

Series 5b: Hebraic Language Symbolism:

(Red lettering **not** in “class handout version”) The following list of symbols, as well as the verses contained within each heading, are far from comprehensive of either the other many symbols in the Bible, or the numerous other Bible verses able to be quoted on each symbol. The purpose of this study was not to be exhaustive in nature, but rather broad in scope, as we attempt to expand our understanding of the Biblical expressive narrative word picture Hebraic language.

Angel. In symbolic language, denotes any agent or messenger which God employs in executing his will.

Air. Frequently equivalent to the spiritual realm between the earth and the unseen heavenly realm, the symbol of government, and an emblem of the kingdom of Satan. In Eph. 2:2 he is called “the prince of the power of the air,” (note Eph. 6:12). A vial poured out upon the air denotes the destruction of all existing governments under the influence of Satan (Rev. 16:17).

Blasphemy. When used as a symbol, denotes idolatry. Thus in Isaiah, “You have burnt incense upon the mountains to idols, and have blasphemed me upon the hills,” Isa. 52:5. See also Deut. 31.

Blood. War, carnage, slaughter. To “turn water into blood” is to embroil nations in war. See Isa. 9:5, 15:9, 34:3, 34:6, 34:7, 49:26. See Ezek. 9:9, 14:19, “...pour out my fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast,”; Joel. 2:30-31; Rev. 14:20.

Burnings, the act of destruction. To “burn with fire” is to destroy. “The Lord will smite you with burning heat,” Deut. 28:22. “And all its land is burning waste and brimstone,” Deut. 29:23. These express God’s anger at Israel’s arrogance. “The land is burned up and the people are fuel for the fire,” Isa. 9:19. “Wail for the day of the Lord is near, every man’s heart will be burned up,” Isa. 13:5-13. “Behold the day of the Lord is coming with burning anger to make the land a desolation,” Isa. 13:9. “The heart of the Egyptians will burn in them,” Isa. 19:1. “Edom shall become burning pitch, and smoke shall go up forever,” Isa. 34:9, “And the people will be burned to lime,” Isa. 33:12. “For behold the day is coming, burning like a furnace, and every evildoer will be set ablaze, and become chaff,” Mal. 4:1-6. “And the earth and its works shall be burned up,” 2Pet. 3:10.

Candle. Emblem of prosperity, success, joy. “His candle shall be put out,” Job 18. “O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head,” Job 29.

Cloud. An emblem of prosperity and glory. To ride on clouds is to rule and conquer. Isaiah 19:1 speaks of the Lord coming on a cloud in judgment into Egypt. See other OT cloud symbolism (not all are listed): Exod. 13:21-22, 14:19-20, 16:10, 19:9, 20:21, 24:16, 33:9, 34:5, 40:34-38; Lev 16:2; Num. 9:15-16, 11:25, 12:5, 16:42; Deut. 5:22; 2 Sam. 22:12; 1 Kings 8:10-12; 2 Chron. 5:13-14; Job 22:14; Psa. 18:11-12, 97:2; 104:3; Isa. 4:5, 19:1; Jer. 10:13, 51:16; Lam. 2:1, 3:44; Ezek. 1:4, 10:3-4, 30:3, 18, 32:7, 38:9, 16; Joel 2:1-11; Nah. 1:3; Zeph. 1:14-15; Zech. 7:14, 9:14. Daniel 7:13 said, “One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven,” & our Lord adds an explanation of the symbol, “with power and great glory,” (Matt. 24:30). NT cloud symbolism: Matt. 17:5, 24:30, 26:64; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7, 11:12, 14:14.

Desert, or wilderness. Means paganism, the wild, savage manners and state of paganism. As the idolatry of the pagans was practiced in groves, woods, and waste places, so it became among the Jews, the symbol of paganism.

Earth. Symbol of the great body of the people contrasted with the government, the anti-Christian part of mankind, idolatrous communities. There are in the political and moral worlds as well as in the natural world, heavens and earth, sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, and seas.

Earthquake, the established symbol of the political and moral revolutions and convulsions of society. “To shake the heavens and the earth” is explained by Haggai as denoting the overthrow of thrones, and the subversion of the strength of the kingdom, Hag. 2:21, 22. The Oneirocritics (interpreters of dreams) concur in affirming that “earthquakes are signified by wars, slaughter of men, and subversion of states and fortunes, or the observation of sun, moon, and stars.” See also: Isa 13:13; Mic. 1:3-4; Ezek. 32:7-8; Heb. 12:26-28.

Eclipse. The universe being the symbol of a kingdom or polity, the obstruction of the sun denotes the diminution or obstruction of the glory of its sovereign, and its potentates symbolized by the moon and stars, Gen. 37:9-10.

Eye. The Symbol of light or knowledge, as blindness is of ignorance. “I will open my eyes upon the house of Judah,” Zech. 12:4.

Fire. Signifies fierce destruction, judgment while living, by the divine God. “For He is like the refiners fire to consume the dross. For behold the Lord will come with fire, to render his anger with fury,” Isa. 66:15. “For by fire and sword will the Lord plead with all flesh, and the slain of the Lord shall be many,” Isa. 66:16. Fire is never the symbol of blessings, but of a curse, so destructive is the symbol of fire. More says that it denotes destruction in some way, by war and hostility; the changing of dispensations will be very destructive to the wicked. “The earth and its works will be burned up with fire,” 2 Pet. 3:10, to which More again adds, “The changing of dispensations would be destructive for the wicked Jew.”

Fire from heaven. The excommunication of those in authority.

Flood. Symbol of abuse, denunciation, and persecution, an emblem of trouble.

Fornication, or whoredom. Symbol of idolatry; departing from the institutions of religion and forming alliances with the enemies of God.

Hail. Denotes inroads of enemies, killing, and destruction, Rev. 8:7. Rev. 11:19, Rev. 16:21. All of which denotes a destructive force sent by God, Isa. 10:5. Assyria will be punished in battles, Isa. 28:2, 17; 30:30-33; Hag. 2:17.

Heaven and earth. This is the study of cosmology. The Greek word *kosmos* (cosmos) basically means an orderly arrangement of the created universe, including both its heavenly and earthly realms. **Biblical Cosmology focuses on how God and the normally unseen spiritual realm interacts with man and the seen physical realm.** Biblical Cosmology attempts to explain how both realms interrelate to each other. Notice the contrast between the *invisible* things in the heavens and the *visible* things on the earth mentioned in Col. 1:16:

- “by Him all things were created, both **in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.**”

In regard to the visible *world* of people, it can refer to how we are organized socially, politically, economically, or philosophically into a *world order* or orderly system, such as the *ancient world* or the *modern world*. It can also apply to the unseen realm, such as *the angelic world*, and can apply to anything which is organized around or associated with some physical, spiritual, or philosophical principle, such as the *philosophical world* or the *religious world*.

In the Bible, a predominant meaning of *Kosmos* is related to the whole creation, including both seen and unseen realms. “*In the beginning, God created **the heavens and the earth***” (Gen 1:1). This overarching theme in the Bible of the “heavens and the earth” refers to the whole *created world*, including **everything in both the seen and unseen realms**. However, in many contexts, the phrase *heavens and earth* has the connotation of a **world order or orderly arrangement** (Gk. *kosmos* cf. Acts 17:24; Rev 11:15; 13:8; 17:8), **or an administration of world affairs** (Gk. *oikonomia* cf. Eph 1:10; 3:9; 1Tim 1:4). In this context, the meaning of the *NEW heavens and earth* seems to be that the entire world (Gk. *kosmos*), **including both the seen and unseen realms**, will operate under a **new set of laws or a new covenantal arrangement or administration** (Gk. *oikonomia*).

Jerusalem. In symbolic or figurative language, the Christian economy, or spiritual Israel, redeemed Zion, Isaiah chapters 52, 53, 54. The old Jerusalem must be cast out (Judaism), Galatians 4:22-31. With spiritual understanding, then, all saints are now in spiritual Israel. New Jerusalem, the city of God, the assembly and church of the first born, the Church, Hebrews 12:22-28. The Jerusalem which is above, Gal. 4:26, is free, the mother of us all. The New Jerusalem represents every professing Christian which submits to the will of Christ, the sole lawgiver. Those who reside in the New Jerusalem have received the promise made to Abraham; they are children and grandchildren, etc of Sarah, 1 Pet. 3:6, and they will reign in the spiritual kingdom with Christ.

Lamp. Symbol of government, civil or religious.

Light. The well-known emblem of knowledge.

Locusts. Numerous armies of men pillaging and destroying a country, Joel 1:6. Achmetes, “If any king or potentate see locusts come upon a place, let him expect a powerful multitude of enemies there.”

Olive tree. Trees in the prophetic Scriptures are often the symbol of men. Moses and Aaron were two olive trees, so were Zerubbabel and Joshua. The ax lies at the root of the dry tree. The godly are called by Isaiah “trees of righteousness,” 61:3. Thy children are like olive plants. The Jewish people and nation. “The Lord called thy name a green olive tree.” Jer. 11:16.

River. Consolations are represented by rivers of living waters, the New Covenant. The Gospel of Christ, the Church. Notice the statement of Christ, “You would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water,” John. 4:10, 13, 14. Compare Rev. 22:1; also Ps. 46:4; Ezek. 47:1; Rev. 22:17.

Sea. Waters signify people. The winds strove upon the great sea. An empire in agitation.

Sun, Moon and Stars. Symbol of the highlights and authorities in society, political and religious. The Sun denotes the chief. The moon is next in authority, and the stars are the nobles. See Joseph’s dream, Gen. 37:5-10, where the **well-known Bible interpretation rule called hermeneutic law of 1st appearance** directs us to the true interpretation of the symbols given. Another: the morning Star is a symbol of the Christ. “I am,” says Jesus, “The bright and morning star.” Stars falling from heaven denote the destruction of nobility. Stars, moon, and sun not giving their light denotes authorities having their rule taken away. See Isa. 13:10; Matt. 24:29. An example of such darkness of the sun and moon being turned to blood is found in Joel. 2:28-32; notice the chronology of events.

1. v. 28, Holy Spirit poured out. (See Acts chapter 2).
2. v. 29, Male and female to receive Holy Spirit.
3. v. 30, Wonders in the sky, and on earth, blood, fire.
4. v. 31, Sun darkened, moon becomes blood, before the “coming of the Lord.”
5. v. 32, Gospel free to all, in Jerusalem there will be those who escape. Many see this as a clear reference to the siege against Jerusalem by General Titus A.D.70. See also Matt. 24:22; Lk. 21:20-32; also Josephus 5:10:1 and 6:3:2-4.

Sword. Symbol of slaughter, sword out of the mouth. Threatening sharp and severe. Sharp two-edged sword in the mouth, a slaughter very severe, such as had not been before, one that is on its way. See Rev. 1:16, also Matt. 24:21.

Smoke. Symbol of the movement of armies, when associated with blood and fire denotes God’s wrath upon people nations, or governments, using as his instruments great armies. Compare Joel 2:30, Isa. 14:31, smoke comes from the north, the movement of the armies of Assyria against Israel. See also Lk. 21:20.

Thunder. “There were thunders and lightning.” The symbol of sudden and terrific dispersion and destruction of the forces of war. As the coruscation of lightning and thunder shake the natural heavens, or air, so symbolic thunders shake the political and existing government of men. Isa. 29:6, Job 39:25, 1 Sam. 2:10, Psa. 18:7.

World. Should read “age” (correct Greek translation) when used to denote the ending of any dispensation. Dispensations are called world in the King James Version, which is an incorrect translation from the Greek, and is correctly translated: age. i.e. Matt. 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 2 Pet. 3:6. All of these passages denoted an ending to the Mosaic dispensation/age and not world/universe. Heb. 9:26 proves this. Suppose the gathering of the tares in Matt. 13:39, 40 were yet future. If this were so, then by the same use of the term in Heb. 9:26 the sacrifice of Christ at the end of the world is yet future, and we are still in our sins! It is the physical understanding which places “end of the world” terms as yet future. When Peter infers that the world will burn up, 2 Pet. 3:10, the reference is to burning of the tares at the end of the dispensation, the annihilation of earth is not intended. Look at 2 Pet. 3:2, “You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and spoken by your apostles.” Notice Peter’s words in Chapter 3 were first spoken by the holy prophets, second, by Christ, then third, by the apostles. Peter leaves no room for anyone to say that this chapter was a new revelation. It had been spoken first in the long ago by the holy prophets. According to the Messiah, all prophecy was fulfilled when Jerusalem the city and Temple was destroyed by the Romans, Lk. 21:20, 22; 22:37; 24:44. When the Mosaic dispensation ended, all things were fulfilled in Christ, including 2 Peter 3.

Zion. The Christian church in her impregnable and triumphant character.

Note. The symbols given here are prophetic symbols and are not to be applied to every reading where the word is found, only where figurative language is used. We might wonder why the prophets used such language? To this there are two answers.

1. The prophets spoke the language of God.
2. Prof. W.K. Mound says, “The Hebrew language possesses a facility to present pictures of events narrated. The Hebrew thought in pictures, and consequently his nouns are concrete and vivid, there are no such things as neuter gender, compound words are lacking.” *Essentials of Bible History*, rev. ed. P. 307.

Geisler and Nix also stated, “Linguistically, words are necessary for the full expression of thought. If God in any meaningful sense expressed himself to the prophet, He had to use words. Words are the clothes of ideas, and a naked thought is a very nebulous entity at best. The desire for clarity in revelation would scarcely be consonant with the ambiguity of non-symbolized ideas. In fact, an idea without symbol to express it is an unexpressed idea, and an unexpressed idea is scarcely a revelation or communication.” Geisler and Nix, *Introduction to the Bible*, p.31.