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GOD'S LAMP, MAN'S LIGHT *Mysteries of the Menorah*



Often I invite guest authors to contribute to my Israel Teaching Letter series. This month I am excited to introduce Dr. John D. Carr, founder of Restoration Foundation and editor of Restore! magazine. Let's see what Dr. Carr has to teach about the menorah:

The menorah is the biblical symbol *par excellence*. The graceful symmetry of its flowing lines displays a profound beauty that is soothing, reassuring, and uplifting to the human spirit. Esthetically appealing, it is an attractive decoration for any home or sanctuary. At the same time, however, the menorah evokes powerful images of the Divine, assuring its observer that

it is far more than an *objet d'art*. This is a heavenly symbol that transcend the imagination of earthly artisans.

Originally designed as the means of providing light in the holy place of the Israelites' wilderness sanctuary, the menorah has become more symbol than apparatus to the

Jewish people. When, after a nineteenth-century hiatus, the nation of Israel was restored, the modern Israelis chose the menorah as the dominant symbol to grace the reborn state's national seal, a testimony to its enduring importance in the corporate Jewish consciousness. The ancient menorah still speaks to Israel of the undying and irresistible force of light.

Because of the extreme attention to detail given to the design of the menorah, it is clear that it is more a symbolic form, rather than a mere religious apparatus. Moses was instructed by God to "*make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand and its base and its shaft are to be made of hammered work . . . six branches shall go out from its sides; three branches of the lampstand from its one side and three branches of the lampstand from its other side*" (Exodus 25:31-32, NASV).

The menorah is a concrete symbol of God Himself, the source of light. Its central lamp is called by the Jews *ner Elohim* (נֵר אֱלֹהִים) (the lamp of God). David exclaimed, “*You are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord turns my darkness into light*” (2 Samuel 22:29, NIV), thereby identifying God with the menorah as He Who illuminates the darkness. The Psalmist observed that God “*wraps Himself in light as with a garment*” (Psalm 104:2, NIV). Rather than bedeck Himself in the brilliant colors associated with the pagan deities of the ancient world, God clothed Himself in pure white light as a mantle. God’s majesty illuminated the Temple as the fiery light of a golden lamp.



THE DIVINE WORD, GOD’S LAMP

It was no coincidence that David called God’s Word “*a lamp to my feet, and a light unto my path*” (Psalm 119:105). Assuring as the light of a torch along an unfamiliar trail on a moonless night, so does the Word of God give vision and direction to humankind, illuminating the narrow way that leads to the gates of eternal life. Without clear insight into the Word of God, people perish (Proverbs 29:18). The Word of God is like a light that shines in a dark place, clearly pointing the way. It channels the path of the just toward the “Day Star” who arises in the hearts of believers (2 Peter 1:19). The Word of God dispels the darkness, the confusion, the ignorance, the fear, the superstition, and the dangers inherent in human existence.

In spite of the ominous obscurity of the human situation, one small ray from the Eternal Word dispels the darkness, brings clarity of purpose, and unmistakably marks the way to the tree of life so clearly that no one who walks in that light will stumble (Isaiah 35:8).

The light of the menorah corresponded to the Torah, the light of which is the eternal flame that ever illuminates men’s pathway. The entirety of God’s instruction became man’s spiritual light. Solomon summarized God’s grace in giving His Ten Commandments (instructions) to men: “*For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life*” (Proverbs 6:23, RSV). God’s commandments are clear, “*enlightening the eyes*” (Psalm 19:8).

Finally, in the fullness of time, God made the complete disclosure of His very essence and glory when He spoke to all mankind through His only begotten Son, Jesus (Yeshua) Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world. The glory of God was fully revealed in Yeshua (2 Corinthians 4:6). The fountain of life that sprang from the presence of the Eternal Father in the Person of the only begotten Son, fully manifested the light of God’s presence so that men were—and continue to be—enlightened. God’s Lamp, the incarnate menorah, brought the essence of heaven down to earth. He became man’s light so that men from every tribe and tongue have been illuminated and brought into the Divine Presence with the promise of being clothed with the same glory of eternal light and life that is manifest in Yeshua, God’s Lamp and man’s light (John 1:4-5, 9). Yeshua Himself said, “*I am the Light of the world; he that follows shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life*” (John 8:12, KJV).



THE LIGHT MOTIF

The very first act in the creation of the present universe came with God’s spoken Word: “*Let light be*” (Genesis 1:3). Suddenly in the universal darkness, light sprang forth, overwhelming the void of the formless universe with the pristine brightness of eternal glory. It is profoundly significant that the very first thing that God created was light. In a measure, the light that radiated forth was the result of God’s separating from Himself a part of His very essence, the Person of His Word. The manifestation of God’s Word always produces light (Psalm 119:130), a

light that penetrates to all degrees, from the lowest degree of natural to the highest degree of spiritual light, and all that is light is united in Him, Who is light.

Light is equated with both knowledge and wisdom in Scripture. For this reason, the menorah speaks of enlightenment—learning, understanding, and reason—the light of knowledge that makes life meaningful and fulfilling. Light also speaks of wisdom in all of its forms. The fact that the Temple menorah is made from one solid piece of gold and not of pieces soldered together reveals the truth that all wisdom is from one Source.

The menorah demonstrates that knowledge is not limited to an elite, exclusive society, but is available to all men. The menorah’s light is manifest in the diversity of seven lamps, indicating that while the light is not limited to a single source, it is also not restricted to a single recipient. All men have the

capacity to receive light and to reflect light. All that is needed is connection to the source of the light, the Living Menorah Himself. Light leads to cognition and action as the Spirit gives insight and wisdom and at the same time spurs man to moral volition and accomplishment.



Menorah plant

THE TREE OF LIFE

The similarity in appearance between the menorah and a tree is neither coincidental, nor is it the product of artistic license. The shape of the menorah with branches foliating from its central stem is clearly patterned after a tree. The Jewish people have long believed that the menorah originally represented the tree of life. The lampstand is clearly a symbol of God's Word, which was David's "*lamp unto my feet*" (Psalm 119:105). The tree of life is also identified with the Torah, the wisdom of God's Word. Solomon declared that wisdom is a "*tree of life*" (Proverbs 3:18). In the Apocalypse, God says that they "*who do His commandments [Torah]*" have a right "*to the tree of life*" (Revelation 22:14). Even without its flames of fire, then, the menorah contains supreme meaning, a message of God's life-giving force and of the divine foundation of all existence.

The blending of tree and fire motifs is clearly seen in the profound incident of the burning bush that initiated the process which established the Chosen People. Moses was called and commissioned



by God Himself in divine words spoken from a bush that was burning, but not consumed (Exodus 3:2). Perhaps this was a preliminary manifestation of the menorah's rich symbolism to the prophet who would liberate Israel. God who "*dwelt in the bush*" (Deuteronomy 33:16) was first manifest to Moses through this flaming bush. From the fire of the *Shekhinah* came the Word of God. The menorah likewise appears as a golden tree from which the fire is manifest that brings both light and life through God's Word.

The menorah also speaks of eternal life through the resurrection. Its arborescent symbolism, along with the mechanics of its operation, leaves this clear picture. In



compliance with divine law, the pure oil used for the menorah light was exclusively from the olive tree. The ancients considered the olive tree to be eternal, a tree that never died; therefore, they regarded the olive tree as a symbol of enduring life. Olive trees presently exist that are more than 2,000 years old in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Even when the trunk of an olive tree is cut down, new life springs forth from its roots in the form of a *netzer*, a shoot.

This is, no doubt, what Job observed: "*For there is hope for a tree, when it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and its shoots will not fail. . . . At the scent of water it will flourish and put forth sprigs like a plant*" (Job 14:7, NASV). In what is likely the oldest of biblical texts, Job used the imagery of the [olive] tree to express his personal hope of the resurrection: "*If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my struggle I will wait until my change comes. You will call, and I will answer You. . . . As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God*" (Job 14:14-15, NASV; 19:25, NKJV).



ISRAEL, GOD'S LAMP

The Jewish people see in the seven flames of the menorah the collective souls of Israel as God's light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). From the time God incorporated them as His chosen nation, He commissioned Israel to be the light of the world. *"Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people"* (Deuteronomy 4:6). Israel was to model before the nations a lifestyle governed by God's instructions. The successful and blessed lives that they would live in obedience to the Word of God would enlighten the Gentiles and turn them to God. As they elevated the light of the menorah, Israel would also be exalted.

Jewish tradition says, "God is the Light of the universe . . . yet He commands that a lamp be lighted to give light back to God . . . So God has led Israel by His light, and in gratitude Israel is to give light in return . . . The light of the menorah does not perish as must even the Temple, but in its continued burning symbolizes the fact that God's blessings endure forever for His children" (*Midrash Rabbah*, Numbers 15:4).

Isaiah confirmed the nature of Israel's witness: *"You are My witnesses," declares the Lord, 'and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me no god was formed, nor will there be one after Me"* (Isaiah 43:10, NIV). So that the nations of the world would believe that the Eternal alone is God, Israel was chosen to bear witness to this truth by manifesting a lifestyle of obedience to God's commandments that would make them a productive, successful people. Israel's faithfulness to God and their resultant blessing would be a radiant example to the world that would point beyond both the lampstand and the light to the Source of the light, to God Himself. Israel understood that God needed their light only as a means of perpetuating the Divine light that He had given to them to be an example to the nations.

Even the words of the commandment for lighting the menorah speak of Israel's being elevated so as to enlighten the Gentile world. The command is, *"When you raise the light"* (Numbers 8:1). Israel was designed to lift up God's fire upon a lampstand so it would give light to the household of humanity. They were not to hide, or lower, the light. They were to raise it, exalt it, make it glorious. Israel itself was elevated above the other nations of the world for the express purpose of raising the light: *"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth"* (Deuteronomy 14:2, NKJV). Israel was not exalted to the status of an elite super race; they were chosen in order to raise God's light. Israel was selected to be a demonstration of God's holiness.

Even when given the exquisite physical menorah and its glorious light, Israel looked beyond the living emblem and its radiant splendor to the Divine Light Himself. They knew that their own radiance and that of the menorah were wholly dependent upon God, as the prophet declared: *"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee"* (Isaiah 60:1). Israel could arise to shine only because God's glorious light had risen upon them.

Isaiah further spoke of God's selection of Israel to enlighten the world: *"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles"* (Isaiah 42:6, NIV). He further expanded upon this theme: *"It is too small a thing for you to be My servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth"* (Isaiah 49:6, NIV). While both of these prophecies are ultimately Messianic predictions, they also apply to Israel, the corporate body of witnesses whom God chose to be His menorah light to the nations of the world and to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth.

In order to have a vehicle for the dissemination of His light, God formed Israel according to the heavenly pattern to be a menorah, a lampstand on which the light could be raised to radiate into the world. Israel was not chosen because of their own greatness. God's intent was to place His light in an insignificant, nomadic tribe and, by illuminating their lives with the goodness of His Torah, make them His meno-



rah to the nations. In God's design, therefore, Israel was not an end in itself but a means to the end—God's predetermined goal to cover the earth with His truth and glory. All men were to be confronted with the illuminating mysteries of God's Word through the agency of His chosen people.

For 3,500 years, Israel has continued to be God's lamp, man's light. Though many Christian theologians have posited that God rejected His ancient people in favor of the Church, Paul strongly renounced this assertion: *"God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. . . Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!"* (Romans 11:2, NRSV; 11:11, NIV). Despite every genocidal attempt to snuff out their lives, Israel remains to this day God's Torah light to the nations, modeling the ethical conduct that God demands, and serving as a material witness to God's immutability (Malachi 3:6).



“YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

When Yeshua ordained His disciples as the world's light, He was operating in complete continuity with the heritage of His Jewish contemporaries. *"Ye are the light of the world"* (Matthew 5:14) was not a novel or revolutionary concept. Yeshua was merely recommissioning His apostles with Israel's ancient enjoinder to be the light to the nations.

First, Yeshua had identified Himself personally and individually as the Light: *"I am the Light of the World"* (John 8:12). He had been declared to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's "light to the nations" prophecy at the time of His dedication. As Simeon, the aged priest, held the infant Yeshua, he exclaimed, *"For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel"* (Luke 2:30-32). The living Menorah had come to bring light both to Israel and to the nations. Yeshua, the perfect man, revealed to mankind not only what it meant to be fully divine but

also what it meant to be fully human. The fullest essence of humanity was manifest in Yeshua, the first time pure humanity had been seen since Adam's creation. Is it any wonder, then, that He was God's menorah? *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world"* (John 9:5), He emphatically declared.

Later, during His ministry, Yeshua told His disciples that what He had been individually, they were to be collectively and corporately. As the body of the Messiah, they were to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). They were to become God's menorah to the nations. Because they had come to faith in Yeshua, they were to manifest the light by walking in a way pleasing to God, doing so solely on the basis of their faith in God. Paul lucidly expressed this truth thus: *"You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:8-10, NIV). Peter noted that the Gentiles also had been called out of their darkness into God's marvelous light, thereby becoming a part of God's chosen nation so that they, along with Israel, might *"proclaim [God's] mighty acts"* (1 Peter 2:19, NRSV), thereby further illuminating the world.



“BY MY SPIRIT, SAYS THE LORD”

The menorah is the centerpiece of one of the most powerful images in Bible prophecy, the prophecy of Zechariah 4. It is an extended metaphor that speaks powerfully to both Jew and Christian of the importance of manifesting the divine light through the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's purposes in the earth.

When a remnant of the Jewish people returned to Jerusalem following the Babylonian

captivity, they discovered utter devastation, layered over with seventy years of accumulated debris and undergrowth. The Temple that had been among the world's most opulent architectural achievements lay in rubble. How could such a feeble people, sorely lacking in resources and personnel, even contemplate rebuilding what elaborate planning, abundant capital, limitless artisans, and international cooperation had produced when Solomon had built the Temple envisioned and planned by his father David? More than eighty percent of the Jewish population of Babylon, including the best minds, the most skilled craftsmen, and the strongest backs, had chosen to remain in that foreign land rather than return to Israel and face the hardships of rebuilding.

Apparently in a time of great struggle, a similar word came to Zechariah as an angel awakened him from sleep and presented a spectacular vision before his eyes. He saw a *"lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps."* The angel then declared that the vision was *"the Word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel,"* to be accompanied by this rubric: *"Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of hosts."*

The Zechariah vision has remained a clear word for the Jewish people throughout their generations. They, above all peoples, understand that their survival and success are entirely dependent upon God's provision. Having endured innumerable onslaughts of discrimination, persecution, and violence, they exist as an identifiable people solely on the merit of their covenantal relationship with God. Defying all the laws of assimilation of conquered peoples, they have maintained their distinctive identity because God never changes and because His gifts and callings are irrevocable. Israel exists neither by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit (Rom 11:29).



DEDICATION PRODUCES LIGHT

One of the most poignant stories involving biblical symbols is the basis for Hanukkah, the Jewish festival that recalls the time in history when the Jewish people won a determined struggle for the heart and soul of Judaism and of all subsequent biblical religion. The central figure in this story is the menorah, the symbol of divine light. Because of the menorah's prominence, this Festival of the Dedication has also been called the Festival of Lights, a holiday celebrated in December. Hanukkah celebrates the triumph of the menorah's light over Zeus' might.

This threat to Jews and Judaism was particularly insidious, for it was an attack at Judaism's very foundation—its monotheism and its holistic world view. Antiochus Epiphanes attempted to convert Israel to Hellenism on the edge of the sword, and a reign of terror ensued. Finally, the Jews were led by Judas, the son of Mattathias, in a guerilla action that expelled the occupying Selucid forces from Judea. Because of his success, Judas was dubbed Maccabee (hammer).

When the victorious Maccabees returned to the desecrated Temple, they set about to restore Temple worship. When a search was made to find consecrated olive oil for lighting the menorah, one flask alone was found that had not been broken or polluted, representing only a single day's supply. However, it takes seven days to purify a supply of oil suitable for Temple worship. Tradition says that a miracle occurred when the lampstand was rekindled. The consecrated oil should have burned in the menorah for only twenty-four hours. The flames, however, continued to rise from the lamp of God for an additional seven days as a witness to God's acceptance of Israel's dedication and sacrifice, both to achieve the victory over pagan forces and to restore His sanctuary to a state of ritual purity.

The victory over Antiochus and the miracle of the light were immediate causes for celebration among the Jewish people. By the time of Yeshua, the annual commemoration of Hanukkah was prominent among the Jews in Judea. Yeshua Himself was present for its celebration in Jerusalem (John 10:22). Today, Hanukkah is perhaps the second most popularly observed of the Jewish festivals (after Passover). It is important to Jews both for its imagery and for its memorialization of Judaism's victory over the intrusion of a pagan philosophy and religion into its ethical monotheism. It is also a celebration of freedom to worship the Creator according to His commandments.

LIGHTING THE MENORAH

At the depth of night when darkness is pervasive, the menorah should be burning its brightest. Likewise, when the world is at its darkest hour, the light of God's chosen people, both Israel and the Church, should be burning most intensely. This is why Paul underscored the fact that believers were to shine as *"lights in the world"* in the midst of a wicked and perverse nation (Philippians 2:15). Each believer in the Lord God of Israel is to be a "mini-menorah," as it were.

Unfortunately, the opposite is too frequently true. When evil has vaunted itself in history, believers have often lacked the fortitude to stand up and speak out. The sad truth is that both the Church and Israel have often failed to bring God's light to the nations as He intended. Though given a perfect operating manual for illuminating behavior, the Jewish people often drifted into isolation, separatism, exclusivity, and elitism, qualities which were replicated in minute detail by the Christian Church. The lamps of God's human menorah were sometimes extinguished, and the menorah was befouled with multiple violations of the source of light, the Word of God.

Even in this condition, however, God never rejected either of His peoples, Israel or the Church. The infidelity of some men never obviates God's fidelity to His beloved creation, mankind. *"God's gifts and His call are irrevocable"* (Romans 11:29, NIV). Graphic demonstrations of God's faithfulness to His covenant with Israel and the Church are seen in the words of Isaiah: *"A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed until He has established justice in the earth"* (Isaiah 42:3-4, NASV). The term *bruised reed* projects a simple natural image of a reed that has been crushed; however, in juxtaposition with the phrase *dimly burning wick*, it also suggests the idea of a damaged lampstand. In this prophetic word, it represents historical Israel as being a damaged menorah for a nearly extinguished light; however, the promise is that Israel would survive. The chosen people were chastised, but not destroyed; they were dimmed, but not extinguished.



Jeremiah made a similar statement regarding Israel: *"The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him"* (Jeremiah 18:4, NRSV). Though the clay pot that the artisan was molding became marred in his hand, he did not discard it but rather reworked the same clay into another vessel that pleased him. God has always remained faithful to His promises to Israel and continues to work His vessel toward the goal of honor and light. He never gives up on His people!

What was said of Israel in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah can be applied equally to the Church, which has more often than not been a damaged menorah reed, a flickering, smoking wick, failing miserably in its commission to be the light of

the world. God, however, has never given up on the Church, any more than He has rejected His people Israel. With both peoples, *"He will not be disheartened or crushed until He has established justice in the earth"* (Isaiah 42:4, NASV). God is neither a smoking flax nor a crushed reed! For the sake of both peoples who have been scripturally called Zion, He will not rest until their *"righteousness goes forth as brightness, and [their] salvation as a lamp that burns"* (Isaiah 62:1, NKJV). God will yet have His torch in the earth. His human menorah will shine forth the light of His truth from enlightened individuals, from Israel, and from the Church.

In the fullness of time, God will send the Messiah and effect the resurrection of the dead. At that time *"those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever"* (Daniel 12:3, NSV). God's lamp will fully become man's light as the Living Menorah illuminates the entire world, causing the knowledge of the Lord to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

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(See back page for books and bibliography.)

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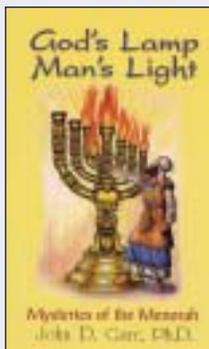
Biographical Sketch

Dr. John D. Garr is the founder and president of Restoration Foundation, an international organization that seeks to restore the church to biblical Christianity by recovering and implementing the Hebrew foundations of Christian faith. He serves as editor and publisher of *Restore!*

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Many pastors, Bible teachers and even lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding, YES! That is why I am sending out this *Israel Teaching Letter*. It is my hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3).