

Don't Try to Tame the Holy Ghost

Too often the American church has tried to put the Third Person of the Trinity in a box.

Hundreds of years before the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early church on the day of Pentecost, the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, newly anointed as a priest, got a free preview of how God would send the Holy Spirit to empower His people. The preview came in the form of a Technicolor vision that included a stormy wind, a cloud that glowed with fire, flashes of lightning and strange, four-faced cherubim that were empowered by God's divine energy.

Ezekiel wrote of these heavenly creatures: "In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire. And the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning" (Ezekiel 1:13-14, NASB).

"Let's not become so trendy and culturally relevant that we lock the Holy Spirit in a cage ... so that He doesn't mess up our scripted show"

Ezekiel also got a close-up view of these angelic creatures. They each had four faces and four wings. Their feet, which looked like calves' hooves, seemed to glow like bronze (v. 7). And the fantastical creatures had the faces of a bull, a lion,

an eagle and a man. Sounds like something we might see on the Syfy channel, or read about in a . Tolkien novel, but this is in the Bible. It is a pre-Pentecost look at Pentecost.

I used to dismiss Ezekiel's amazing vision as nothing more than a description of strange looking angels in heaven. But now I realize more is implied in the prophet's vision. The four-faced creatures are described in detail to remind us that anyone who is anointed by the Holy Spirit will be transformed into something wild! These animals represent qualities of God's nature that He shares with us.

The "living creature" Ezekiel saw had the face of man. This symbolizes human nature. All of us are frail vessels of clay, and we will always deal with flaws, temptations and weaknesses. But the creature also had the faces of three wild animals. This signifies to us that when we are filled with God's Holy Spirit, He shares with us His supernatural attributes. Our very nature is infused with a raw, holy zeal.

The bull speaks of apostolic strength. It is what the psalmist had in mind when he wrote: "You have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil" (Psalm 92:10). When the oil of the Spirit touches us afresh we receive rare, unexplainable power to accomplish what we could not do before. We are able to advance in the Spirit and take territory for the Lord.

The lion speaks of evangelistic courage. As Proverbs 28:1 says, "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are as bold as a lion." This animal fears nothing and no one. His roar is the loudest sound in the jungle. Truly Spirit-empowered Christians cannot stop talking about Jesus.

The eagle speaks of missionary speed as well as spiritual strength and keen prophetic insight. The prophet Isaiah understood this when he said that those who wait for the Lord "will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like

eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary" (Isaiah 40:31).

What God was sharing with Ezekiel was the miracle of Pentecost, when God would clothe His people with power from on high. Not only would the early disciples hear the sound of a rushing wind and see flames of fire descend on every believer's head. Those believers would be infused with untamable qualities—supernatural strength, fierce courage, uncanny boldness and an unusual ability to see into the invisible realm of God's mysteries.

When I say that the Holy Spirit is wild, I am not suggesting that He brings disorder or chaos. God is not the author of confusion, and He certainly cannot be blamed for any of the foolish "charismatic chaos" we have manufactured in recent years. But too often the American church has tried to put the Third Person of the Trinity in a box. We want to confine Him, muzzle Him, constrain Him or shoot Him with a tranquilizer gun so we can maintain control.

Many of our trendy churches are doing this today. We've built an impressive evangelical culture with great music, hip lighting and stage design, and cool videos and Power Point presentations. We even have smoke machines and rock star pastors. I have nothing against any of those things if they help make the gospel relevant to the younger generation.

But I just want to remind everybody: None of those things can replace the Holy Ghost. Let's not become so trendy and culturally relevant that we lock Him in a cage ... so that He doesn't mess up our scripted show.

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