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‘And round about the Throne were four and twenty seats : and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment ; *and they had on their heads crowns of gold.*’

The ‘elders’, as they are termed, wearing crowns, represent the company of redeemed and glorified saints in Heaven *after* the Resurrection has taken place (see 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thesalonians 4:17). ‘Their Crowns and Thrones betoken their royal dignity; the Harp and Song indicate their joy in worship; while their robes and vials point to priestly character and action. (W. Scott).

The Throne in the midst is occupied by none other than Christ Himself, the Son of man and Son of God, in transcendent Glory. What do these glorified saints do with their crowns? For answer read Revelation 4:10 and 11.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

1. The Fertile Crescent

In a day when the Gospel has gone round the world, it is sometimes hard to grasp that the history of man and of salvation contained in the Old Testament was played out in a relatively small area until the rise of Cyrus, king of Persia. By conquering the empires of the Medes and of Croesus, king of Lydia, as well as Babylon, he permanently widened the stage in which God's purposes were being worked out. Since the establishment of the Persian empire is one of the latest historical incidents in the Old Testament—Cyrus captured Babylon in 539 B.C., and Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem was in 433 B.C.—it and its results will be virtually ignored here. A closer description of Palestine, where so many of the main incidents of the Old Testament took place, is reserved for the second half of this study.

The lands of the Old Testament, apart from Egypt and omitting

Iran (Persia) for the reasons already given, are bounded on the west by the Mediterranean or Great Sea; on the north-west by the Taurus and Anti-Taurus ranges, which separate them from the high Anatolian plateau of Asia Minor; on the north by the high mountains of Armenia, and on the east by the Zagros mountains, which separate them from the Iranian plateau. The Arabian desert not only bounds this area to the south, but pushes right into its heart, leaving only a relatively narrow strip of fertile land between the Mediterranean and the desert, seldom much over sixty miles in width. In the north and east the desert begins almost as soon as the limits of irrigation from the Euphrates are reached. Most of the fringe of this desert is suited for pasture after the rains.

We are left then with a long, fairly narrow, roughly crescent-shaped stretch of fertile land—and the name given it by Breasted. 'The Fertile Crescent' has become universally accepted. It is continued in the south-west, after the break of the Sinai desert, by the fertile valley of the Nile. From the sea to just north of Cairo lies the fan-shaped delta of the Nile. From Cairo to the First Cataract at Assuan (Ezek. 29: 10, Syene), normally the effective southern frontier of Egypt in Bible times, Egypt is effectively the narrow valley of the Nile flanked on either side by desert.

What is the size of this area? The length of the Nile from the First Cataract to the sea is about 560 miles. From the Brook of Egypt (Wadi el-Arish), south of Gaza, to the Gulf of Alexandria the eastern coast of the Mediterranean is about 400 miles long as the crow flies. From Antioch to Nineveh is about the same distance, while from Jerusalem to Ur of the Chaldees is somewhat less than 700 miles.

These distances may not seem so great, when compared with those of the United States, India, Russia or China. We must bear in mind, however, that not only were modern methods of transport not available, but that, apart from the very rich or powerful, a man could seldom travel faster than he could walk. The horse and chariot were used for military purposes and the donkey or mule were the usual means of transport. In addition it was exceptional to cross the Arabian desert. The trade routes

from Egypt and Palestine to Babylon did not run due east, but north to the fords over the Euphrates at Carchemish, Tiphseh (1 King 4:24), etc., and then south-east and south through the Mesopotamian plain. The large-scale commercial use of the camel was a later development. This means that distances were greater than the map might suggest.

The effects of distance were increased by the virtual absence of roads, except where the shape of the ground made it almost unavoidable that certain routes should be followed. It is true that military motives might lead to the construction of what might be reasonably called roads, e.g., the great Egyptian road from Gaza northwards towards the Euphrates. But not only were these liable, where they crossed the plains, to be impassable during the rains, but at the best of times they will seldom have been easy to traverse. Hori's letter to Amen-em-Ope* is doubtless exaggerated, but it is clear that he considered that the roads of Canaan would tax the stoutest hearts.

At the end of our period we find Ezra and his company taking four months (Ezr. 7:9) for the approximately 900 miles from Babylon to Jerusalem. If we allow for the wait at the river Ahava (Ezr. 8:15, 31) and the certainty that they will not have travelled on the Sabbath, they covered about ten miles a day. Nehemiah does not tell us how long he took for very much the same journey, but a comparison of Neh. 2:1 with 6:15 suggests that with all the resources of the royal commission behind him, he will not have taken much less than three months.

Though we are justified in seeing a certain natural unity in the lands of the Old Testament, the distances within them are so great and natural obstacles often so formidable that we must not exaggerate it. In our later treatment of Palestine we shall see that even in so small a country natural divisions could present great obstacles to true unity.

'The Fertile Crescent' represents in fact the area of two of the world's oldest civilizations (the third, that of Harappa and Mohenjodaro in the Punjab and Indus valley is not mentioned

* Papyrus Anastasi I, see Pritchard: *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 475 *seq.*

in the Bible) the valley of the Nile and that of the Euphrates and Tigris with the connecting strip of Syria and Palestine. Other nations outside this area are mentioned but they had little influence on it, except as they broke their way into it. For long man found the high uplands of Asia Minor, Armenia and Iran, and the scattered oasis of Arabia too inhospitable for the development of a stable civilization.

The chief exception was the Hittite empire in Asia Minor, which faced Egypt, when the latter was at the height of its power, on equal terms in war and peace. It should be noted however, that contrary to widespread ideas, the Bible has few, if any, references to this great Anatolian empire. The Hittites of Canaan (the same as 'the children of Heth' in Gen. 23) were small groups who had achieved dominant positions in some cities owing to their powers in war. Since we cannot date Abraham with certainty, we cannot pass judgment on the theory that their presence in Canaan was due to the great period of migrations that brought the Hyksos into Egypt and also introduced the Hurrians (Horites) as rulers to some cities in Syria and Canaan. The references to the Hittites outside Canaan are to the areas of North Syria and North Mesopotamia that had been conquered by the Hittites at the height of their power and had retained something of Hittite culture and in some cases Hittite ruling families. The real Hittite empire collapsed about 1200 B.C. during the period of the Judges.

The nature of 'The Fertile Crescent' then was such that while the constant threat of wild tribes on the mountain and desert frontiers was sufficient to prevent stagnation, it was not sufficient to interrupt the continuity of civilization. When these tribes were able to obtain a footing in the fertile lands, either by force or peaceful infiltration, they were rapidly assimilated to the age-old culture of the region.

The sea was an even better frontier defence than mountains or desert. The waters of both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf (which in Old Testament times stretched as far north as Ur) wash bleak deserts. The ships then in use were large enough to permit some commerce with South Arabia, East Africa and even India, but they could never have carried an invading army. The same

is true of the Mediterranean. The Greeks (*Ionians*) are mentioned a few times, apart from the prophetic references in *Daniel*, but the Phoenicians on the coast of Syria were normally strong enough to prevent anything more than a limited amount of trading. Crete may well be referred to as Caphor (Amos 9:7), but the great Minoan civilization (ending c. 1400 B.C.) and its Greek continuation (ending c. 1225 B.C.) has left no mark on the Old Testament. The number of Minoan articles found by archaeologists in Syria and further east testify to large scale trade, but the distances involved were too great to make invasion possible. It is noteworthy that the three great conquests of the Fertile Crescent from outside, viz., by Cyrus, Alexander the Great and Pompey, were all by land.

There was only one partial exception. About 1200 B.C., driven doubtless by invaders from the north, a regular migration of tribes from Greece, the Aegean isles and western Asia Minor swept south. It was they who broke the Hittite empire, and to their destruction of Ugarit (Ras Shamra) we owe the preservation of its priceless records for the modern archaeologist. They passed down the Syrian coast by land and sea in the hope of overrunning Egypt, but Rameses III defeated both sections of their attack. The Philistines in the south of the Palestinian coastal plain and the Thekels in the Plain of Sharon were part of the flotsam left by this invading host. They may well have been among the captives settled there by the Pharaoh to guard the southern end of the trade and military road for him.

Both the great length of the Fertile Crescent and the diversity of conditions in it prevented its being dominated by one power for long; equally there was never any possibility of a unitary civilization and language. Egypt was never able to push its frontier beyond the Euphrates, while the normal limit of Assyrian and Babylonian influence was the Sinai desert. It is true that under Esarhaddon and Ashur-bani-pal from 671 to about 651 B.C., with some breaks, Egypt was part of the Assyrian empire, but the effort required for the conquest was probably the chief cause of Assyria's sudden collapse, Nineveh being destroyed in 612 B.C. The physical nature of Syria and Palestine is such that the only

time this part of the Fertile Crescent rose to power was under David and Solomon, when both Egypt and Mesopotamia were weak.

Though Egypt was always regarded as the union of two kingdoms, it was always a unity whenever it had strong rulers, in spite of its great length. There is not a little evidence to suggest that even before the semi-legendary Menes (or Narmer), who united the kingdoms probably between 3400 and 3000 B.C., there were those that had ruled over the whole of Egypt.

The effect of this unity was increased by the uniformity of nature. In the rainless climate of Egypt life is dominated by the sun and the Nile with its annual flood, always the chief gods of the land. So regular is life, that it is claimed by many that the Egyptians were able to fix an accurate calendar as early as 4241 B.C.

These uniformities, though they produced a civilization which still impresses us and which for long led the world, were bound to lead to atrophy. The great productive period of Egyptian genius was already well past its peak, when Joseph ruled the land and Moses faced Pharaoh. More and more Egypt began to stagnate within its frontiers, concerned mainly to keep its enemies at a distance. What was even more important was that its religion and customs were so specifically a product of the peculiar conditions of the Nile valley, that they had a relatively small influence on the rest of the Fertile Crescent.

The earliest knowledge we have of Sumer and Akkad, the southern part of the Mesopotamian plain, reveals many independent rival cities, of which one and another would rise to temporary overlordship. Though supreme power passed first to Babylon and later to Assyria, we cannot say that they really succeeded in unifying Mesopotamia. Even at the height of Assyrian power the death of the king was generally followed by widespread revolts.

More vulnerable frontiers, greater variations in the seasons, less security of life made them turn their eyes longingly to the heavenly bodies moving untroubled by human affairs through the sky; they became their chief gods.

This greater flexibility not only kept Mesopotamia virile much

longer than Egypt, until it was bled white by the unending wars of Assyria, but it made its civilization and religious outlook a dominant factor throughout the Fertile Crescent right to the frontier of Egypt. This influence was increased by the continued commercial importance of Babylon.

When Abram first entered Canaan, he found a land where the traditions of Ur, Babylon, Nuzu and Mari were powerful, and they did not really disappear until Alexander's conquests transformed the outlook of the Near East.

Conditions in Syria and Palestine were very different to those in the river valleys and alluvial plans of Egypt and Mesopotamia, but they must await the second half of this study.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER

DR J. BOYD

Before considering the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the believer today it is instructive to note the expressions used of His association with individuals before Pentecost.

First, He came upon men. This is said concerning Moses and the seventy elders in Num. 11:17, 29. In the New Testament the Spirit came upon Simeon (Luke 2:25). Secondly, a somewhat similar expression is used in the Authorised Version, but is rendered in the margin of the Revised Version by the words, 'He clothed Himself with men', for example, Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Amasai (1 Chron. 12:18), Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:27). A third word indicates that He came mightily upon men, lit. He prospered men. In this way He enabled Samson to slay a lion (Judg. 14:6), and David to rule Israel (1 Sam. 6:13). Again, the Holy Spirit was in men, even before He was sent from the Father after Christ's glorification. He was in Joseph, giving him wisdom (Gen. 41:38), and in Joshua, the leader of Israel (Num. 27:18). Peter tells us that the Spirit was in those men who wrote the Old Testament