

Verse 15 contains a strange phrase: "Glorify ye the LORD in the fires." Many commentators seek to interpret this as the converse of the latter part of the verse, which speaks of "the isles of the sea." The sea is to the west; therefore they take the fires as indicating the east. This they do by considering fires as a synonym for light, and light as standing for sunrise, which would naturally indicate the east. The verse then would mean that God would be praised both in the east and in the west.

This is a very interesting idea, but it can hardly be derived from this verse. Hebrew has other ways to express "sunrise," or "east." "Fires" is an entirely different idea. It is true that the Hebrew word, by a change of vowel, could be made into the common word for "light." Even then, it would hardly naturally mean "sunrise." As it stands it does not mean "light," anyway. It is similar -- perhaps identical -- with the word Urim which stands for something connected with the high priest's breastplate (Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; et al). Other wise it occurs only six times in the Old Testament. All but this one are in the singular. In one instance it is translated "light" (Is. 50:11), but in the context it means the light of a fire. In the other four instances it is translated "fire." Isaiah 31:9 speaks of "the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem." In Isaiah 44:16 and 47:14 it refers to a fire where one may warm himself. In Ezekiel 5:2 it occurs in God's command to the prophet to "burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city." Clearly the word indicates fire as distinct from mere light, and it is hard to see any connection between it and a means of designating the east.

What then does our verse mean: "Wherefore glorify ye the LORD in the fires?" Does it not indicate the fires of tribulation and suffering? Does it not indicate that the time to follow the exile will be one when God's people will go through persecution and misery, and yet will praise God in the midst of the fires?

As we think of the history of God's people since the time of Isaiah we find that it has been, on the whole a time of insecurity and frequent persecution. We think of the difficulties faced by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as they glorified God in the fiery furnace. We think of Daniel in the lion's den. We think of the early Christians, dying as flaming