



*Is God Beautiful?*

Christians and Muslims believe God is supremely magnificent. His splendor and glory is reflected in what he created in heaven and on earth as taught in the Bible and the Qur'an: "The heavens proclaim the glory of God." (Psalm 19:1) "Whatever is in the heavens and on earth declares the praises and glory of God." (Surah 64:1) Muslim tradition also teaches that God is beautiful as seen in the 99 beautiful names of Allah. Muslims acknowledge that the prophet Daood (David) wrote the Zabur (Psalms) where he testifies; "One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD." (Psalm 27:4, NIV)

Since April 2024 millions of people have seen eye-catching news stories highlighting awe-inspiring displays of the solar eclipse and aurorae. These beautiful celestial scenes prompt people to ponder these signs and acknowledge that there is, indeed, an Almighty creator God who is surrounded by "splendor and majesty ... strength and beauty are in his sanctuary." (Psalm 96:6, ESV) Interestingly, the Qur'an describes true believers as "those who remember Allah ... and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth..." (Surah 3:191, Muhsin Khan)

Let me share a recent conversation I had in the elevator with a neighbor, Jill, when I asked a simple question, "Did you get the opportunity of seeing the beautiful night lights called aurora?" She replied, "No, but I did see some beautiful photos on social media." Then she added, "We also need to realize there is danger behind the beauty." I agreed with her since the beautiful aurorae are generated by sun flares. It was barely two months earlier that severe sun flares impacted our planet causing the highest level geomagnetic storms in almost twenty years. I acknowledged that her warning is not only true for the northern lights, it also applies to the solar eclipse which many people witnessed in early April. People were sternly warned not to look directly at the sun without wearing protective glasses otherwise they could suffer blindness.

Let me share another example from a few weeks ago. I asked an attendant at the motel who was serving me breakfast if she had been able to see the northern lights. She replied with a beaming smile, "Yes I did see them, they were so amazing!" I told her that though I didn't

actually see these lights myself, I did see several beautiful pictures. One was especially lovely which included bright yellow, merging into pink and also blue. I offered her a teaser to an article, titled, 'Reflections on the aurora' and explained that it gives a link to the colorful picture I had described. She gladly accepted my offer. Then an hour later I got into a similar pleasant conversation with the lady at the front desk while checking out of the motel. She also accepted the teaser, but interestingly, when she read the first sentence she remarked, “We already have this posted on our community board,” which means that the attendant I had talked with earlier had already posted it!

This encounter at a motel reminds me of a similar experience in a restaurant when I asked the waitress if she would like to read a fascinating riddle. She accepted my offer so I gave her a slip of paper with a couple verses from Ecclesiastes 3 on it; “There is a season for every activity under heaven; a time to be born and a time to die. ... God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart yet even so people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.” A few moments later I saw her sharing it with a couple other waiters!

Both these experiences illustrate how something 'beautiful' can spark someone's curiosity and whet their appetite to learn more about God. The first features beautiful aurora, whereas the second has to do with God making everything 'beautiful' for its own time. It highlights immortality – a longing for eternity which God has planted in the human heart. Whereas the first example focuses on the human capacity to admire aesthetic beauty as seen in colorful northern lights (or a sunset), the second example appeals to our heartfelt longing to live forever. Both of them reflect how we are made in God's image, and thus, lend themselves to engaging neighbors in thought-provoking yet gracious conversation about spiritual things, pointing ultimately, to Jesus Christ.

The paradox about beauty and danger behind the aurora and sun flares can be glimpsed in 1 Timothy 6:16 which declares that God “lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will.” We see a helpful illustration of this where

Saul dramatically encountered the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and was blinded by a “light from heaven brighter than the sun.” (Acts 26:13; cf. 9:8-9) A similar description of Jesus is found in Matthew 17:2 recounting how he was transfigured in front of Peter, James and John so that his face shone “like the sun.” Again John sees a vision of Jesus in Revelation 1:16-18 with his face shining “like the sun in all its brilliance.” John is so stunned by this dazzling brilliance that he falls at Jesus “feet as though dead. Then he [Jesus] placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.’” (NIV)

Could it be that Jesus is more than a mere mortal man because he arose victorious over the grave and therefore, has authority over death? In fact, he makes the astonishing claim, “I am alive for ever and ever.” Notice how sharply this contrasts with the Hadith which teach that Isa will die and be buried after he returns to earth in the end times! Also notice that Jesus Christ claims to be, ‘the First and Last,’ a title that no other person ever claimed as it belongs to Almighty God. This is one of many statements in Scripture showing that Jesus claimed equality with God. (Revelation 1:8,17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13) On the one hand, God alone is worthy of worship, yet John's vision repeatedly describes people and angels worshiping God **and the Lamb** (a title uniquely applied to Jesus).

Two other Scriptures about Jesus and sunlight which imply his deity are Revelation 21:23 and 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. They read as follows:

The city [New Jerusalem] does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ... For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

**God is beautiful and colorful**

When a beam of light shines through a prism it produces a beautiful spectrum of rainbow colors. In a similar way, considering that God is light, it is no surprise that Scripture describes a magnificent rainbow around God's throne and a stunning spectrum of colors in the heavenly city, also called the New Jerusalem. Let's consider two passages.

In Revelation chapter 21 God shows the apostle John a vision of the new heaven and new earth. One aspect of this is a wedding celebration involving a beautifully adorned bride with her groom, God's Lamb (v. 2,9). Interestingly, further glimpses of the bride's beauty are provided in verses 18-21,

“The (New Jerusalem's) wall was made of jasper, and the city was pure gold, as clear as glass. The wall of the city was built on foundation stones inlaid with twelve precious stones: the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were made of pearls—each gate from a single pearl! And the main street was pure gold, as clear as glass.”

This colorful display of precious stones inlaid in the foundation of the New Jerusalem are evidence of God's beauty and love. As human beings made in God's image we express loving creativity by choosing to wrap gifts to our loved ones in colorful paper when we celebrate. How hard is it to imagine that God would take delight in splashing color across the sky? Think of rainbows, auroras and sunsets or even colorful birds and butterflies. These show that God loves the beauty of color in his creation and he also made us with a special capacity to appreciate such beauty.

Consider this thought: the auroras are not unlike the stunningly beautiful descriptions in Revelation 21 pointing to our future hope of a fully restored new heaven and new earth. Such colorful aurora displays could be compared to the brilliant multicolored jewels adorning the future foundations of the new Jerusalem which God lovingly prepares as the home of the Lamb and his bride. Admittedly, this wedding imagery is difficult for Muslims to understand, as it points to the surpassing love Jesus has shown for his bride, the church. Jesus himself said, “There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.” (John 15:13) And this is precisely what Jesus did when he gave his life as a ransom for us, dying

on the cross as the Lamb of God “to take away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Scripture also teaches husbands to love their wives, “just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27) Many unbelievers, including Muslims, don’t know that Jesus is called the Lamb and are unfamiliar with the backstory behind the title, Lamb, mentioned 19 times throughout Revelation. (cf. Genesis 22:8,14) Obviously the expression, ‘the Lamb who was slain’ in Revelation 13:8 highlights Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross which is the heart of the gospel.

Not only is the bride of God’s Lamb dressed beautifully, Scripture describes colorful splendor surrounding God’s throne as seen in Ezekiel’s vision. This passage concludes by mentioning the beautiful imagery of a “rainbow shining in the clouds on a rainy day.” Here is the full quote from Ezekiel 1:26-28:

Above this surface was something that looked like a throne made of blue lapis lazuli. And on this throne high above was a figure whose appearance resembled a man. From what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like gleaming amber, flickering like a fire. And from his waist down, he looked like a burning flame, shining with splendor. All around him was a glowing halo, like a rainbow shining in the clouds on a rainy day. This is what the glory of the LORD looked like to me. When I saw it, I fell face down on the ground, and I heard someone’s voice speaking to me.

This rainbow imagery in combination with clouds and rain, calls to mind the sign of the rainbow which God used to reassure Noah and all his descendants that he would never destroy the whole earth by flood waters again. But one may ask: What’s the point of promising to never (again) destroy the world by water, if God knew that humanity would continue being sinful and rebellious, and he would eventually have to destroy the world again, this time by fire?

Scripture answers this question in 2 Peter 3:3-15,

Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again?



From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.”

They deliberately forget that God made the heavens long ago by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed.

But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being **patient** for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment. Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the **new heavens and new earth** he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.

And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight.

And remember, our Lord's **patience** gives people time to be saved. (bold added)

In the final analysis, the rainbow symbol serves as a reminder that God is forbearing and **patient** with our sinful, rebellious world. What is true of God is also true for humans. As it is written, “A person's wisdom yields **patience**; it is to one's **glory** to overlook an offense.” (Proverbs 19:11, NIV, bold font added)

Down through history the human race has persisted in sin which has, in a sense, tested the limit of God's **patience**, so to speak. Even in Ezekiel's day when God displayed the rainbow around his throne, judgment hung

over the nation of Israel. Ezekiel was given the unpleasant task of warning a sinful, rebellious people that judgment and destruction were coming, if they refused to repent. Sadly judgment did come and many were killed or scattered and exiled from their homeland.

Interestingly, Jesus showed the truth of this proverb (19:11) about overlooking an offense when he asked God to forgive those who crucified him since they did not really understand what they were doing. (Luke 23:34) They didn't realize that Jesus was completely innocent, that he is God incarnate. The above passage from second Peter three shows that when the end finally comes, and God vindicates himself by destroying the heavens and the earth with fire, it will all be “to his glory.” This is the prelude to the restoration/re-creation of a new heaven and a new earth filled with God's righteousness and peace. (Revelation 21)

## **Examples of God's forbearance**

The prophet Isaiah declared God's message to Jews and Gentiles alike, the Holy One, says this: “I live in the high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I restore the crushed spirit of the humble and revive the courage of those with repentant hearts. For I will not fight against you forever; I will not always be angry. If I were, all people would pass away—all the souls I have made.” (Isaiah 57:15-16)

The Qur'an also teaches divine forbearance/patience,

And if Allah were to seize mankind for their wrong-doing, He would not leave on it (the earth) a single moving (living) creature, but He postpones them for an appointed term and when their term comes, neither can they delay nor can they advance it an hour (or a moment). (Surah 16:61, Muhsin Khan)

Almost everyone has heard about the prophet Jonah who was sent to proclaim God's wrath and impending judgment against the wicked people of Nineveh. At the end, Jonah was surprised and upset when God held back his judgment because they humbled themselves and repented. Instead of being glad that they had listened to his preaching Jonah became angry and complained, “I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.



You are eager to turn back from destroying people. Just kill me now, Lord! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen." (Jonah 2:2-3) But heaven rejoices when one sinner comes to repentance! We began by looking at God's beauty and goodness so it is fitting that as we begin to wrap things up, we should now consider how to respond to his goodness. The apostle Paul challenges his readers,

Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant [forbearing], and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? (Romans 2:4)

A recent example of God's wonderful kindness is the magnificent aurora lights that were admired by millions of people around the world especially since May 2024. During this latest cycle of solar flares it is evident that God has graciously allowed us to view these displays of northern and southern lights without experiencing devastating impacts like the electricity blackouts that occurred across the province of Quebec as a result of severe geomagnetic solar storms in March 1989.

However, thoughtful readers will ponder the possibility that in the not-so-distant future our world may experience more devastating effects as seen in recent research published by BBC, titled, 'The superstorms from space that could end modern life', by Jonathan O'Callaghan. This article warns, "The Sun is going through a period of high activity, but it is nothing compared to an enormous solar event that slammed into our planet 14,000 years ago. If one were to occur today, the effect on Earth could be devastating." [<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240815-miyake-events-the-giant-solar-superstorms-that-could-rock-earth> ]

The Bible foretells an end times scenario somewhat like a monster solarflare or superstorm mentioned in the above article. "Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, causing it to scorch everyone with its fire. Everyone was burned by this blast of heat, and they cursed the name of God, who had control over all these plagues. They did not repent of their sins and turn to God and give him glory." (Revelation 16:8-9) We should recognize, therefore, that this current period of solarflare cycles when we are able to view beautiful displays of aurorae means that God is being patient and slow to anger before he sends the superstorm of judgment. (Bear in mind, that this current cycle is

expected to peak some time next year.) Also note: these beautiful lights imply that God is mercifully and lovingly beckoning and inviting us to accept his gift of salvation. The bottom line is: mercy and judgment are divine attributes. God is both compassionate and holy.

Earlier we saw glimpses of God's plan to renew the heavens and the earth as foretold in Revelation. We also read about the beautiful adornments of the bride of God's Lamb. Now, in conclusion, it is fitting to see how Revelation ends by highlighting eternal life, a theme Solomon alluded to in his wise saying about God planting eternity in the human heart. How beautiful it is to see God fulfilling this longing!

## **Conclusion**

The apostle John describes true believers in heaven,

they stand in front of God's throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter.

They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun. For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water.

[this imagery calls to mind 'living water—eternal life' which Jesus offered to the woman of Samaria in John chapter four. Note: Samaria is roughly equivalent to what is, today, called the West Bank]

“Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” ...

Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ... No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him.

And they will see his face, ... The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” Let anyone who hears this say, “Come.” Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life.”

(Revelation 7:15-17; 21:1,4; 22:1,3,4)

Let me share an encouraging story illustrating how God quenches our spiritual thirst as mentioned in Isaiah 55:1,11; “Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine

or milk—it's all free! ... I send it out [my Word], and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to."

A couple weeks ago I was buying milk at a store and was happy to see one of the staff, a Muslim lady whom I first met five years ago. I hadn't seen Sarah for about 4 months and it's been even longer since we discussed anything spiritual. So in our latest encounter when she confided that she was baptized last year I was totally surprised and praising the Lord! I'll never forget my first encounter with her when I entered the store and she greeted me with a smile as she does with all customers. I smiled back at her and then walked over to the counter and exchanged a few words while giving her a card containing a wise saying from Ecclesiastes 3:11; "God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart." A few minutes later she went looking around the shop until she found me. "I want to tell you personally," she said, "how much I appreciate that card you gave me."

Whenever I saw Sarah after that remarkable encounter she seemed open and even curious to know more. I shared some intriguing gospel insights from the Old Testament but then a couple years passed with little or no indication that she was taking these seeds to heart – until now.

### **Endnote 1: Made in God's image/likeness**

Earlier we noted in Ezekiel's heavenly vision "a figure on the throne whose appearance **resembled** a man." (Ezekiel 1:26, bold added) We also noted that the apostle John saw a heavenly vision involving a figure who was **like** a man. John describes this figure as "someone **like** the Son of Man." (Revelation 1:13, bold added) Jesus repeatedly identified himself in the gospels as truly human by using this title, 'Son of Man' (Matthew 24:36-44) and yet he also claimed equality with God by identifying himself as the Son of God. (John 1:18, 3:16-18; 10:31-39; Matthew 26:63-64)

Since Muslim readers adamantly reject this title, Son of God, let me remind you of a hadith qudsi which acknowledges that Adam (and mankind) were created in the image of God. A team of six international Islamic scholars have plainly admitted this fact in their recent publication, *The Study Qur'an*. A footnote to Surah 95:4 quotes the phrase in Surah 64:3, "human beings are the best of God's creation" and also references

a famous hadith qudsi which echoes Genesis 1:27, “Truly God created Adam in His image.” Remarkably, the footnote actually references Genesis 1:27 and then continues, “This hadith is understood to mean that human beings are created with such attributes as life, knowledge, power, will, speech, hearing and sight (the qualities most often used in Islamic theology) to describe God which are, in fact, Divine attributes.”

Interestingly, Luke 3:38 describes Adam as “the son of God.” This statement concludes a long list of names tracing the history of Christ's ancestry. In what sense, therefore, is Adam God's son? The simplest and most obvious way of explaining this expression is that Adam is **like** God because he was made in God's image. Notice also that Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be **like** us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.” (bold added)

Note: the word 'like' in the Hebrew language means that although we are like God in certain respects, humans are not the same as God. This vital subject is discussed in more detail in the article, 'Jesus Son of God.'

## **Endnote 2: Colorful aurorae are only visible at night whereas rainbows can only be seen in the daylight. Is there any spiritual significance to this?**

A rainbow is truly beautiful and it reflects God's grace and compassion. Yet even more stunning is a multicolored aurora as seen on the cover which contrasts starkly with the surrounding darkness. This is illustrated in Philippians 2:14-15, “Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights [stars] in a world full of crooked and perverse people.” (cf. Daniel 12:1-3) As God's children we ought to live pure, innocent lives in a dark, morally bankrupt and perverse society so we may shine like bright stars against the backdrop of a dark night sky. You can also search online to view photos taken by space telescopes showing star clusters that shine even more magnificently against a dark background.

Questions/comments? Write me @ rolandclarke1139@yahoo.com

Copyright 2024 by Roland Clarke

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial NoDerivs2.5 License. This means one may freely copy it without making any changes (<http://creativecommons.org/about/licenses/>)