarding this passage, Saint Jerome observes: "For they look for nothing else than to have children, to possess health and wealth. They seek the things of the earth; they give no thought to those of heaven. They are hired men."²⁶⁸

Saint Justin warns the Jews, saying, "You are sadly mistaken if you think that, just because you are descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, you will share in the legacy of benefits which God promised would be distributed by Christ. No one can by any means participate in any of these gifts, except those who have the same ardent faith as Abraham, and those who approve all of the mysteries. For I say that some precepts were given for the worship of God and the practise of virtue, whereas other commandments and customs were arranged in respect either to the mystery of Christ or the hardness of your people's hearts."²⁶⁹

3. The True Israel.

The prophet also uttered the promise of future blessing for the people of God: **"Thus saith the Lord God, 'I will also gather Israel from the nations, among whom they have been scattered, and I will be sanctified among them, and before the peoples and nations. And they shall dwell upon their land, which I gave to My servant Jacob. Yea, they shall dwell upon it safely, and they shall build houses, and plant vineyards, and dwell securely, when I shall execute judgment on all that have dishonored them,**

²⁶⁶ Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, Ch. XV, Ante-Nicene, I:479, 480.

²⁶⁷ Saint Chrysostom, "Homily VII," *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XII:38.

²⁶⁸ Saint Jerome, "Homily 76," *Homilies 60-96 On The Psalms*, Vol. 2, FC, 2nd ed. 57:137, 138.

²⁶⁹ Saint Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. 44, FC, 3rd ed., 6:214.

even on those that are round about them. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, and the God of their fathers [Ez. 28:25, 26].” Saint Irenaeus gives us the correct identification of those mentioned in the prophesy: “The Church is the seed of Abraham; and for this reason, that we may know that He Who in the New Testament raised up from the stones children unto Abraham [Mt. 3:9] is He Who will gather, according to the Old Testament, those that shall be saved from all the nations.”²⁷⁰

4. Against Usury [Ez. 22:12].

With his customary priestly zeal, Prophet Ezekiel shows himself unbending and stern when dealing with not only gainsayers but also corruption in high places. The Jews were practising usury, profiting from their neighbors by extortion [Ez. 22:12]. “The sin of usury has been censured in many places in Scripture,” remarks Saint Basil the Great. “Ezekiel, indeed, places it among the greatest of evils to take interest or any profit, and the Law expressly forbids it [Deut. 23:19].”²⁷¹

5. “I am against the shepherds [Ez. 34:10].”

Ezekiel rebuked the shepherds of Israel, as the Lord commanded: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say to the shepherds, ‘Thus saith the Lord God, O shepherds of Israel, do shepherds feed themselves? Do not the shepherds feed the sheep [Ez. 34:2, 3]?’” But they did the contrary, which is the worst kind of wickedness, and the cause of all the rest. Therefore, Scripture says, “**The weak one ye have not strengthened, and the sick ye have not cherished, and the bruised ye have not bound up, and the stray one ye have not turned back, and the lost ye have not sought; and the strong ye have wearied with labor [Ez. 34:4].**”

As a man of outstanding moral character, he accepted the unpleasant commission of rebuking the leaders of his people. The priests incurred divine displeasure because they had not distinguished between the holy and the profane. Her rulers brutalized the people, especially the poor. Her shepherds fed themselves, but not the sheep. Hence, the Lord’s sheep were scattered because there were no shepherds. They became prey to all the wild beasts of the field. Judgment, thus, is pronounced upon them: “**Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require My sheep at their hands; and I will turn them back that they shall not feed My sheep, and the shepherds shall no longer feed them; and I will deliver My sheep put of their mouth, and they shall not longer be meat for them [Ez. 34:8-10].**”

²⁷⁰ Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Ch. LXXXII, Ante-Nicene, I:563, 564.

²⁷¹ Saint Basil, “Homily 12 on Psalm 14,” *Exegetic Homilies: A Psalm of David Against Usurers*, FC, 2nd ed., 46:181.

The shepherds would not go unpunished, for their not only failing to care for God's flock but also plundering of it. They would also lose their right to shepherd the flock. From the foregoing, it is evident that judgment is a prominent element in the prophet's message. Yet further on, in Chapter 34, he speaks of restoration; for the Lord promises to seek out His sheep and to visit them. He says: **"I will bring them back from every place where they were scattered in the day of cloud and darkness. And I will bring them out from the nations, and will gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land, and will feed them upon the mountains of Israel, and the villages, and in every inhabited place of the land [Ez. 34:11-13]...."**

"And I will raise up one Shepherd over them, and He shall tend them, even My servant David, and He shall be their Shepherd; and I the Lord will be to them a God, and David a prince in the midst of them; I the Lord have spoken it [Ez. 34:23, 24]." Saint Chrysostom points out that "no man called Him (Jesus Christ) son of Abraham, but all son of David; and that is because this last one was more in the recollection of all, both on account of the time, for he had not been so very long dead, and because of his royalty. On this principle again all the kings whom they had in honor after his time were named from him, both by the people themselves and by God. For both Ezekiel and other prophets, besides, speak of David as coming and rising again; not meaning him that was dead, but them who were emulating his virtue.... For great was the glory of the man (David), both with God and with men."²⁷²

6. "Say to the Prince of Tyrus [Ez. 28]."

A prophetic proclamation is uttered against the ruler of Tyre. The prophet is speaking in both a contemporary and future sense. The description in several instances fits both Antichrist and Satan. In his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, Saint Hippolytos (ca. 170-ca. 236) believes that the prophet is speaking of that tyrant and king, that dread judge, that son of the devil, that is foreordained to spring and arise: **"And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'And thou, son of man, say to the prince of Tyrus, "Thus saith the Lord: 'Because thy heart has been exalted, and thou hast said, "I am God, I have inhabited the dwelling of God in the heart of the sea," yet thou art man and not God, though thou hast set thy heart as the heart of God [Ez. 28:1, 2]."'"**" In that same treatise, Hippolytos writes: "When Antichrist has overmastered three horns out of the ten in the array of war and has rooted these out, namely, Egypt, and Libya, and Ethiopia, and has gotten their spoils and trappings, and has brought the remaining horns which suffer into subjection, he will begin to be lifted up in heart, and to exalt himself against God as master

²⁷² Saint Chrysostom, "Homily II," *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, Nicene, 1st Ser., X:11.

of the whole world. And his first expedition will be against Tyre and Berytus, and the circumjacent territory. For by storming these cities first, he will strike terror into the others, as Esaias, says, 'Be ashamed, O Sidon....Moreover, when it shall be heard in Egypt, sorrow shall seize them for Tyre [Is. 23:4, 5].' These things, then," continues Saint Hippolytos, "shall be in the future, beloved; and when the three horns are cut off, he will begin to show himself as God, as Ezekiel has said aforetime: **'Because thy heart has been exalted, and thou hast said "I am God [Ez. 28:2]."'**²⁷³

"And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Son of man, take up a lamentation for the prince of Tyre, and say to him, "Thus saith the Lord God: 'Thou art a seal of resemblance (ἀποσφράγισμα ὁμοιώσεως), and crown of beauty [Ez. 28:11, 12]."'"

"Where are you," asks blessed Jerome, "who say that the devil was created by the devil? Where are they who say that an evil nature had been created by God?...How has the morning star fallen, the son of dawn? [cf. Is. 14:12]....He is the one to whom the words of Ezekiel are addressed: 'Thou wast stamped with the seal of perfection [cf. Ez. 28:12].' Notice exactly what the prophet says, **'the seal of resemblance [Ez. 28:12].'** He did not say to the devil, thou art the sign of resemblance, but the seal of resemblance. God had set His impression upon thee and made thee like unto Himself; but thou didst afterward destroy the resemblance."²⁷⁴

"From the day that thou wast created thou wast with the cherub: I set thee on the holy mount of God; thou wast in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast faultless in thy days, from the day that thou wast created, until iniquity was found in thee [Ez. 28:14, 15]."

"Of the abundance of thy merchandise thou hast filled thy storehouses with iniquity, and hast sinned. Therefore, thou hast been cast down wounded from the mount of God, and the cherub has brought thee out of the midst of the stones of fire [Ez. 28:16]."

"The Prince of Tyre," we are told by Saint Aphrahat, "ruled the kingdom during the days of twenty-two kings of the house of Juda, that is, for four hundred and forty years. And since the years of that king of Tyre were many, all the time he thus said in his heart, **'I am God, I have inhabited the dwelling of God in the heart of the sea [Ez. 28:2].'** But Ezekiel said to him, **'Thou art man, and not God [Ez. 28:9].'** For while the prince of Tyre was walking without fault in the midst of the stones of fire, there was mercy upon him. But when his heart was lifted up, the cherub who overshadows, destroyed

²⁷³ Saint Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, Ante-Nicene, V:215.

²⁷⁴ Saint Jerome, "Homily 14," *1-59 On The Psalms*, Vol. 1, FC, 2nd ed., 48:107; cf. *Commentary on Ezekiel 28:11-20*, P.L. 25.269(331).

him [Ez. 28:14, 15]. Now, what are the stones of fire, but the children of Sion and the children of Jerusalem [cf. Lam. 4:1, 2; Zach. 9:16; Jer. 23:29]?²⁷⁵

The Regeneration of the People of God

Prophet Ezekiel is concerned about the inner regeneration of the flock. Saint Cyprian urges his fellow bishops that "if those who were baptized by heretics and schismatics ask to come to the true Church, which is one, they ought to be baptized." Perceiving the prophetic disclosure of Baptism, he quotes this passage from the Prophet Ezekiel: **"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be purged from all our uncleannesses and from all your idols, and I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and will put a new spirit in you [Ez. 36:25, 26]."**²⁷⁶

Saint Irenaeos sees also how the Prophet Ezekiel makes mention of how the Gentiles were to become a new and holy people. "For our hearts through faith," says he, "having been taken away from stony services, see God; and we have become sons of Abraham who was justified by faith. Therefore, God says through Ezekiel: **'And I will give you a new heart, and will put a new spirit in you. And I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh and will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you, and will cause you to walk in Mine ordinances, and to keep My judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell upon the land which I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be to Me a people, and I will be to you a God [Ez. 36:26-28].'**"²⁷⁷ This renewal is also spoken of by Saint Paul: "It is manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, which hath not been engraved with ink, but with *the* Spirit of the living God, not in stony tablets, but in fleshly tablets of the heart [2 Cor. 3:3]."

"Thus," continues Saint Irenaeos, "through the new calling, a change of heart comes about in the nations, . . . so that the Church bears fruit in so great a number that she is more fruitful than the Synagogue of the past."²⁷⁸ *By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, O prophet of God, thou didst proclaim the outcome of mysteries that were to come to pass.*²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Saint Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., XIII:355, 356.

²⁷⁶ Saint Cyprian, "Epistle LXIX to Januarius and other Numidian Bishops, On Baptizing Heretics," *The Epistles of Cyprian*, Ante-Nicene, V:375, 376; and, idem, "Letter 70," *Letters 1-81*, FC, 2nd ed., 51:259.

²⁷⁷ Saint Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, ACW, 16:104.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 104, 105.

²⁷⁹ July 23rd, Dismissal Hymn of Prophet Ezekiel, Mode Three.