

Bible Lives

Vol. 2

Prophets: Moses, Joshua, Samson, Elijah, Jonah, Daniel

Duncan Heaster

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P.O. Box 152

Menai NSW 2234

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www.aletheiacollege.net

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Contents

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

- 1 The spirit of prophecy
- 2 The counter-cultural message of the prophets
- 3 Frontal attack on indifference
- 4 The prophetic attack on pride and wealth
- 5 The prophets and injustice
- 6 The prophetic criticism of Israel's religion
- 7 The prophetic experience
- 8 Hosea: Case Study

MOSES

- 1 Moses And Us
 - 1-1 Moses Our Example
 - 1-2 Moses And " The reproach of Christ"
 - 1-3 Moses And Paul
- 2 Moses: The Path Of Growth
 - 2-1 Events In The Life Of Moses
 - 2-2 The Spiritual Growth Of Moses
- 3 The Death Of Moses
 - 3-1 Themes Of Moses In Deuteronomy
 - 3-2 The Song Of Moses
 - 3-3 The Death Of Moses
- 4 Moses As A Type Of Christ
- 5 Moses Not Entering The Land
- 6 Moses In The Gospel Of John
- 7 Moses And Amalek
- 8-1 God Manifestation In Moses
- 8-2 The Hand Of God

JOSHUA

- 1 Events In The Life Of Joshua
- 2 Legalistic Obedience?
- 3 Peer Pressure
- 4 Joshua Our Example
- 5 Joshua: Potential Messiah?
- 6 Joshua And The Name of God

7 Rahab And The Fall Of Jericho

SAMSON

- 1 A Character Study Of Samson
- 2 Samson And Deja Vu
- 2-1 Repetition In Biblical Narratives
- 2-2 Samson And Job
- 2-3 Samson And Gideon
- 2-4 Samson And Solomon
- 2-5 Samson And David
- 3 Samson's Marriage (Judges 14:1 - 15:8)
- 4 Samson At Lehi (Judges 15:9 - 20)
- 5 Samson In Gaza (Judges 16: 1-3)
- 6 Samson And Delilah (Judges 16:4-21)
- 7 The Death Of Samson (Judges 16:23 - 30)
- 8 Samson A Type Of Christ

ELIJAH

- 1 Elijah's Strength: Elijah And Prayer
- 2 Elijah In Weakness
- 2-1 Fire From Heaven
- 2-2 Playing God
- 2-3 Elijah And Others
- 2-4 Elijah And Moses
- 3 How God Worked With Elijah
- 4 Elijah And Angels

JONAH

- 1 Jonah: A Type Of Christ
- 2 The Preaching Of Jonah
- 3 Jonah And The Gourd
- 4 Jonah and Nahum

DANIEL

- 1 The Character Of Daniel

The Spirit Of Prophecy

1. The Spirit Of Prophecy

The preaching or testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, says Rev. 19:10. I understand this to mean that our testimony to Jesus is in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets. For Rev. 22:6 associates the God of the holy prophets [a phrase referring to the Old Testament prophets in Lk. 1:70 and Acts 3:32] with the same God who is with us in our witnessing to Christ. And Rev. 18:20 speaks of those prophets rejoicing in the last day together with all preachers of the Gospel. This is why incidents from the lives and teaching of the Old Testament prophets are repeatedly alluded to in the New Testament and applied to all of us. James 5:10 puts it bluntly- the prophets are to be taken by us as our examples. Thus the prophets become our pattern for witness; they are our “brethren the prophets” (Rev.22:9). And so an understanding of them becomes programmatic for our witness today. Our audience, the world in which we live, is in essence that in which the prophets lived. Isaiah was up against the attitude that “Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die” (Is. 22:13)- and Paul quotes that passage as relevant for all Christians who hold the hope of resurrection amidst a world that does not (1 Cor. 15:32).

Firstly, we need to clear up the misconception that the prophets were merely fax machines, dispassionately forwarding God’s message to men. Their words were indeed the words of God, they were inspired, but they also had emotional involvement. All Scripture is indeed God-breathed, but this involved the prophets in breathing in of that Spirit and exhaling it, as it were (2 Tim. 3:16). The passage in 2 Pet. 1:19-21 has been somewhat misunderstood. Holy men of God indeed spoke as they were “moved” by the Holy Spirit; but, contrary to what is repeated parrot fashion by so many, the Greek for “moved” doesn’t necessarily mean ‘irresistibly carried along’, as if the prophets had no personal input into what they said. The Greek word *phero* appears several times in 2 Peter:

- “The grace that is to be *brought* unto you” (2 Pet. 1:13)
- “There *came* such a voice to [Christ] from the excellent glory” (2 Pet. 1:17)
- “This voice which *came* from heaven” (2 Pet. 1:18)
- “The prophecy *came* not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *phero* [‘as they were...’ is not in the original- it’s in italics in the AV] the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21)

Clearly enough, *phero* in 2 Pet. 1 doesn't mean 'irresistibly carried along by'. The context of 2 Pet. 1:21 is a warning that as there were false prophets in Old Testament times amongst the people of God, so there will be in the new Israel. Peter's stress is that the Old Testament prophets were *holy*, they spoke according to the will of *God* and not the will of *man*; their words came from the Holy Spirit, and not the spirit of the flesh- in distinction to the false prophets who spoke of the flesh.

Now all this is not to say that some prophets were not 'carried along' against their will almost. Heb. 1:1 states that God spoke to the prophets in various manners. We can understand by this that inspiration took various forms. Consider Num. 12:6. God tells Moses and Aaron that [at that time] He reveals Himself to prophets by dreams and visions, but with His prophet Moses, He uses another method- He spoke with Moses "mouth to mouth". Whilst all prophets spoke God's word, they each had different processes of inspiration at work. Not all prophets went through the process of inspiration of which we are going to speak in this study. God reminds Israel that "day after day", ever since they left Egypt, He had *consistently* and *persistently* sent His prophets to them- there was never a day when a prophet wasn't active (Jer. 7:25; 11:7: 25:4; 26:15; 29:19; Am. 3:7; 2:12). And yet obviously we only have the written record of a few of those prophets.

God And Man Together

That said, there was of course a sense in which the impact of Divine inspiration couldn't be resisted (Am. 3:8 etc.); and yet this somehow was congruent with the freewill of the prophet, and the process happened still within the vortex of the prophet's own temperament. Note how Peter says that the prophet was a 'man of God' who was moved by God's Spirit to write Scripture; whereas Paul says that the Spirit-inspired Scriptures are what makes a 'man of God'- us- who he is (2 Tim. 3:17 cp. 2 Pet. 1:21). There is a mutuality here, in which even we in this age can have a part. Although the prophets were on God's side as it were, sharing His spirit, speaking His words, they were also men, and they were largely Jews, members of the nation upon whom He was announcing His wrath. At times, they reason with God. Amos delivered God's judgment against his people, and then pleaded: "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee! How can Jacob stand?... the Lord repented... It shall not be, said the Lord" (Am. 7:2-6- other examples in Is. 6:11; Jer. 4:14; Ps. 74:10). This was how well the prophets knew God; and yet again, it shows that they weren't merely impersonally reproducing a message from God. They were involved in it and highly sensitive to it.

So often in the prophets, the pronouns change. One moment we have God speaking, the next, the prophet is responding in agreement, appealing to his people, or echoing the message in his own words. So in Is. 1:2,3 we have the direct words of God, ending with “They have rebelled against me... my people does not understand”. And then in Is. 1:4 we have Isaiah echoing back those thoughts of God: “They have forsaken the Lord”. Prophecies begin with God speaking in the third person, and end with Him speaking in the first person; and vice versa. In all these examples, we see God merging with His prophet, and vice versa (Am. 3:1; Is. 3:1,4; Is. 5:1,2 cp. 3-6; 7; Is. 10:12; Is. 11:3,9; Is. 22:17,19,20; Jer. 11:17; Jer. 23:9,11; Jer. 9:1,2; Is. 53:10,12; Is. 61:6,8; Is. 1:2,3,4; Jer. 4:1,2,21,22; Jer. 8:13,14; Nah. 1:12,13). However, there was more than an echo going on between God and the prophet. There was a kind of dialectic in the Divine-human encounter. God is influenced by man, as well as man by God.

And yet despite this unity of spirit between God and the prophets, the prophets weren't always forced to say the words. Jeremiah didn't want to say them at times, the weariness of it all got on top of him; and yet he felt unable to walk away, just as God felt with Israel. But there were times when he outright rebelled. Jer. 20:7 is made a mess of in most translations, because the obvious translation is simply too shocking. Jeremiah complains: “O Lord, thou hast seduced me [s.w. Ex. 22:16 of a man seducing a woman], and I am seduced; thou hast raped me [s.w. Dt. 22:15] and I am overcome” (Abraham Heschel's translation). Here is Jeremiah saying that he was attracted by God, he was seduced by Him, but then the whole thing became too much- he felt his soul had been raped. And yet in Jer. 15:16 he says that he had found God's word and eaten it, and as a result, “I am called by thy name, O Lord”- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his “joy [and] delight”- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was “full of the wrath / passion of God” (Jer. 6:11). A prophet could only be incensed if God was incensed (Num. 23:8)- such was the bond between them. No wonder these men felt alone amongst men. They had a relationship with God which others couldn't enter into, which totally affected their lives and beings. The preacher / testifier of Jesus knows something of this spirit of prophecy. But in Jer. 20:7, Jeremiah felt he had been raped and not married. He resented the complete takeover of his heart. In Jer. 15:15, Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and in Jer. 15:18 accuses God of deceiving him. God's response is to ask him to repent of this, so that he can resume his prophetic work: “If you [Jeremiah] return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me [prophetic language]. If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as my mouth” (Jer. 15:19). Perhaps Jeremiah had this

incident in mind when he commented: “The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word” (Lam. 1:18). This indicates that at least in Jeremiah’s case, he was not irresistibly carried along by the Spirit in some kind of ecstasy, having no option but to speak God’s word. His speaking of God’s word required that he shared the essentially loving and gracious spirit / disposition of his God.

Scholars have struggled to understand whether the Old Testament prophets were writing prose or poetry. The passion and emotion in the prophet perhaps resulted in the words having a kind of metre and style which can appear poetic without actually being poetry. This feature is a reflection of their passion. Peter Ackroyd, who was a novelist and biographer as well as a theologian, commented: “the words of Isaiah are neither prose nor poetry but, rather, a series of incandescent utterances which effortlessly find their true form” (1). And he quotes the poet Coleridge: “Wherever passion was, the language became a sort of metre”.

The idea of prophets was well known in the world around ancient Israel. The idea of a prophet was that a person was caught up in some kind of ecstasy, transported into some ‘other’ world, and leaving behind their humanity. The true prophets were different. Their inspiration was about being attuned to the mind of God, they remained very much in the flesh and in the world, and the subjects of their prophecy related to very real, human things- injustice, a guy building an extension on his house without paying the labourers. Not flashing lights and ethereal coasting through space. The pagan prophets (e.g. the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:26-29) worked themselves into a frenzy in order to reach a state of depersonalization and loss of consciousness, in the hope that then they would be filled with Divine consciousness. True prophets like Amos were absolutely different; the inspiration process required them to be fully in touch with their own consciousness and personality, and it was exactly through their humanity that the personality of God came through in the inspired words they spoke and wrote. Amos perceived the Lord’s word, and then ‘butted in’ as it were, in full consciousness: “O Lord God, forgive, I beseech Thee! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” (Am. 7:2). This is the very opposite of the pagan prophets losing touch with their human senses and reasoning. Likewise consider Jeremiah’s response to receipt of God’s word: “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth”. In fact we could say that whereas the false prophets aimed to lose consciousness in order to receive something from God’s consciousness, the true prophets received heightened sensitivity and conscience / consciousness in order to receive God’s word and to know His mind. The message which the true prophets received wasn’t some vague abstraction or personal transport into an unreal world. What they received from God was the sense that this world and its fate are very dear to its creator. It was because the true prophets entered into the mind of God,

that this issued in the experience of words. The false prophets tended to experience something *happening*; whereas the true prophets experienced the thoughts of God, which issued in words. Their experience had form, but no content. And I can't help adding that the Pentecostal 'Holy Spirit' experiences appear to me to be the form of ecstasy claimed by the false prophets. Receipt of God's true revelation involved dialogue with God, even disagreement with Him for a moment, response, pleading, speech and counterspeech. It wasn't a case of merely passively hearing a voice and writing it down. Part and parcel of hearing the word of God and being inspired with it was to react to it in daily life- hence Ezekiel couldn't mourn for his wife, Hosea had to marry a whore as a reflection of God's love for Israel, Isaiah had to walk naked (Is. 3:17). Truly "The prophet threw his whole self into his prophecy, and made not his lips alone, but his whole personality, the vehicle of the divine 'word'" (2). The inner accord which the prophets had with the mind and word of God led to their personalities being like God's. And mankind's laughing them off as crazy, as mentally disturbed, was effectively their rejection and mocking of God Himself. We're reminded of how the suffering Son of God in His time of dying, the highest and most intense expression of God's love, was "the song of the drunkards" (Ps. 69:12). The prophets "spoke from the mouth of Yahweh" Himself; and yet the people scoffed at them (2 Chron. 36:12,16 RV). The power of inspiration was and is so great; and to not heed God's word is therefore a personal affront to Him.

Notes

(1) See Peter Ackroyd, *Studies In The Religious Tradition Of The Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1987) pp. 105-120.

(2) H.H. Rowley, *The Servant Of The Lord* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) p. 118.

2 The Counter-Cultural Message Of The Hebrew Prophets

Israel had come to perceive of Yahweh as a god like the gods of the other nations and tribes around them. The prophets consciously brought home the fact that He is unique, and *not* at all like any local pagan deity. The pagan gods were thought to punish their people for minor infringements of ritual, or simply because deities were cruel at times. Yahweh wasn't like that; His judgments came only after passionate pleading, after being deferred time and again, and even then, they came in order to bring about correction, as a purging (Is. 1:25,26 and often), and not as an expression of irritation or mere anger of a capricious, unstable deity. "He has torn, that He may heal us" (Hos. 6:1). Amos speaks of Israel's final judgment as a day of their meeting their God, and he

urges them to prepare to meet Him (Am. 4:12). This was no grim fatalism, an angry final statement. The language is shot through with allusion to how both Israel and Moses were told to prepare to meet Yahweh at Sinai (Ex. 19:11,15; 34:2). But that meeting involved a declaration of God's Name, the foremost characteristic of which was that God is a God *full* of mercy and love for His people.

The Love Of God

The Canaanite tribes spoke of how their gods were married to their *land* and would defend it. But the prophets, especially Hosea, reveal Yahweh as married to His *people*. "Thus says the Lord, O my dear people [*bath 'ami-* as if they are God's partner]... make mourning... for suddenly the destroyer will come upon *us*" (Jer. 6:22,26). God delicately speaks as if He is married to Israel, and that even in their sufferings, He would suffer with them, as a husband suffers with his wife. "The destroyer will come upon *us*" even sounds as if God let Himself in a way be 'destroyed' in Israel's destruction; for each of us dies a little in the death of those we love. The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (Lam. 1:1; Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question- if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of God is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God's feelings at His peoples' destruction. In a context where the first person pronouns clearly refer to God and not Jeremiah, we read: "Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is grievous... truly this is a grief, and I must bear it. My tabernacle is spoiled... my children are gone forth... there is none to stretch forth my tent" (Jer. 10:18-20). This is the almost unbelievable extent of God's pain and hurt for His people. Truly did it hurt God more than His children knew to punish them. Jer 6:8 and Ez. 23:18 speak of how God's soul "departed" from His people- but the same word is translated to hang / crucify (Num. 25:4; 2 Sam. 21:6,9,13). It's as if God was crucified in His pain for Israel. And in the death of His Son He went through that pain. And so never, ever, ever... can we nor Israel complain that our pain is greater than God's. Never.

God left Himself as a mighty man that cannot save, as a wayfaring man wandering through His own deserted land (Jer. 14:8,9). "The Lord of hosts" even calls the mourning women to come "and raise a lament over *us*" (Jer. 9:17,18). The "us" is God and Israel. The tragedy is awful, beyond words. All commentary is bathos. His love is wondrous. "Thy love is better than life", David said (Ps. 63:3)- 'more than my own life do I value God's love, *hesed*, covenant love, for me'. Indeed, Hosea's reference to *daath elohim*, the knowledge of God, has been observed as strikingly intimate, hinting as it does of God 'knowing' His people and them knowing Him, in the same way as a man 'knows' a woman. Hence the utter pain of Hos. 5:4: "The spirit of harlotry

is within them, and they know not [i.e. sexually] *the Lord*'- although they 'knew' so many others, they were sexually obsessed. This was God's pain, lived out by Hosea. It was that very "knowledge of God" which He desired, rather than burnt offerings (Hos. 6:6). For as Amos put it, "You only have I known..." (Am. 3:2). No wonder the prophets needed psychological strengthening to be able to share in these tragic feelings of God. But this was part of their spirit, and it is to be the spirit of our urgent appeal to men to respond in faithfulness to God's love. When we read: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people... Oh that I might leave my people!" (Jer. 9:1,2) we can too easily assume that these are the thoughts of Jeremiah. But the references to "my people" in the passage point us toward God as the person expressing these feelings. And then in Jer. 9:3 we have the speaker defined: "... and they know not me, said the Lord". These were *God's* thoughts. He wished He had human tear ducts to weep with... this was how He felt for them.

The Wrath Of Love

The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are 21st century readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out

how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism.

God paints Himself as acting with the anger of a very angry husband, whose anger is rooted in the profoundness of His love for His wife. There is a dark side to intimacy. It's why families, lovers, both spiritual and natural, experience the heights of both love and frustration / anger with each other. With a love like God's, it's inevitable that there is a strong element of jealousy and potential hurt over us. It has to be so. And yet as we know the story of the prophets never ends with the angry judgment- amazingly, given this level of anger and judgment / retribution, there is always the passionate appeal for Israel to return, to recover love, romance and intimacy in the relationship. Taking as it were a snapshot of the nature of the judgments God expressed, this is indeed hard to swallow. It's hard to read Jer. 31:16-34, how God will slay Rachel's children, leave her weeping for them, and then dry her eyes and speak of a new covenant and new relationship with her. But the point of it all is that this indeed is how radical the cycle of sin, judgment and repentance really is in the lives of each of us. If a movie were to be made of all this, none of us would be able to resist it. The story of how through love gone sour, estrangement, rape and battery, a couple triumph in love and true, eternal intimacy. But this is the wonder and power of true repentance. And it is also a powerful window into the consequence and nature of human sin. These metaphors and images of God as the jilted lover convey the reality of sin and reconciliation in a way that no amount of prose ever could. And yet it wasn't only metaphor- all this was lived out in the feelings of Hosea for Gomer. He could only have had those feelings if he very deeply loved her. The whole story, the images and ideas... surely leave us knowing once and for all that our religion and relationship with God simply can never be merely abstract contemplation of Biblical ideas, devoid of commitment and passion in response to God's love. All these wonderful ideas come down to us through reading and reflection upon Scripture. But Bible reading, understood and felt as it should be, can from now on for us surely never again be a passive, neutral, private experience. If we truly are in covenant relationship with this wondrous God, it demands our all. Our failures, forgiven as they are, will haunt us for their awfulness; and the wonder of His love will never cease to move us to real tears in the midst of this unemotional, too busy, post modern world. And the experience of God's ever new love and forgiveness will lead us to rise above all the examples of failed relationships and marriages we are surrounded with, to realize quite simply that those whom we love, we forgive. And the vastness of God's love means that He genuinely forgives us. And we too will go on risking ourselves, making ourselves vulnerable, to love again, to forgive again, knowing His love for us. But of course all this hinges around our perception of our sins and unfaithfulness being what it is.

The shocking sexual language and imagery of the prophets was in order to help Israel see that this was how far they had outraged God. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences (2). Just as for a woman to have her skirt ripped above her head and her nakedness displayed was ultimately humiliating for her, so Israel had humiliated God by their sin (Jer. 13:25-27); their actions were just as shocking and obscene. And yet we... so minimize sin. Just a bit of injustice, a little touch of selfishness, a moment of hypocrisy... but all this is obscene treatment of our God. We read the description of the red clothing, gaudy jewellery and heavy make up of the harlot Israel in Ezekiel and Jeremiah... and this is how inappropriate is mere external religion (Jer. 4:30). And we're all guilty of that, in some ways at some times. And we all know the downward spiral into sin... how once we start, we can't stop. But when Israel were like this, they are likened to a female camel in insatiable heat (Jer. 2:23-25; 5:7-9). We'd just rather not read that, or retranslate the words to make it seem somehow different. But we're dealing with serious matters here. Sin is serious to God.

Knowing God: The Spirit Of Prophecy

The prophets shouldn't be seen as angry old men. They were filled with the wrath and emotion of God. But God's wrath is, as they frequently say, but for a moment. Always there is hope in His wrath, that it will bring about reformation. We're helped not to see the prophets as angry old men if we perceive the difference between anguish and anger. They spoke with more anguish than anger. In this context it needs to be noted that the language of "Woe!" is not to be read as angry threat and rage, but rather is it anguish, "a summons to grieve a death" (1).

Hosea dreamt or fantasized about the day when, he hoped, Gomer [cp. Israel] would return to him. And we find God through the prophets doing this often, as an expression of His love for them. He dreamt of how Israel as His vineyard would again be fruitful: "In that day: A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!... I [will] guard it day and night; I have no wrath" (Is. 27:2,3). He had wrath, and yet at the thought of Israel's blessed future with Him, He could say "I have no wrath". The God who spoke of slaying Israel with thirst in Hosea could then comment: "I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man... and I will *not* come to destroy" (Hos. 11:9).

God hasn't wound up this world and left it ticking by clockwork, dispassionately looking on as Israel and all His people make such a mess of things. He sends the rain, consciously; not a sparrow falls from the air [i.e., as the result of a man's sling stone- for birds die in their nests usually, not in mid-flight] without Him being aware, and, by implication, grieving for it. He even

knows how much sparrows are sold for (Mt. 10:29). Any serious study of Bible teaching about the Angels reveals just how intensely God is working every moment, how much energy He consciously expends. We know that e.g. the decision to kill Ahab involved a large amount of discussion, suggestion and rejection of various Angelic plans etc (1 Kings 22). When we read that “Surely the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (Am. 3:7), we might tend to take that as a statement of absolute principle that is obvious to all the Angels. But we find an Angel discussing with others: “Shall I hide from Abraham [who was a prophet] what I am about to do?” (Gen. 18:17). My point quite simply is that the Angels have more debate, expend more mental and physical energy than we surely realize, in order to operationalize things which we might consider to be standard and automatic in God’s work with men. In our context, what this means is that when men reject the machinations and schemings of God’s love, they reject an awful lot; and it grieves and disappoints Him, and appears tragic to those like the prophets who see things from His viewpoint.

Notes

(1) J.H. Hayes, ed., *Old Testament Form Criticism* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974) pp. 164,165.

(2) See Phyllis Trible, *God And The Rhetoric Of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) pp. 31-71.

3 Frontal Attack On Indifference

The reality of God’s anger, His hurt, His jealousy, means that God isn’t indifferent to sin. And neither should we be, increasingly surrounded by it as we are, with sin presented to us as the norm of human existence. We may feel or express disapproval at sin; but God’s reaction is something which language can’t convey. It results in the broken heart of God. This is the message of the prophets: that we must end our indifference, quite literally, for God’s sake. Sadly, many readers of the prophets seem to feel that these men are merely droning on, one prophet, one chapter, seems so much like the next. Yet read sensitively, and in a good translation, the words of the prophets expose us to a relentless shattering of indifference. Their words are onslaughts against cherished assumptions, patterns of living, challenging our endless evasions of issues, calling faith and behaviour to account. They are the very voice of God passionately imploring us to turn more fully to Him. Their task was “to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8; Is. 58:1). Jer. 28:9 seems to imply that no true prophet prophesied only peace to Israel- there was always an exposure of sin and an appeal to repentance. That was part of their

ministry. And it was directed at the people of God, for the most part- to us, the ecclesia. And it's indifference, lack of passion, which, it seems to me, is the besetting tragedy of our age. When did you last really shed tears? When were you moved, really wrenched in your gut, by the suffering of others, by the sin of this world, your own sin, your part in humanity's tragic rejection of God... when did you last *feel* for God in His pain, as He sees His beloved children and creation walk away from Him day after day, second after second? When did you last feel ecstatic joy, deep sadness... in this post-modern world of surface level emotion? It's in all this that the words of the prophets and their personal nature as people challenge us- and their spirit is to be the spirit of our testimony to Jesus in this world. They called upon men to "hate evil and love good" (Am. 5:15), to have some passion about our positions.

Our world's devaluing and misunderstanding of sin has likely affected all of us. We see the rich abusing the poor, manipulation of all sorts going on, petty injustices, hypocrisy in the ecclesia, falsehood, cheating in business, white lies, unkindness to ones' brethren... and we shrug and think that it's just normal, part of life as it is. And yet for the prophets, these things were a catastrophe. Saying one thing to someone whilst feeling differently about them in the heart was the reason for God passionately wishing to take vengeance "on a nation such as this" (Jer. 9:8,9)- note that the whole nation are counted as guilty, in that society just shrugged at hypocritical words. What to us are the daily minor sins and injustices of life were to them issues of cosmic proportion. Nobody in our current society would consider what you *think* to be a criminal act; and nobody did in early Israel, either. But time and again, the prophets passionately call down judgment for "evil thoughts" and "evil hearts" (Jer. 3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 14:14; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17). Sins committed in private we tend to accept as irrelevant to us; yet Hab. 2:11,12 says that "the stone shall cry out of the wall" because of wicked plans hatched within the walls of that room. "There is no regard for man" was the complaint of Is. 33:8- the value and meaning of the human person was disregarded. And this was the cause of 'bitter weeping' (Is. 33:7). Perhaps we could say that the prophets are characterized by taking the individual seriously. We seem to have a hard enough job maintaining a sense of the value of persons ourselves, quite apart from weeping that others don't have such values. This level of sensitivity to human sin is quite something; and yet this is the spirit of prophecy. In the ancient world it was felt that, as Cicero put it, "the gods attend to great matters; they neglect small ones" (*De Natura Deorum* Vol. 2, 167). The God of Israel was and is quite different; for as the prophets show, what men may regard as small issues are to Him all and vitally important. That slightly unkind email, that less than truthful passing comment on a brother, that exaggeration... these aren't trivialities to God. What to us are trivialities are crucial to Him; that's the message of the prophets. The spirit of the prophets cried out in pain and anguish because of that kind of thing; and their spirit is to be ours. There's

something alive and passionate to the words of the prophets. They're not just droning on. Although they largely wrote in poetry, let not this delude us from feeling the cutting edge of their passion. Their poetry wasn't what Wordsworth thought poetry is- "emotion recollected in tranquillity". The attack on complacency and passionlessness was full frontal: "Tremble, you women who are at ease [as you stroll the supermarkets of today], shudder, you complacent ones [as you hang out with your friends, lost in small talk]; strip and make yourselves bare" (Is. 32:11 RSV- the RSV seems to me to capture the passion of the prophetic words best of all the English translations).

Who we are now is who we will eternally be; hence the intense responsibility we should attach to all our actions, attitudes and deeds. One of the many dangers of the myth of an 'immortal soul' is the assumption that we can live in this life as men, and then go on to a totally different life on death. No. We are developing now towards the character and essential personality we will eternally be. C.S. Lewis, for all his other wisdom, wrote a book about death called "The Great Divorce", his idea being that at death there is a great divorce between our present earthly life and our eternal, future life. He couldn't have dreamed up any more dangerous a philosophy. Who we are now is who we will eternally be, and so we'd better live now towards tomorrow. There will be no great divorce between the Duncan of today and the eternal Duncan of the Kingdom age.

It was tragic for the prophets that the people were so indifferent. They portrayed the tragic, passionate love of God to His people, they sung of it, wrote of it, made poetry about it [for much of the prophetic writing is poetry]. And yet they passed this off as mere "allegory" in a mocking way (Ez. 20:49), Ezekiel was "to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice... for they hear what you say, but they will not do it" (Ez. 33:32). They were like buskers singing songs in the subway, which we may listen to with half an ear, even admire them for a few moments, and then walk on in our busy lives. But the prophets were speaking forth the words of passionate love of God Almighty for His people... truly as Paul Simon put it, with an uncanny appropriacy to our train of thought, "the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls". They thought that "the Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill" (Zeph. 1:12); "the Lord does not see us" (Ez. 8:12; 9:9); "my way is hidden from the Lord" (Is. 40:27; 29:15). This of course is the attitude with which we daily live. The question is, will we perceive it as the prophets did?

The prophets were up against the same passionless spirit that pervades our societies today. The Jews came to discount the existence of God as a person, and condemned any form of anger or passion: "God loves him who never gets angry" (*Pesahim* 113b); "He who gets angry is regarded as if he would worship an idol" (Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Deoth, Vol. 2, 3). "Do not get angry and

you will not sin” (*Berachoth* 29b). By contrast, consider Ps. 4:5 (quoted in Eph. 4:26 and exemplified in the anger of the Lord Jesus): “Be angry and sin not”. The Rabbinic commentaries changed this to “Tremble before God, and you will not sin”. Likewise “the Lord thy God [is] a jealous God” (Ex. 20:5) was changed in the Targums to “I am a God above jealousy” (*Mechilta*). The prophets speak so often of God’s wrath, love, hurt, pain, passion, anger, pathos... And they speak too of the terrible “repentings”, the kindling of contradictory impulses, which there apparently is in the mind of God. He is angry with sinners, but He will not be angry for ever because “from me proceeds the spirit, and I have made the breath of life” (Is. 57:16-19); His passionate, constant outpouring of energy into His creation means He simply won’t be angry with man for ever. But amongst the Jews there was a revulsion against the idea of God having passion, being angry, and His children sharing those same emotions. It’s the same basic approach as the obsession we have today with ‘nice speak’- don’t be too committed, go so far but no further, don’t appear extreme. Here the spirit of the prophets must be our urgent example- we are to have passion for the positions we adopt. And of course that involves us in being careful, Biblical and prayerful about what positions we adopt. It was the passion with which the Lord Jesus held to His positions that so endeared Him to the Father. Because He so loved righteousness and hated iniquity, the Father so highly exalted Him (Heb. 1:9). This division within the Lord between righteousness and sin is perhaps reflected in the records of the wilderness temptation- sin and righteousness were so clearly divided in His own mind that the record is written in the unusual way it is.

Perhaps more than anything, the prophetic descriptions of condemnation were aimed at attacking the indifference which pervaded Israel. The power of sexual imagery is used to the full in the description of rejected Israel as a whore all dressed up with no place to go, so utterly unwanted and despised (Jer. 4:30,31). This was and is the tragedy of Divine rejection of those who have so desperately sought the approval of this world, when all too late they find this world is over for good.

4 The Prophetic Attack On Pride And Wealth

For all the issues which the prophets could have condemned people for, pride was high on their list. “I abhor the pride of Jacob”, Amos cried out in dismay (Am. 6:8). Jeremiah wept in secret, his eyes running with tears, “for your pride” (Jer. 13:15-17). Isaiah gets passionate about the way that Assyria thought that “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom” (Is. 10:13). Because Ephraim trusted in his wealth, the most awful words of judgment are pronounced upon him (Hos. 12:8; 10:13,14). We shrug when we see pride and trust in wealth. Rich or poor, we all tend to trust in money.

Thinking that that's life... under the sun. But the prophets went ballistic about this. We've developed established patterns of indifference to this kind of thing. But the prophet's consciences were keenly sensitive to these patterns, and they openly challenged them. They weren't just empty moralizers, bleating on about the state of the nation; their words are an assault of the mind and conscience. Amos speaks of judgment to come in dramatic terms 'just' because creditors sold their debtors into slavery just to recover the cost of a pair of shoes (Am. 2:6,7). Jer. 22:13-19 is a long and passionate condemnation of Jehoiakim for building an extension to his house, using his neighbours as workmen and not giving them the agreed wages. We see this sort of thing all the time. And shrug and think it good fortune it didn't happen to us. But that's not the spirit of prophecy. In the midst of Judah's prosperity, with a land "filled with silver and gold" (Is. 2:7), visions of doom haunted Isaiah's soul; he couldn't just go along with the swing of things, knowing that all that wealth was an illusion and being used as an antithesis to faith. Now that's something we see all the time around us and in the brotherhood; but is our soul touched like his was? Do we know the spirit of the prophets?

To trust in weapons, foreign powers etc. rather than on God alone was something about which Isaiah wailed and lamented (Is. 22:8,11). In our terms, this may translate into situations like what we do when we feel the first onset of an illness; when our car won't start... do we trust on human strength, on the pretensions of science, and turn to God if all else fails? There can scarcely be one of us who doesn't see this pattern of response in our lives. And yet, in prophetic terms, this is *awful!* That we don't first and totally turn to our God. Human "might is not right" (Jer. 23:10); human power is fiercely criticized by the prophets. "One of the most striking and one of the most pervasive features of the prophetic polemic is the denunciation and distrust of power in all its forms and guises" (3). "Not by might, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6; Mic. 7:16). The Jews of Isaiah's day turned to political alliances with the Egyptians to save them from the threat of Assyria. Isaiah insisted: "Do not rely on horses! Do not trust in chariots... the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit" (Is. 31:1,3). Egypt and Assyria are likened to mere tiny insects, a fly and a bee. Yet Judah were doing what was humanly sensible and smart. To trust in politics, in what seems the usual human response to an issue rather than trust in God, is in fact something which breaks God's heart. With Assyria at the height of her power, Isaiah proclaimed her downfall (Is. 14:24-26). The life of faith in God is simply the very opposite of what seems humanly sensible. To give money we'd surely be better saving; risk our lives and health for another; neglect our business or career for the sake of the Lord's work. These ought to be the *normal* decisions we make, if we are walking in step with the spirit; and yet it would appear that they are the exceptions to the rule of far too many of our lives. And the point is, God's heart broke because His people were and are like this.

5 The Prophets And Injustice

The prophets not only reflected God's dismay and passionate feelings, they expressed their own dismay too. Lack of justice was a major concern of the prophets. But to us, injustice may be so commonplace we don't really worry about it too much. Given all the idolatry going on at the time of Jeremiah, we'd have expected the condition for being spared judgment at the hands of their invaders to be: 'Throw your idols away!'. But Jer. 34:11,22 offers them a reprieve if they stopped abusing their brethren. When, temporarily, the Jews ceased doing that and proclaimed liberty to their brethren- the pending judgment was put on hold. When they again abused their brethren, not giving them the "liberty" which must be afforded to all those made in God's image, then the Babylonians returned. And we need to ask whether we proclaim liberty to our brethren- or abuse them by not allowing them the basic freedom which is the dignity God allows to each of His children. It's rather like Paul writing to the Corinthians, and firstly addressing the sin of their divisiveness. What about their drunkenness at the breaking of bread, false doctrine, idolatry, using temple prostitutes? Paul focuses firstly on the sin of their divisions. Likewise, there were a host of issues the prophets could've raised with Israel; but injustice is the recurring theme. Because of the injustice going on in Jerusalem, Isaiah calls her a whore (Is. 1:21). Jeremiah speaks of running to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem, searching her squares, to see if he could find a single man who did justice and wasn't greedy (Jer. 5:1,5; 6:6,13; 8:10). Why get so ballistic because people are greedy and have no real sense of justice? Isn't that part of the human deal, don't we see it every single day? Yes we do. But the challenge of the prophets is to feel its' awfulness and realize that for this, an awful judgment is coming from God. It is indeed hard to see the world from God's perspective; but this is what the spirit of prophecy was and is all about. The prophets stood in the presence of God, and partook in His "council", i.e. His inner circle of trusted friends (Jer. 15:19; 23:18). Note that in this and many other passages, Jeremiah isn't hitting at the specific sin of named individuals; rather does he criticize Jewish society as a whole for allowing such injustice. Jeremiah's running around the streets was reflective of how God was desperately and urgently in search of men who shared His Spirit, who saw what He's really getting at.

The American Rabbi Abraham Heschel made the point that it's inaccurate to think of men searching for God- although we hear the phrase so often, and even think we may've done it (1). The fact is, God is desperately searching for man; hence the ecstatic joy of God and man meeting, with all the Angels in Heaven rejoicing over 'just' one repentance. Heschel came out with another phrase that rambles on my mind: "God is in need of man" (2). Indeed, the prophets present Him as searching for *a* specific man, and finding Him in Messiah. God is

searching for us, longing for us, as the father watching for the prodigal's return. And it is this spirit / disposition of God which we are to have in our pleading outreach to humanity. We're extending the tragic and even desperate search of God for man. Our witness can certainly not be indifferent, take-it-or-leave-it, just a bald presentation of Biblical information... there must be some heart and soul and spirit to it, reflecting none less than the searching, longing heart of God Himself. Is *our* testimony to Jesus in this spirit of the prophets? With whom have you talked this week? To whom have you reached out, for whom have you prayed that they might return to their God? Why not make prayer lists of people whom we desperately wish would turn to God...? And when one does turn, this spirit will lead us to do all we can to ensure he never turns away again.

God's search for man is a repeated theme of the prophets. "Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, I saw your fathers" (Hos. 9:10). "He found him in a desert land... He encircled him, He cared for him, He kept him as the apple of his eye" (Dt. 32:10). "I said, Here am I, here am I... I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people... I called, no one answered" (Is. 50:2; 65:1,2; 66:4). "I have found David my servant" (Ps. 89:20). So it's not us as it were reaching out to God; He is fervently reaching out to us, and we have to come to realize that. We don't so much as find God, as realize that He already is earnestly with us. Every man and woman is somehow a life "bound in the bundle of living in the care of the Lord" (2 Sam. 25:29). We come to realize that before we were formed in the womb, God knew us (Jer. 1:5).

6 The Prophetic Criticism Of Israel's Religion

We tend to think that if others are hypocrites, well, I'd better ensure I'm not. But this indicates a lack of perception of the glory of God, and omits the factor of how *He* must feel at all those other peoples' hypocrisies; the glory that is intended to be given to Him, that isn't. Because of hypocritical "songs of praise" to God, Isaiah felt physically ill- "I pine away, I pine away" (Is. 24:16). The prophets felt for God, seeing things from His viewpoint. They had the spirit of Moses, who wished to see Israel in the land glorifying God, and was willing for his name to be blotted out of the book of eternal remembrance for that to happen. In that spirit, Moses even earlier could rejoice in song that "Thou wilt bring *them* in and plant *them*" (Ex. 15:17) rather than "You will bring *us* in...". The prophetic desire was to see God glorified rather than their own success. This is the spirit of the prophets. This is what led them to see the tragedy of insincerity, of indifference, of the don't care attitude.

Like many of the surrounding peoples, the Jews were sure that because they had a temple, because they offered sacrifice to their God and went through required rituals, therefore they were OK. The prophets exposed all this as scandalous pretension, revealing Israel's cherished beliefs and suppositions about these things as meaningless and false. Their surrounding world taught that if you offered sacrifice to your god, all went smoothly. And yet Jeremiah blasts them: "To what purpose does frankincense come [up] to me... your burnt offerings are not acceptable" (Jer. 6:20). Time and again Jeremiah accuses the people of purposefully inciting God to anger through their worshipping of Him (Jer. 7:18,19; 11:17,18; 25:6; 44:3-8)- whereas the onlooker would've likely commented that at least they were doing *something*, and Jeremiah should just calm himself down about it all. He uses a grating sarcasm in Jer. 7:21-23: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh... I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings...but this command I gave them: Obey my voice". The people loved their temple: "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord...' they said. And Jeremiah responds: "You trust in deceptive words to no avail" (Jer. 7:4,8).

And time and again, the prophets predicted the destruction of the temple by the God of Israel. This was radical stuff in those days; the idea was that the survival of a god depended upon the survival of his temple or shrine. No pagan god would threaten to destroy his own shrine. Israel's God was so different. Likewise a pagan god looked after his own people against their enemies. But Yahweh of Israel sent and empowered Israel's enemies against them, and gave them victory against His own people; He encamped against His very own people (Is. 29:2-4). The archenemy of Israel, Assyria, was revealed as a rod in the God of Israel's hand (Is. 10:5 etc.), and the King of Babylon was Yahweh's servant who would come against Yahweh's own people (Jer. 25:9; 27:6 etc.). The will of Israel's God was that the capital city, seen by the people as the symbol and nerve centre of a god's power and control, was to be destroyed by Israel's enemies (Jer. 34:1-5; 21:3-7). In the surrounding culture of Israel, capital cities were portrayed as women, the wives of the gods. They are always presented as pure and wonderful. But the prophets represent cities like Jerusalem and Samaria as fallen women, whores. It was all *so* counter-cultural. Yahweh's prophet even appealed for Israel to surrender when under siege (Jer. 21:8-10). Try to enter into how radical and counter-cultural all this was. The prophets were trying to share the feelings and positions of a God *so* vastly different to the imaginations and understandings of His very own people. The nervous stress of this, the psychological pressure, can't be underestimated. And we are asked to share the spirit / mind / disposition of those prophets. Not only was God on the side of Israel's enemies; yet through all that, He somehow *was* with Israel; quite simply, "God is with us", even though it is He who encamps against them too (Is. 8:9,10; 18:4). The God of Auschwitz is somehow still the

God of Israel. The very torment, even torture, of understanding that was etched clearly in the prophets, and it will be in us too.

7 The Prophetic Experience And Prophetic Consciousness

But how did the prophets get like this? Their own spirituality obviously played a part in it; but further, Jeremiah speaks of how he came to see Israel for who they were: “The Lord made it known to me and I knew; then thou didst show me their evil deeds” (Jer. 11:8). Ezekiel was shown “what the house of Israel is doing in the dark” (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must’ve been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would’ve been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and “iron pillar” to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn’t be “dismayed at [the] looks” of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

This psychological strengthening was absolutely necessary- for no human being can live in a constant state of inspiration without breaking. The composer Tchaikovsky commented: “If that condition of mind and soul, which we call inspiration, lasted long without intermission, no artist could survive it. The strings would break and the instruments be shattered into fragments” (4). The whole tremendous experience of having God’s mind in them, sharing His perspective, seeing the world through His eyes, made the prophets appear crazy to others. There’s a marked emphasis upon the fact that they were perceived as madmen (e.g. Jer. 29:24,26; Hos. 9:7; 2 Kings 9:11). For us to walk down a street for even ten minutes, feeling and perceiving and knowing the sin of every person in those rooms and houses and yards, feeling the weeping of God over each of them... would send us crazy. And yet God strengthened the prophets, and there’s no reason to think that He will not as it were strengthen us in our sensitivity too.

The prophets weren’t fax machines, computer hardware that prints out whatever message comes into it. There was a personal identification between them and the word they spoke. And that, as now, is what gives human words authenticity and power- when it is apparent that the person and his words are one. Their emotions were God’s; Ezekiel even lost his wife in order for him to be able to enter more into how God felt. This was an exhausting task. No

wonder they needed this psychological strengthening. The prophets weren't merely informing men ahead of time that God's judgments were coming; rather were they sharing with the people the Divine pathos, His feelings and sense of tragic rejection. The prophets were therefore not mere fax machines; their own feelings were involved in the act of transmission of God's feelings to men through words. Even despite the special psychological strengthening which they received, sometimes the whole prophetic experience seemed too much for them, as it does for us: "Therefore I said, Look away from me... do not labour to comfort me for the ruin of my people" (Is. 22:4). The prophets believed their message, to the point that it overcame them with grief that men wouldn't heed them. Is this how we feel at the rejection of our message? Is our testimony to Jesus really in the spirit of these prophets...? Can we identify with Micah when he lamented and wailed, going stripped and naked, because of the import of what he was prophesying, and human rejection of it (Mic. 1:8,12)?

The voice of the prophets didn't go entirely unheeded. A tiny minority responded. Isaiah had his school of disciples, referred to in Isaiah 8. The books of the prophets were presumably written up (under inspiration) by their disciples, and the biographical sections added by them. So the very existence of the books of the prophets itself indicates they had some converts who hung on and valued their every word. And yet despite this, the prophets felt lonely men, despite the converts they made- Micah felt like a tree left alone, naked and bare at the end of Summer (Mic. 7:1). Jeremiah "sat alone" (Jer. 15:17). Not only was their perspective on human sinfulness so very different to that of their audience. They preached a message which was counter-cultural and attacked the very bases of the assumptions which lay at the core of individual and social life in Israel. They appeared to back Israel's enemies. Their message was therefore rejected. Jeremiah lamented: "For twenty three years... the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened" (Jer. 25:3-7). The prophets saw the love of God, but saw too how Israel spurned it and refused to understand it. It must've been a tragic and awful experience. The very essence of God's Name was that He has a perpetual and passionate love for His people; but they didn't believe it, nor were they even very interested (5). The prophets spoke of the amazing grace and eternal love of God for Israel, how His wrath endured but for a moment (Is. 57:16; Jer. 18:23); and yet Israel asked: "Will he be angry for ever?" (Jer. 3:5). It was more than frustrating for the prophets; they shared God's feelings of having poured out so great a love, to see it ignored and disregarded, no time to look at it, too busy sowing my seeds, weeding my garden, having coffee... Jeremiah mourned Israel's lack of spiritual sensitivity and failure to live up to their potential- they had eyes, but didn't see (Jer. 5:23), they were God's servant, but a blind one; His messenger, but unable to hear any message (Is. 42:19). So the prophets weren't satisfied just because a minority responded to their message of

God's love. They were hearbroken because the majority rejected it. I suspect we tend to think that 1 response in 1000 is good, 1 in 10,000 isn't bad. But what about the other 999, or 9,999, who receive our tracts, hit our websites, hear our witness- and don't respond? Is our witness in the spirit of the prophets? Are we happy that the tiny minority respond, and don't spare a thought for the tragedy of the majority who don't? Not only their tragedy, but the tragedy for God? Don't forget the vast amount of faith involved in the prophets' preaching- for only very rarely did prophets do miracles to authenticate their word (6). Therefore they'd have been perceived as just ranting on in an obnoxious way. They weren't taken seriously; and yet the prophet felt that the Lord was *roaring* from Zion through his prophetic words (Am. 1:2; Joel 3:16). This essential loneliness and rejection of the prophets by the majority was a significant part of their spirit.

And yet, and here's the paradoxical nature of the spirit of prophecy, the prophetic experience wasn't merely negative. Micah realized that the apparently negative message he had would actually "do good to him who walks uprightly" (Mic. 2:7). Jeremiah found God's words to be the joy and delight of his heart (Jer. 15:16). And of course, the prophets did enjoy some response. Isaiah had his "sons", his school of disciples who heeded him; Jeremiah had his few faithful friends; and there always was a righteous remnant whom the prophets had converted. All the prophets have the feature of strangely mixing declarations of fierce judgment with prophecies of God's grace, of His final acceptance of Israel. Some of the finest descriptions of God's coming Kingdom on earth, based around Jerusalem and the land of Israel, are to be found wedged between the most angry predictions of God's wrath and judgment against His people. This in itself reflects the 'two minds' of God toward His people, and the resulting tension within the prophet's personality too; the 'struggle' between law and grace, between justice and mercy. Hosea especially mixes such prophecies, e.g. that God will "slay her with thirst", rend her like a lion, with declarations that God passionately loves Israel as a mother, a lover who'll forgive anything, a husband... The wrath of God, His grief at sin and being rejected, is intertwined with His amazing grace and love. That the extent of God's anger arises from the degree of His love is perhaps reflected in the way the Hebrew words for "lover" and "hater" are so closely related- *oheb* and *oyeb*. Hos. 2:9 appears to make a word play based around this. The gravity and emotional enormity of each 'side' of the total equation, the huge tension of the equilibrium that keeps them in perfect balance in God's character and words, was reflected in the prophets personally; and it will be in us too. The result of this is that the anger of both God and His prophets becomes understandable as more an expression of His and their sorrow, the hurtness of their love, even their weariness. God says that He has "had enough" of Israel, even saying "I am weary to bear" them (Is. 1:11-15). Is. 43:24 specifically speaks of God's weariness with His people- and this too was part of the prophets' spirit. And yet

shining through all that is God's hopefulness for His people, and His grace: "The Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore will He exalt Himself [in judgment] to show mercy to you" (Is. 30:18). This wasn't an angry God hitting back at a rebellious people; this is the God of Israel looking at judgment only as a way to reveal His grace and mercy in the longer term.

All the same, the tension within God is apparent. Hosea's the clearest on this. God wants nothing more to do with His adulterous people; and then He pleads with them to come back to Him, breaking His own law, that a put away woman can't return to her first husband. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?... mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together" (Hos. 11:8). And Jeremiah has more of the same: "How can I pardon you... shall I avenge myself on a nation such as this? Shall I not punish them for these things?" (Jer. 5:7-9,28,29). God reveals Himself as oscillating between punishing and redeeming, judging sin and overlooking it. God is open to changing His stated plans (e.g. to destroy Nineveh within forty days, to destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation). He isn't like the Allah of Islam, who conducts a monologue with his followers; the one true God of Israel earnestly seeks dialogue with His people, and as such He enters into all the contradictory feelings and internal debates which dialogue involves. 'God loves the sinner and hates the sin' has always seemed to me problematic, logically and practically. Love is in the end a personal thing; in the end love and hate are appropriate to persons, not abstractions. And the person can't so easily be separated from their actions. Ultimately, it is persons who will be saved or condemned. The prophets reveal both the wrath and love of God towards His people, in the same way as a parent or partner can feel both wrath and love towards their beloved.

These oscillations of feelings, the sharp opposition between judgment and mercy, were felt equally by the prophets, who were breathing in God's spirit. Consider all the other oppositions and paradoxes which there were in the prophetic experience:

- Speaking for God against Israel, when they themselves were members of Israel
- Appearing to be on the side of their own peoples' enemies
- Holding an understanding of Israel's God that was contradictory to Israel's own understanding of their God
- Understanding why judgment should come, and yet like Habakkuk crying out with the question "Why?" (Hab. 1:2-4). After twice approaching

God with this question, and each time being given fresh insights into the awful nature of the judgment to come as a response, Habakkuk ends up with a trembling body and lips that ‘quivered at the sound’... and yet, at the very same time, feels that he still “will rejoice in the Lord” (Hab. 3:16,18). What a torn man he was.

- We’ve seen that the prophetic experience made them feel married to God. But the prophets were also Israelites, and they felt like this: “We have all become like one who is unclean... we all fade like a leaf... our iniquities take us away” (Is. 64:6, and note Daniel’s prayer of confession of Israel’s sins in Dan. 9, where he feels as if he too has sinned with them). At times, the prophets are paralleled with Israel- Jeremiah was a “prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5), and yet this was Israel’s role (Is. 49:2). Both the prophets and Israel are described as “the servant of the Lord”. But God and Israel were in the process of divorce, as they knew. The prophets were both on God’s side, and Israel’s. They were torn men. Just as God Himself was. He appeared “like a man confused” (Jer. 14:9).

- At times pleading with God to change the word which they themselves had pronounced and knew to be justified. Is. 62:1-7; 51:9 even appears to be Isaiah’s challenge to the Lord to not let His judgment remain on Zion- Isaiah will not keep silent, nor will his fellow prophets, until God acts. He begs God to not restrain Himself, and to take note of the desolation caused (Is. 63:15; 64:8-12)

- The prophets appeal for their people to repent to avert God’s judgments; and yet they proclaim a message of grace, that because “I *have* swept away your transgressions [therefore] Return [repent] to me, for I *have* redeemed you” (Is. 44:22). The fact of God’s forgiveness leads to repentance- by grace. And yet the prophets also appeal for Israel to repent *so that* they might be forgiven.

- Seeing the world through the eyes of both God and man- Jeremiah said that God’s wrath was his wrath, “I am full of the wrath of God” (Jer. 6:11), and yet he stood before God “to turn away thy wrath from them” (Jer. 18:20).

- Sometimes wishing to abandon their very own people (Jer. 19:1), just as God felt at times

- Oscillating between anger and grace

- The very prophetic call was “to pluck up and break down... to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:10)

- Being betrayed and hated by their own people, and yet feeling such pain for the judgment to come upon them- despite being so badly treated by Judah and his own family, Jeremiah was still struck with pain at the thought of their judgment: “My anguish! My anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly...” (Jer. 4:19-21)

- Giving visions of impending judgment, and then, within moments, visions of Israel’s blessed latter end

These contradictions, paradoxes, oppositions, call them what you will, were felt deeply within the prophet’s personality. The bi-polarity resulted in some of them exhibiting bi-polar emotions- e.g. Jeremiah one moment is cursing the day of his birth, the next, he is ecstatically joyful. The phenomena of depressed, bi-polar believers was once something I felt awkward about, even ashamed of. But now, it makes sense to me. Research into the bi-polar condition is still limited. But what has been established is that it is the presence in the person of seriously conflicting loyalties, emotions, persuasions, even belief systems, which has something to do with it. In some ways, it’s more of a condition, a state of being, than a disorder. It doesn’t surprise me that Jeremiah appears to have acted in a bi-polar manner. God can have multiple relationships with people simultaneously, feeling joy at one event and deep sorrow at another event, even though the events are happening at the same time. He also sees to the end of history. His nature allows such multiple feelings without any disorder. But for a mere man on earth, invited to share in the inner council of God, the experience of these things was and is deeply destabilizing. Yes, God made men like Jeremiah a brazen wall, hardened their faces... and yet all the same, the experience of all this would’ve led to a certain element of emotional bi-polarity. Perhaps this opens some kind of window into understanding the emotional and psychological experience of the believer, especially those involved in preaching.

8 Hosea: Case Study

I’ve written elsewhere about the love of God in and through Hosea (7); here I’ll try to not repeat what I’ve said elsewhere. Hosea’s love for Gomer was an image of God’s love for Israel. But he wasn’t merely acting a role; his feelings throughout the book are genuinely his feelings and actual experience. Therefore we can conclude that he really did passionately love Gomer. He was a spiritual man, and yet he fell so deeply for this very unspiritual woman, doubtless aware that she wasn’t really worthy of him, knowing in himself that likely she wouldn’t reciprocate his love and would betray him. And yet he went ahead and did it, a spiritual man marrying an unspiritual and immoral woman, because a) he must’ve been a very passionate man and b) quite simply, because

he loved her with a love that was so great, a deathless love, love that would go to the death if it could for her, but circumstances didn't thus arise, and he went on living, but with that passion of love for her. Now every part of this mentality reflects that of God. He knew, for He knows all things, that Israel would betray Him, just as Samson knew Delilah would, yet still he trusted in her and loved her. And yet God still went ahead, because He is passionate, and because He is love itself for Israel. And this God is our God...

It seems to me that the statement that God told Hosea to go marry a promiscuous woman was perhaps (and I'm not at all dogmatic about this) not made in so many words. The book of Hosea is Hosea's inspired write up of his life. As his life and self-understanding unravelled, he realized that his passionate attraction to that faithless woman was in fact a command from God, and he realized more strongly that his marriage had in fact been a parable of God's love for Israel. It was perhaps with hindsight that he reflected that effectively, God had asked him to love Gomer with the love of God towards Israel (Hos. 3:1). Perhaps this is why God isn't recorded as telling Hosea to marry Gomer, but, to marry a promiscuous woman.

Throughout the book, Hosea clearly speaks on God's behalf, even though he at times speaks in the first person. It's hard at times to realize whether Hosea is talking about his own marriage, or about God's feelings to Israel. And that's understandable, given the view of inspiration we have been discussing. The feelings of Hosea were God's feelings; He was inspired with the spirit / mind / attitude of God Himself. Thus in Hos. 2:4-25 we appear to have a monologue in which Hosea speaks to his wife and kids; but he speaks to them as if it's God speaking. So close was his identity with God's feelings as a result of the pain of his failed marriage and family life. The way Hosea redeems his wife, partly in cash and partly in kind, suggests he wasn't wealthy- he gave absolutely all he could scrape together for that worthless woman. And this was the cost to God, even His feelings, in redeeming His people- ultimately, through the blood of His own Son. And think of how Hosea accepts the children Gomer produced as his children- when they were the children of her whoredom. Presumably she went to the idol shrines and was a prostitute. She describes them as what she received from her lovers (Hos. 1:14). And the idols of Israel are described by Hosea as their lovers, with whom they were unfaithful to Yahweh (Hos. 2:7-15; 8:9; 9:10). It all fits together. Gomer got pregnant with the idol worshippers, she was unfaithful to Hosea by sleeping with them, just as Israel were doing the same to Yahweh by worshipping those idols. No wonder Hosea came to know the heart of God through his experience with Gomer. He knew, it seems, ahead of time, that Gomer was a wife who was going to become adulterous. Adultery of course implies that she wasn't adulterous at the time of marriage. Additionally, Andersen and Freedman argue on grammatical grounds that "a wife of whoredoms" in Hos. 1:2 means a wife who would become adulterous

(8). No young man would surely marry a woman whom he knew would be adulterous later on. And yet perhaps in a way Hosea is saying that he did know this, but, his love for her was so strong, he married her. Just like God, when He met idol-worshipping Israel in the wilderness. They carried through the desert their god Remphan and the tabernacle of Moloch with them, as well as Yahweh's tabernacle. And yet it was there that Yahweh, the God who knows the future and the destiny and spiritual path of every man, fell in love with them and spread His skirt over them in love and delight and betrothal (Ez. 16,23). Just as Hosea did. For he married Gomer *bat Diblaim* (Hos. 1:3)- which was apparently the name for a temple prostitute (9). Note how Hos. 3:1 refers to the *dibla*, the raisin cakes used in the Baal cult, from which the word Diblaim comes. Hosea knowingly married a temple prostitute, just as God married Israel, in the hope that their intense love and covenant relationship would reform her and make her responsive to their love.

It's hard to understand what was happening in Hos. 3:1- it appears Hosea attempted to force through to realization his fantasy about re-marrying Gomer and starting over, he redeemed her again to himself for marriage. But still she went astray from him. Another suggestion is that Hos. 3:1 actually speaks of a second wife, who according to the analogy of Ez. 23, might have represented Judah. In this case we see the extreme love of Hosea, and God; having gone through all that heart break over Gomer, he was still so full of love that he was prepared to risk all yet again in another relationship. Note that when God tells Hosea to "go yet" and marry this woman, He uses 'Yahweh' about Himself, rather than speaking in the first person: "Go yet, love a woman... according to the love of Yahweh toward the children of Israel" (Hos. 3:1). Perhaps this was in order to demonstrate the grace and passionate love so inherent within God's very Name.

Sensitivity

There was a tremendous sensitivity in Hosea to both God and to the sin of His people, honed and developed by his own relationship with Gomer. At the start of Hosea's prophecy, Israel were prosperous. They worshipped Yahweh, and assumed He was with them. And yet Hosea discounts their worship of Yahweh as being effectively idolatry. Time and again Hosea accuses Israel of idolatry, using words to describe their idolatry which are word plays on language associated with Yahweh. He speaks of their *kabod* [glory] (Hos. 9:11; 10:5)- a word usually used about the glory of Yahweh. They worshipped *lo'al* (Hos. 7:16)- and he uses *al* to refer to Yahweh in Hos. 11:7. They worshipped *sor* (Hos. 9:13)- the same consonants as *sur*, the "rock" of Yahweh (Dt. 32:31). He calls Yahweh *qados* (Hos. 11:9), but they worshipped *qedosim* (Hos. 12:1). We tend to assume that Hosea's denunciation of idolatry meant that Israel worshipped both Yahweh and various other images and idols of their pagan

gods. But that seems to be an over- simplification. Archaeologists have actually not found much evidence of such gods. Summarizing much research, Cogan concludes: “There is no evidence of Assyrian interference in the Israelite cult prior to the 720 BCE annexation of Samaria [after Hosea’s time]... Israel was free of any cultic obligation” (10). And yet, Hosea speaks for all the world as if there were shrines etc. to other gods all over the place. My conclusion is that the idols, shrines etc. to which Hosea refers were therefore actually understood by Israel as a form of Yahweh worship. But he points out to them that actually, their worship of Yahweh is a form of idolatry. And all this has relevance to us. For actually things like daily Bible reading, attending church, going through the formalities of a religion, can become a form of fetishism rather than parts of the dynamic, Spirit filled life which they ought to be a vital part of. Worshipping Yahweh in the “high places”, i.e. the pagan shrines, was Israel’s besetting sin. It’s rather like the way they turned the bronze snake of the wilderness into an idol. They, like us, never simply turned their back on the true Way. Rather did they mix it with the way of the flesh, the way of the world, and pronounced that as in fact Yahweh worship. And it was all this which Hosea was so deeply sensitive to, as demonstrated by the careful word plays he made, in order to demonstrate that their worship of Yahweh was in fact idol worship.

Another example of Hosea’s sensitivity is his prophecy that the blood of Jezreel would be visited upon the house of Jehu (Hos. 1:4). At Jezreel, Jehu had killed Ahab’s family in a quite literal bloodbath. And God had commented that because Jehu had done this and thus fulfilled His word, Jehu’s family would reign for the next four generations (2 Kings 10:30). So why, then, does Hosea start talking about punishing the house of Jehu for what they did to the house of Ahab? Jehu became proud about the manner in which he had been the channel for God’s purpose to be fulfilled, inviting others to come and behold his “zeal for the Lord” (2 Kings 10:16). Jehu and his children showed themselves to not really be spiritually minded, and yet they prided themselves in having physically done God’s will. And because of this, Hosea talks in such angry terms about retribution for what they had done; the house of Jehu’s act of obedience to God actually became something his family had to be punished for, because they had done it in a proud spirit. We see this all the time around us. Men and women who clearly are instruments in God’s hand, like the Assyrians were, doing His will... but being proud about it and becoming exalted in their own eyes because of it. And Hosea is so sensitive to the awfulness of this, he goes ballistic about it.

The Vital Importance Of Human Behaviour

Hosea 4 described a law suit (Heb. 4:1 Heb.) between God and the inhabitants of the land- and it’s over lack of integrity, mercy and knowledge of God. These

things are paralleled in the law suit with murder, stealing and adultery- things which most people would shrug at are considered by Him to be criminal matters. To seek human help rather than Divine appears a mere common failure. But Hosea uses the same Hebrew words to describe his wife's desertion ["she walked / departed from me", Hos. 2:7,15] as he does to describe the embassy to Assyria as departing / walking there (Hos. 7:11). To seek human help in distress is to be unfaithful to our God. And yet when health fails, a lump appears, the car won't start, we lose our job... to whom do we instinctively turn? Here is the huge relevance of all this to 21st century humanity, who have striven to insure and protect themselves against calamity to an unprecedented extent.

Counter-Cultural Challenges

Our instinctive tendency is to rely upon human strength in time of trouble, to take the insurance policies of the world, to do what seems the humanly sensible thing to do, to take humanly wise precautions. If a person does that and also proclaims a trust in God, we tend to think that's fair enough. But Hosea absolutely lambasts Israel for trusting in political alliances. He calls them a silly dove, fluttering between Assyria and Egypt. Hosea seriously advocated a national defence policy of total trust upon Yahweh, and nothing else. What he was suggesting was against every human instinct. But the spirit of the prophets was to live and proclaim life to be lived in a counter-instinctive way, to do what seems humanly foolish, because of our faith. We have ample opportunity to show that spirit of the prophets, in a society which increasingly seeks to insure and re-insure itself against every possible 'act of God'. Yet Hosea went even beyond all this- he spoke of how Israel would be left "without a king" (Hos. 3:4), and that the ruling dynasty would be overthrown. This would've been seen as seditious and revolutionary, a desire to overthrow the King.

Tragedy

The deathless love of Hosea for Gomer, the very intensity and height of it, in itself highlights the tragedy of God. That His love, yes, the passion and longing of God Himself, was rejected by His people. There are some reasons to think that the book of Hosea was rewritten (under inspiration) during the captivity. Isaiah had explained (Is. 54:7) that although God and Israel had departed from each other, they would come together again by Israel being regathered- i.e. by their return from Babylon to the land. And perhaps Hosea was rewritten at the same time, as an appeal for the Jews to 'return' to their God, i.e. to return to Judah. And yet, so tragically, whilst they all avowed their allegiance to Yahweh, generously supported the few who did return... the majority of the Jews didn't return to their God. They chose the soft life in Babylon, where they remained. It's why the close of the book of Esther is so sad- the Jews are there

in prosperity and popularity in Babylon, no longer weeping by the rivers of Babylon.

Consider how Hosea names his child [if indeed he was the father of it], 'Not my people'. Consider his hurt, to reject a child from his family. This was God's hurt. God, like Hosea, had no other children, no other people. For God to say to Israel 'You are not My people' would leave God without a people, as it were alone in the earth. Hosea shared the tragic loneliness of God.

God At Stake

For Hebrew men like Hosea, the chastity of virgins and the faithfulness of wives were the most important thing in their personal lives (cp. Dt. 22:13-30). And so, the point is being made, God values our faithfulness supremely. The man had a deep sense of shame before the whole world if the woman he trusted betrayed him (Jer. 2:37). The shame of God over Israel was before the whole cosmos, not just some village in Palestine. No wonder Jeremiah wept at the thought of what was being done to God in this way (Jer. 8:22-9:3). The image of the unfaithful wife played deeply on male fears of female sexuality. Hosea was a Hebrew male. And they all feared their women in one way- that she might be unfaithful to him. And this was and is the fear of God for our sin, our unfaithfulness. The Jews who first heard Hosea and others would've been led into taking sympathy with the man, agreeing that the punishment for the woman was appropriate to her sin (Jer. 2:30-37; 13:20-27). And yet of course the point was that it was they who were the woman in all this. We've all seen jealous men in relationships, querying every guy who calls their home number, wanting to know whom the wife's been out with... and on a far higher and altogether not petty level, this is the kind of God with whom we are in relationship. The men of Old Testament times feared their woman's unfaithfulness as it placed his whole honour and status as a man at stake. Hos. 2:7,12 reveals Hosea's hurt and anger that his wife considered other men to be the providers of her food and needs; for this was his honour, to provide for his wife, and for other men not to do that. And so we could say that in our unfaithfulness, in our turning to other supports other than Him... no less that God Himself is at stake. God is at stake. That's how he sees it. That's how much He's risked Himself for us, when He could have never even gotten involved with us. No less than God Himself is at stake. And perhaps I need to stop writing and you need to stop reading for a moment, to reflect on the tragedy of that.

It's not only that God's essential 'Godhood' was at stake. Just as Hosea's great love for Gomer made him so obviously and tragically vulnerable, so God's love for us on this tiny planet has done the same for Him. A great lover is the most vulnerable of persons to hurt and depression. The tragedy of unrequited love is

awful, biting in its tragedy. And the love of God, so infinitely above the dearest of human love, makes Him a vulnerable and potentially tragic figure, just as Hosea was. And yet Hosea's hope and fantasy will ultimately come true for God. The most broken of relationships, that between God and Israel, the deepest betrayal... will one day soon be gloriously resolved in a new world. And we are playing our parts towards that end; for if nothing else, we are called to be God's faithful Israel, His dutiful wife...

The Baal Cult: An Insult To God's Godhood And Hosea's Manhood

By allowing her lovers to provide her food and clothing, she was insulting her husband Hosea (Hos. 2:7). Our lack of faith that God really will provide, our seeking of those things from others apart from Him, is a similar insult to Him at the most essential level of His being and our relationship. The parallel in the God / Israel relationship is clear. The Baal cult was a fertility cult. The idea was that by sleeping with the temple prostitutes, Baal would provide fertility in family life and also good harvests and fullness of bread. Yet Yahweh was the giver of bread to Israel (Ex. 16:29 cp. Dt. 8:18; Ps. 136:25; Ps. 146:7). For Israel to trust Baal for these things was a denial of Him. Hos. 2:18 implies that Israel even called Yahweh "my Baal". And so when Gomer participated in these fertility rituals, she was living out the very picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to their God.

According to Ex. 21:10,11, a husband should provide for his wife food, clothing and sex. The ancient Near Eastern cultures generally felt that in the case of divorce, a husband could recover everything from his wife, on the basis that they had never become part of her property, as she had not been a faithful wife. This could be the idea behind the Hebrew of Hos. 2:11: "I will take back the grain to myself", along with "my grain... my must... my wool... my flax" [i.e. material for her clothes]. Gomer had taken these things from her lovers, and thus she declared herself not to be Hosea's wife. Israel had 'taken' these things from the Baal fertility cult, and thus declared themselves not to be Yahweh's wife. And if we trust in our own strength to provide these things- our jobs, salaries, investments, pensions, families- we are effectively denying our relationship with God. He has promised to provide the basics- and this we need to accept in faith.

Israel's mixture of Yahweh worship with Baal worship is demonstrated by the reference to their being "lovers of raisin cakes" (Hos. 3:1). According to 2 Sam. 6:19, these cakes appear to have been part of the legitimate worship of Yahweh- and yet in Song 2:5 they are referred to as an aphrodisiac. There was a heady mix of Yahweh worship with participation in the sexual rituals of the Baal cult. It was this mixture which was so abhorrent to God- and time and again, in essence, we likewise mix flesh and spirit. A brother may express the

most awful hatred and spite in ‘upholding the faith’ against one whom he perceives as apostate- and thus show the same mixture of flesh and spirit. A sister may indulge in gossip, kidding herself it’s all for the cause of Christian love and concern... and the examples multiply, hour by hour, in daily Christian experience. We see it again in Hos. 3:4- the people were using “cult pillars... ephods” in their Baal worship. The patriarchs set up pillars in faith; and an ephod was part of Yahweh worship. But yet again, the same external things were used in a wrong context with wrong motives. Excavations of the Elephantine community reveal that the Jews mixed Yahweh and Baal worship to such an extent that they believed that Yahweh, like Baal, had a consort called Anat. Inscriptions from Quntillet Ajrud show the names Yahweh and Baal mixed together, including one which appears to speak of “Yahweh and his asherah”. Ez. 16:21 and Ez. 23:39 are quite specific about this anyway- Israel offered sacrifice to idols in Yahweh’s own temple.

Reflecting The Struggle Of God

The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, “where I will not show you favour” (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. ‘show favour’] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would “cause them to know mine hand... and they shall now that my name is The Lord” (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah’s sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn’t much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn’t cause God’s people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn’t the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He’s not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah’s repentance and return to Him: “Thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness” (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It’s rather

like “They will reverence my son” (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

We have commented elsewhere how sometimes God speaks as if He has rejected Israel, and other times as if they will eternally be His people. Such is the extent of His passionate feelings for them. And the Son of God entered into this- He said that no man would eat fruit of the tree of Israel for ever (Mk. 11:14), when in fact Israel one day will fill the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). We too, in the spirit of the prophets, are to enter into these feelings of God. God’s threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don’t somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. He cries out through Hosea of how His many ‘repentings’ are “kindled together” as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened (Hos. 11:8). And this struggle was reflected within the emotions and through the speeches / writings / poetry of Hosea. Hosea’s speeches have an air of turbulence and struggle about them, which reflected the spirit / mind of the God who inspired him. The very way he was told to marry, in marked contrast to Jeremiah who was told not to marry (Jer. 16), perhaps indicates the duality of God’s feelings toward Israel- a desire to marry them and yet not to do so. The extent of God’s wrath with Israel, and His harsh, angry language against her, was an outcome of His love for her. "For the wrath of God is the love of God", wrote Emil Brunner long ago. It's like when we see a child run out in front of a car and narrowly escape death; the mother is angry and shouts at the child. Whilst we the unlookers breathe a prayer of thanks to God in much calmer terms. And this may help explain to us what appears the harder side of God at times. Hos. 2:11 speaks of God uncovering Israel’s “nakedness”- used in Gen. 9:22,23 as a euphemism for her genitals. This uncovering of her nakedness is parallel with exposing her lewdness (Hos. 2:12). This will be the shame of the rejected at the day of judgment; and it’s why any personal game plan that depends upon looking good to our brethren when we’re rotten in God’s sight will end in the most acute shame ultimately. But the promises and prophecies and even fantasies of Israel’s future glory always occur within a few verses of such outpourings of wrath. The prophets are full of this, and Hosea especially, following the feelings of Hosea toward Gomer.

Let’s remember that God’s own law was pretty clear about adultery. The adulterous woman was to be punished with death- for one act of adultery. Even if she repented. And in any case, it was a defiling abomination [according to the Mosaic Law] to remarry a divorced wife. But here in Hosea, Hosea doesn’t keep the law. He lets his wife commit multiple acts of adultery, and he still loves her and pleads with her- even though he was a man in love with God’s law. And this reflects the turmoil of God in dealing with human sin, and His sinful people. Hosea outlines his plan in Hosea 2. He will hamper her

movements so she can't find her lovers; if she does find them, he will take away her food and clothing, so she appreciates his generosity to her; and if she still doesn't return, he will expose her naked and shamed in front of her lovers. But there's no evidence Hosea ever did that. He just... loved her, was angry with her as an expression of that love, loved her yet more, yet more... And this perhaps too reflects God's mind- devising and declaring judgments for Israel, which are themselves far less than what He has earlier stated in His own law, and yet the power of His love means He somehow keeps bearing with His people. Even in the context of speaking of His marriage to Israel, God says that He will punish them "as women that break wedlock are judged" (Ez. 26:38; 23:45). And yet, He didn't. His love was too great, His passion for them too strong; and He even shamed Himself by doing what His own law forbade, the remarriage to a divorced and defiled wife. Perhaps all love involves a degree of paradox and self-contradiction; and a jealous, Almighty God in love was no different. This, to me, is why some Bible verses indicate God has forsaken Israel; and others imply He hasn't and never will. Somehow, even right now, the Jews you meet... are loved still by their God. And he still fantasizes, in a way, over their return to Him. Imagine His utter joy when even one of them does in fact turn to Him! That alone motivates me to preach to Israel today.

Divine Fantasy

In Hos. 2:16-23 we appear to have a fantasy of Hosea about his family. After nostalgic dreaming about the early days of their relationship, Hosea fantasizes about once again wooing Gomer, becoming betrothed to her, marrying her in some sort of outdoors wedding ceremony in which the animals and physical creation witness the vows and enter the joy, entering a new covenant with her, and renaming their children from 'Not my people' to 'My people'. As the children were to be renamed, Lo-ammi becoming Ammi, so the valley of Achor would become a door of hope (Hos. 2:17), and Jezreel, scene of Israel's rebellions, would become the place of joyful reconciliation between God and His people. The valley of Achor had previously been a block to Israel's entry to the land; now it becomes the entrance to it. In that awful place, God wanted to stage an outdoor wedding ceremony with His re-married people. Is. 65:10 mentions Achor as a place of special blessing in the Kingdom of God on earth-it's as if God's grace rejoices in inverting things, pouring out His richest blessing upon the places of our darkest failures. And we in daily life, in the interactions we have with others, are asked to reflect this same kind of grace.

This fantasy was and is the fantasy of God for His people. For doesn't love involve an element of fantasy, imagination, wild hope? If God loves His people with passion, is it so inappropriate that He should have such fantasy about them? And this God is our God! Although He may appear silent, our response to the new covenant must give Him great joy, although this doesn't cancel out

the sorrow and tragedy of all His other rejected love. It makes me for one want to preach the harder to persuade men and women of His love. Let's remember that the events in Hosea's life, according to the information in Hos. 1:1, occurred over a span of at least 30, and perhaps even 50 years. His love for Gomer was the love of a lifetime, the hope and pain of a lifetime. And this in its turn reflects the long term love of the eternal God for His people. Hosea's fantasy for Gomer was unbounded. He fantasized of how when she returned to him with all her heart, with the children renamed, actually the whole of creation would join with him and her in some sort of ceremony of renewal (Hos. 2:16-23). The heavens would echo back the earth's joy. The wonderful thing is that this will happen when finally the Lord Jesus returns and Israel returns to their God. His fantasy was also God's. And God's fantasy for His people will in the end come true. And yet the whole language of Israel's rejection and then a *new* covenant being made between God and her is in essence marriage language. Jer. 31 speaks of how Rachel weeps for her slain children, but also as a virgin takes her tambourine in hand and dances, entering a new covenant with her *ba'al*, her Lord, her husband, who has obliterated the memory of all her sins in a way that only a Divine being could do (Jer. 31). Women in love are stereotypically associated with emotions of giddiness, hysteria, excitement, joy... and this is the language applied to weeping Rachel, weeping over the children God had taken from her. And *yet...* according to the New Testament quotations and expositions of Jer. 31, this is the very same 'new covenant' into which we enter in baptism. This is God's joy over us, and it should be ours over Him.

The hopefulness and fantasy of God for Israel comes out in His statements that Israel definitely will repent "As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so *is* [note the present tense] the house of Israel ashamed" (Jer. 2:26). This was God's fantasy for His people. There's another in Jer. 3:22: "Return, ye backsliding children. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God". This latter sentence is God's fantasy about Israel, imagining them saying those words. How bitter was His disappointment therefore- and how great His delight in those of us who in our weakness do come unto Him and recognize Him meaningfully as our God. Indeed the whole of Jer. 3:22-25 is full of God fantasizing about the sort of words Israel would say upon their repentance, and how they would take responsibility for their sins rather than blame them on their fathers (Jer. 3:25). This apparent certainty that Israel would repent and thus obviate the threatened judgments must have conflicted within the thinking of the Father- with His certainty that all was already too late for them. Hence passages like Hos. 11:8 speaks of the burning pain within the thought processes of God Almighty.

Hosea spoke in God's Name. He would've known how that Name was a memorial of the characteristics of God, His pity, mercy, forgiveness etc. as

outlined in Ex. 33:19. And yet Hosea uses those very words in saying that now, God will not have mercy, pity or forgiveness toward Israel (Hos. 1:6). But Hosea spoke in the Name of Yahweh; and predicted that the Yahweh who had been their elohim from the land of Egypt, would still be their God (Hos. 12:9). In this we see Hosea's personal involvement in the tension of God; for he spoke in God's Name, with all that Name implied. And we too carry that Name, having been baptized into it. And we speak in that Name to this world, bearing within us the same conflict between the reality of future judgment, and the earnest grace of God to save this world.

Notes

- (1) Abraham Heschel, *God In Search Of Man* (New York: Farrar, 1955).
- (2) Abraham Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York: Noonday Press, 1951) p. 241.
- (3) James Muilenburg, *The Way Of Israel* (New York: Harper, 1961) p.89.
- (4) Rosa Newmarch, *The Life And Letters Of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* (New York: Vienna House, 1973 ed.) pp. 274,275.
- (5) It has been argued that the very name of God, YHWH, is related to the Hebrew root *hwy*, passionate love. He is the one who was and is and will be the passionate one. See S.D. Goitein, *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. 6 pp. 1-9. Whether or not this is the case linguistically, the declaration of God's Name in Ex. 33:19 defines the Name as primarily concerning God's grace and mercy.
- (6) Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1969) p.138.
- (7)http://www.carelinks.net/books/dh/mm/6-3-1The_Love_Of_God_In_Hosea.htm and http://www.carelinks.net/books/dh/ww/4-5-1extent_of_grace.htm
- (8) F. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Hosea* (London: Doubleday, 2004 ed.) p. 159.
- (9) H.W. Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p. 17.
- (10) M. Cogan, *Imperialism And Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974) pp. 103,104.

Prophecy, Post Modernism And Inspiration: A Response by John Stibbs

Tchaikovsky's view of inspiration [the manic phase of bipolar?] it would seem is what was called by post modernists the modernist myth of the 'great artist' or in his case the 'great composer', as a conduit from the divine...buying into the idea that such prodigious talent could only come from God [but who often needs a muse to get him in the 'mood']. In post modernism there is no such thing at least in the visual arts [because there is no 'divine']...all can be attributed to the exteriors of things or 'its', i.e. 'mind' or even consciousness

itself is directly attributed to or is a result of chemical and / or electrical processes. All folks are equal and what is needed to be an artist can be taught, thus we are all just artisans and the concepts are of literal signs, the meta narrative having been deconstructed in semiotics, no narrative therefore is more important than another ['flatland']...except the meta narrative of post modernism itself of course! But for musicians its different it seems as there is still a recognition of talent because, I would suggest, it is performance based, [and all are not equal in that way at least] though it is no longer seen as from the divine.

Inspiration of the Biblical kind I would suggest is not so much a man, or woman, being the conduit of the divine as is or has been supposed by what is essentially modernist religious fundamentalism [Christian scientific rationalism]. It was from this that there arose the notion that every word is God breathed or attributed to some kind of magical possession by divine ethereal disembodied spirit, like some kind of channelling from the 'spirit world'. These it seems were rationalisations of the unknown encountered in heightened or altered states of awareness within the consciousness level of the culture and described in available terms which were culturally bound and values system laden. What the consciousness of post modernism has allowed is for us to deconstruct the myth and to know that it is part of the world or cosmos that we know not some kind of fiat from another world inhabited by 'spirit-beings' such as angels and of whom God is the king. It is in fact a state of mind or level of consciousness that is quite common and is experienced by creative minds such as Tchaikovsky and others, but is not related to survival or existence of the individual or group. Albert Einstein [a spiritually mature man] is another whose concepts in science came as 'a blinding flash' of inspiration or in other words what has come to be known as 'peak experiences' of an altered state of conscious attained by a natural kind of meditative frame of mind somewhat similar to the manic phase of bi polar or that of a savant [whose brain chemistry or make-up 'allowed' such 'focus'], and try as he might he could never recreate to the same extent again because he failed to see where it came from. Many men and women in the past have achieved altered states of consciousness by using mind altering drugs, or experiences [meditation, yoga etc in the east] as a matter of course often not of their doing... many poets, artists, writers etc. used drugs prescribed by doctors, Vincent van Gogh is a case in point, as is the poet Browning and many others even Newton. Just as an aside here- Sufism for instance uses dance and music to attain an altered state of consciousness not unlike an hypnotic trance. Anyway, the point is that in the past these 'peak experiences' could only be described [in the West at least] in the language of the times... the whole process of 'cultural' development is not unlike the individual maturation process, each stage or step may answer previous questions but opens up the awareness to more questions in a seemingly endless quest for 'truth'. This post modern 'flatland' of external processes i.e. the view

that internal processes are an outcome of chemical or electrical processes, is boring and more importantly doesn't really explain everything, the truth of such science is relative... it just poses more existential questions of a 'higher level' of consciousness. But to people on one certain level of consciousness there is no recognition of any 'higher' level only the levels through which one has already come. This is not unlike the maturation process which evolves through a process of differentiation and identification. So it's no wonder that prophecy, and the Revelation is a good example [because it 'comes' from a higher level of consciousness which expresses a much wider worldview], has to be lived through and only understood in retrospect... though if we meditate on it we may be able to glimpse a part of this 'truth' which is relative to us as we have great difficulty thinking beyond the level of consciousness in which we are now living. This is not unlike Newtonian mechanics as compared with quantum mechanics, which truth may also be superseded. We know that quantum works in the real world, but we don't fully understand why. But I think we are now on the cusp of a new much wider, inclusive and compassionate level of consciousness hence all the turmoil in the heavens and upon the earth.

2. MOSES

1-1 Moses Our Example

It cannot be too often or too highly stressed that Moses was and is seen in the Jewish world as a larger than life figure. Theologically, Judaism has placed Moses greater even than Messiah. We have shown that it was the purpose of John's Gospel to correct this ⁽¹⁾. The idea that ordinary believers can in any sense be equal to or even greater than Moses was (and is) absolute anathema to the Jewish mind. And yet through allusion and almost explicit statement, the Lord Jesus and the New Testament writers invite us to see ourselves as equal to or greater than Moses, on account of the spiritual riches made available to us in Christ. How radical this was to the first century mind is extremely hard for us to enter into. The point is, God intellectually stretches us to an extent which may be almost unacceptable to us; as with our first century brethren, we too are challenged to radically turn against many of the concepts and attitudes which are fundamental to our upbringing. If we can really grasp the reality of the fact that we are called to behold the *glory of God*. Moses seems to have struggled to believe that he really had been invited to such an experience (Ex. 33:16; 34:9,34).

Moses: Our Example

In this light, consider the following invitations to be like Moses:

- The very name 'Moses' meaning 'drawn out' suggests he is the prototype for every saint- a called out one.
- We'll sing Moses' song; as if his victory was ours (Rev. 15:3)
- We'll all be like Moses was at the end, in essence; we'll share his finest hours. Our names will not be blotted out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5), as Moses' wasn't (Ex. 32:32).
- At the day of judgment, we will all go through the Moses experience; hiding in the rock in the presence of God's glory (Is. 2:10 cp. Ex. 33:22). And our vision of that glory in the face of the Lord Jesus *even now* should have the same humbling effect.

- “Have ye not read that which was spoken unto *you* by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham...” (Mt. 22:31) quotes the words God spoke to *Moses* as having been spoken personally to *us*.

- In the same way as Moses spoke to the Angel without a veil on his face, and thereby came to reflect the glory which shone from the Angel's face (Ex. 34:33-35), so we are bidden look at the glory of God in the face of Jesus, to consider his character, and be changed into that same glory by reflecting his character in our lives. By simply beholding the glory of Christ's righteousness, truly appreciating it, we will be changed (2 Cor. 3:15-18 RV). Paul seems to be arguing that whenever a Jew turns to the Lord Jesus and fellowships with Him, then he is living out the pattern of Moses. And further, 2 Cor. 4:3 speaks of our Gospel being 'veiled' to those who are lost- as if *we* are as Moses, the Gospel we preach being as the glory of God which shone from Moses' face. Let's keep remembering how huge and radical was the challenge of this to a first century Jewish readership for whom Moses was an almost untouchable hero.

- We must not cast away our confidence, which has great recompense of reward- and the writer uses these words about Moses, bidding us follow his example (Heb. 10:35; 11:26).

- John's Gospel contains several references to the fact that Christ 'shows' the Father to those who believe in him, and that it is possible to " see the Father" and his glory through seeing or accurately believing in him as the Son of the Father (Jn. 11:40; 12:45; 14:9; 16:25). Moses earnestly wished to see the Father fully, but was unable to do so. The height which Moses reached as he cowered in that rock cleft and heard God's Name declared is hard to plumb. But we have been enabled to *see* the Father, through our appreciation of the Lord Jesus. But does an appropriate sense of *wonder* fill us? Do we really make time to *know* the Son of God? Or do we see words like " glory" as just cold theology?

- The Lord Jesus in John's Gospel describes Himself in terms of the “I am...” formula. Each time, He was referring back to the burning bush revelation of Yahweh as the “I am”; and by implication, the Lord's audience are thereby placed in the position of Moses, intended to rise up in response as he did.

- Our eyes shall “behold the land that is very far off” (Is. 33:17) just as Moses had been given the vision of the promised land far off.

- The man Moses was *made* very meek, until he was the meekest man alive on earth (Num. 12:3 Heb.). “A stuttering shepherd, shy of leadership and haunted by his crime of passion” in slaying the Egyptian...these things developed this in him. Remember that Moses himself wrote this. It's an autobiographical

comment, reflecting of course the Spirit of Him who knows every heart, and could make such a statement. And yet he writes it in recording how God had rebuked Aaron and Miriam for criticizing him, and how He had told them that He spoke with Moses alone face to face. We can imagine Moses blushing, with hung head. And then he makes the comment, that he was made the most humble man... Appreciating the honour of seeing so much of God, when he himself was a sinner, was part of that humbling process. All Israel will ultimately go through this when they face up to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:10,11). This certainly reads like an allusion to Moses' cowering in the rock, humbling himself in the dust, before the glory of Yahweh. Our glimpses of the wonder of the Father's character should have the same effect upon us, just beholding the glory of God, i.e. the manifestation of His perfect character is Christ, should change us into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18- another invitation to see ourselves as Moses). And yet I see little evidence of this in my own life, or those of my brethren and sisters. We have perhaps become all too familiar with the knowledge of the glory of God. The awesomeness of His holiness as manifest in Christ seems far, far from our appreciation. Despite God's evident pleasure with Moses, manifest in the revelation He gave him, Moses still fumbled around in his recognition of his own humanity: "If now I have found grace in thy sight...pardon *our* iniquity and *our* sin" (Ex. 34:9). This is surely homework for us; to grow in our appreciation and marvel at God's holiness, at the moral beauty of His character. For this is how we too will be changed into the same image, and how we will come to truly love God. For we cannot love what we do not appreciate or understand. But note that God's comment on Moses was also: "the man Moses was very great" (Ex. 11:3). Yet it is also written that "the man Moses was very meek" (Num. 12:3). Putting the two passages together we have the clear lesson that he who humbles himself is made great; and in this, Moses was not only a type of Christ but also a pattern for all who would go through the pattern which the Lord Jesus set before us: of humbling ourselves now that we might be made great in due time. Moses our example is really a challenge in this.

- Moses desired that God's glory would "appear...upon / unto" the children of God's servants (Ps. 90:16). He wanted all God's children to have the same experience of glory appearing to them as he had had. And according to 2 Cor. 3:18, this desire is fulfilled every time a man turns to the Lord Jesus, and like Moses, with unveiled face, beholds that same glory.

- God spoke to Moses "mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of Yahweh shall he behold" (Num. 12:8) is the basis of 1 Cor. 13:12: "Now (in the period of the Spirit gifts) we see through a

glass darkly; but then (in the dispensation of the completed word) face to face: now I know in part (from the ministry of the gifts); but then shall I know, even as also I am known" . The point of this connection is simply this: The close relationship between God and Moses is now available to us through the word. But do we feel God speaking to us face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Ex. 33:11)? For this is how close God and Moses came through the word. Yet it is possible. An *urgent* devotion to the word is needed by us as a community. This is what we really need exhortation about.

- In the same way as Moses was called up into the mount to receive his Divine commission, so the Lord Jesus called up to the mount His disciples- implying that they, who represent all of us, were now a new Moses (Mk. 3:13). Moses was thus an example that challenged those from a Jewish background especially.

- Wherever an ordinary Israelite offered sacrifice, "I will come unto thee ['you' singular] and bless thee" (Ex. 20:23). This is the very language of God coming unto Moses on the top of Sinai (Ex. 19:20 RV)- as if to imply that the very pinnacle of Moses' relationship with God, meeting Him on the top of the mount, is just as attainable for each of God's people who truly sacrifices to Him.

- When Eliphaz says that the righteous "Will die at the height of your powers, and be *gathered* like ripened grain" (Job 5:26, Stephen Mitchell's translation), there is an evident connection with the account of Moses being *gathered* at his death, and dying with his natural faculties undiminished. Moses is presented as the epitome of the righteous believer.

- The way Moses pleaded with God to change His mind and not destroy Israel for the sake of what the surrounding nations would say is indeed inspirational to us all. It surely inspired David to pray likewise- for "wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now there God?" (Ps. 115:2).

- " I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (Ex. 4:12) is almost quoted in Mt. 10:19,20 and Mk. 13:11 concerning how we too will be taught what to say when we come before the rulers of our world. In such moments of crisis, Moses, even in weakness as he was at this time, really is our living example.

- Joshua was encouraged that " As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Josh. 1:5). But these very words are quoted in Heb. 13:5 as the grounds of our matchless confidence that the Lord God will be with us too! As He was with Moses- not just in power, but in wondrous

patience and gentleness- so He will be with us too. Not only did God encourage Joshua to see himself as in Moses' shoes; He inspired Jeremiah likewise (Jer. 21:8 = Dt. 30:15,19), and Ezekiel (Ez. 2:3 = Dt. 31:27; Neh. 9:17; Num. 17:10); and He wishes us to also see Moses' God as our God. But if Moses' God is to be ours in truth in the daily round of life, we must rise up to the dedication of Moses; as he was a faithful steward, thoroughly dedicated to God's ecclesia (Heb. 3:5), so we are invited follow his example (1 Cor. 4:2; Mt. 24:45). Note that the promise of Moses that God would not fail nor forsake Joshua, but would be with him (Dt. 31:8) was similar to the very promise given to Moses which he had earlier doubted (Ex. 3:12; 4:12,15). Such exhortation is so much the stronger from someone who has themselves doubted and then come to believe.

In addition to all this, Moses is set up as example and representative of his people Israel. Israel is likened in Ez. 16:5 to a child rejected at birth, but miraculously found and cared for, and brought up with every pampered blessing. Just as Moses was. Stephen described the 'putting out' of Moses with the same word used in the LXX for what happened to Israel in Ezekiel 16 (Acts 7:21; Ex. 2:3 LXX).

Moses, Gideon And Us

Gideon was bidden rise up to the example of Moses- for there were many similarities between his call by the Angel, and the Angelic calling which Moses received at the burning bush. Thus Gideon was called to follow the Angel in faith, "because Ehyeh is with you" (Jud. 6:16)- a direct quotation from the Angelic manifestation to Moses in Ex. 3:12. And yet he responds: "Alas! For I have seen Yahweh's envoy face to face!" (Jud. 6:22). Gideon knew full well that Moses had seen the Angel "face to face" (Dt. 34:10). Gideon's fear is therefore rooted in a sense that "No! I'm simply *not* Moses!". And it's the same with us. We can read of all these reasons to believe that Moses is really our pattern, and respond that "No! This ain't me...". But there, in the record of Gideon and his success, lies our challenge to rise up to the spirit of Moses.

1-2 Moses And "The reproach of Christ"

At age 40, Moses came to a crisis. He had a choice between the riches of Egypt, the pleasures of sin for a season, and choosing rather to suffer affliction with God's people and thereby fellowship the reproach of Christ (Heb. 11:24-26). He probably had the chance to become the next Pharaoh, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; but he consciously refused this, as a pure act of the will, as an expression of faith in the future recompense of the Kingdom. There are a number of passages which invite us to follow Moses' example in this. We will

see below that Paul was motivated in his rejection of worldly advantage by Moses' inspiration. And as in all things, he is our example, that we might follow Christ, who also turned down the very real possibility of temporal rulership of the world- for the sake of living the life of the cross, and thereby securing our redemption.

Even within Hebrews, the description of Moses' rejection of Egypt for the sake of Christ is shown to be our example: " Esteeming the *reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures (i.e. Pharaoh's treasures, which he could have had if he succeeded as Pharaoh) in Egypt...let us go forth therefore unto (Jesus) without the camp, *bearing his reproach*" (Heb. 11:26; 13:13). We should be even eager to bear 'reproach for the name of Christ' as Moses did (1 Pet. 4:14), knowing it is a surety of our sharing his resurrection.

For Moses, " the reproach of Christ" was his having " respect unto the recompense of the reward" . He therefore must have understood in some detail that there would be a future Saviour, who would enable the eternal Kingdom promised to Abraham through his bearing the reproach of this world. Such was Moses' appreciation of this that it motivated him to reject Egypt. His motivation, therefore, was based upon a fine reflection upon the promises to Abraham and other oblique prophecies of the suffering Messiah contained in the book of Genesis. Moses knew he could have a share in the sufferings of the future saviour and thereby share his reward, because he saw the implication that Messiah would be our representative. Yet those promises are the very things which Christians now say they are bored of hearing every few weeks on a Sunday evening. No wonder we lack Moses' desire to share Christ's reproach, and thereby reject the attractions of this world. The way Moses had " respect unto the recompense of the reward" is our example; for again, even within Hebrews, we are exhorted: " Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great *recompense of reward*" (Heb. 11:26; 10:35). The Greek for " respect" means to look away from all else; indicating how single-mindedly and intensely did Moses look ahead to the Kingdom; the knowledge of which was, in terms of number of words, scant indeed. All he had was the covenants of promise.

It is worth trying to visualize the scene when Moses was "full forty years old" (Acts 7:23). It would make a fine movie. The Greek phrase could refer to Moses' birthday, and one is tempted to speculate that it had been arranged that when Moses was 40, he would become Pharaoh. Heb. 11:24 says that he refused and chose- the Greek tense implying a one off choice- to suffer affliction with God's people. It is tempting to imagine Moses at the ceremony when he should have been declared as Pharaoh, the most powerful man in his world...standing up and saying, to a suddenly hushed audience, voice cracking with shame and stress and yet some sort of proud relief that he was doing the

right thing: "I, whom you know in Egyptian as Meses, am Moshe, yes, Moshe the Jew; and I decline to be Pharaoh". Imagine his foster mother's pain and anger. And then in the end, the wonderful honour would have been given to another man, who became Pharaoh. Perhaps he or his son was the one to whom Moses was to come, 40 years later. After a nervous breakdown, stuttering, speaking with a thick accent, clearly having forgotten Egyptian... walking through the mansions of glory, along the corridors of power, to meet that man, to whom he had given the throne 40 years earlier.

" The reproach of Christ"

Paul " counted" the things of this life as loss " for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ" and his sufferings (Phil. 3:8), so that he would gain the resurrection. Moses likewise rejected the world for the same two reasons: the excellency of sharing the reproach of Christ, and secondly from respect unto the recompense of the reward, at the resurrection. He uses the same word translated " esteemed" when we read of how Moses " esteemed" the reproach of Christ as greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Heb. 11:26). The " reproach" of Christ is the same word used concerning Christ being " reviled" on the cross. Paul felt that the intellectual heights of knowing the mind of our crucified Lord, of being able to enter into the riches than are even now in the mind of Christ (Col. 2:3) more than compensated for his sacrifice of all material things in this life. And Moses was the same; he esteemed the " reproach of Christ" , the knowledge that he was sharing the sufferings of his future saviour and would thereby enter the Kingdom which he would make possible, as far far greater than the possibility of being King of Egypt. He knew that he was sharing the sufferings of Christ, and that therefore he would be rewarded. It was this knowledge which motivated him in rejecting the riches of Egypt.

And Moses really is our example- as is Paul. It is tempting to think that intellectual appreciation cannot affect our practical lives. But once we start to sense that we really are touching minds with the Lord Jesus, that our sufferings are really making us one with the mind / spirit of Christ in Heaven, then this alone will make our material position in this life utterly meaningless. We will easily reject demanding jobs, larger houses, the security of savings- because of the sheer wonder of our knowledge of Christ and our fellowship with him. For many, this idea will be pushed off as altogether too theoretical, too abstract. And yet for a minority of brethren and sisters, the truth of all this has been realised in practice, year after year. The teaching of these passages, the examples of Paul and Moses, really are there to be copied. They are not just sweet stories to be admired, as pictures, for their beauty in themselves. There is a dynamism within them, an ability to enter and change our lives- if we are willing. *Moses really is our example*; he went through the pain of rejecting his

mother, the shame of the poor intellectual falling in love with the shepherd girl, the agony of divorce from her later, the bitter loneliness of the wilderness years and apparent rejection by God for the sake of those he loved... We tend to ask for the pain to be taken away as soon as we have it, and I suppose it's natural that we should ask the Father for such things. But through much tribulation we enter the Kingdom.

Moses forsook the possibilities of Egypt not just for " the reproach of Christ" ; he was also motivated by the fact that " he endured (Gk. was vigorous), as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). It was *as if* he had seen the invisible God, as he later asked to. When the disciples asked to see God, Christ said that the manifestation of His character which they had seen in him was the same thing (Jn. 14:8). Our experience of seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, with unveiled face like Moses, ought to be a *wondrous* experience. When Moses asked to physically see God, the Angel proclaimed the characteristics of God before him. So when we read of Moses *as it were* seeing God at the time he decided to forsake Egypt, this must mean that he so appreciated God's Name and character, he so had faith in the future Kingdom which this great Name and character promise, that he left Egypt. The Lord Jesus fed for strength on the *majesty* of the Name of Yahweh (Mic. 5:4). Therefore an appreciation of the Name of Yahweh is what will motivate us to forsake the attractions of this temporal world. This does not mean, of course, that simply pronouncing that Name in our prayers and readings is enough. We must develop an appreciation of God's righteousness, so that we read of His demonstration of grace, of mercy, of truth, of judgement for sin, and love it, revel in it, respect it. As Paul says, if we behold the glory of the Lord as Moses did, we will by that very fact be changed into the same image of that glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Yet such an appreciation needs constant feeding and development. It is tragic, absolutely tragic, that over the next 40 years Moses lost this height of appreciation, until at the burning bush he seems to have almost completely lost his appreciation of the Name. Whatever spiritual heights we may reach is no guarantee that we must inevitably stay there. The history of our community is littered with many fine brethren who fell from such heights of spirituality.

" (Moses) refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; *having chosen rather* (Gk.) to suffer affliction with the people of God" (Heb. 11:24,25) suggests that there was a struggle within the mind of Moses, between the reproach of Christ and the approbation of this world, and he then decisively came down on the right side. If we are truly saints, called out ones after the pattern of Moses, this struggle between present worldly advantage and the hope of the Kingdom must surely be seen in our minds. For this reason Moses is held up so highly as our example and pattern. He " forsook" Egypt uses the same word translated " leaving" when we read of a man leaving his parents to be joined to a wife, or of the shepherd leaving the 99 sheep to find the lost one.

1-3 Moses And Paul

If Moses is the central, inspirational figure of the Old Testament scriptures and the Old Covenant, Christ is of the New Testament and New Covenant. And yet Christ was especially manifested in his matchless servant Paul. Paul seems to have consciously modelled his life upon that of Moses; he evidently saw Moses as his hero. The evidence for this is quite compelling:

Paul

" His letters, say they (Paul's detractors in the new Israel) are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible...though I be rude in speech...Christ sent me...to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words (mg. speech)" (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6; 1 Cor. 1:17).

Paul says he was "*taught* according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" by Gamaliel, receiving the highest wisdom possible in the Jewish world; but he uses the same word as Stephen in Acts 7:22, describing how Moses was "*learned*" in all the wisdom of Egypt.

Paul earnestly asked three times for his "thorn in the flesh" to be removed (2 Cor. 12:9).

Moses

" I am not eloquent (mg. a man of words)...I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10); this is how Moses felt he would be perceived, although actually he was formally quite fluent when in the court of Pharaoh (Acts 7:22). Paul would have remembered Stephen saying how Moses was formerly full of worldly *wisdom* and "mighty in words". Paul felt that he too had been through Moses' experience- once mighty in words as the rising star of the Jewish world, but now like Moses he had left all that behind in order to try to save a new Israel from Judaism and paganism. As Moses *consciously* rejected the opportunity for leading the 'world' of Egypt, so Paul probably turned down the chance to be High Priest. God maybe confirmed both him and Moses in their desire for humility by giving them a speech impediment (the "

thorn in the flesh" which Paul was " given" , 2 Cor. 12:7).

Moses asked at least twice (maybe three times?) for him to be allowed to enter the land (Dt. 3:25; Ps. 90); but the answer was basically the same as to Paul: " My grace is sufficient for thee" . The fact Moses had been forgiven and was at one with his God was so great that his physical entering the land was irrelevant. And for Paul likewise, temporal blessings in this life are nothing compared to the grace of forgiveness which we have received (Ex. 34:9).

" Therefore let us keep the feast (the breaking of bread, the new Passover), not with old leaven...of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor.5:8).

Paul's selfless relationship with Corinth was inspired by that of Moses with Israel. Thus Paul warns Corinth not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), or else he would come to them and not spare.

In similar style, Paul warns the Hebrews to " serve God acceptably with reverence" because " our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).

Paul saw visions of God which were

This is echoing Moses' command to keep the Passover feast without leaven (Ex. 12:15; Dt. 16:3). Paul saw himself as Moses in trying to save a generally unresponsive and ungrateful Israel.

He is quoting the LXX of Num. 25:3 concerning how Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor, resulting in Moses commanding the murder of all those guilty- just as Paul later did to Corinth.

He is quoting the very words of Moses in Dt. 4:24.

Moses saw the greatest

impossible for him to explain (2 Cor. 12:1-5).

visions of God of any man in the Old Testament; visions which he could not repeat; he only repeated the words of command which he was given. He did not tell Israel what he saw in Ex. 34.

Paul several times calls himself " a servant of God" (e.g. Tit. 1:1).

Paul is surely alluding to the frequent descriptions of Moses as God's servant.

The Lord Jesus seems to have encouraged Paul to see Moses as his hero. Thus he asked him to go and live in Arabia before beginning his ministry, just as Moses did (Gal. 1:17). When he appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, he spoke in terms reminiscent of the Angel's commission to Moses at the burning bush: " I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the (Jewish) people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to...turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance...Whereupon...I (Paul) was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:16-19).

Moses was promised that he would be protected from Pharaoh so that he could bring out God's people from the darkness of Egyptian slavery (" the power of Satan"); going from darkness to light is used by Peter as an idiom to describe Israel's deliverance from Egypt, which the new Israel should emulate (1 Pet. 2:9). Moses led Israel out of Egypt so that they might be reconciled to God, and be led by him to the promised inheritance of Canaan. As Moses was eventually obedient to that heavenly vision, so was Paul- although perhaps he too went through (unrecorded) struggles to be obedient to it, after the pattern of Moses being so reluctant.

Paul " *counted*" (Phil. 3:8) the riches of this world as dung, that he might have the honour of sharing the sufferings of Christ. He was motivated in this by the example of

The same word is used in Heb. 11:26 concerning how Moses " *esteemed*" the reproach of Christ greater riches than those of Egypt.

Moses in rejecting the rulership and riches of Egypt in order to share "the reproach of Christ".

Paul looked at Moses' example and was truly inspired to utterly despise worldly advantage, and to appreciate the sheer *honour* of sharing the sufferings of Christ. The height of this calling should make our wealth or poverty in this world utterly irrelevant. And we too should be inspired by Moses as Paul was. For Moses is specifically intended as our example.

He describes Epaphroditus as one of those "that ministered to my wants" (Phil. 2:25).

The Greek for "ministered" is used in the LXX concerning the priests (and Joshua) ministering to Moses in practical things.

Paul warned the new Israel that after his death ("after my departing", Acts 20:29) there would be serious apostasy. This is the spirit of his very last words, in 2 Tim. 4.

This is exactly the spirit of Moses' farewell speech throughout the book of Deuteronomy, and throughout his final song (Dt. 32). "After my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves" (Dt. 31:29).

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves" (Acts 20:28)

To help them combat this apostasy, and to set them an example in faithfulness to the word, Paul pointed out that "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

"Take heed unto yourselves" is repeated so many times in Deuteronomy (e.g. Dt. 2:4; 4:9,15,23; 11:16; 12:13,19,30; 24:8; 27:9).

"I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly" (Acts 20:20).

Exactly as Moses completely revealed all God's counsel to Israel (Acts 7:33; Dt. 33:3).

As Moses shewed God to Israel and publicly taught

" Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things" (Acts 20:30).

" Now, brethren I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance" (Acts 20:32).

" I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel" (Acts 20:33)

" Neither count I my life dear unto myself" (Acts 20:24). " I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3). Paul is here rising up to imitate

them.

As Moses likewise warned in his farewell speech that false prophets would *arise* - and should be shunned and dealt with (Dt. 13:1).

This is the spirit of the whole of Deuteronomy, Moses' farewell warning: love the word, be obedient to it, because this will lead you to inherit the promised land for ever. He pleaded with them to " take heed to thyself" that they kept God's word and taught it to their children, so that they would enter the land (Dt. 4:1,9). These words are alluded to by Paul in 1 Tim.4:16, where he says that attention to the doctrine of the new covenant will likewise save us and those who hear us.

This is the spirit of Moses in Num. 16:15: " I have not taken one ass from them" . Paul maybe had these words in mind again in 2 Cor. 7:2: " We have wronged no man...we have defrauded no man" .

This was the spirit of Moses, in being willing to give his own physical and eternal life for the salvation of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32).

Moses at perhaps his finest hour-willing, at least in principle, to give up his eternal life for the sake of Israel's salvation. The extent of Paul's love for natural Israel does not come out that strongly in the Acts and epistles; but this allusion to Moses says it all. The RVmg. renders Rom. 9:3: "I could pray...", more clearly alluding to Moses' prayer that the people might enter and he be rejected. Yet Paul perceived that God would not accept a substitute offering like that; and hence he says he *could* pray like this. In essence, he had risen to the same level. Likewise he wrote in 1 Thess. 2:8 RV that he was "well pleased [i.e. theoretically willing] to impart unto, you not the gospel of God only, but our own souls, because ye were dear unto us". He perceived the difference between mere imparting of the Gospel in preaching, and being willing to give ones' soul, ones salvation, because of a heart that bleeds for others. No wonder Paul was such a convincing preacher, with such love behind his words.

" My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1).

Throughout 2 Cor. 3:15-4:6, Paul comments on how Moses' face shone with God's glory, and yet he spoke to Israel through a veil, with the result that Israel did not appreciate God's glory.

Who else prayed like this for Israel's salvation? Only Moses. He tried to match the intensity of Moses' prayers for Israel on Sinai.

Paul uses this to explain why Israel did not respond to his preaching; " if *our* preaching be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. 4:3). Paul therefore saw himself and his fellow preachers as like

He speaks of him and all preachers of the true Christian Gospel as "able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6)- clear allusion to Moses as the minister of the old, inferior covenant.

Moses, radiating forth the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to an Israel which had the veil upon their heart. This allusion must have so angered the Jews- to suggest that Christian preachers were like Moses!

These copious similarities raise an interesting point: if we love the word, if we enter into the spirit of the characters we read of there, should we not model ourselves upon some of them? If the word is a living word, surely we should be able to sense the spirit of these characters in our own experience of life, they should drive us onwards. Paul's conscious emulation of Moses is not the only example of this. He himself invites us to see him as a similar role model. We have shown elsewhere how Jonathan and Saul both seem to have had Gideon as a hero ⁽¹⁾. It is also possible to show that Jeremiah saw Job in the same role (just glance down the marginal references to Job in Jeremiah). There are times when Jeremiah quotes the very words of Job as being relevant to his own experiences. The point of such conscious emulation is that we are copying the spirit of Christ as it was displayed in these men. Thus Paul asks us to copy him *so that* we might more accurately reflect the pattern of the Lord Jesus; he was "a Christ-appointed model" to this end.

Notes

(1) See *David and Jonathan in Bible Lives: Kings..*

2 Moses: The Path Of Growth 2-1 Events In The Life Of Moses

A read through the records will indicate that Moses was somewhat temperamental in his faith. For the first forty years of his life, he scarcely let his light show. Yet all the time his conscience was active, enabling him to build up towards heights of spiritual achievement few of us can achieve. At the age of 40, he had a flash of spiritual devotion; he rejected the opportunity for greatness in Egypt, possibly the opportunity to become king of Egypt (as Christ had the opportunity to become king of the world in his wilderness temptations). Yet after that, he went into 40 years of decline. In the eyes of men, he was a

finished man. He had gone away from God's people, he was living in a family of idolaters, and had married one of them. His marriage went wrong, he divorced his wife, and picked up some other woman. He didn't circumcise his children, and thus he despised his covenant relationship with God. Eighty years is a long time. They were eighty years of at best mediocre commitment to the God of Israel, with only the occasional flash of spiritual brilliance. Yet this man Moses went on to become one of the greatest spiritual men there has ever been, a man who came closer to God than all others except the Lord Jesus. " There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Dt. 34:10). The Lord Jesus was " like unto" Moses (Dt. 18:18)- a high enough commendation for Moses. The following notes show that Moses achieved this through an appreciation of God manifestation in himself and in Israel.

Because of his weakness, we are able to relate to Moses, and see him as our example. It is possible that Moses was not circumcised (Ex. 6:12,30); which would make him even closer to us. The Lord Jesus encouraged us to see ourselves as Moses: " If thou wouldest believe (in Christ), thou shouldest see the glory of God" (Jn. 11:40) is without doubt an allusion to Moses' experience of seeing God's glory- an experience which in Jewish eyes marked Moses out as the greatest man who had ever lived. The veneration in which Moses was and is held in the Jewish world is hard for Gentiles to enter into. A glance through rabbinical commentaries on the Pentateuch will illustrate this well. And here was the Lord Jesus saying that through faith in him, we can share the experience of Moses, we can rise to the spiritual heights of the man who spoke to God face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

Main events in the life of Moses

EVENT	REFERENCE	SPIRITUALITY
		(Score out of 10)
1. 40 years in Egypt, hiding the fact he was an Israelite, not preaching the Gospel to anyone, appearing as an Egyptian. He learnt all the philosophy of Egypt, and was a prominent public speaker, with the possibility of becoming the next Pharaoh. According to non-	Ex. 2:19; Acts 7:22	2 (over say 25 years, from the age of 15 - 40)

Biblical tradition, he was the leader of the Egyptian army.

2. Crisis at age 40. He refused the riches of Egypt, and consciously chose to suffer affliction with the Israelites. He really wanted to save Israel and free them from their enemies, and make them live at peace among themselves.

Heb. 11:24 Heb. 11:26 Acts 8
7:23-28

3. However, he didn't want Egypt to know that he was doing this; he thought he could do it secretly. Once he realised that people knew what he was trying to do, he was afraid. His fearfulness has similarities with that of spiritually weak Jacob, who fled from the face of Laban into the unknown, as Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh. Thus God encouraged him after forty years that he need no longer fear: "Return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life".

Ex. 2:14 Ex. 2:15 cp. 2
Gen.31:22; 35:7 Ex. 4:19

4. But then he rallied his faith and left Egypt, without (at the point of leaving) fearing the anger of Pharaoh. He so strongly believed, it was as if he physically saw God- as he asked.

Heb. 11:27 8

5. Moses flees to Midian, where he helps some unknown shepherd women from being abused by some rough men; he did this without at first receiving any reward, and without the women wanting him to go with them; although they thought he was an Egyptian, showing that he still concealed his relationship with God. Ex. 2:17Ex.2:19 6
- 5a. Moses " supposed his brethren would have understood how that God *by his hand* would deliver them" ; but God told Moses at the bush: " I will stretch out *my hand*, and smite Egypt...." . Moses had yet to learn the meaning of God manifestation through men. Acts 7:25 cp. Ex. 3:20
6. Moses " was content to dwell" with the father of the women. The Hebrew for " content" comes from a root which means weakness of mind; the implication is that he easily yielded to this man. Ex.2: 21 2
7. " And he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter" . She was not one of the covenant people; she was the daughter of a pagan priest (Ex. 18:11 implies Jethro thought Yahweh was only one of many gods); she did not circumcise their Ex. 2:21; 3:1; 4:25 3

children. Should Moses have married her? The fact Moses did not bother circumcising his son shows he was not really serious about his relationship with God; God tried to kill him because of this. God tried to kill Moses because of this; this shows how serious this was in God's eyes. Zipporah was a Midianite, a descendant of Abraham through Keturah (Gen. 25:1-6). Circumcision was a sign of the covenant through Isaac, hence the resentment and bitterness of Zipporah over the circumcision issue; and it seems Moses capitulated to her on this. Their marriage is sure proof that fundamental spiritual differences at the start can only lead to anger and break up later on.

The way the Lord "tried to kill" Moses (Ex. 4:24) indicates how God's intentions can be changed by human actions; and it also reflects the limitation of power experienced by the Angel, who presumably was the one who 'tried' to do this but was thwarted by a woman. However in our context of Moses' weakness we need to reflect how this incident echoes how Pharaoh sought to kill

Moses in Ex. 2:15. Even through his weakness, Moses was being taught that his personal salvation and continuation in life was by grace. Moses was saved on this occasion by a Gentile woman, Zipporah- just as he had been saved as a baby by another Gentile woman- as well as by the quick-wittedness of his own mother and sister. As Zipporah mediated with the Angel and saved Moses by touching his son with blood, so Moses would save Israel through his mediation with God and through the Passover ritual (Ex. 12:13,22,23), as well as later throwing blood upon the people (Ex. 24:8). What are we to make of all these echoes and connections of thought? Perhaps that Moses was indeed weak at this time, was saved by grace alone, and yet on that basis he was called to in his turn also save the weak through appealing to God's grace.

8. However, Moses' children had names which showed some faith, and a recognition he was a stranger in the land where he was living; he lived as a stranger in Midian. Few people live in a country for 40 years without feeling

Ex. 18:3,4; Acts 7:29 4

they belong to it. But his mind was in the past, in how God had been good to his father, and how God had saved him from Pharaoh's death threat.

9. Moses' marriage was weak. 40 years later, Zipporah's frustration boiled over: " Surely a bloody husband art thou to me...then she said (again), A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision" . As a descendant of Ishmael she was angry at Isaac's choice and circumcision. This is probably the closest the Bible gets to recording the real life use of taboo language. " Because of the circumcision" suggests she despised Moses' religion. Moses divorced her. It also seems from Ex. 4:23,25 that God tried to kill Moses' son because Moses was not fully believing that God would kill Pharaoh's firstborn.

Ex. 4:25,26 (see N.I.V.); 2
18:2

10. He " took" (not married) another woman, an Ethiopian- probably a slave woman, or possibly a cheap woman. Moses' brother and sister were ashamed that their brother was involved with a woman like this. Whoever she was, Moses was under the one

Num. 12:1 AVmg. 2

man: one woman standard of the garden of Eden. And further, he "put away" this woman- Ex. 18:2 LXX is the same "put away" as in 1 Cor. 7:11-13. Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts (Mt. 19:8) and yet he himself appears to have divorced her- for the hardness of his heart?

11. God appeared to Moses in the flame of fire in the bush, but Moses had to be told to take off his shoes as a sign of respect- even though taking off shoes was understood as a token of respect and recognition of sin (see 2 Sam. 15:30). "Draw not nigh hither...for the place whereon thou standest is holy" sounds as if Moses did not appreciate the holiness of God. It even seems that Moses had forgotten the significance of God's Name, even though it had been revealed to Abraham (Ex. 3:13). Moses' fear to look upon God suggests a bad conscience. The double repetition "Moses, Moses" may be some kind of rebuke. "I *have*" seen the affliction of Israel could suggest that Moses felt God was not sensitive to the pain of His children; he had been living for 40 years

Ex. 3:5 Ex. 3:6 cp. Gen. 3:8; 2
Is. 6:5 Ex. 3:7 Acts 7:31 cp.
Mt. 15:31; Mk. 6:51; Lk.
8:25; 24:41; Acts 13:41

feeling forgotten by God. Moses "wondered" at what he saw and heard at the burning bush- a Greek word which is often used in a negative sense concerning people lacking faith and insight when they should have had it.

12. " I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people...And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go?....And God said...they shall hearken to thy voice...And Moses answered...They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice (he didn't seem to believe God's promise to inspire him)...I am not eloquent, neither heretofore (i.e. in the past)...I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue (although this was untrue-earlier Moses had been an eloquent speaker in Egypt; actually he was just the right man to do what God wanted)...and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses" . Remember that God is *very* slow to this kind of anger (Ex. 34:6). Forty years earlier, Moses had understood, presumably from a direct revelation from God, that God would deliver Israel through him. But he had

Ex. 3:10,11,18; 1
4:1,10,13,14; Acts 7:22, 25

lost faith in that promise, and was arguing back against God. This was the outcome of many years of spiritual slipping. "Send...by the hand of him whom *thou wilt send*" (alluding to God's Name, I will be) can be seen as indifference; perhaps Moses was saying 'As you do what you will, your name is I will be, then if you send by me, send by men, I can't resist'.

12. Moses does actually leave Midian and begins to ask Pharaoh to let Israel go Ex. 4:29 - 5:5 Ex. 4:18,19 6

12a. He seems to make the excuse to Jethro that he is homesick for his family who are still in Egypt. And yet straight after this, the Lord confirms him in his desire to return. Moses asks Jethro for permission to return to Egypt to see whether his Hebrew brethren are "still alive" (Ex. 4:18)- yet God had just told Moses that there were indeed Hebrews still alive there who he will lead out of Egypt. Of course Moses *may* have been referring to his literal family; but it's possible that his words to Jethro imply a lack of faith in God's word. At the very least, he was shy to share God's word to him with 3

Jethro. In this context it may be significant that the words God tells Moses to say to Pharaoh at this time in Ex. 4:23 are in fact never said by Moses throughout the dialogue with Pharaoh recorded in Ex. 11 and 12.

12b. God had explained to Moses what He wished him to tell Pharaoh: "Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, hath met with us: and now let us go, we pray thee, three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Yahweh our God" (Ex. 3:18). But Moses actually doesn't say those exact words. Instead he says: "Thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness...The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice unto Yahweh our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword" (Ex. 5:1,3). This seems perilously similar to the way in which Eve added to Yahweh's words when telling the serpent that actually, God had told Adam not to *even touch* the fruit. Moses appears to be painting Yahweh as somewhat draconian and

threatening of him personally as well as Israel- as if to say 'Well sir, please do us this favour, or else our God is gonna get mad with us'. Perhaps this was actually how Moses misperceived Yahweh; or perhaps he added to Yahweh's words in order to make his appeal sound more plausible.

13. Moses is easily discouraged by the fact that Israel reject him: " Moses returned unto Yahweh, and said, Lord...why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh...thou hast not delivered thy people at all" . The Yahweh / Lord difference may suggest that he got over familiar with the Angel, forgetting the degree to which that Angel carried God's Name. Ex. 5:22,23 2

14. God replied by telling him to declare the covenant Name to Israel, and remind them that therefore God would surely save them. But they again failed to respond. " And Moses spake before the Lord, saying, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?" . Yet God had Ex. 6:12,30 2

promised Moses earlier that Israel *would* hear him (3:18). God solemnly told him to go and speak to Pharaoh, because God had told him to do so. But Moses has the cheek to say exactly the same words to God a second time. In a chapter which speaks much of Moses' reluctance, the record encourages us: "These are that Aaron and Moses...these are they which spake to Pharaoh...these are that Moses and Aaron" (Ex. 6:26,27).

15. Moses and Aaron agreed to continue speaking to Pharaoh and Israel; they "did as the Lord commanded them, so did they". This is saying the same thing twice- stressing their obedience.

Ex. 7:6

6

16. The record of the miracles is framed to show God commanding Moses to do certain things to bring and end the plagues, and him obedient to this. But Ex. 8:9 RV contains a strange sentence: "Have thou this glory over me: when shall I intreat for thee...to destroy the frogs?". It could be that, in the words of Bro. Mark Vincent, "Moses with an excessive and sarcastic

Ex. 7,8,9

73

politeness, is asking, 'And (pray tell me!) when exactly would you like the frogs to be gone?', as though Pharaoh might miss them and fondly wish them to stay around for a couple more days". This to me doesn't score very highly in spiritual terms.

17. " By faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them (Israel). By faith *they* (Israel) passed through the Red Sea" . Yet at this time Israel were weak in faith, they passed through the Red Sea cuddling the idols of Egypt, from the day God knew them they were rebellious against Him; so runs the refrain of the prophets. It seems that due to Moses' faith Israel were saved by the Passover lamb, through his faith they passed through the Red Sea; his faith was so great, his desire for their salvation so strong, that God counted it to the rest of Israel. Thus " he (Moses, in the context) brought them (Israel) out" of Egypt (Acts 7:36,38). This points forward to Christ's redemption of us, and also indicates how quickly Moses' faith rallied. And yet just prior to

Heb. 11:28,29

8

crossing the Sea, God rebuked Moses: "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" - even though Moses calmly exhorted the people to have faith (Ex. 14:15 cp. 13). Yet by faith he brought them through the Red Sea. Therefore as with his first exit from Egypt (he feared the wrath of the King, and then he didn't), his faith wavered, but came down on the right side.

18. Moses' song of triumph after the Red Sea deliverance shows a fine spirituality. However, note his possible misunderstanding in Ex. 15:13,17- that Sinai was to be "the place" where God would dwell with Israel. Ex. 15 8

19. Israel's murmurings about the lack of food did not discourage Moses; "the Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: for what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord" . Ex. 16:8 8
Here we see the beginnings of some real humility in Moses, due to his appreciation of God manifestation in him.

20. Moses' victory against Amalek due to his faith, in which he typified our Ex. 17:8-16 8

Lord's crucifixion.

21. Moses becomes reconciled to his ex-wife Zipporah whom he had divorced, and has the humility to accept the advice of his ex-father in law Jethro. This all indicates an increasing humility. 21a. Moses accepts Jethro's advice on the basis that he will "surely wear away" (Ex. 18:18); even though his natural strength never abated (Dt. 34:7), and God surely would not have asked him to do the impossible. Jethro at this time seems to have seen Yahweh as only one of many gods; he was a pagan priest. He prophesied that if Moses followed his advice, "all this people shall go to their place in peace" - which they didn't. Num. 10:31 suggests Moses saw Jethro's knowledge of the desert as better than the Angelic "eyes" of Yahweh (2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 15:3) who were going ahead of the camp to find a resting place (Num. 10:33 cp. Ex. 33:14 cp. Is. 63:9). It seems Moses recognized his error in this on the last day of his life, when he admits Yahweh, not Jethro's wisdom, had led them (Dt. 1:33). Likewise Paul in his

Ex. 18:2-27 Ex. 18:1,18,23 8

final communication comments on the way that Mark with whom he had once quarrelled was profitable to him (2 Tim. 4:11).

22. Moses is called up into Sinai and speaks with God. While there, Israel turn away from God, and God wants to make Moses' family His people and reject Israel. But Moses argues with God against this, again showing his humility and his appreciation of God manifestation in Israel, and his earnest desire that God would save Israel. " He said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath" . This was only months after his weak faith and reluctance to lead Israel out of Egypt. He says that he will " go up (and) make an atonement" (Ex. 32:30). And yet he knew the principle that atonement was impossible without shedding blood. Yet he goes further than that: " Blot me, I *pray thee* (he really wanted to do this) out of thy book" (Ex. 32:32)- i.e. the book of salvation (Ez. 13:9; Dan. 12:2; Lk. 10:20; Rev. 20:12). Moses is willing to give his

Ex.32:10-14, 30-32; Ps. 10
105:23

physical life and also his eternal salvation so that Israel can enter the land. Surely he reached matchless heights of selflessness. Note how God's anger "waxed hot" and so did that of Moses. But Moses asks God not to wax hot in anger (Ex. 32:10,11,19). What are we to make of this? Surely, positively, Moses was totally in tune with the feelings of God. And yet he does himself what he asks God not to do. What score would we give Moses for this?

23. God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. God knew Moses by name (Ex. 33:12,17) and so He shows Moses *His Name* (Ex. 33:17,19)- there developed a mutuality between the two. Yet God told Moses that because Israel were stiffnecked, therefore He could not go up with them (Ex. 33:5). Moses agrees the people are stiffnecked, but he knows God well enough to ask Him to still go up in the midst of them (Ex. 34:9). And God did! He acted according to how broad was Moses' conception of God's grace. If Abraham's conception of grace had been even

Ex. 33:11

9

broader, perhaps Sodom would've been saved... Moses' achievement is all the more remarkable because he himself struggled with grace. God assures Moses that he has found grace in His eyes [i.e. before the Angel with whom Moses met?]. And yet Moses says: "If I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way that I may know thee, to the end that I may find grace in thy sight" (Ex. 33:12,13 RV). Despite having been told that he had found grace, Moses still wanted confirmation... as if the voice of God wasn't enough! And maybe there is even the implication that he mistakenly thought that he needed more *knowledge* of God before he could find that grace... as if it depended upon his own mental faculties. And yet God patiently assures Moses yet again: Thou *hast* found grace in my sight", and goes on to proclaim His Name to Moses. "I *will be gracious* to whom I will be gracious" (Ex. 33:19) was surely said specifically to Moses, given the context of Moses' doubts about his receipt of God's grace. The coming down of Yahweh to pronounce His Name was, in the context, to show how

far God would go to assure Moses that yes, His grace towards Moses was real. We too struggle with grace, and are given, also by grace, this undeserved assurance upon assurance.

24. Moses has the spiritual ambition to ask to see the face of God Himself. He is given the greatest God manifestation any man has seen except the Lord Jesus. It's a delightful essay in the possibilities of spiritual growth that the man who once forgot God's Name later came to so finely appreciate it that he was given the finest revelation of it. Despite this, Moses still has the humility to question whether in fact he has found grace (overlooking of his sins) in God's eyes. However, there is maybe a connection between Moses hiding in the " cleft of the rock" (Ex. 33:22) and Elijah hiding in a similar place to witness a theophany whose aim was to *humble* him. Is. 2:10-12 makes a similar connection.

Ex. 33:13-23; 34:9 9

25. Ex. 39 and 40 each contain a marked repetition of the fact that the whole Tabernacle was built and arranged by Moses exactly as God commanded him. It was in this sense that

Ex. 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,32,42;
40:16,19,21,23,25,27,29,32;
Heb.3:2,5 8

Moses was faithful in all his house- as the writer to the Hebrews twice stresses

26. Num. 10 and 11 seem to portray Moses in weakness. He pleads with his brother in law not to leave them, because without him they would not know where to camp in the wilderness; " thou mayest be to us instead of eyes" . Yet the Angels are God's eyes, they were seeking out resting places for Israel in the wilderness; the record reminds us of this straight afterwards (Num. 10:33). Jethro elsewhere suggested that Moses needed more help in leading the people because otherwise fading thou wilt fade away' (Ex. 18:18 A.V.mg.); at the end of his days, the record seems to highlight the untruth of this by commenting that his natural strength was not faded (Dt. 34:7). So Jethro's advice wasn't always spiritual. Moses is depressed by Israel complaining at how boring the manna was. He doubts God's earlier promises to him: " Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight (God said he had, in

Num. 10: 29-32; 11:11-15, 21-23

Ex.33:17)...have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto them, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child unto the land which thou swearest unto *their* fathers (not " our" - notice the uncharacteristic separation between Moses and Israel). Whence should *I* give flesh unto all this people...if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, *if* I have found favour in the sight (as God had earlier promised him that he had)" . God was the father and conceiver of Israel, the one who would carry them to the land (Ex. 19:4; 33:15; Dt. 32:11,12; Hos. 11:1); it is as if Moses is saying: They're your children, you look after them, don't dump them on me. Although compare this with his earlier love for them, willing to sacrifice himself for them. God then says that He will provide more food for Israel. But Moses almost mocks God: " Shall the flocks and herds be slain for them, to suffice them?" . And the Angel angrily replied: " Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not" . If he had

Num. 11:28

8

faith, Moses surely would have realised that if God could provide manna, he could provide any food. Moses seems to have suffered from fits of depression and also high spirituality.

Joshua urged Moses to “forbid” or [Heb.] ‘imprison’ Eldad and Medad for prophesying (Num. 11:28). He fell into the mistake so many have done; shut up or silence a genuine man of God, for fear that the institution, the existing administration, would be undermined. Perhaps they were prophesying of Moses’ death? Whatever, Moses’ refusal to shut them up seems to indicate an openness to God’s Spirit and way of working, even if it threatened to undermine his authority. He shows such a genuine spirit when he replies that he wished that all God’s people were the spiritual leaders.

27. Miriam and Aaron try to humiliate Moses because of the Ethiopian woman he had palled up with in earlier days. But his response was humility itself; so much so that the record comments: "The man Moses was very

Num. 12:1, 13

9

meek (some suggest the Hebrew implies 'made very meek', as a process), above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" . What a compliment! The most humble man that was then alive; and humility is of great value to God, according to the Proverbs and 1 Pet. 3:4. That the leader of 3 million people for forty years could be the meekest man is a sure wonder. Perhaps this comment is made at this point because Moses weakness in the previous chapter had perhaps further developed his humility. He truly cries unto God to heal Miriam of the punishment she was given for criticising him.

- | | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| 28. Israel want to return to Egypt. God again wants to destroy them and make Moses' family His people. But Moses successfully asks God to forgive Israel for this rather than take the personal honour God offered him. | Num. 14:11-20 | 9 |
| 29. God openly declares His acceptance of Moses to all Israel. | Num. 16 | 9 |
| 30. God again wants to destroy Israel and make of Moses' family a new people. Again, for the third | Num. 16:44-50 | 9 |

time, Moses knows God well enough, he has enough faith, enough humility and enough true love for Israel to ask God- successfully- to relent from this. That God wanted to do this three times shows His great love for Moses.

31. God again openly declares His acceptance of Moses in front of all Israel in the incident of the rods. Num. 17 9

32. Moses' faith slips for a moment; his spirit is provoked by Israel, so that he speaks unadvisedly with his lips and is therefore barred from entering the land (although maybe such an apparently temporary slip was the reflection of deeper problems?). Yet it does seem uncharacteristic, a tragic slip down the graph of ever rising spirituality. There must have almost been tears in Heaven. Being easily provoked was one of Moses' characteristics; consider how he *turned himself* and stormed out from Pharaoh (Ex. 10:6; 11:8); how his anger waxed hot when he returned from the mount, how he went out from Pharaoh in great anger, how he first of all feared the wrath of Pharaoh and then stopped fearing it; how Moses was " very Num. 20:12; Ps. 106:32,33 1

wroth" at Israel's suggestion that he was appropriating the sacrifices for himself; how he was "angry" with Eleazer (Ex.32:19; 11:8; Num. 16:15; Lev. 10:16,17). This temperament explains his swings of faith. Was the Lord Jesus likewise afflicted? Note carefully the process of failure here. Moses and Aaron were told to *both* speak to the rock, and this would result in Moses personally bringing forth water: "Gather thou [singular] the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye [plural- both of them] unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou [Moses personally] shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink" (Num. 20:8). But Moses seems to have dismissed Aaron's intended involvement and assumed that he alone could bring the water out with his rod. Yet Aaron was also condemned for this incident- presumably because he didn't speak to the rock but just let Moses smite the rock with his silence meaning consent.

complain, and God punishes them with serpents; Moses' prayer for them is accepted. These prayers for others' salvation must have required intense faith and acceptability to be heard.

34. Moses did not get bitter at his rejection, nor disinterested in Israel's future because he would not be with them in the land. He asked God to provide a replacement for him. Num. 27:16,17 8

34a. Moses seems to express his own weakness in his final speeches to Israel in Deuteronomy. He recalls how even towards the end of the wilderness journey, God told him to contend with Sihon in battle (Dt. 2:24); and yet Moses admits: "I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the highway, I will turn neither unto the right hand nor to the left. Thou shalt sell me food for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only let me pass through on my feet" (Dt. 2:26-28). And yet Dt. 2:24-28 2

God by grace to Moses hardened Sihon's heart so that there was a battle in which, again by grace, he gave Israel victory.

35. The love of Moses for Israel as reflected in his final address to them in Deuteronomy, his knowledge of them, his sensitivity to their weakness, his constant desire for them to be spiritually strong and to enter the land; God's respect of him at the end of his life, shown in his burial and in subsequent comments about him. Although Moses is at a spiritual peak in Deuteronomy, he does repeatedly comment-almost under his breath as it were- that he was not going to enter the land "for your sakes", and that he was thereby bearing the anger of God against Israel (e.g. Dt. 4:21 etc.). Whilst in a sense this was true, God's anger was against Moses personally regarding the sin of striking the rock. Given that "that rock was Christ", his inappropriate striking of it was some kind of symbolic crucifixion of Christ. He was in the wrong- the record of the event makes that clear. And yet at the end of his life,

Moses is blaming Israel for his sin and his exclusion from the land. Perhaps he was indicating his understanding of how his prayer to not enter the land for their sakes was being answered. On the other hand, one could argue that even on the last day of his life, Moses never came to terms with that sin, sought to justify himself in the eyes of Israel, to shift the blame... and yet even then, God's grace was big enough to accept him. Quite how to score Moses on this point will always be debatable, but the exercise certainly provokes a lot of introspection about our own attitudes to public confession of sin, both in ourselves and in others, and its relationship to God's ultimate acceptance of a person.

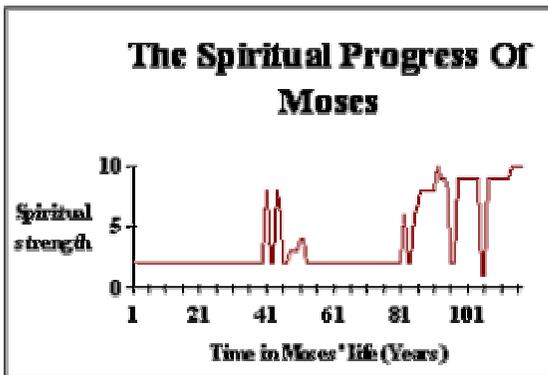
2-2 The Spiritual Growth Of Moses

It may be that some may feel that the above analysis is hard on Moses in his early years. But consider these two points:

1. Moses was encouraged that God really would work through him by his arm becoming leprous and then being cured, and by being given the power to grab hold of a snake. Snakes and leprosy were evident symbols of sin. Surely God was encouraging Moses that with His help, he really could overcome his sinfulness and achieve the work he had been given to do.

2. In Psalm 90 Moses pleads for his rejection and that of his people to be reversed. He says that the reason for their rejection was God setting their "secret sins" in the light of His countenance (Ps. 90:8). He felt his rejection was due to his secret sins- not the one painfully public failure. The Hebrew for "secret" means 'that behind the veil'; it is from the same root as the Hebrew for 'young girl', i.e. a veiled one. He felt the sins he had committed behind the veil had been exposed in the light of the Angel's face. Remember that Moses *always* appeared to Israel with a veil (Ex. 34:33-35; 2 Cor. 3:16-18 RV), only removing it when he spoke face to face with the Angel, radiating the light of God's glory to him. It seems Moses is alluding to this in Ps. 90:8; he felt that he had many secret sins, hidden to Israel, but completely open to the Angel when he met with him. Likewise Israel were rejected because of the sins of their *heart* rather than their grosser failures (Acts 7:39; and see the reason for their condemnation given in many other passages). "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Ps. 90:8) is not Moses reproaching God; rather is it him soberly recognising why they were barred from the land. Notice "*our* iniquities...*our* sins" - Moses was completely at one with condemned Israel, he knew exactly how they felt- just as the Lord Jesus with us.

It makes a good exercise to photocopy the above table with the scores in the last column blanked out, and then ask a group of brethren and sisters or Sunday School kids to argue out what they think the right scores are. And then draw a graph and join the dots:



The spiritual growth of Moses was jagged. A consideration of this graph and our own likely graph reveals that we ought to be more careful how we judge the weaknesses and strengths of brethren. Their and our present situation must be seen in the context of the graph of life. The Moses who could plead "Kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, and let me not see my own wretchedness" was the same Moses who rose to the heights of offering his place in the Kingdom for

Israel. For many of us, our whole lives are characterised by Moses pattern of spiritual growth until age 80. Yet the progressive humbling of him by God really did have an effect. He went on to rise up to the very heights of appreciating God's righteousness, until finally he gathers all Israel before him at the age of 120, perhaps helped up on to a tall rock from where he could address the whole nation. Perhaps they cheered as he first stood up. And then there would have been enthralled silence as he spoke, his eyes fixing on a few random faces. He had gathered them together to say farewell, from the man who had loved them more than any other man. It would have been an awesome sight. Remember Balaam's words, " How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters" (Num. 24:5,6). And there was Moses, " an hundred and twenty years old...his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Dt. 34:7). Perhaps there were 'shouters' who relayed his words to the whole assembly, so that they all heard him. Which means he would have spoken sentence by sentence, very slowly, occasionally drinking from a water bottle.

The word of his God was in his heart, as he stood there before Israel, that people whom he loved, those for whom he wished to make atonement with his own life, even his eternal life. " Yea, he loved the people" is the Spirit's comment (Dt. 33:3- the " he" in the context seems to be Moses). It could only be the Spirit which would write so concisely. " Yea, he loved the people....they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words" . And then he pours out his heart to them, he reels off what we have as the book of Deuteronomy, written at the end point of the spiritual growth of Moses. But in reality that was the outpouring of his heart, pleading with Israel to be faithful to the covenant, encouraging them to be aware of their weakness, encouraging them to go forward and inherit the Kingdom. In those hours as he stood there saying those words, and then he sung that song to them of Dt. 32, I think we see Moses at his finest. And then he blesses those assembled tribes, the *love* of that man for Israel flowing out, and then, no doubt with a lump in his throat, swallowing back the tears, he turned and walked away, up that mountain, higher and higher, with the blue mountains of Moab shimmering in the distance. Even before that, surely his voice had faltered, even broken down, when he spoke to them of the tragedy of their future apostasy, of how the gentle and sensitive woman among them would eat her own children. And how the days would come when they would awake in the morning and say 'Would God it were evening'. As he foresaw in essence the horrors of the Nazi camps, and of so much else...he could only have said those words with tears and passion. For "he loved the people". If ever there was an understatement...

The pathos of the scene is wondrous. Yet in the sadness of it all, we see a type, more than a type, a superb image, of the death of Christ for us. It was for their

sakes that Moses didn't enter the land, remember. That is the emphasis the Spirit gives. As he climbed, for it would have taken a while, perhaps he thought back to those years in Egypt, the struggle of his soul in those years. You may think I'm being over emotional, but it seems to me as he climbed he would have thought back to his dear mum to whom he owed his relationship with God, the mother he'd doubtless disowned for forty years, claiming that he was the son of Pharaoh's daughter; until at age 40 he was honest with himself, he told the world who his real mother was, he refused to be called any longer the son of Pharaoh's daughter. I mean, if we had say 24 hours to live, and we were told to go for a walk before we died, I guess we'd think back to our childhood for at least a moment, wouldn't we. And he was a man, just like any of us.

And perhaps he thought back to those weak years in Midian, to Zipporah, to the long lonely days with the animals. And then to the wonder of the Red Sea, to the nervousness of meeting the Angel, to the joy of that communion in another mountain. He knew that Angel well, they spoke face to face as men who are friends speak to each other (Ex. 33:11). How fitting that at the top, he met that Angel again. The same love, the same open-faced friendship would have been there. The Angel showed him the Kingdom, opening his eyes to see to the very boundaries of the land. And then he buried him, laying him in the grave in hope of better days, when Christ would come and raise his people, when God's people would at last be obedient. What an end. Out of weakness, such weakness, he was made strong. His temperamental faith, with its flashes of devotion, turned into a solid rock, a real ongoing relationship with a loving Father. *Every one* of his human relationships had failed: with his brother and sister, with his wife, with his people. But finally that lonely man found his rest in Yahweh, Israel's God, he came to know Him as his friend and saviour. No wonder he is held up, by way of allusion throughout the New Testament, as our example.

3 The Death Of Moses

3-1 Themes Of Moses In Deuteronomy

We have seen how Moses truly was made spiritually strong out of weakness. We have seen how his faith fluctuated, until at last he came to a spiritual height at the end of his life. We have seen something of the intensity and passion of his love for Israel, to the point where he was willing to give his physical and eternal life for Israel's salvation. In a sense, his desire was heard. Because of the sin of a moment, caused by the provocation of the people he loved, God decreed that he could not enter the land of promise. *For their sakes* he was barred from the land; this is the emphasis of the Spirit (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21); and Ps. 106:32,33 says that Moses was provoked to sin because Israel angered

God, and that *therefore* " it went ill with Moses for their sakes" . Truly, God works through sinful man to achieve His glory ⁽¹⁾. Thus Moses says that he must die "Because *ye* [plural] trespassed against me" (Dt. 32:51). This all helps explain why Christ had to die, apart from the fact that he was mortal. He died the death of a sinner for our salvation, he felt all the emotions of the rejected, the full weight of God's curse; for " cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" in crucifixion (Gal. 3:13). We have seen that Moses is a superb and accurate type of the Lord Jesus ⁽²⁾. Therefore Moses in his time of dying must grant us insight into the death of our Lord, the prophet like him (Dt. 18:18). As Christ declared God's Name just before his death (Jn. 17:26), so did Moses (Dt. 32:3 LXX). Personally I find the last hours of Moses so moving. As we read through the Law, you sense that tragic moment must come; rather like as we read through the Gospels. Moses saw at the end that there was no third way: it was either complete dedication and salvation, or rebellion and condemnation. He pleaded with them to see that " this day...this day...this day" he set before them life and death, forgiveness or salvation (Dt. 30:15-19). The Lord Jesus had His mind on this when He told the thief with the same emphasis that " this day" He could tell them that he would be saved, not condemned (Lk. 23:46). He felt like Moses, but greater than Moses, in that He not only set before men the choice, but could grant them the salvation they sought. Personally I find the last hours of Moses so moving. As we read through the Law, you sense that tragic moment must come; rather like as we read through the Gospels.

So finally Moses gathers Israel before him at the age of 120. It would have been an awesome sight. Remember Balaam's words, " How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters" (Num. 24:5,6). And there was Moses, " an hundred and twenty years old...his eye was not dim, nor his *natural force abated*" (Dt. 34:7). Strong defines those Hebrew words as meaning that his newness, his youth, had not been chased away (AV " abated") by the years, as happens to most men. He had all the energy, intellectually and physically, of a 21 year old, yet with all the sadness and knowledge of God of his 120 years. All the times we read he " rose up early" to commune with God demonstrate his energy, his enthusiasm for the word of the God of Israel (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4).

The word of his God was in his heart, as he stood there before Israel, that people whom he loved, those for whom he wished to make atonement with his own life, even his eternal life. " Yea, he loved the people" is the Spirit's comment (Dt. 33:3- the " he" in the context seems to be Moses). It could only be the Spirit which would write so concisely. " Yea, he loved the people....they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words" . This is God's comment on that last meeting between Moses and Israel. And then he pours out

his heart to them, he reels off what we have as the book of Deuteronomy (it takes about four hours to read it through loud), writes a copy of the Law (31:9; notice how Dt. 24 was *written* by Moses, Mk. 10:5), sings a Song to that silent multitude (surely with a lump in his throat, especially at points like 32:15), and then he turns and climbs the mountain to see the land and meet his death. The fact it all happened on his birthday just adds to the pathos of it all (Dt. 31:2). The huge amount of work which he did on that last day of his life looks forward to the Lord's huge achievement in the day of his death. No wonder Yahweh describes that day of Moses' death with an intensive plural: "The days (i.e. the one great time / day) approach (s.w. "at hand", "made ready") that thou must die" (Dt. 31:14). It seems that he said much of the book in one day; hence his repeated mention of the phrase "this day" throughout the book. The people were often reminded that they were about to "go over [Jordan] to possess" the land (Dt. 11:8,11 RV), as if they were on the banks of Jordan almost. In reality that speech of Deuteronomy was the outpouring of his heart, pleading with Israel to be faithful to the covenant, encouraging them to be aware of their weakness, encouraging them to go forward and inherit the Kingdom. Not only do we have a powerful type of the Lord Jesus in all this; Israel assembled before him really do represent us. Dt.32:36 ("the Lord shall judge his people") is quoted in Heb. 10:20 as relevant to all of us.

The Love Of Moses In Deuteronomy

Some time, read through the book of Deuteronomy in one or two goes. You'll see many themes of Moses in Deuteronomy. It really shows how Moses felt towards Israel, and how the Lord Jesus feels towards us, and especially how he felt towards us just before his death. For this is what the whole book prefigures. "Love" and the idea of love occurs far more in Deuteronomy than in the other books of the Law. "Fear the Lord thy God" of Exodus becomes "love the Lord thy God" in Deuteronomy. There are 23 references to not hating in Deuteronomy, compared to only 5 in Ex. - Num.; Moses saw the danger of bitterness and lack of love. He saw these things as the spiritual cancer they are, in his time of maturity he warned his beloved people against them. His mind was full of them. The LXX uses the word *ekklesia* eight times in Deuteronomy, but not once in Moses' other words (Dt. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 23:1,2,3,8; 32:1). Responsibility for the whole family God had redeemed was a mark of his maturity. It is observable that both as a community and as individuals, this will be a sign of our maturity too. The following are just some aspects of his relationship with Israel.

The way Moses sees Israel as far more righteous than they were reflects the way the Lord imputes righteousness to us. He says that Israel didn't go near the mountain because they were afraid of the fire (Dt. 5:5), whereas Ex. 19:21-24 teaches that Israel at that time were not so afraid of the fire, and were quite

inclined to break through the dividing fence and gaze in unspiritual fascination at a theophany which was beyond them. He speaks as if he assumed that surely Israel would love their neighbour as themselves: "Thy brother...or thy friend, which is as thine own soul" almost unconsciously reveals the depth of Moses' positive faith in their obedience, even though on the other hand he clearly understood their future apostacy (Dt. 13:6). He even assumed that Israel would not possibly try to break through the barriers around Sinai to "gaze"- "for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount and sanctify it" (Ex. 19:23). He over-estimated their obedience, so much did he love them.

Moses does not repeat every single commandment in the Law. Rather are there several themes of Moses in Deuteronomy presented. His choice of which ones he does repeat indicates his feelings towards Israel. His sensitivity towards the weakest and poorest of Israel comes out in this. He was reaching the spirit of the Lord Jesus, who said that the weakest of his brethren represented him (Mt. 25:40 Gk.). Thus Moses stresses how they were not to go into the house of a poor man to take back his pledge (Dt. 24:10); Moses could enter into the sense of shame and embarrassment of the poor man when a richer man enters his home. The Law in Exodus 22:26 did not stipulate that the house of the poor man should not be entered; by making this point in his farewell speech, Moses was showing his sensitivity, his ability now to enter into the feelings of the poorest of God's people. Indeed, the whole passage in Deuteronomy (24:6-17) about pledges is quite an expansion upon what the Law actually said in Ex. 22. And this from a man who could have been the king of Egypt, who could have had the world. What marvellous similarity with our Lord! Moses' sensitivity is shown by the introduction of other expansions upon existing commandments; e.g. "thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Dt. 25:4). This is quoted by Paul as being actually part of the Law (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18), showing that Moses was so attune with the mind of God that these practical extensions which his sensitivity led him to command Israel were indeed the inspired commandments of God.

Moses' spiritual pinnacle was characterized by arriving at a profound depth of love. Love is likewise seen by Paul as "the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14), the sign of ultimate maturity.

Knowledge Of Their Weakness

In this time of final spiritual maturity, Moses was keenly aware of his own spiritual failings (as Paul and Jacob were in their last days). This is one of the great themes of Moses in Deuteronomy. He begins his Deuteronomy address by pointing out how grievously they had failed thirty eight years previously, when they refused to enter the good land. He reminds them how that although God had gone before them in Angelic power (Dt. 1:30,33), they had asked for

their spies to go before them. And Moses admits that this fatal desire for human strength to lead them to the Kingdom " pleased me well" (Dt. 1:23). It seems to me that here Moses is recognizing his own failure. Perhaps he is even alluding to his weakness in wanting Jethro to go before them " instead of eyes" , in place of the Angel-eyes of Yahweh (Num. 10:31-36). Moses at the end was aware of his failures. And yet he also shows his thorough appreciation of the weakness of his people. Moses admits at the end that Israel's faithless idea to send out spies "pleased me well"- when it shouldn't have done (Dt. 1:23,32,33). He realized more and more his own failure as he got older.

Moses often reminds them that he knows that they will turn away from the Covenant he had given them (e.g. Dt. 30:1; 31:29). He knew that one day they would want a king, even though God was their king (Dt. 17:14). He knew that there would always be poor people in the land, even though if the Law was properly kept this would not be the case (Dt. 15:4mg, 11). He knew they would accidentally commit murder and would need a way of escape; therefore he twice repeats and explains the law concerning the cities of refuge (Dt. 4:42; 19:5). These being a symbol of the future Messiah (Heb. 6:18), this emphasis would suggest that like Paul and Jacob, the mind of Moses in his time of spiritual maturity was firmly fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. He foresaw how they would see horses and chariots and get frightened (Dt. 20:1-4). When he commented about the commandments that God "added no more" (Dt. 5:22), he foresaw his people's tendency to add the Halakahs of their extra commandments... He could foresee the spiritual problems they would have in their hour by hour life, he appreciated how both their nature and their disobedience would be such a problem for them, and Moses foresaw that they would not cope well with it (ditto for our Lord Jesus). And he was fully aware, more so than they were, of the judgement this would bring. He not only repeats all the curses of Lev. 26 to them, but he adds even more, under inspiration (Dt. 28:50-57). Presumably the Angel had explained in one of their conversations how Israel would suffer even greater punishment than what He had outlined in Lev. 26. Notice in passing that Lev. 26 and Dt. 28 are not strictly parallel. And in some ways, Moses became more demanding, whilst at the same time emphasizing grace and love. Thus under the Law, Israel were not to lend to their poor brother upon usury (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:37); but now Moses forbids them to do this to *any* Israelite (Dt. 23:19).

Having reminded them that if they were obedient, "there shall be no poor among you; for the Lord shall greatly bless thee", Moses goes on to comment that "the poor shall never cease out of the land"- and he gives the legislation cognisant of this (Dt. 15:4,11). Moses realized by the time of Deuteronomy that they wouldn't make it to the blessings which were potentially possible. Finely aware of the seriousness of our relationship with God, Moses pleads with Israel to " choose life" , not with the passivity which may appear from our armchair

reading of passages like Dt. 30:19. Yet he knew that the majority of Israel would not choose life. When he appeals to them to choose obedience he is therefore thinking of the minority who would respond. Our Lord Jesus, with his knowledge of human nature, must have sensed that so many of those called into his new covenant would also turn away; He must have known that only a minority of Israel would choose the life which He offered. Yet like Moses He doubtless concentrated his thoughts on the minority who would respond. Moses spoke Deuteronomy without notes. It was no set piece address. All these things were in his heart; their proneness to failure, the coming of judgment for sin, his knowledge of their future apostasy. Enter into the *passion* of it all. The man who was willing to give his eternal life for them, about to die for the sake of their provocation- singing a final song to them, giving a final speech, which showed that he knew perfectly well that they would turn away from what he was trying to do for them, and therefore the majority of them would not be saved.

Despite such great love for Israel, Moses knew them so well that he fully appreciated that they were extremely prone to weakness. This is one of the major themes of Moses in Deuteronomy. He did not turn a blind eye to their sins; Deuteronomy is punctuated with reminders of how grievously they had sinned during their journey. Time and again he comments on how easily they will be tempted to disobey commandments. "Take heed" runs like a refrain throughout Moses' speech. He warns them, e.g., not to "take pity" on false teachers, but to purge them from the community (Dt. 7:16; 13:8; 19:13,21; 25:12). Not once in the Law does this warning occur. Moses had come to know Israel so well that he could see how they were tempted to fail, and so he warned them forcibly against it. The way the Lord Jesus knows our thought processes, the mechanism of our temptations, is wondrously prefigured here. There are so many other examples of Moses showing his recognition of exactly *how* Israel were likely to be tempted (Dt. 6:11-13; 8:11-20; 9:4; 11:16; 12:13,19,23,30; 13:1-4; 14:27; 15:9,18; 17:11,12 ("will"), 14,16,17; 21:18; 22:1-4,18; 23:21; 25:8).

Moses adds a whole series of apparently 'minor' commands which were designed to make obedience easier to the others already given. Thus he tells them in Deuteronomy not to plant a grove of trees near the altar of God - because he knew this would provoke the possibility of mixing Yahweh worship with that of the surrounding world (Dt. 16:21). Likewise he commands any future king not to send God's people to Egypt to buy horses because he could see that this would tempt them to go back to Egypt permanently (Dt. 17:16). There are many other examples of this kind of thing (Dt. 14:24; 15:18; 17:17-19; 18:9; 20:7,8). The point is that Moses had thought long and hard about the ways in which Israel would be tempted to sin, and his words and innermost

desire were devoted to helping them overcome. Glorious ditto for the Lord Jesus.

Another theme of Deuteronomy is the way in which Moses visualizes commonplace daily incidents which he could foresee occurring in Israel's daily life: the man cutting down the tree and the axe head flying off and hitting someone; finding a dead body in a lonely field; coming across a stray animal on the way home from work; a man with two wives treating one as his favourite; seeing your neighbour struggling to lift up his sick animal; coming across a bird's nest and being tempted to take the mature bird as well as the chicks home for supper; being tempted not to bother building a battlement around the flat roof of your new house; the temptation to take a bag with you and fill it up with your neighbour's grapes; the need to have weapons which could be used for covering excrement (Dt. 19:5; 21:1,15; 22:1,2,4,6,8; 23:13,24,25; 24:5,6,10,15,19; 25:11,13). The sensitivity of Moses was just fantastic! His eager imagination of His people in daily life, his understanding of their everyday temptations so superbly typifies that of our Lord!

Because Moses knew all this, he was pleading with Israel to "choose life", not with the passivity which may appear from our armchair reading of passages like Dt. 30:19. I wonder if he wasn't screaming this to them, breaking down in the climax of logic and passion which resulted in that appeal. Yet he knew that the majority of Israel would not choose life. When he appeals to them to choose obedience he is therefore thinking of the minority who would respond. Our Lord Jesus, with his knowledge of human nature, must have sensed that so many of those called into his new covenant would also turn away; he must have known that only a minority of Israel would choose the life which he offered. Yet like Moses he doubtless concentrated his thoughts on the minority who would respond. Moses spoke Deuteronomy without notes. It was no reading of a carefully prepared paper. All these things were in his heart; their proneness to failure, the coming of judgement for sin, his knowledge of their future apostasy. Enter into the *passion* of it all. The man who was willing to give his eternal life for them, about to die for the sake of their provocation- singing a final song to them, giving a final speech, which showed that he knew perfectly well that they would turn away from what he was trying to do for them, and therefore the majority of them would not be saved. As he came to the end of his speech, he seems to have sensed they didn't grasp the reality of it all: "It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life" (Dt. 32:47); and thus his speech rises to a crescendo of intensity of pleading with them, after the pattern of the Lord.

Moses' Appeal To Israel

One of the most repeated themes of Moses in Deuteronomy is the way he keeps on telling them to "remember" all the great things which God had done for them on their wilderness journey (e.g. Dt. 10:21; 11:3-6), and especially the wonder of how he had redeemed them as children (his audience had been under twenty years old when they went through the Red Sea). Just look up all the times "remember" occurs in Deuteronomy. He really wanted them to overcome the human tendency to forget the greatness of God as manifested earlier in our lives and spiritual experience. Our tendency as the new Israel is just the same - to forget the wonder of baptism, of how God reached out His arm to save us.

Time and again, Moses speaks of the state of their *heart*. He warns them against allowing a bad state of heart to develop, he speaks often of how apostasy starts in the heart. Moses makes a total of 49 references to the heart / mind of Israel in Deuteronomy, compared to only 13 in the whole of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. This indicates the paramount importance which our Lord attaches to the state of our *mind*. This was perhaps his greatest wish as he faced death; that we should develop a spiritual *mind* and thereby manifest the Father and come to salvation. Moses likewise saw the state of our mind as the key to spiritual success. But do we share this perspective? Do we guard our minds against the media and influence of a mind-corrupting world? Statistical analysis of the word "love" in the Pentateuch likewise reveals that "love" was a great theme of Moses at the end of his life (Moses uses it 16 times in Deuteronomy, and only four times in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers). The word "commandments" occurs 43 times in Deuteronomy, and only 19 times in the other three records; "remember" occurs 16 times compared to 8 times in the other three. And yet Moses commanded Israel specifically to engrave the law on tables of plaster, not stone, knowing that they would soon be washed away; thus he wished to teach Israel [or try to] the temporary nature of the Law (Dt. 27:4-8). Like Paul in his time of dying, Moses saw the importance of obedience, the harder side of God; yet he also saw in real depth the surpassing *love* of God, and the grace that was to come, beyond Law. This appreciation reflected Moses' mature grasp of the Name / characteristics of God. He uses the name "Yahweh" over 530 times, often with some possessive adjective, e.g. "Yahweh *thy* God" or "Yahweh *our* God". He saw the personal relationship between a man and his God. Jacob reached a like realization at his peak. The idea of 'cleaving' to God is also a big theme of Moses in Deuteronomy (4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4,17; 28:21,60; 30:20); the only other time Moses uses the word in his writings is in Gen. 2:24, concerning a man cleaving to his wife. Moses seems to have been suggesting to Israel that their covenant relationship with God meant they were *marrying* God. This was a real paradigm breaker. We may be used to such things. But against the theological background of the

time, not to say the generally low level of spirituality among Israel, this was a shocking idea. It reflected the heights to which Moses had risen.

Moses really wanted Israel's well-being, he saw so clearly how obedience would result in blessing (e.g. Dt. 6:3; 12:28). This is a major theme of Moses in Deuteronomy. There was therefore a real sense of pleading behind his frequent appeal for Israel to "hear" God's words. "*Hear, O Israel*" must have had a real passion behind it in his voice, uncorrupted as it was by old age. He didn't rattle it off as some kind of Sunday School proof. At least four times Moses interrupts the flow of his speech with this appeal: "*Hear, O Israel*" (Dt. 5:1; 6:3,4; 9:1; 20:3). And again, a glance through a concordance shows how often in Deuteronomy Moses pleads with them to hear God's voice. So he was back to his favourite theme: Hear the word, love the word, make it your life. For in this is your salvation. And the Lord Jesus (e.g. in passages like Jn. 6) makes just the same urgent appeal.

Despite omitting some of the Law's commands in his speech, there are other commands which Moses really emphasises and repeats within his speech; e.g. the need to destroy idols and false teachers, and to provide cities of refuge to cater for the sins they would commit without intending to (Dt. 7:5; 12:3, 23-25; 13:6-14 = 17:2-7). This surely reflects our Lord's attitude to us; it is his desire that we recognise our sinfulness, our likelihood of failure, our need to separate from things which will lead us away from Him. And yet the Christian community is increasingly blind to this. Moses' frequent references to the way in which the Exodus had separated Israel from Egypt show the same spirit (Dt. 13:5; 15:15; 16:12); as our Lord in his time of dying was so strongly aware of the way in which he was redeeming us from this present evil world.

The Enthusiasm Of Moses For Israel

Having stated that the Canaanite tribes would only be cast out if Israel were obedient, Moses goes on to enthuse that those tribes would indeed be cast out—so positive was he about Israel's obedience (Dt. 6:18,19; 7:1). And yet on the other hand he realistically was aware of their future failures. He said those positive words genuinely, because he simply loved Israel, and had the hope for them which love carries with it. Throughout his speech, Moses is *constantly* thinking of Israel in the land; he keeps on telling them how to behave when they are there, encouraging them to be strong so that they will go into the land. I estimate that about 25% of the verses in Moses' speech speak about this. Israel's future inheritance of the Kingdom absolutely filled Moses' mind as he faced up to his own death. And remember that his speech was the outpouring of 40 years meditation. Their salvation, them in the Kingdom, totally filled his heart. And likewise with the Lord Jesus. Psalms 22 and 69 shows how his thoughts on the cross, especially as he approached the point of death, were

centred around our salvation. And Moses was so positive about them. "The Lord thy God *shall* bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands", even though these blessings were conditional upon their obedience. Moses was this confident of them (Dt. 16:15 cp. 28:1,4,12).

Despite knowing their weakness and his own righteousness, Moses showed a marvellous softness and humility in that speech. When he reminds them how God wanted to reject them because of their idolatry with the golden calf, he does not mention how fervently he prayed for them, so fervently that God changed His expressed intention (Dt. 9:14); and note deeply, Moses *does not mention how he offered his physical and eternal life for their salvation*. That fine, fine act and desire by Moses went unknown to Israel until the book of Exodus came into circulation. And likewise, the depth of Christ's love for us was unrecognised by us at the time. Moses had such humility in not telling in Israel in so many words how fervently he had loved them. The spiritual culture of the Lord is even greater.

The softness of Moses, the earnestness of his desire for their obedience, his eagerness to work with them in their humanity, is shown by the concessions to human weakness which he makes in Deuteronomy (with God's confirmation, of course). When they attacked a foreign city, OK, Moses says, you can take the women for yourselves- even though this is contrary to the spirit of earlier commands (Dt. 20:14; 21:11). Likewise with the provisions for having a human king (Dt. 17:17) and divorce (24:1-4). He knew the hardness of Israel's hearts, their likelihood to give way to temptation, and so he made concessions contrary to the principles behind other parts of the Law (Mt. 19:8). And Dt. 16:2 seems to imply that now, the Passover sacrifice didn't necessarily have to be a lamb, and it could be boiled not just roasted (:7).

Despite being fully aware of how weak Israel were, Moses often speaks of the "blessing" which God would give them for obedience; he even speaks of the future blessing of obedience in the prophetic perfect, so confident was he that they would receive it: "Every man shall give as he is able (once he is settled in the land), according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he *hath* given thee" (Dt. 16:17). Moses speaks with confidence of how God would grant them the blessing of the land and victory over their enemies, even though these things were conditional upon their obedience (Dt. 19:1; 20:13), and even though Moses clearly knew that most of them would disobey. The conclusion from this is that Moses thought so much of that minority who would obey his covenant, who would grasp the spirit of his life and the speech he was now making. And our Lord likewise- in his feelings for us, we trust.

And yet for all Moses' desire for Israel's obedience, there are some subtle differences in his attitude to law and obedience between Deuteronomy, and the

law earlier given. Thus in Leviticus 26 it was stressed that obedience would bring blessing; whilst Dt. 28:58 says that obedience results in fearing the fearful Name of Yahweh and His glory. Fear shouldn't lead to obedience; but obedience leads a man to *know and fear his God and His Name*. This is blessing enough. Like Jacob and Job, Moses came to a fine appreciation of Yahweh's Name at his latter end.

Notes

(1) Ez. 20:38 says that the rebels in the wilderness "shall not enter into the land", with reference to how when Moses called the people "rebels" and beat the rock, he was disallowed entry into the land. Because he called them rebels, i.e. unworthy of entry to the Kingdom, he also was treated as a rebel. If we condemn others, we likewise will be condemned. On another level, he was simply barred for disobedience; and on yet another, his prayer to the effect that he didn't want to be in the land if his people weren't going to be there was being answered; and on yet another and higher level, his offer to be blotted out of the book of inheritance for Israel's sake was also being heard. Thus God works within the same incident in so many ways!

(2) See *Moses and Jesus* and *Moses in the Gospel of John*.

3-2 The Song Of Moses

In those hours as Moses stood there saying those words of Deuteronomy, and then as he sung that song of Moses to them of Dt. 32, I think we see Moses at his finest. His voice would have been that of a young man, and yet with all the passion of meaning of his 120 years. And then he blesses those assembled tribes, the *love* of that man for Israel flowing out, with that same wondrous voice. " Yea, he *loved* the people" . And then, no doubt with a lump in his throat, swallowing back the tears, he turned and walked away, up that mountain, higher and higher, with the blue mountains of Moab shimmering in the distance. " That selfsame day" Moses spoke Deuteronomy, God commanded him: " Get thee up into this mountain...and behold the land...and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people" (Dt. 32:50). Like the Lord Jesus, he received a commandment to die (Jn. 10:18; 14:31), and yet he presumably did not know how to consciously fulfil it according to his own actions. He climbed the mountain alone, that same day he spoke Deuteronomy. Presumably he spoke Deuteronomy in the morning, sung the song of Moses, and then " that selfsame day" died. It would have taken him time to climb the mountain, to be met at the top by the Angel, who then showed him the land, kissed him (see later) and buried him. Presumably he died late in

the day, watching the sun setting over the promised land- perhaps at the same hour Jesus died.

The pathos of the scene is wondrous, the Song of Moses as it were can be heard still echoing. Yet in the sadness of it all, we see prefigured the death of Christ for us. It was for their sakes that Moses didn't enter the land, remember. That is the emphasis the Spirit gives. As he climbed, for it would have taken a while, perhaps he thought back to those years in Egypt, the struggle of his soul in those years. You may think I'm being over emotional, but it seems to me as he climbed he would have thought back to his dear mum to whom he owed his relationship with God, the mother he'd doubtless disowned for forty years, admitting that he was the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He would have reflected how at age 40 he was honest with himself, how he told the world who his real mother was (probably, tragically enough, after her death, sad that her son seemed to have rejected her for the pleasures of Egypt), how he had refused to be called any longer the son of Pharaoh's daughter. I mean, if we had say 24 hours to live, and we were told to go for a walk before we died, I guess we'd think back to our childhood for at least a moment, wouldn't we. And he was a man, just like you and me, with all a man's feelings, all a man's memories, all a man's humanity. I believe, although I can't prove it, that he wept all the way to the top, climbing farther and farther away from the people he loved, knowing that the majority simply didn't understand him and what he had suffered for them. And perhaps as he sung the song of Moses, he thought back to those weak years in Midian, to Zipporah, to the arguments with her, to the pain of the divorce, to the Ethiopian woman, to the long lonely days with the animals. And then to the wonder of the Red Sea, to the nervousness of meeting the Angel, to the joy of that communion in another mountain. He knew that Angel well, they spoke face to face as men who are friends speak to each other (Ex. 33:11).

The echoes of Deuteronomy in the Lord's goodbye speeches shouldn't be missed; for Moses at this time truly was a superb type of the Lord Jesus. Deuteronomy concludes with two songs of Moses, one addressed to the Father (Dt. 32), and the other to his people (Dt. 33). It is apparent that the Lord's final prayer in Jn. 17 is divisible into the same two divisions- prayer to the Father, and concern for His people. It has been observed that the prayer of Jn. 17 is also almost like a hymn- divided into seven strophes of eight lines each. It would appear to be John's equivalent to the record in Mk. 14:26 of a hymn being sung at the end of the Last Supper.

3-3 The Death Of Moses

How fitting that at the top of the mountain, he met that Angel again, who had lovingly prepared for the death of Moses. The same love, the same open-faced

friendship would have been there. The Angel showed him the Kingdom, opening his eyes to see to the very boundaries of the land. It seems to me that in some sense the Lord Jesus had a vision of us in the Kingdom just before his death (Is. 53:10; Heb. 12:2; Ps. 22:17,20 cp. Eph. 5:30). Moses died " by the mouth of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley...but no man knoweth of his sepulchre" (Dt. 34:5,6 Heb.). " By the mouth of the Lord" can imply a kiss; as if the Angel kissed Moses, and this resulted in his death. Remember, the Angel was Moses *friend* (Ex. 33:11). It was a reversal of how the Angel created Adam and breathed into his nose the Spirit; now the Angel kisses Moses and takes it away. And then he buried him, laying him in the grave in hope of better days, when Christ would come and raise his people, when God's people would at last be obedient. What an end. Moses seems to have foreseen this when he said that "We bring our years to an end with a sigh", a final outbreathing (Ps. 90:9 RVmg.). And then the Angel built a sepulchre. Just picture that Angel perhaps digging, yes *digging* the grave, building the sepulchre of the rocks laying around in that cleft in the mountain ⁽¹⁾. In the context of Moses leading Israel, we are told: " As a beast goeth down into the valley (tired at the end of a day, led there to drink by a loving owner), the Spirit (Angel) of the Lord caused him to rest" (Is. 63:14). Remember how Moses was buried by the Angel in a valley in the mountain (Dt. 34:6). The Hebrew translated " rest" means both to physically lay down and to comfort. So we have the picture of the Angel comforting Moses with the hope of resurrection, kissing him goodnight as it were, and then laying him down in the grave. The softness of God at the death of Moses, the gentleness, prefigured above all the gentleness, in a sense, of the Father with His Son at the cross; and His gentleness with each of us in our time of dying. Let's remember this idea. For short of the second coming, we're all mortal. There's something wondrous about the death of Moses. It's as if God took Moses' funeral- and said in truth 'This is the best man I've yet known', as a man might say at the funeral of his best friend.

Through it all we sense the great love of Yahweh, manifest in that Angel, for His servant. And this all typifies the tenderness of God for Jesus in his time of dying. As we think of the Angel lowering the body of Moses, with his arms around and underneath him, it seems no accident that the last words of Moses spoke of this very thing: " There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency in the sky. *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms*: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee....Israel then shall dwell in safety alone (language of the future Kingdom, Ez. 29:26; 34:25): the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by Yahweh...thine enemies shall be subdued unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places" , i.e. their idols (Dt. 33:26-29). Surely these Moses' last words could not have been said without his voice cracking with emotion.

A few hours before the death of Moses, he had been telling Israel: " While I am yet alive with you this day (for a few more hours), ye have been rebellious against Yahweh; and how much more after my death?" (Dt. 31:27). Earlier that same day the Angel had told him: " Thou shalt *lie down* (mg.) with thy fathers (cp. the Angel lying him down in the grave)...and this people will *rise up* (i.e. immediately after his death), and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land" (Dt. 31:16). No wonder this was ringing in Moses' ears as he came to his death. Yet he triumphed in the fact that a minority would not give way. *His very last words* were a confident exaltation that ultimately Israel would overcome their temptations, the influence and idols of the surrounding world. But he knew that the majority of them would spiritually fall because of these things. Therefore he was looking forward to the minority in Israel who would gloriously overcome, who would come to the Kingdom, the land of corn and wine, when the heavens would drop dew. This is clearly the language of Ps. 72 and Isaiah about the future Kingdom. Moses met death with the vision of the faithful minority in the Kingdom, in the promised land, having overcome all their besetting temptations. And the Lord Jesus died with exactly that same vision (Ps. 22:22-31; 69: 30-36).

What an end. Out of weakness, such weakness, he was made strong. His temperamental faith, with its flashes of devotion, turned into a solid rock, a real ongoing relationship with a loving Father. *Every one* of his human relationships had failed: with his natural brother and sister, with his wife, with his mother, with his adopted mother, with his people. But finally that lonely man found his rest in Yahweh, Israel's God, he came to know Him as his friend and saviour. No wonder he is held up, by way of allusion throughout the New Testament, as both our example and a superb type of our Lord Jesus. Israel mourned for Moses, but it is emphasized that their weeping came to an end (Dt. 34:8). This is one of the most tragic things about the whole record of the death of Moses. They rose up, and forgot his love (Dt. 31:16,27). And what of us?

Notes

(1) An alternative reconstruction of the death of Moses is possible. Rabbinical tradition says that " he buried him" (Dt. 34:6) is reflexive; it means that Moses buried himself. For confirmation of this, see S.R.Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, Vol. 5 p.685 (New York: Judaica Press, 1971). It is the same Hebrew construction as in Lev. 22:16 and Num. 6:13. In this case, the description of Christ as 'making his own grave' (Is. 53:9) could be read as an allusion to the death of Moses. Therefore the pattern of events was perhaps something like this: The Angel showed Moses the land; Moses, in the presence of the Angel, dug his own grave and lowered himself into it, as a conscious act of the will, in

obedience to God's command (as the prototype of the Lord Jesus). The prophesy that Moses would *lie down* in death takes on a literal sense in this case (Dt. 31:16). Then the Angel kissed him, and he died. The Angel then built up the sepulchre over his body. Personally I feel this was what happened, but I am cautious to strongly push ideas which rely on a fine point of Hebrew grammar.

4 Moses As A Type Of Christ

By the time he uttered Deuteronomy, Moses would probably have been the oldest person any of the congregation had ever known. Many of the earlier generation had been cut down in the wilderness. He was nearly twice the age of Joshua. He had dominated their lives from birth, had stuck with them, with their fathers and even grandparents. Just as the Lord Jesus is to be the central figure in the new Israel. Moses was also a representative of his people, just as the Lord Jesus is in a sense 'Israel' - the suffering servant refers to both Israel and their Messiah. Moses was "adopted by an imperial parent, punished for his rashness, sentenced to wander forty years in the wilderness, forgiven, restored, hand-selected for an impossible task, accompanied by the overwhelming presence of God at every step...", just as his beloved people. In the same way as Moses was the mediator of the old covenant, so Christ was of the new. Christ was the prophet like unto Moses (Dt. 18:18). Moses was the shepherd of the flock of Israel, leading them on God's behalf through the wilderness towards the promised land (Is. 63:12), as Christ leads us after baptism to the Kingdom. It was only through Moses' leadership that they reached Canaan: "The Lord said unto (Moses), Arise (cp. Christ's resurrection), take thy journey before the people (as Christ, the good shepherd, goes *before* the flock, Jn. 10:3), *that* they may go in and possess the land" (Dt. 10;11). As Moses very intensely manifested God to the people, so he foreshadowed the supreme manifestation of the Father in the Son. The commands of Moses were those of God (Dt. 7:11; 11:13,18; and 12:32 concerning Moses' words is quoted in Rev. 22:18,19 concerning God's words); his voice was God's voice (Dt. 13;18; 15:5; 28:1), as with Christ. Israel were to show their love of God by keeping Moses' commands (Dt. 11:13); as the new Israel do in their response to the word of Christ. Indeed, the well known prophecy that God would raise up a prophet "like unto" Moses to whom Israel would *listen* (Dt. 18:18) is in the context of Israel saying they did not want to hear God's voice directly. Therefore God said that he would raise up Christ, who would be another Moses in the sense that *he too* would speak forth God's word.

It is possible that Moses appreciated that he was a type of Christ the future Messiah; he considered "the reproach of Christ" enough to motivate him to reject the attractions of Egypt (Heb. 11:26); he knew he was sharing the

sufferings of the future, ultimate saviour, and the wonder of that alone was enough to motivate him to leave the attractions of this world- even the possibility of being the next Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth. The similarities between Jesus and Moses are too many to sensibly tabulate. There is ample opportunity to enter deeply into the attitude of Moses towards Israel, and it is this which perhaps most valuably deepens our appreciation of the love of Christ for us, and of our own liability to failure after the pattern of Israel.

The Rejection Of Moses

Stephen in Acts 7 stresses the way in which Moses was rejected by Israel as a type of Christ. At age 40, Moses was " thrust away" by one of the Hebrews; and on the wilderness journey the Jews " thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt" (Acts 7:27,35,39). This suggests that there was far more antagonism between Moses and Israel than we gather from the Old Testament record- after the pattern of Israel's treatment of Jesus. It would seem from Acts 7:39 that after the golden calf incident, the majority of Israel cold shouldered Moses. Once the point sank in that they were not going to enter the land, this feelings must have turned into bitter resentment. They were probably unaware of how Moses had been willing to offer his eternal destiny for their salvation; they would not have entered into the intensity of Moses' prayers for their salvation. The record seems to place Moses and " the people" in juxtaposition around 100 times (e.g. Ex. 15:24; 17:2,3; 32:1 NIV; Num. 16:41 NIV; 20:2,3; 21:5). They accused Moses of being a cruel cult leader, bent on leading them out into the desert to kill them and steal their wealth from them (Num. 16:13,14)- when in fact Moses was delivering them from the house of bondage, and was willing to lay down his own salvation for theirs. The way Moses submerged his own pain is superb; both of their rejection of him and of God's rejection of him from entering the Kingdom. The style of Moses' writing in Num. 20:12-14 reveals this submerging of his own pain. He speaks of himself in the third person, omitting any personal reflection on his own feelings: " The Lord spake unto Moses...Because ye believed me not...ye shall not bring the congregation into the land...and Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the King of Edom..." . Likewise all the references to "the Lord spake unto Moses" (Lev. 1:1). Moses submerged his own personality in writing his books.

It is simply fantastic that Moses could love those people so intensely, despite their aggression and indifference towards him. He was prepared to give his place in the Kingdom so that they might enter; he *prayed* God to accept his offer. He knew that atonement could only be by sacrifice of blood (Lev. 17:11); and yet he climbed the Mount with the intent of making atonement himself for Israel's sin (Ex. 32:30); he intended to give his life for them. And he didn't make such a promise in hot blood, as some men might. He made the statement,

and then made the long climb to the top of the mount. And during that climb, it seems he came to an even higher spiritual level; he was prepared not only to offer his physical life, but also his place in the Kingdom (Ex. 32:32 cp. Ez. 13:9; Dan. 12:2; Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 20:12). Now although hopefully we are not rejecting Christ as they did, the fact still stands that the love of Moses for Israel typifies the love of Christ towards us. The degree, the extent of Moses' love, is but a dim foretaste of the *degree* of the love of Christ for us. Now in this is something wonderful, something we really need to go away and meditate about. And the wonder of it all is that Israel did not realize the extent of Moses' love at the time. At the end of his life he recounts how God has threatened to destroy the people, and then "I turned and came down from the mount" (Dt. 9:15). He doesn't record his 40 days of pleading with the Father, and how he turned down the offer of having himself made into a great nation. In this we see tremendous spiritual culture, pointing forward to the Lord's own self-perception of His sacrifice.

The loneliness of Moses as a type of Christ in showing this kind of love must surely represent that of our Lord. They went to a height which was generally beyond the appreciation of the men among whom they lived. The Spirit seems to highlight the loneliness of Moses by saying that at the same time as Moses *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Israel *refused* him (the same Greek word is used; Heb. 11:24; Acts 7:35). He was rejected by both the world and God's people: for 40 long years. As Israel envied Moses for spiritual reasons (Ps. 106:16; Acts 7:9), so they did Christ (Mt. 27:18), after the pattern of the brothers' spiritual envy of Joseph (Gen. 37:11). Spiritual envy leading to persecution is quite a common feature in Biblical history (Job, Jeremiah, Paul...). And it isn't absent from the Christian experience either.

The tragedy is that Israel's rejection of Moses is typical of the rejection of Christ by those in the new Israel who turn away. The same word used about Israel *refusing* Moses as their deliverer (Acts 7:35) is used about those who *deny* (same word) the Lord (Jesus) that bought them (2 Pet. 2:1). This latter verse is prefaced by the information that as there were those who lost their faith in the ecclesia in the wilderness, so there will be among the new Israel (2 Pet. 2:1). Therefore "the Lord that bought them" is an allusion back to Moses as a type of Christ. The illogicality of Israel's rejection of Moses when he first appeared to them is so apparent. They were slaves in Egypt, and then one of the most senior of Pharaoh's officials reveals that he is their brother, and has been sent by God to deliver them. Yet they preferred the life of slavery in Egypt. This same illogicality is seen in us if we refuse baptism, preferring to stay in the world of slavery, or later when we chose the world as opposed to Christ. We deny, we refuse, we reject, the Lord who bought us by going back to the world from which he redeemed us. The illogicality of going back to the world is brought out by the illogicality of Israel's rejection of Moses. Israel rejected

Moses because it was easier to stay where they were. Such is the strength of conservatism in human nature; such is our innate weakness of will and resolve. They rejected the idea of leaving Egypt because they thought it was better than it was, they failed to face up to how much they were suffering (Num. 11:5). And our apathy in responding to Christ's redemptive plan for us is rooted in the same problem; we fail to appreciate the seriousness of sin, the extent to which we are in slavery to sin- even though the evidence for this is all around us.

" The same did God send..."

Stephen in Acts 7 brings out the sheer grace of God in redeeming Israel. Although Israel rejected Moses as their ruler and deliverer, " the same did God send *to be* a ruler and a deliverer" (Acts 7:35). They didn't want to be saved from Egypt through Moses, and yet God did save them from Egypt through Moses. Israel at that time were exactly like us; while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, we were redeemed in prospect from a world we didn't want to leave. We were saved- and are saved- almost in spite of ourselves. That we were predestined to such great salvation is one of redemption's finest mysteries.

And so God sent Moses to be their saviour, pointing forward to His sending of the Lord Jesus to redeem us. Moses came to Israel and " shewed (Greek '*optomai*') himself" to them (Acts 7:26). Yet '*optomai*' really means to gaze at, to watch a spectacle. He came to his people, and gazed at them as they fought among themselves, spiritually and emotionally destroyed by the oppression of Egypt. He invited them to likewise gaze upon him as their saviour. This surely prefigures our Lord's consideration of our sinful state. As he grew up in Nazareth he would have thought on this a lot. As Moses " looked on their burdens" at age 40 (Ex. 2:11), so at the start of his ministry, our Lord assessed the weight of ours. His concern for our burdens in Mt. 11:30; 23:4 is perhaps a conscious allusion back to Moses' awareness of Israel's burdens, and his desire to deliver them, even though it cost him all that he had in this world.

Moses fought with the temptation to just observe from a distance, but then he came out into the open, declaring that he was a Hebrew, rejecting his kind Egyptian foster mother, openly declaring that he was not really her son, as both she and he had claimed for 40 years. He would have borne the shame of all this, " the reproach of Christ" (Heb. 11:26). But he was not ashamed to call Israel his brethren, as Christ is not ashamed of us (Heb. 2:11- one of many allusions to Moses in Hebrews). All this suggests that like Moses, our Lord came to a point where he " came down" from obscurity to begin his work of deliverance. The references to 'coming down' in John's Gospel allude to this ⁽¹⁾. " When Moses *was grown*, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their

burdens...when he was *full forty years old* it came into his heart to visit his brethren...by faith Moses, *when he was come to years*, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Ex. 2:11; Acts 7:23; Heb. 11:24). The implication seems to be that Moses reached a certain point of maturity, of readiness, and then he went to his brethren. God looked on the sorrows of His people through the sensitivity of Moses, He *saw and knew* their struggles, their sense of being trapped, their desire to revive spiritually but their being tied down by the painful business of life and living; and He sent Moses to deliver them from this. But these very words are quoted about our deliverance through the 'coming down' of the Lord Jesus (Ex. 3:7; 4:31 = Lk. 1:68).

And so Moses as a type of Christ came to his brethren, and saw one of them being beaten by an Egyptian. Moses "looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian" (Ex. 2:11,12). This little incident is typical of how Christ was to destroy the devil, the power of sin, on the cross. The common translation of this passage can give them impression that Moses was very nervous. Yet it does not say that when he saw no man *was looking* he slew the Egyptian. There was at least one man looking- the suffering Israelite. And there must have been others looking for news to get round that Moses had killed the Egyptian. So I would suggest that Moses saw the Israelite suffering, and looked round in wonder to see if any other Israelite was going to go to his rescue. Because he saw there was no man, he himself got involved. This is an eloquent essay in the humility of Moses and the Lord he typified.

This is exactly the same picture which we find in Is. 59:16 concerning Christ's decision to achieve our redemption: "He saw that there was no man (quoting the words of Ex. 2:11), and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation" (God saved Israel from Egypt by the *arm* of Moses, manifesting His arm: Ex. 6:6; 15:16; Dt. 4:34; Is. 63:12). Is. 63:4-6 also contain allusions to Moses and the exodus (the rest of the chapter speaks explicitly about this): "The day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year (time) of my redeemed (the one I will redeem) is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation" . The implication of these passages is that he was surprised, he "wondered" , that there was no one else to save Israel. He looked round for someone else to do it, but he found none- exactly after the pattern of Moses. This is not only an eloquent essay in our Lord's humanity, and the monstrosity of the 'trinity'; it indicates the true humility which he manifested in his work of redemption.

Yet Israel rejected Moses as their deliverer, they failed to see in that dead Egyptian the ability of Moses to save them completely from the life of slavery. And so Moses fled away from them, he came to Gentile, pagan Midian, and rescued a Gentile woman from the persecution of men, married her, and started

a new life in the wilderness- to return many years later in the power of the Holy Spirit and redeem Israel when they were in truly desperate straits. All this naturally points ahead to the work of Jesus after Israel failed to respond to his work on the cross. The word used to describe Moses rescuing his future wife from the shepherds is the same used concerning God rescuing Israel from Egypt (Ex. 2:19; 18:10). Thus Moses was manifesting the redemptive work of God when he saved his wife. In full view of Israel (as Moses killed the Egyptian, according to our reconstruction above), Christ openly shewed his ability to destroy the power of sin, on account of which we lived in fear of death, "all (our) lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15)- clear reference back to Israel in Egypt. The passage in Hebrews 2 says that Christ can deliver us from such bondage because he is our representative, our brother, of our nature, not ashamed of his connection with us (2:11). Reasoning back from this, we can see that Moses' ability to redeem Israel from Egypt, his appropriacy for the task, was because he had openly declared that he was one of them. Yet the wonder of that was lost on them. And if we are not careful, the wonder of the fact that Christ had our nature, that he was our representative and is *therefore* mighty to save, can be lost on us too. The thrill of these first principles should ever remain with us.

Moses As Mediator

Israel were certainly representative of us. The *degree* of love shown by Moses to Israel is only a shadow of the degree, the kind of love shown by Christ to us, who hopefully are not rejecting him as Israel did. The power of this point just has to be reflected upon. That Moses could love Israel, to the extent of being willing to give his life and salvation for them, is a fine, fine type of the devotion of Christ. There is another oft emphasised aspect of Moses' love for Israel: the power of his mediation for them. We are told that God "hearkened" to Moses' prayers for them (Dt. 9:19; 10:10). He prayed for them with an intensity they didn't appreciate, he prayed for *and gained* their forgiveness before they had even repented, he pleaded *successfully* for God to relent from His plans to punish them, even before they knew that God had conceived such plans (Ex. 32:10,14; 33:17 etc.). The fact we will, at the end, be forgiven of some sins without specifically repenting of them (as David was in Ps. 19:12) ought to instil a true humility in us. This kind of thing is in some ways a contradiction of God's principles that personal repentance is required for forgiveness, and that our own effort is required if we are to find acceptability with Him. Of course ultimately these things are still true, and were true with respect to Israel. But the fact is that God was willing to hearken to Moses as he prayed so, so earnestly, He was willing to change His expressed purpose in respect to destroying Israel (perhaps Ps. 90 is the transcript of this prayer- v.3 in Hebrew asks God not to destroy the children of men, and to repent concerning His servants in vv. 13-17. In Dt. 16:15 Moses sounds as if Ps. 90:17

has been answered). It should also be noted that Moses as a type of Christ was not the High Priest. He mediated for Israel on a voluntary basis; not because he was under any duty to offer up their prayers. Indeed, they didn't make any prayers for him to offer up. He pleaded with God for them on his own initiative, rather than being asked by them to do so. And this is the basis of Christ's mediation for us; he pleads for us even when we know not what to pray for, even when we don't realize the need to beseech the Father. Moses' mediation, not so much Aaron's offerings, are the prototype which the New Testament uses to explain the Lord's present work. In the Apocryphal Assumption of Moses (1:14), Moses is made to say of God: " He designed and devised me and he prepared me before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator" . These words are alluded to in a number of NT passages. Clearly we are intended to see Moses' mediation as typical of the Lord's. His freewill mediation was the basis of Israel's salvation: " By a prophet (Moses: Dt. 18:18), the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved" (Hos. 12:13). This last clause may be a hint that Moses prayed for the gift of life-preserving manna, and thus sustained Israel, all unbeknown to them. Likewise the intensity of his prayers and the supremacy of his willingness to sacrifice himself for them was tragically unknown to them at the time. It's almost sad that these things have to be typical of the Lord's preservation and redemption of us his thick-skinned and unknowing people.

When we sin, the sentence of death is passed again and again upon us. Tragically, we sense that our forgiveness through Christ is almost effortlessly achieved by Him, benignly rubber stamped by a God who is eager to overlook sin. This is not the case. The intensity of Moses' pleadings for Israel, the grievousness of their sins, points forward to the work of the Lord Jesus for us on our wilderness journey to the Kingdom. Rom. 8::26,27 allows us to enter a little into our Lord's heavenly agony for us: " the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us (the language of Moses interceding for Israel) with groanings which cannot be uttered" . And even more wondrously, we are probably unaware of all Christ's prayers for us, as Israel were far from completely aware of the passionate dialogues between Moses and God on their behalf. They just got on with their lives at the foot of the mountain, occasionally jerked into a repentant frame of mind, assuming Moses would sort it all out up there in the mountain, full of their petty murmurings and wistful thoughts of Egypt. What tragic similarity with much of our lives. Can't we learn from them? Surely we must.

Moses As An Agent Of Grace

Moses, like the Lord, was an agent of grace. Israel no longer knew the Name of the God of their fathers- and the same passage in Exodus states that Pharaoh likewise didn't know the Name of Yahweh. Ezekiel 20 makes it clear that the

Israelites worshipped the gods of Egypt and even took them with them through the Red Sea. Therefore God's saving of His people out of Egypt was an act of pure grace. It wasn't because they were righteous, they had forgotten Him. And likewise, our calling out of the world, our exodus from it through baptism, is a result of the calling / election of grace.

The Farewell Discourse

The lives of both Moses and the Lord ended with a farewell discourse and prayer. Not only do the words of the Lord consciously allude to Moses' words in Deuteronomy, but John's comments do likewise. John's comment that "Jesus knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world..." (Jn. 13:1) is without any doubt referring to the well known [at the time he was writing] Jerusalem Targum on Dt. 32: "And when the last end of Moses the prophet was at hand, that he should be gathered from the world...". Consider the following obvious allusions of the Lord Jesus to Moses' final words:

- "If ye love me ye will keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15,21,23; 15:10) reflects a major identical theme in Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,22; 13:3,4; 19:9; 30:16.
- "Let not your heart be troubled... neither let it be afraid" (Jn. 14:1,27) repeats Moses' final encouragement to Israel "fear not, neither be dismayed" (Dt. 31:8; 1:21,29; 7:18).
- "I go to prepare a place for you" = the idea of Moses and the Angel bringing Israel "into the place which I have prepared" (Ex. 23:30).
- "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you... out of the world" (Jn. 15:16,19) corresponds to the oft repeated theme of Moses that God has chosen Israel "out of all peoples" (Dt. 7:6 RVmg.), by grace (Dt. 4:37; 10:15; 14:2).
- The Lord's common Upper Room theme of 'abiding' in Him uses the same word as Moses used when exhorting his people to 'cleave unto' God (Dt. 10:20; 11:22). This abiding involved loving God and keeping His commandments- all ideas which occur together in Dt. 13:4; 30:20.
- The Lord told the Father that He had given the disciples His words, "and they have received them" (Jn. 17:8). This is evident allusion to the editorial comment in Dt. 33:3 about how all Israel received God's

words through Moses. Likewise “I manifested thy name... they have kept thy word” (Jn. 17:6,26) = “I will proclaim the name of the Lord... they have observed thy word” (Dt. 32:3; 33:9). One marvels at the way the Lord’s mind linked together so much Scripture in the artless, seamless way in which He did.

- “Holy Father... righteous Father” (Jn. 17:11,25) was a form of address which the Lord had in a sense lifted from Moses when he addresses God as “righteous and holy” (Dt. 32:4 LXX).

There are many other references in the Upper Room discourse to Moses—without doubt, Moses was very much in the Lord’s mind as He faced His end. Consider at your leisure how Jn. 14:1 = Ex. 14:31; Jn. 14:11 = Ex. 14:8. When the Lord speaks in the Upper Room of manifesting the Father and Himself unto the disciples (Jn. 14:21,22), he is alluding to the way that Moses asked God to “manifest thyself unto me” (Ex. 33:18 LXX). The Lord’s allusion makes Himself out to be God’s representatives, and all those who believe in Him to be as Moses, receiving the vision of God’s glory. Note that it was that very experience above all others which marks off Moses in Rabbinic writings as supreme and beyond all human equal. And yet the Lord is teaching that that very experience of Moses is to be shared *to an even higher degree* by all His followers. It would’ve taken real faith and spiritual ambition for those immature men who listened to the Lord that evening to really believe it... And the same difficult call comes to us too.

Moses: Representative And Saviour

It is a fundamental, if neglected, doctrine that Christ was our representative. This really ought to be a source of comfort to us, as we sense the involvement of the Son of God in our lives, one who can truly empathise (rather than just sympathise) with our spiritual struggle. This is so clearly taught by the typology of Moses as a type of Christ. Although he spoke to God as a friend, with an open-faced relationship, he still took upon himself the sin of Israel, he felt as condemned as they felt (Ex. 34:9 cp. 33:11); when he pleaded for God’s sentence on him to be lifted, he pleaded for the same sentence on Israel to be lifted too (Ps. 90:8). When Yahweh met Moses, it was as if He met with Israel (Ex. 3:18). God promised to go with Moses, but Moses re-quotes this as God going with “us” (Ex. 33:14-16). This is how inextricably linked were Moses and his people, even in their condemnation. And so it is, thankfully, with us and the Lord. Moses manifested / represented both God and Israel, superbly prefiguring the nature of the Lord’s work and mission far later. As God “saw” the oppression of Israel (Ex. 2:25; 3:7,9; 4:31; 5:19), so did Moses (Ex.2:11). He looked on God’s people with the eyes / perspective of God—just as we should. Moses ‘struck’ the Egyptian who was persecuting the Hebrew just as

God would strike Egypt (Ex. 2:11 cp. Ex. 12:12,13,29 etc.). And Moses helps and delivers (Ex. 2:17,19) the daughters of Jethro, just as God would help and deliver Israel (Ex. 12:27; 14:13,30; 15:2). Note that at that time when Moses first met Jethro's daughters at the well, Moses was in depression. His plans and vision rejected by his own people, fallen from riches to rags, homeless and alone... and yet in that low moment he was chosen to be a manifestation of God! And this is the wonder of how God rejoices to work with the broken. However, Moses' desire to save others, his concern for the oppressed and helpless, shines through- he seeks to save the slave beaten by his Egyptian master; the neighbour wronged by his Hebrew brother; the unknown women deprived at the well by male nomads (Ex. 2:11,13,17). In all this Moses was manifesting the concern and saving help of God. And when we do likewise, we show God's face to this world.

In line with this, we find Moses as a type of Christ also presented as representative of Israel, and therefore able to completely sympathise with them in their physical afflictions and spiritual weaknesses. Thus the Spirit says (in the context of presenting Moses as a type of Christ) that Moses was " *in* (not " *with* ") the ecclesia in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38), stressing the way in which he was in their midst rather than distanced from them. The commands which constituted the covenant were given to Moses personally (Neh. 1:7,8), insofar as he represented Israel. Thus there is a parallel drawn in Ps. 103:7: He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel" . " After the tenor of these words have I made a covenant with thee and with Israel" (Ex. 34:27). In the context of describing Israel's deliverance from Egypt, they are said to have been delivered from "the basket" (Ps. 81:6 RV)- clearly associating them with Moses' deliverance. Is. 63:11 (Heb.) is even more explicit: " He remembered...*Moses his people*" . Moses seems to have appreciated fully his representative role on that last glorious day of life when he addressed Israel: " The Lord said unto *me*...I will deliver [Og] into *thy* hand...so the Lord our God delivered into *our* hands Og" (Dt. 3:2,3). David recognized this unity between Moses and Israel; David describes both Israel and Moses as God's chosen (Ps. 16:5,23). Moses is described as encamping in the wilderness, when the reference clearly is to all Israel (Ex. 18:5). Moses recalled how "the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have delivered up Sihon and his land before thee [you singular- i.e. Moses]; begin to possess it, that thou [you singular again!] mayest inherit his land". Yet Moses then comments that therefore God "delivered" Sihon "before *us*" (Dt. 31,33 RV). The land and victory that Moses personally could have had- for it was God's wish to destroy Israel and make of him a new nation- he shared with Israel. Ex. 7:16 brings out the unity between them by a play on words: "The LORD God of the Hebrews hath *sent me* [lit. 'let me go'] unto thee, saying, *Let my people go*". "Let go" translates the same Hebrew word as "sent me". Just as Moses had been let go by Yahweh, so Israel were to be. Likewise, both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called " the elect" (Is.

42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. The days will be shortened for the elect's sake (Mk. 13:20); for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours.

Israel are called "the body of Moses" in the same way as the church is the body of Christ (Jude 9; 1 Cor. 10:2). His very name, 'Moses', can mean both one who draws out, and also one who is drawn out⁽²⁾. As Moses was drawn out of the Nile and saved, so he later drew Israel out of Egypt. He could exactly enter into their feelings when they emerged from the Red Sea, as Christ exactly knows ours after baptism- better than we appreciate ourselves. Moses was saved by being surrounded by water in an "ark" (Ex. 2:3)- the only other time this word is used is concerning Noah's ark, which is a type of our salvation through baptism. God even worked through Moses' weakness to make him even more representative of his people; as he drew back from the theophany of the burning bush through a bad conscience, so did Israel at the foot of Sinai; as they were excluded from the land for inattention to Yahweh's word, so was Moses. He was touched with the very feeling of their sinfulness. In a marvellous way, the Lord Jesus achieved the same, yet without sin; he really felt like a sinner in his death. As the firstborn, Moses should have been slain on Passover night (Ex. 13:15); but he made the Passover sacrifice for his own redemption, although Heb. 11:28 says that he did it for the sake of Israel's redemption. Likewise the Lord's almost incomprehensible victory over human nature was not motivated by a selfish desire for his redemption; he did it for himself, that it might be for us. And this is what strengthened him. And on a far lower level, our own salvation is surely worked out through the sacrifices we make for the sake of others' spirituality. The fact that Christ, as Moses, has gone along the same path to salvation really should be a comfort to us, it should lessen the distance which we feel between us and our Lord. Thus a study of typology and of the atonement is not barren; it really will bring us closer to the Lord Jesus if we do it in the right spirit.

Moses' persecution by Pharaoh enabled him to enter into the feelings of Israel in the slave camps; and as they fled from Pharaoh towards the Red Sea, Moses would have recalled his own flight from Pharaoh to Midian. The whole epistle to the Hebrews is shot through with allusions to Moses. "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Heb. 2:17) is alluding to Dt. 18:18: "I will raise them up a Prophet *from among their brethren* like unto *thee* (Moses)". The brethren of Christ are here paralleled with Moses; as if Moses really is representative of not only natural Israel, but spiritual too- as well as Moses being a type of Christ. For this reason he is such a clear pattern for us, and we are invited so often to identify ourselves with him by copying his example⁽³⁾. Moses was *made like* his brethren through his similar experiences, as Christ was progressively *made like* us by his life of temptation.

It can be shown that much of Moses' life, especially his Midian years, were lived in a spirit of semi-spirituality, aware of his responsibility to God, but being slack to rise up to what it really meant, being content, year after year, to live the life of a spiritual minimalist, ever making excuses for himself ⁽⁴⁾. Yet somehow God overruled this, as He did the fact that Moses sinned and was excluded from entering the land. The result was that Moses was able to enter exactly into the feelings of rejected, spiritually apathetic Israel in their 40 years wilderness wanderings. For 40 years he too had wandered in the same desert as a shepherd, with the same apathy. This points forward to how the Lord Jesus can enter into the feelings of active sinners, whilst himself being sinless. This phenomenon is discussed more fully elsewhere ⁽⁵⁾.

So there is no doubt that Moses as a type of Christ was also representative of Israel to a very high degree. And yet we have also seen ⁽⁶⁾ that in no other Old Testament character was God so intensely manifest as in Moses. So the concepts of being God manifest and also being representative of a sinful Israel come together in Moses in a wonderful way. Ex. 3:18 is an example of this. The elders of Israel were to tell Pharaoh that "the Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us". Yet Yahweh God of Israel had only met with Moses. Yet because he was representative of Israel and also because he himself manifested Yahweh God of Israel, the elders had met Yahweh when they met Moses. In this we see a superb prefiguration of the Lord Jesus. He was the supreme, faultless manifestation of God, and yet also the total, empathetic representative of sinful man.

Moses himself realised the extent to which God saw him as representative of Israel; thus he told Israel: "The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to shew you the word of the Lord" (Dt. 5:4,5). This is similar to Christ saying that because he had spoken God's words to us, we have seen God (Jn. 14:8). It was Moses who saw God face to face (Ex. 33:11), yet he knew he was so representative of Israel that in reality *they* had seen God face to face. All the honours and glory given to Moses were thereby given to Israel *if they identified themselves with him*. And ditto for us and the Lord Jesus.

Notes

(1) See *The 'Coming Down' Of Christ*.

(2) See Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed* p.102 (London: S.P.C.K., 1994).

(3) See *Moses And Us*.

(4) See *Moses In Weakness*.

(5) See "*My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?*" .

(6) See *God Manifestation In Moses*.

5 Moses Not Entering The Land

Israel hated him, they thrust him from them (Acts 7:39); due to their provocation he failed to enter the land. He had done so much for them, yet they bitterly rejected him- " this Moses" , as they called him (Ex. 32:1,23 cp. Acts 7:35). But when God wanted to destroy them and make of Moses a great nation, he pleaded for them with such intensity that he achieved what few prayerful men have: a change (not just a delay in outworking) in God's categorically stated intention. And especially, consider that time when Israel had sinned with the golden calf. Moses said that he would climb that mighty mountain yet again, and " I will make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30). He knew well enough that no atonement was possible without the shedding of blood (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22; and see the similarity with Phinehas making an atonement for Israel's forgiveness through the slaying of Zimri and Cozbi in Num. 25:8,13). And yet he hoped (" peradventure") that God would accept *him* as an atonement: " I will make an atonement" . He intended to offer his own life as an atonement for them- for that people who hated him, who pushed him from them and in their hearts returned to Egypt. He climbed that mountain (nearly a day's work), and at the top he made an even finer and altogether higher offer to the Angel: " If thou wilt forgive their sin...blot me, *I pray thee* (notice the earnestness of his desire) out of thy book" (Ex. 32:32) ⁽¹⁾. And he begged Yahweh to accept this for 40 days and nights, fasting without food or water (Dt. 9:17; 10:10). It wasn't just a once off, emotional outburst of a moment. Omission of the name from God's book is a clear reference to a believer losing his part in God's Kingdom (Ex. 32:33; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 17:8; 21:27; 22:19). This was not an offer made in hot blood; after the hours of climbing the mountain, Moses had decided what he sorely wished to do: to offer his place in God's Kingdom, so that Israel might be forgiven one awful sin. This is just superb. To offer one's physical life is one thing; to offer one's eternal life is quite another, and this is what Moses' not entering the land amounted to. And he pleaded with God to accept his offer, just for the forgiveness of one sin, of a people who hated him and were evidently bent on fulfilling the lust of the flesh. If this is how much Moses loved sinful Israel, think how much more Christ loved them. And if that's the level of Christ's love for sinful Israel, consider (or try to) the level of Christ's love for us who at least

try not to thrust Him from us, who wish, in our weakness, to follow Him to the end.

To be blotted out of the book God had written may have been understood by Moses as asking for him to be excluded from an inheritance in the promised land; for later, a 'book' was written describing the various portions (Josh. 18:9). The connection is made explicit in Ez. 13:9: "...neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel". To be blotted out of the book meant to not enter the land (surely Ezekiel is alluding to Moses' experience). If Israel were to be blotted out there and then in the wilderness, then Moses wanted to share this experience. God had just spoken of 'blotting out' Israel from before Him (Dt. 9:14), and making a nation of Moses; but now Moses is asking to share in their condemnation rather than experience salvation without them. This was the extent of his devotion. On the last day of his life, Moses reeled off the great speech of Deuteronomy, knowing full well that he was to die without entering the land. In Dt. 9:18 he says that his prayer of Ex. 32:32 *was heard*- in that he was not going to enter the land, but they would. Hence his urging of them to go ahead and enter the land- to experience what his self-sacrifice had enabled. In this we see the economy of God, and how He works even through sin. On account of Moses' temporary rashness of speech, he was excluded; Moses didn't enter the land. And yet by this, his prayer was heard. He was temporarily blotted out of the book, so that they might enter the land. Moses' fleeting requests to enter the land must be read as a flagging from the height of devotion he reached, rather like the Lord's request to escape the cross in Gethsemane. But ultimately he did what he intended- he gave his place in the Kingdom / land so that they might enter [although of course he will be in the future Kingdom]. This is why Moses stresses on the last day of his life that he wouldn't enter the land *for Israel's sake* (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21). He saw that his sin had been worked through, and the essential reason for him not entering was because of the offer he had made. It "went ill with him *for their sakes*" (Ps. 106:32).

In all this, Moses was typifying the death of the Lord. Is. 53:8 describes His cross as being "cut off [Strong: 'excluded'] from the land of the living" (s.w. 'the congregation'- of Israel), for the transgression of His people. This is undoubtedly reference to the self-sacrificial exclusion of Moses from the land, that Israel might enter. The Lord died the death of a sinner, He chose like Moses to suffer affliction with us, that we might be saved. The intense prayer of Moses for Israel's salvation inspired David in prayer (Ps. 25:11 = Ex. 32:30,31). And Paul makes a series of allusions to Moses, which climax in an invitation to pray like Moses for the salvation of others:

2 Tim. 2:24,25**Moses**

“the servant of the Lord

A very common title of Moses

must not strive

As Israel did with him (Num. 26:9)

but be gentle unto all

The spirit of Moses

apt to teach

As was Moses (Ex. 18:20; 24:12; Dt. 4:1,5,14; 6:1; 31:22)

patient

As was Moses

in meekness

Moses was the meekest man (Num. 12:3)

instructing those that oppose themselves

at the time of Aaron and Miriam’s self-opposing rebellion

if God *peradventure* will give them repentance [i.e. forgiveness]”

“*Peradventure* I shall make an atonement for your sin” (Ex. 32:30)- and he prayed 40 days and nights for it.

And note too:

2:19 = Num. 16:5,26

2:20 = Num. 12:7

2:21 = Num. 16:37

2:22 = Num. 12:2; 16:3

2:26 = Num. 16:33

This is quite something. The height of Moses’ devotion for His people, the passion of his praying, shadowing as it did the matchless intercession and self-giving of the Lord, really is our example. It isn’t just a height to be admired. It means that we will not half heartedly ask our God to ‘be with’ brother x and sister y and the brethren in country z, as we lie half asleep in bed. This is a call to sustained, on our knees prayer and devotion to the salvation of others.

Notes

(1) It is difficult to interpret the Hebraism here. Moses *may* have meant: 'If you bar them from the Kingdom, then take my part out of it too; I don't want to be there without them'. Considering how they had treated him, this likewise shows his great love for them. A lesser man would have reasoned that being without that rabble of apostate renegades was what he looked forward to in the Kingdom.

6 Moses In The Gospel Of John

The point has been made that internal evidence suggests that John's Gospel was written some time after the other three Gospels, and is written with the assumption that readers are familiar with them. The big problem in the first century was that people were unwilling to see the supremacy of the place of the Lord Jesus Christ compared to Moses. Of course, many Jews just could not accept that Jesus of Nazareth was anything to do with the promised Messiah. Others, including some of the early converts, evidently held the view that Jesus was the Messiah, but they failed to see that he was any more important than Moses or David. One of the themes of John's Gospel is the supremacy of Christ over Moses. The Spirit through John does this by both direct statement and indirect allusion, e.g. through framing the records of Christ's miracles in language and style which highlights their supremacy over the ministry of Moses. Once we appreciate this, we can gain more insight into the way in which Moses was a type of Christ, both by contrast and similarity; and thereby we can enter closer into the mind of both Moses and the Lord Jesus. The Jews were drawing a contrast between themselves as "Moses' disciples", and the disciples of Jesus (Jn. 9:28; 18:17,25); John's Gospel demonstrates that such a distinction is invalid. Those who followed Moses would follow Jesus, because the whole of the Law of Moses taught understanding about Jesus (Jn. 5:46).

John's Gospel

"The darkness comprehended it (the light of Christ) not... the (Jewish) world knew him not" (John 1:5,10)

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). Moses in John's Gospel is an opening theme.

Moses : Jesus contrast

Israel "understood not" the work of Moses (Acts 7:25)

"When he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren...he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God

by his hand would deliver them" (Acts 7:23,25). Therefore Moses in the court of Pharaoh = Jesus working in Nazareth until age 30. Was Moses' "surprise" at Israel's lack of response reflected in Christ (cp. Is. 50:2-7; 59:16) ? Despite his own righteousness, did Christ think too highly of the potential spirituality of Israel (Lk. 13:9; 20:13 cp. his high regard of others' spirituality: Mt. 8:10; 11:11; 15:28)? If the Lord *respected* others so much- shouldn't we have deep *respect* for each other? The pain of Moses' rejection = Christ's; although he was rich, Moses had become poor for their sakes.

" The word was made flesh...we beheld his (Christ's) glory...full of grace and truth" (1:14). " if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see (like Moses) the glory of God" (John 11:40).

Philip asks Jesus to "show us the Father" (John 14:8), and Jesus replies that He is the manifestation of the Father.

Israel had asked that " the word" be not spoken to them any more; only Moses saw God's glory. But we are being invited to be equal to Moses, seeing from the cleft in the rock the awesome majesty of the perfection of Christ's character; the full glory of God. But do we appreciate his righteousness? Paul likewise invites us to behold with unveiled face, as Moses did (2 Cor. 3:18 RV), and thereby, just from appreciating the glory of Christ's character, be changed into the same glory. Note too how in Rom. 11 we are each bidden "behold the goodness and severity of God"- a reference to Moses beholding all the goodness of Yahweh. We are in essence in his position right now (Ex. 33:19).

This is the language of Ex. 33:18 LXX, where Moses likewise asks God "show yourself to me". The answer was in the theophany on Sinai, with the Name of Yahweh declared, as full

of grace and truth. This, according to Philip's allusion to it, is what we see in Jesus. And this is why Jn. 1 speaks of Jesus in terms of the theophany of Exodus, that in His personality the full glory of the Father dwelt.

" The Law was given by Moses, but *grace* and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Blessing from obedience to commands was replaced by salvation by pure grace in Christ.

" No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which *is* in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (1:18). John here makes clear allusion to Moses.

This alludes to Moses being unable to see God, whereas Christ now is cuddled in the bosom of the Father- such closeness, such a soft image, even now in his heavenly glory! Christ declared God's character (alluding to the Angel declaring God's Name at the same time as Moses was unable to see God) in his perfect life and above all on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

" The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the (Jewish) world" (John 1:29)

Contrast with how Moses tried harder than any other man to gain forgiveness for Israel, even to the extent of offering his own salvation for them- only to be told that this was not possible; all he achieved was a deferment of their punishment.

" We have found him (Jesus) of whom Moses in the law...did write" (John 1:45)

They recognised that Moses foresaw *throughout* the Law that *all* its ordinances pointed forward to one man, Messiah.

" Jesus...manifested forth his glory" (John 2:11) through his miracles. His miracles therefore were a demonstration of the character ("glory") of God, not just to relieve human grief as he came across it. Therefore they are all capable of allegorical interpretation.

Contrast how the glory of God was manifested to Moses, who peeped at it from the rock. Yet Jesus was the glory of God, higher than the Angel who actually manifested the glory.

" What sign shewest thou unto us?" (John 2:18)

Cynical Israel asked exactly the same of Moses, in effect; superficially, "

the people believed" (Ex. 4:31) after they saw the signs. The hollowness of Israel's 'belief' in Moses was matched by the experience of Christ. And yet they still both loved Israel.

In John 3:3,5, the Lord speaks of how a man must be born again in order to *see* and *enter* the Kingdom. He parallels *seeing* the Kingdom with entering it.

Moses *saw* the land of the Kingdom of God, but couldn't *enter* it. This is surely behind the Lord's words here. Given the many allusions to Moses in John's Gospel, I submit that the Lord was surely saying something about Moses' seeing of the land before he died (Num. 27:12). It's as if He felt that Moses' seeing the land meant that he would ultimately enter it. To be enabled to see the land, with 'born again' special eyesight, was therefore a guarantee that Moses would enter the Kingdom. And Is. 33:17 speaks of beholding the King in his beauty and seeing "the land that is very far off" [an obvious allusion to Moses seeing the land] as a picture of ultimate salvation.

" No man hath ascended up to heaven" except Jesus (John 3:13)

Moses' ascents of the mountain were seen as representing an ascension to Heaven; but he had not ascended up to the " heavenly things" of which Christ spoke. Consider the spiritual loneliness of rising to heights no other man has reached, as far as Heaven is above earth. John the Baptist recognised this (Jn. 3:31).

" Where I am, thither ye cannot come" (John 7:34) sounds like Moses ascending the Mount, leaving Israel behind him. Yet " Where I am" refers to Christ's unity with God; the heights of his relationship with God connect with the physical ascension of Moses into the mount to hear God's words.

" I will that they also...be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (17:24) alludes to the 70 elders sharing Moses' experience in the Mount (Ex.24:70); it is as if Christ is saying that his disciples really can enter into his relationship with God,

we can be where he was spiritually in his mortal life (see comments on 3:34 below).

" As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14)

It was the serpent which gave salvation to sin-stricken Israel, not Moses; and the *serpent* represented Christ in this case. Moses " lifted up" the serpent in the same way as the Jews " lifted up" Christ in crucifying him (Jn. 8:28). Moses drew attention to serpent and it's power to save, in the same way as his Law drew attention to how sin would be condemned in Christ as the means of our salvation. The connection between Moses " lifting up" Christ and Israel doing likewise is another indicator of how Moses was representative of Israel (cp. Christ).

" For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John 3:34)

This is Moses language- he was sent by God, and his words were God's words [\(1\)](#). But Christ spoke *all* God's words (Jn. 15:15; 17:7,8,14 cp. 5:20), he had God's Spirit without limit, he completely revealed God, compared to the partial revelation through Moses. Christ had " all things" revealed to him, and those " all things" are now revealed unto us by the Spirit (Jn. 16:14,15; 1 Cor. 2:9-15; Eph. 1:3,8; Col. 2:2). Because of this, it is possible for us to reach the same level of knowledge of God which Christ had in his mortality. This alone should inspire us to more than do our daily readings. That God gave Christ " all things" was a sign of His love for him (Jn. 5:20); and so God granting us progressive understanding of those " all things" is a reflection of His love for us. Growing in knowledge is not just for the Bible study enthusiast!

" My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me" (John 7:16) alludes to Moses above all, whose words were those of God.

Christ at a well met the Samaritan woman, and had a highly spiritual conversation with her; he gave her "living water", i.e. spring water, in return for her well water (John 4:7-10)

Surely this contrasts with Moses meeting his Gentile wife by a well; a relationship in which he gave her very little, and which was an indicator of a spiritual weak cycle in his life⁽²⁾. The Samaritan woman immediately recognised Jesus as Jewish (Jn.4:9). Zipporah thought that Moses was an Egyptian (Ex.2:19)- which is another comforting type of Christ's humanity.

The paralysed man had waited by the pool 38 years, waiting for someone to cure him. There was no cure in those 38 years- only in the word of Christ (John 5:5)

Israel were actually in the wilderness for 38 years; the similarity implies Moses' leadership could not bring salvation, only the word of Christ⁽³⁾.

"The works...The Son can do nothing of himself" (Jn. 5:19)

"All these works...I have not done them of mine own mind" (Num. 16:28).

In Jn. 5:19,20 we read that the Son does (*poieo*) what He sees the Father doing, and the Father shows Him (*deiknumi*) all (*panta*) that He does.

This is referring to Ex. 25:9 LXX, where Moses makes (*poieo*) the Tabernacle according all (*panta*) that God shows him (*deiknuo*). The reference of Jn. 5:19,20 is therefore to the Lord working with His Father in the building up of us the tabernacle... and *all* things God planned for us were revealed to the Son even in His mortality. What great wealth of understanding was there within His mind, within those brain cells... and how tragic that the head and body that bore them was betrayed and ignored and spat upon and tortured by men...

" The Father himself which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape (Gk. form, view). And ye have not his word abiding in you...I am come in my Father's Name, and ye receive me not...there is one that accuseth you, even Moses...for had ye believed Moses, ye would have

Nearly all these statements were true of Moses, but untrue of the Jews. Yet there was one glaring contrast: Moses earnestly desired to see God's shape, to view Him, to completely understand Him. This was denied him- but not Jesus. The similarity and yet difference between Moses and Jesus is really brought out here. And

believed me" (John 5:37-46)

again, Moses is shown to be representative of sinful Israel; as he lifted up the serpent, so they would lift up Christ; as he failed to see the Father's "shape", so they did too.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes made men see the similarity between Christ and Moses, whom they perceived to have provided the manna (John 6:32). Therefore they thought that Jesus must be the prophet like Moses, of whom Moses wrote (John 6:14).

But Jesus said that he was greater than Moses, because Moses' bread only gave them temporal life, whereas if a man ate of him, he would live for ever; his words would give spiritual life which was part of that "eternal life" of the Father (6:49,50). The Jews thought that the prophet like Moses of Dt.18:18 was a prophet equal or inferior to Moses. John's Gospel records how Christ was showing that the prophet would be greater than Moses. Martha understood that when she said that "the Christ...which should come into the world" (i.e. the prophet of Dt.18:18) was "the Son of God", and therefore Jesus of Nazareth (11:27).

In this context, "the Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:41)

Israel continually "murmured" against Moses (Ex. 15:24; 16:2,7,8; 17:3; Num. 14:2,27,29 cp. Dt. 1:27; Ps. 106:25; 1 Cor. 10:10). Nearly all these murmurings were related to Israel's disbelief that Moses really could bring them into the land. Likewise Israel disbelieved that eating Christ's words (Jn. 6:63) really could lead them to salvation; and their temptation to murmur in this way is ours too, especially in the last days (1 Cor. 10:10-12).

"The prophet" (Jn. 7:40,52 RV) is clearly a reference to "the prophet" like Moses, i.e. Messiah. There are many other allusions by John's record to the Dt. 18:18 passage: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak

unto them all that I command him". References to the Son only speaking what the Father commanded Him are to be found in Jn. 4:25; 8:28; 12:49⁽¹⁾.

- (1) This theme especially is developed well in T.F. Glasson, *Moses In The Fourth Gospel* (London: SCM, 1963) p. 30.

"If thou doest these things, manifest thyself to the world" (Jn. 7:4) connects with the other references in John to the Lord 'hiding himself' (Jn. 8:59; 12:36).

The Jews thought that as Moses hid himself and then re-emerged from obscurity, so Messiah would. Rabbi Berekiah said: "As the first deliverer [Moses] was revealed, then hidden and afterwards appeared again, so will it also be with the last deliverer [Messiah]"⁽¹⁾. John's record is clearly presenting the Lord as Moses in this sense.

- (1) Quoted in J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea In Israel* (London: Macmillan, 1956) p. 17.

" Jesus went unto the mount of Olives...he came again into the temple, and all the people (i.e. the leaders and the crowd, see context) came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them" (John 8:1,2)

This is framed to recall Moses coming down from Sinai: " The Lord came (down) from Sinai (manifest in Moses)...yea, he (God) loved the people (in the fact that) all his saints (Israel) are in thy (Moses') hand (as we are in the hand of Christ, Jn. 10:28-30): and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words...the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel (i.e. both leaders and ordinary people) were gathered together (to Moses)" (Dt. 33:2-5).

"I do nothing of myself, but as the works, for I have not done them of

Father taught me” (Jn. 8:28).

myself” (Num. 16:28 LXX)

The good shepherd of John 10 enables the sheep to go out and come in.

Moses sought for a prophet / successor like unto him, who would lead out and bring in the sheep of Israel (Num. 27:17,21). The descriptions of the good shepherd not losing any sheep (Jn. 10:28; 17:12) perhaps allude to the well known Jewish stories about Moses being such a good shepherd that he never lost a sheep⁽¹⁾.

(1) L. Ginzberg, *Legends Of The Jews* has a section on ‘Moses as faithful shepherd’ (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1910) Vol. 2 pp. 300-316.

" I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11)

" The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the (Jewish) world" (John 6:51). " The world" in John's Gospel is normally the Jewish world.

" Jesus should die for that nation" (John 11:51)

Many other passages teach that *primarily* Christ died for the salvation of Israel (e.g. Gal. 4:5); some Gentiles have been saved only insofar as we become spiritual Israel ⁽⁴⁾.

Moses was a shepherd for 40 years, and then for 40 years he put this into practice by leading Israel as God's shepherd for 40 years in the same wilderness (Num. 27:17; Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:11). As Moses was willing to sacrifice his eternal life for the salvation of the sheep of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32), so Christ gave his life for us. John's Gospel normally shows the supremacy of Christ over Moses. In this connection of them both being shepherds willing to die for the flock, Moses is not framed as being inferior to Christ- in that in his desire to die for Israel, he truly reached the fullness of the spirit of Christ. " The good shepherd" may well have been a Rabbinic title for Moses; Christ was saying " I am Moses, in his love for your salvation; not better than him, but exactly like him in this" . In a sense, Moses' prayer was heard, in

that he was excluded from the land *for their sakes* (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21; Ps. 106:33); they entered after his death. This was to symbolise how the spirit of his love for Israel was typical of Christ's for us. The Lord Jesus likewise died the death of a sinner; he was "forsaken" in the sense that God forsakes sinners, whilst as God's Son he was never forsaken by the Father.

" Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews...(he) did hid himself from them...he that seeth me seeth him that sent me" (John 11:54; 12:36,45).

" The time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father" (John 16:25).

The increasing distancing of Christ from Israel seems to mimic that of Moses. He spoke to them through a veil at all times, so that they did not appreciate the glory of God which shone from his face; they thereby failed to appreciate the closeness of his relationship with the Angel, whose glory was transferred to the face of Moses when they spoke face to face (2 Cor. 3:18-21; Ex. 33:20). If the Jews had spoken to Moses without the veil, it would have been as if they were talking directly to the Angel. But if we see or understand *Christ*, we see God- not just an Angel. We therefore simply *must* give time to understanding the character of Christ. Otherwise we can never know God. The time when Christ would shew his disciples plainly of the Father was when they received the Comforter. Through the ministry of the word ⁽⁵⁾, we too can see " plainly of the Father" , with unveiled face.

"Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him" (Jn. 12:37)

This was the identical experience of Moses, described in just the same language (Num. 14:11).

" If I go... I will come again...A little

This may refer to Moses going up and

while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to my father" (John 14:3; 16:16)

"Let not your heart be troubled...I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1,2).

Jn. 14:16 promised the disciples another 'Paraclete' or comforter / intercessor, implying Jesus was the first Paraclete [as confirmed in 1 Jn. 2:1].

" Ye shall weep and lament, but the (Jewish) world shall rejoice" (John 16:20)

" The men which thou gavest me out of the (Jewish) world...they have kept thy word" (John 17:6)

down the mountain, disappearing from Israel's sight, and then returning with the covenant- to find Israel worshipping the golden calf.

"Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them" (Dt. 1:41). Yet the contrast is with Moses, who fain would have gone ahead into the promised land to prepare the place, but was unable.

Yet Moses was the foremost intercessor for Israel, and is actually called 'the Paraclete' in the Midrash on Ex. 12:29⁽¹⁾.

(1) Quoted in D. Daube, *The New Testament And Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone Press, 1956) p. 11.

Cp. Israel rejoicing in the works of their own hands (Acts 7:41), the golden calf, while Moses was absent- cp. Christ's absence in the grave, with the Jews rejoicing and the disciples lamenting. In another sense, the return of Moses from the mountain may look ahead to Christ's return from Heaven- to find the majority of the new Israel apostate, although thinking they are being especially obedient to Yahweh (Ex. 32:5). The peak of selfless love for Israel which Moses showed at this time therefore points forward to the zeal of Christ for our forgiveness and salvation at his return (Ex. 32:32). Moses at his finest hour thus typifies Christ at his return. And after the golden calf incident, Israel are encouraged to enter the Kingdom (Ex. 33:1)- as at the second coming.

Cp. the Levites being " given" to Aaron / the priesthood out of Israel (Num. 3:9; 8:19; 18:6); at the time of

the golden calf they " observed thy word, and kept thy covenant" (Dt. 33:9), as did the disciples. The relationship between Moses and the Levites was therefore that between Christ and the disciples- a sense of thankfulness that at least a minority were faithful.

" I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me...I have declared unto them thy name" (John 17:8, 26)

As Moses gave all God's words to Israel on his return from the Mount; " every one shall receive of thy words" (Dt. 33:3). Moses " received the lively oracles to give unto us" (Acts 7:38).

" I have proclaimed the name of the Lord" (Dt.32:3 LXX) was surely in Christ's mind; and those words are in the context of Moses' song, which roundly exposed Israel's future apostacy. The character, the fundamental personality of God, is declared through appreciating human weakness and apostacy. Christ's words of Jn.17:26 were likewise in the context of revealing apostacy and future weakness. Thus through recognition of sin we come to know God; this is the fundamental message of Ezekiel and other prophets. Through knowing our own sinfulness we know the righteousness of God, and vice versa. Thus properly beholding the righteousness of God as displayed on the cross ought to convict us of our sinfulness, as it did the people who saw it in real life (they " smote upon their breasts" in repentance, cp. Lk. 18:13).

" I pray not for the (Jewish) world, but for them (the disciples, cp. the Levites) which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:9)

As the Levites were God's (Num. 3:12,13,45; 8:14). The Levites represent us (John 17:6 = Dt. 33:9); the relationship between Moses and

the Levites represents that between Christ and us. Moses' thankfulness that they remained faithful during the golden calf crisis, that sense of being able to rely on them, will be reflected in the Lord's feelings toward the faithful.

" Sanctify them through (i.e. through obedience to) thy word" (John 17:17)

As the Levites were sanctified (1 Chron. 23:13 Heb.). The Levites were consecrated in God's eyes by their zeal (motivated by the word) to rid Israel of apostasy; this is what constituted them Yahweh's " holy (sanctified) one" (Dt. 33:8,9). Through his allusions to this, Christ was telling the disciples not to be frightened to stand alone from the community they knew and respected ⁽⁶⁾. Resisting apostasy is therefore *part* of our sanctification. It cannot be ignored, or left to others.

"Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (Jn. 17:24)

This a reference to the description of Moses as having been prepared in God's plan from the beginning: "He prepared me [Moses] before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator of His covenant" (*Assumption of Moses* 1.14). Once we appreciate this and other such allusions to popular Jewish belief about Moses, then the passages which appear to speak of personal pre-existence are easier to understand. The Jews didn't believe that Moses personally pre-existed, but rather that he was there in the plan / purpose of God, and with the major role in that purpose, from before creation. The Lord was applying those beliefs and that language to Himself, showing that He was greater than Moses. But by doing so, He wasn't implying that He personally pre-existed.

Consider Num. 16:28 LXX: “Moses said, Hereby ye shall *know* that the Lord hath *sent me to do all these works*; for I have not done them *of myself*”. The ideas of *know*, *sent me*, *do these works*, *not of myself* are so frequent in John: Jn. 13:35; 8:28,42; 7:3,28; 5:30,36; 10:25,37; 14:10; 15:24; 17:4.

It has also been demonstrated by Pauline Clementson that there is “a remarkable correlation between the signs recorded in John, and the plagues Moses brought upon Egypt. There cannot be a complete match as the numbers are unequal, but the differing types of miraculous signs all find their counterpart in the plagues”. The purpose of all these allusions to the time of Moses' return from Sinai was surely to make the following point: As Moses disappeared into Sinai to attain the old covenant, so Christ died for three days to attain the new covenant. The majority of Israel, egged on by their high priest, turned to apostacy. On Moses' return, only the Levites were faithful; they sacrificed all their natural relationships in order to defend the Faith (Dt. 33:9). Likewise, the majority of Israel turned to apostacy in the first century, mixing the desires of the flesh with their keeping of the Law of Moses, just as they did with the golden calf. The 'little of both' syndrome is one of our most common enemies. Moses' return was like Christ's resurrection. The Levites represent the disciples who went on to become the teachers of Israel, a new priesthood. Those Levites represent us (1 Pet. 2:5), a minority who stand alone, both in the world and perhaps also among the covenant people, motivated by the word, yet like the disciples at the time of Christ's resurrection- rather unsure, struggling within their own faith, yet going on to be the teachers of the world.

Notes

(1) See *God Manifestation In Moses*.

(2) See *Moses In Weakness*.

(3) The symbolism of this incident is worked out further in H.A.Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels*.

(4) This point is developed in "*Why hast thou forsaken me?*".

(5) Proof that the ministry of the word in our times is parallel with the promised Comforter is provided in *Bible Basics* Digression 7.

(6) It seems the disciples respected the Jewish religious system far too much. Throughout the Gospels we see the Lord Jesus trying to educate them as to the extent of the apostasy which was there.

7 Moses And Amalek

I'd suggest that close study will lead to the conclusion that the events of Ex. 17 are the basis for Ps. 95. This is largely a Psalm of praise for what God did for Israel in the wilderness, whilst also commenting on the way they tragically put God to the test, and complained about His care for them. Now the words of Ps. 95:7- 11 are directly quoted in Heb.3:7- 11 concerning the experience of the new Israel. The simple conclusion from this is that we are really intended to see the events of Ex.17 as directly relevant for us.

Hard Road

So here were Israel, finding the way tough in Ex. 17, stumbling through the wilderness, like we are coughing and hacking our way through our 70 years or whatever. Verse 8: " And then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim" . Dt. 25:18 fills us in with some more details: " (Amalek) smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary" . So Israel were " faint and weary" , some of them had fallen by the wayside, others were being picked off almost daily by the bands of aggressive Amalekites. There are sure similarities with the weak state of our own community at the moment. As we read at the beginning of Ex. 17, Israel were living through the aftermath of their rebellion against Moses; they had been chronically thirsty, and perhaps their spiritual tiredness was matched by the mental and physical faintness of clinical dehydration. The effects of this can last quite some time after liquid is received. So they were at low ebb. In spiritual (if not physical) terms, this, I sense, is the position of many of us here this morning. Any brother or sister who is truly striving to imitate the spirit of Christ will go through this sense of exhaustion and spiritual depression at times, this sense that we must keep on going, but feeling ineffably tired, weary of the two steps backward and three forward which characterizes our spiritual growth.

Well, here were Israel, desperately summoning what physical and spiritual strength they had left to fight this battle with Amalek. It may be that this is the spirit of some here this morning. Surely each of us have an element of it in us. But there was a source of dynamism which led to their victory, a glorious victory, in the end. Moses began to pray, standing up, with his hands above his head. Let's look at the scene from a macro perspective. There were weary Israel, weary both spiritually and physically, fighting the strong, powerful

Amalekites. The battle swayed to and fro, sometimes Amalek had the upper hand, sometimes Israel. This was no walk over for either side (v.11). There was Moses, with his hands lifted above his head, praying intensely, "until the going down of the sun" (v.12). On account of the intensity of his prayers, Israel prevailed. Now I sense that you are all starting to see the point. You can guess where our thoughts will go. A righteous man, Moses the superb and detailed type of Christ, with his hands above his head, fellowshiping Israel's sufferings, battling with intense spiritual, mental and physical weariness, praying intensely, until sundown. Of course this is pointing forward to our Lord's crucifixion- on account of which our weariness can really be overcome, we really can find the victory over sin which we vainly would have.

So now, in more positive spirit, let's eagerly get down to analyzing this incident from this viewpoint. Let's believe our prayer at the beginning of this meeting, that God will truly open our eyes to the spirit of Christ as it is in these Old Testament records. Because this is how we can more deeply enter into the mind of our Lord as he hung upon the cross.

Uplifted Hands

Uplifted hands are something consistently- and frequently associated with intense prayer, often for the forgiveness of God's people Israel (Lam. 2:19; 2 Chron. 6:12,13; Ezra 9:5; Ps. 28:2; 141:2; 1 Tim. 2:8). The only time we read of Moses lifting up his hands elsewhere is in Ex. 9:28,29, where his spreading out of his hands is made parallel with his entreating of God to lift the plagues on Egypt. In passing, let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies (perhaps it is the Old Testament source of Christ's words in Mt.5:44?). It must be significant that uplifted hands is also related to a confirmation of God's covenant (see especially Ez. 20:5,6,15,23,28,42; 36:7; 47:14); for this is exactly what Christ did on the cross. And in a sense, this is what was happening in Ex.17; Israel had sinned, God had forgiven them, and was reconfirming the covenant through Moses (notice that one of the terms of the covenant was that God would save Israel from their enemies, e.g. Amalek).

John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: "They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one" (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why

John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them "two others" (Jn. 19:18) and "...the legs of the first and of the other" (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

Genesis 49

I'd like us to think through Gen.49:22- 24. This speaks (v.22) of the descendant of Joseph as a fruitful vine (N.I.V.), with branches. The Lord Jesus seems to have quarried his description of himself as a vine with branches from this very passage (Jn.15:5). Verse 23 continues: " The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and (note this bit) the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; from thence is the shepherd, the stone (more Messianic allusions here) of Israel" . The upholding of Moses' arms is being unmistakably prophesied here; in a Messianic prophecy. The " God of Jacob" in Gen.48:15,16 refers to God manifest in Angels; Jacob there defines his God as " the Angel that redeemed me" . There are plenty of other reasons for thinking that " the God of Jacob" is Angelic language; but that's another story.⁽¹⁾ So Messiah's arms were to be upheld with Angelic strength. But we have seen that Christ's uplifted hands on the cross refer to the way in which he was intensely praying at the time. The hymnwriter put two and two together and came to the right conclusion: '...and Angels there / sustained the Son of God in prayer'. This was one of the ways in which " God was in Christ" in his sufferings; He gave him special Angelic encouragement to keep on praying, to keep on asking for help, without forcing Christ in any way to be righteous.

Surely in this we get some light on the mystery of the atonement; the mystery of the degree to which the Father helped the Son to overcome without in any way affecting Christ's freewill. It is perhaps significant that there were two men (Aaron and Hur) upholding Moses' arms, in enacted prophecy of how the Angels would strengthen Christ in prayer. Does this point forward to the two Angels especially associated with Christ, Gabriel and Michael? Physically, of course, it was the nails which kept Christ's hands uplifted above his head; yet are we to infer that the Angels even overruled that for a purpose?

Moses began to pray standing up, with his hands above his head, with the blazing midday sun beating down upon him (so is implied by the fact that he kept his hands steady until the sun went down. The battle would surely have lasted a few hours; perhaps eight, which was the length of time Christ hung on the cross?) But he just couldn't maintain this intensity of mental and spiritual concentration; he let down his hands. But from his high viewpoint, he could see (and hear?) the panic of Israel as they started to flee before their enemies. So he

returned to his mental battle. No doubt when he let down his hands, he continued praying, but not so intensely. Yet he came to realize, perhaps after a few cycles of Israel starting to flee before Amalek, that his prayer was absolutely essential for Israel's survival and victory. But he knew that he just couldn't physically go on. His knees were weak, he was going to have to abandon his favourite prayer posture of standing (cp. the earlier records of his prayers in Exodus). His mind must have desperately raced as to how he could go on. At the back of his mind, he would have thrown his predicament upon the Lord. And a way was made. " They took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands" (v.12). Note how Moses did not waste his energy in getting the stone for himself; we get the picture of total mental devotion to Israel's cause, a man all consumed with his prayer, being humanly helped by lesser men. Israel's salvation depended on his totally voluntary intercession. The type is powerful. Peter reasons that Christ's attitude in prayer should be ours (1 Pet. 4:1). His prayers then, and ours now, were a struggle, after the pattern of Jacob.

Prophesied Prayers

The importance of Christ's prayers for us on the cross does not come out directly from the Gospel records. The fact Moses prayed until the sun went down perhaps indicates how Christ prayed constantly right up to his death. The way in which he constantly quotes the Psalms has led some to suggest that he actually recited Psalms, e.g. 22, as he hung there. This suggestion appeals to me as being quite likely. But we must realize that those Psalms were fundamentally prayers of Messiah to God. This helps us build up a likely picture of Christ's mental state on the cross: merging prayer with Scripture quotation, desperately battling to maintain the necessary intensity, rather than taking any kind of mental break (cp. Moses realizing that he mustn't drop his hands for a break). Yet the prayers of Christ on the cross, as prophesied in the Psalms, were repeatedly for his own personal salvation and resurrection. There is some mention of the salvation of " the great congregation" , but fundamentally those prayers are for himself. But it was only through his own salvation that ours was possible. This is in itself an indication of the peerless selflessness which Christ achieved as he hung there; to pray for his own salvation, 100% motivated by a desire for our salvation. Whenever we pray for ourselves rather than others, what is our motive? Are we praying (e.g.) for our own deliverance from danger or illness so that we can live and help others, to the glory of God? Or are we just exercising our own selfish, animal self-preservation instinct under a spiritual guise? Now that really is something to ponder. That is one of the many challenges of the cross.

It can be Biblically demonstrated that as Christ prayed on the cross, so we should arm ourselves with the same attitude of mind in prayer (cp. 1 Pet.4:1).

Now I want to underline that. We have been entering into the intensity of Christ's praying for us on the cross, patterned on the intensity of Moses in Ex.17. And now we are going to see that this intensity really is an example for us. Let's have a look over at the Messianic Ps.69:13. In the context, these are the thoughts of Christ on the cross: " My prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time...in the truth of Thy salvation" . These words are alluded to in 2 Cor.6:2, where we are told to draw near to God (and encourage others to do so), because now is the accepted time and the day of salvation. Let's make the point even clearer. Please flick on to Heb.12:12: " Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" . Now if Scripture interprets Scripture at all, this just has to be an allusion back to feeble-kneed Moses, with his hanging-down hands being held up. And the apostle says: 'You are the one with feeble knees and hands, represented by Moses in Ex.17!' - when we have figured out that Moses is representing Christ praying for us on the cross. So the Spirit is teaching us that with the intensity that Moses prayed for Israel's (and therefore his own) salvation on that hill in Ex.17, with the intensity that Christ prayed on the hill of Golgotha - so we should be praying for each other's salvation, and our own. We must sustain each other in prayer, perhaps we can see it in terms of allowing the Angels to work through us to strengthen others in the ecclesia in their prayer life.

How often do we even speak to each other about prayer? Prayer ought to be a major feature of our spiritual life. Our spiritual life ought to be the main feature of our conversation the one with the other. But is it? I mean, what are we going to be talking about after the meeting this morning? Please, see the urgency of what I'm saying. Time is so short. And now is the accepted time, now is the day of God's grace. If we really believe this, we ought to at least be talking to one another about it! To spur us down this road, just consider the effort which Christ puts into his mediation for us. We've begun to enter into the intensity of his praying for us on the cross. Heb.5:7 comments on this that Christ prayed " with strong crying and tears" . These words are certainly to be connected with Rom.8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with " groanings which cannot be uttered" . One might think from Heb.5:7 that the Lord Jesus made quite a noise whilst hanging on the cross. But Rom.8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. No doubt the Lord Jesus was praying silently, or at best quietly, as he hung there. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved on the cross for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father. Brethren and sisters, what is our response? To fall asleep as we pray, all too late at night. To rush through our prayers before food, resume our worldly conversations the moment we say (or hear) the 'Amen'.... ? Am I really exaggerating? I trust I am. But I'm exaggerating to make a point.

A Memorial

The battle which swayed to and fro between Israel and Amalek clearly points forward to our battle with the flesh. Moses/Jesus is away above us, earnestly praying for our victory. Yet in the same way as Israel had Joshua actually with them in the field (v.10), so Joshua- Jesus is not only some remote Heavenly helper. He is with us, leading us in the practical business of fighting this war. The personal effort which the Israelites had to make to follow Joshua is surely implied by the fact the victory was no walk-over. The weak among Israel were killed by the Amalekites (Dt.25:17,18); despite the incredible level of Christ's mediation for us, such is the power of sin and the apathy of human nature that we can still lose the battle. Thanks to Moses' hard mental work (cp. Christ's work on the cross), God issued a statement of intent after the battle: " I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek" (v.14). This points forward to God's purpose to obliterate the memory of the " former things" - i.e. Amalek, the things of our moral weakness (Rev.21:4); note how the " former things" in several Old Testament passages refer to the things of Israel's sad spiritual past). The forgetting of the former things therefore refers to the lack of awareness of the things with which we battled in this life. In the same way as God can 'forget' our sins, so one of the Kingdom joys will be the lack of memory of anything sinful. Such fullness of righteousness is hard for us to imagine in our present weakness. Yet the typology we have been studying lifts our minds into the possibility of at least considering these things.

The work of Moses led to the declaration that God will be perpetually at war with Amalek; in prospect, Amalek was destroyed when the sun went down. The same happened with our sinfulness on the cross. In a sense Amalek was destroyed for good, in another sense a long warfare was started; " the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" . Within our natures, as well as in our dealings with the world, we are experiencing this warfare. There is no respite from it. Yet we have this marvellous assurance: God is at war with sin, He is truly on our side in these struggles, these wrestlings with our very natures, which we all go through. This is the comfort, the massive, huge encouragement as we strive onwards. The spiritual aspect of the warfare is the only really important problem we have to face. Yet God is with us, He has openly declared His aggression against the very things which we struggle against, our selfishness, our impatience, our bitterness, our frustration...And so much did God want Israel to be aware of this attitude of His towards Amalek that He told them to write all this down " for a memorial " of the fact that the memorial of Amalek ultimately was going to be destroyed. There is a slight play on words here, which makes a powerful point. Israel were to ever remember that ultimately Amalek would no more be remembered. And this brings us to the way in which Christ's victory against the Amalek of sin has been memorialized in bread and wine, as a reminder that the day is coming

when there will be no more remembrance even of the things against which we now spiritually struggle.⁽²⁾ So let's be motivated to keep up the struggle, to drive home and make good the victory which Christ achieved. You may recall that later, Saul failed to defeat the Amalekites completely; he failed to fully realize the extent of God's help in fighting Amalek/sin (1 Sam.15:3); whilst by contrast, David did completely destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam.30:1,17). So then, let's not let our hands down, let's fix our minds on the intensity which Moses and above all our Lord Jesus achieved and maintained in prayer, let's hold up each others' hands as we live out this life under the sun-until the sun goes down, as it were, and the very concept and possibility of our personal sinfulness is finally forgotten, and death shall be swallowed up in Christ's victory.

Notes

(1) A story told in *Angels*, Chapter 1.

(2) That memorial was physically symbolized by the building of the altar called Jehovah- Nissi (v.15). This literally means 'Jehovah is my pole'; this is a word used indirectly in prophecies about the cross of Christ.

8-1 God Manifestation In Moses

Moses is one of greatest types of the Lord Jesus, in whom the Father was supremely manifested. Because of this, it is fitting that we should see a very high level of God manifestation in Moses. Indeed it seems that God was manifest in Moses to a greater degree than in any other Old Testament character. The following points are proof enough of this:

- Yahweh said that He would give Joshua a charge; but Moses gave Joshua the charge (Dt. 31:14,23).

- Yahweh anointed the priests (Lev. 7:36) - but in practice Moses did.

- Israel were led by God's hand (Heb. 8:9; Is. 63:13); but in practice by Moses' hand (Ps. 77:20; Is. 63:12).

- Israel "chode with Moses...they strove with the Lord" (Num. 20:3,13) uses the same Hebrew word for both "chode" and "strove". To strive with Moses was to strive with the Lord- i.e. with the guardian Angel that was so closely associated with Moses? Num. 20:4 continues rather strangely with the Israelites addressing Moses in the plural: "The people chode with Moses, saying...Why have ye [you plural] brought up...". Could it be that even they recognized his partnership with God? Likewise Num. 21:5: "And the people spake against

God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye [plural] brought us up out of Egypt to die?”.

- The pronouns often change (in Deuteronomy especially), showing a confusion between the voice of God and that of Moses. Dt. 7:4 is an example: “They will turn away thy son from following me (this is Moses speaking for God)...so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you”. Thus Moses’ comments on God’s words are mixed up with the words of God Himself. There are other examples of this in Dt. 7:11; 29:1,10,14,15 (“I” cp. “us”). Consider especially Dt. 11:13,14: “If ye shall diligently hearken unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord...that I will give you the rain of your land...I will send grass in thy fields”. The “I” here switches at ease between God and Moses. The Moses/God pronouns are also mixed in Rom. 10:19.

- God is His word (Jn. 1:2). Moses is likewise spoken of as if he is his word (Acts 15:21; 21:21; 26:22; 2 Cor. 3:18), so close was his association with it. The words and commands of Moses were those of God. “In the bush God spoke unto (Moses), saying, I am the God of Abraham...Isaac and Jacob” (Mk. 12:26; Mt. 22:31; Ex. 3:6). Yet Lk. 20:37 says that “that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when *he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham*” etc. Yet this was what God said of Himself.

- Likewise the Law was “a law...which I (Yahweh) have written” (Ex. 24:12). Yet the Lord Jesus speaks of *Moses* writing the precepts of the Law (Mk. 10:5). “The book of the law of Moses” is parallel with “the book of the law of Yahweh” (Neh. 8:1; 2 Chron. 17:9); it was “the book of the law of Yahweh given by Moses” (2 Chron. 34:14). His personal blessing of the people was that of God (Dt. 33); and when he looked with pleasure upon the completed tabernacle and blessed Israel, he was imitating God’s inspection and blessing of the completed natural creation (Ex. 39:43). Yet Israel tragically failed to appreciate the degree to which God was manifest in the words of Moses, as they did with Christ. This is shown by them asking for Moses to speak with them, not God; they failed to realise that actually his voice was God’s voice. They failed to see that commandments given ‘second hand’ really are the voice of God (Ex. 20:19). Perhaps our appreciation of inspiration is similar; we know the theory, but do we really see the wonder of the fact that what we read is the awesome voice of God Himself? And there are many other ‘first principles’ we need to appreciate in practice.

- All the commands of Moses’ law were in order to teach Israel to appreciate and respect the character and name of Yahweh (Dt. 28:58) - therefore all this commands were a manifestation of the fundamental personality of the Father. Ditto for the words of Jesus, who was the prophet who would speak God’s word as Moses spoke it (Dt. 18:15-18). Because Jesus would speak God’s word

as Moses did, the words of Moses should be studied as much as the words of Jesus - as Jesus himself said (Jn. 5:47). Yet do we *love* the Law of Moses as David did? Or do we not incline to be spiritually lazy, to be influenced by the (so called) New Testament Christianity of the apostate religious world around us? It is only by truly entering into the spirit of Moses' words that we can really understand our Lord - he said this himself. And yet we would rather read Jesus' words than those of Moses, because we can't be bothered to make *the effort to understand the spirit of our Lord as it is revealed there*. And therefore we complain (if we are honest) of a lack of sense that we are having a real relationship with the Lord Jesus.

- Israel's rejection of Moses was a rejection of the God who was working through Moses to redeem them. Thus Korah and his followers "strove against Moses... when they strove against Yahweh" (Num. 26:9 cp. 16:11). Moses understood that when Israel murmured against him, they murmured against Yahweh (Ex. 16:2,7; Num. 17:5; 21:5). They *thrust* Moses *away* from them (Acts 7:27,39) - yet the same word is used in Rom. 11:2 concerning how God still has not *cast away* Israel; He has not treated them as they treated Him through their rejection of Moses and Jesus, who manifested Him.

- Because of the high degree of God manifestation in Moses, he was so severely punished for not sanctifying Yahweh in the eyes of Israel in his sin of smiting the rock. Israel provoking his spirit to sin at this time is spoken of in the context of the way in which they provoked *God's* spirit (Ps. 106:7,29,33,43) - such was God's manifestation in Moses even while he was sinning. And so God is manifest in sinful men like us too. Moses knew this, he knew his closeness to God through manifestation, and yet he yearned to see God physically, he struggled with his distance from God (Ex. 33:18,20). The spirit of Christ in the Psalms is similar. And for us too (although surely it is difficult to share this enthusiasm if we refuse to accept God's existence in a physical, bodily form).

- Aaron asks: "Would it have been well pleasing in the sight of Yahweh?", and then we read "And when Moses heard that, it was well-pleasing in *his* sight" (Lev. 10:19,20 RV).

- We have seen that the time of Num. 10 and 11 was a spiritually low period for Moses(1). Consider Num. 10:30; 11:11-13,22,23. Yet in these very chapters there seems almost an emphasis on the fact that God was manifest in Moses: "Moses heard the people weep"; but they wept in the ears of Yahweh (Num. 11:10,18); "it displeased the Lord; and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased" (11:1,10) shows the connection between them; God has asked Moses to carry Israel "as a nursing father... unto the land" (11:12), although Yahweh was their father who would carry them to the land

(Dt. 32:6; Hos. 11:1). That Yahweh is manifest in His servants *even in their times of weakness* is both comforting and sobering. It is because of this principle that an apostate Israel caused Yahweh's Name *which they carried* to be mocked in the Gentile world (Ez. 20:39; 36:20; 39:7; 43:8). Yahweh did not take that Name away from them the moment they sinned. Having been baptized into the Name, our behaviour in the world, whether they appreciate it or not, is therefore a constant exhibition of the Name.

This manifestation of God in a person leads to a mutuality between them. There's a nice example of the mutuality between God and Moses in Ex. 33:1, where God says that *Moses* brought up Israel out of Egypt; but in Ex. 32:11, Moses says [as frequently] that *God* brought Israel out of Egypt. And we too can experience this mutuality in relationship with the Father. Through Moses allowing himself to become part of God manifestation, he found a confidence to achieve that which felt impossible to him. He asks God: "Who am I...?" to do the great things God required... and the answer was "*I will be who I will be*" (Ex. 3:11-13). Moses' sense of inadequacy was met by the principle of God's manifestation in him; and so will ours be, if we participate in it.

8-2 The Hand Of God Is Our Hand

In Ex. 4:4 Moses is told to "put forth" his hand. It is the same word repeatedly translated "let go" in the context of God telling Pharaoh to let Israel go [e.g. Ex. 4:23]. "Caught" is the same Hebrew word frequently translated "harden" in the context of God hardening Pharaoh's heart [e.g. Ex. 4:21]. As the snake hardened in Moses' hand into a rod, so this was how God would deal with Pharaoh through Moses. Thus God is showing Moses that what Moses will do with *his* hand to the snake- a symbol of Egypt- so the hand of God will do, working through Moses' hand. Thus Moses' rod [s.w. Ex. 4:2, about his shepherd's crook] was a symbol of Egypt and Pharaoh. But the throwing down of the shepherd's rod surely also indicated that Moses was to cast down the shepherd's life he had been living, and let God's hand take hold of him, so that his hand became the hand of God. Moses would thus have perceived some sort of parallel between himself and Pharaoh; God was working in both their lives, and it would take as much courage to grab hold of his own serpent-like life, as it would to do battle with Egypt. Ex. 4:23,24 brings out the parallel between how God told Moses that He would slay the firstborn of Pharaoh; and then seeks to slay Moses and *his* firstborn. And we can see lessons for ourselves here, surely. We throw down our worldly lives, take hold of them in faith, and they are transformed into the rod of God through which He will work wonders. Moses had to perceive the serpent-like aspects of his life and grip them; just as the parallel second sign involved his hand becoming leprous, with all its associations with sin, and then being healed and made strong to be used as the

hand of God. What all this shows is that God manifestation, our hand becoming the hand of God, God working through us to deliver His people, is predicated upon our own realization of sinfulness, and grasping it firmly. Ultimately, the hand of Yahweh was revealed through the hand of Moses. Moses was “sent forth” by God to do the work (Ex. 3:12 and frequently); yet the same Hebrew word is used to describe how God ‘sent out’ [“stretched forth”] the hand of God to do it (Ex. 3:20). And Moses was taught this by being told to ‘stretch out’ [same Hebrew word] *his* hand (Ex. 4:4).

But Moses, for some moments at least, just didn’t want to do this. Hence God’s anger when Moses comments: “Send [the same word translated “let go” or “put forth” used about Moses being asked to “put forth” his hand in Ex. 4:4] by the hand of him whom thou wilt send” (Ex. 4:13). It was Moses’ hand that God had asked to be ‘put forth’ or ‘sent’. But Moses refuses to play a part in God manifestation. He wanted God to send forth another hand, the hand of God personally perhaps; although God had asked him to put forth *his* hand. We too tend to assume that God cannot manifest Himself through *us*; but we all tend to assume someone else will do the job, when it is *we* who are called to it. The rabbis hold that Moses is not being weak here, rather he is referring to the Messiah- the hand whom Moses knew God would one day send forth to save His people. He would then be saying: ‘No, I don’t want to do this, let the Christ do it’. The same thought is maybe found in Ex. 5:22, when Moses asks Yahweh: “Why is it that thou hast sent [s.w. “put forth” and “let go”] *me*?”- i.e., why don’t You use Messiah, the man of Your right hand? And this, subconsciously and unexpressed, is so often our view; He must do it, not me. I’m just a shepherd, God ought to leave me alone in the comfortable monotony of my working life. But He has called us to greater things, to realize as Moses finally did that *we*, you and me, are the ones through whom God truly will work in this world. The rod of Moses (“*thy* rod”) became the rod of God (Ex. 4:20); the shepherd’s crook, the symbol of an obscure workaday life, became transformed to the rod and arm of God Almighty.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt from all this that God was intensely manifest in Moses. The hand of God was manifested through the hand of Moses. Moses had many deep seated spiritual weakness, and also many traits which were not appropriate to leadership, and yet because of his willingness to participate in God’s desire to be manifest through him, he was able to be changed and used by God. We have elsewhere commented on these weaknesses and how they were slowly changed through the power of God manifestation in a willing man.

Joshua: The Jagged Graph

1 Events In The Life Of Joshua

Moses was a hard act to follow. Joshua is someone I can identify with in that he had great potential which he never totally lived up to; although he was himself sound enough in his basic faith and, we can assume, will be in the Kingdom. Indeed, it seems he could have been a Messiah figure, leading Israel into the true Kingdom of God. This is developed at more length in the section 'Joshua: Potential Messiah?'. And yet Joshua did not give them "the rest" which it seems he could have. The following key events in the life of Joshua can be given a spirituality score out of, say, 10. They reveal a jagged graph, similar to that of all God's children.

Event in the life of Joshua	Spirituality score out of 10
The repeated encouragement to be strong and of a good courage and not be fearful (Dt. 31:23; Josh. 1:6,7,8,18). What does this imply about Joshua?	4
4:3-8- strict obedience to Divine commands?	7
4:21 Quoting / alluding to Moses- as Joshua often does	8
5:13,14 Is this a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will.	5
5:15 the command to remove his shoe from holy ground. This is evidently reminiscent of the command to Moses in a similar situation. Shouldn't Joshua have perceived this, seeing his life was so clearly framed after that of Moses?	4
6:26 Was this unnecessarily extreme?	6
7:3-5 Shouldn't Joshua have led them into battle in	4

- person (1:5); he did the second time they attacked Ai (8:15)
- 7:7,8- he lost faith in the promise of 1:5-7,9 2
- 7:10,11,13 He is being reminded not to just see himself as part of a community, but to remember his personal relationship with God, and not to have such a low self image 5
- 7:19 He correctly perceives that repentance is a giving of glory to God's Name 8
- 8:1 dismayed- he lost faith in 1:3,9 5
- 8:5,6 Fleeing before their enemies was perhaps a recognition of the truth of Dt. 28:25 7
- 8:26 Given the similarities with the battle against Amalek, were his arms held up in fervent prayer? This is a common association with upholden arms. Moses held his hand up, and Joshua led the army into battle, succeeding because Moses had his hands held up in prayer (Ex. 17:10). Now, Joshua is the one holding his hands up in prayer, whilst Israel are in battle. Lesson: We go through experiences which later repeat; and we are in the position of those who had before prayed for us, and are expected to replicate their examples.8:31,35- exact obedience 8
- 9:14-18 Too influenced by his 'committee'? 4
- 9:26 Integrity? 6
- 10:8 Lack of faith in 1:5? 5
- 10:12 Amazing faith in prayer; he commanded things to happen, so sure of the prayer being heard. 9
- 11:6,14- lack of faith in 1:9? 5

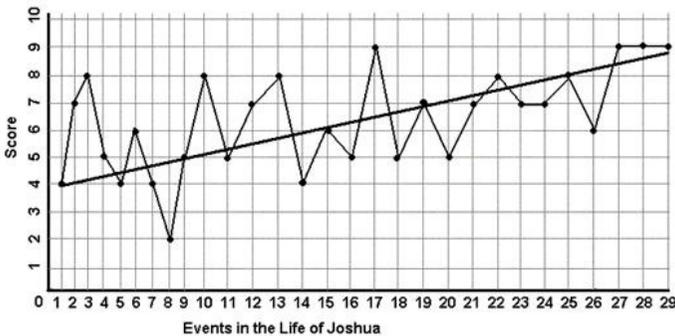
- 11:15,23 Strict obedience to commands 7
- 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4 Much land was still not possessed; does 11:23 therefore imply that the land had been possessed only in the perceptions of Israel? How responsible was Joshua for this? 5
- 17:16-18 He saw their potential? 7
- 19:50 Spiritual ambition 8
- 21:43,44 The Lord gave them the land, i.e. potentially, but they failed to possess it. Is this therefore an implied criticism of Joshua, or of Israel? 7
- 22:2-4 This seems an over positive view of Israel, an exaggeration of their true spiritual position- cp. 23:4; 24:14,23. Or is this rooted in his love for them, not seeing iniquity in Jacob? Moses had told the Reubenites and Gadites that they could return to their possessions when “the Lord have given rest unto your brethren, and they also possess the land” (Dt. 3:20). But Joshua tells them to go to their possessions simply because their brethren were now at “rest” (Josh. 22:4). He significantly omits the proviso that their brethren must also possess the land- because much of the land wasn’t possessed. Was this Joshua getting slack, thinking that the main thing was that people were living in peace, even though they weren’t possessing the Kingdom? Or is it a loving concession to human weakness? Indeed, the conditions of Dt. 3:20 were in their turn an easier form, a concession to, the terms of the initial agreement in Num. 32:20-32. 7
- 23:7 Don’t even make mention of their gods- alluded to in Eph. 5:3 8
- 23:9,14 Too positive? Saw things as achieved that hadn’t been- Jud. 1:1. He seems to have tried to perceive the promises, which were conditional upon obedience, as having been fulfilled fully when they hadn’t been. Solomon made the same mistake. 6

24:14 Compare his earlier over positive statements. 9
Now it seems he came to a final sense of realism about sin, obedience and Israel's failure

24:15 As for me...we will serve. He realized that Israel, whom he had seen as so obedient, actually weren't serving God at all

24:19,23 A final realism as to the real nature of sin, and the ultimate demands which God makes upon human life in practice. 9

And plotting these as a graph gives the following:



A few things come out of these considerations:

2 Legalistic Obedience?

Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed

the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

3 Peer Pressure

Joshua like many modern Christians was very prone to being influenced by peer pressure and the views and expectations of others, especially in these situations. He told Israel they'd done a good job and driven out all the tribes- when they were still worshipping idols, and hadn't driven out all the tribes. Only in his deathbed speech did he face up to the reality of their sinfulness. Ex. 32:17,18 is another example of Joshua's genuine naivety- thinking that Israel were far stronger than they were. He mistook the sound of their idolatrous partying for the sound of a battle; and Moses almost rebukes him for his naivety. He allowed the leaders of Israel to lead him into wrong decisions about the initial attack on Ai, and also into being deceived by the Gibeonites. And yet as a younger man, he had boldly stood up to the peer pressure of the princes of Israel in faithfully declaring that Israel could and should go up into Canaan; when the other princes must have put huge pressure upon him to agree with them. He is described as maintaining "another spirit" to theirs (Num. 14:24). The resolution of youth seems to have been somewhat lost as he grew older.

In Ps. 1:1-3, David makes several allusions to Joshua. He speaks of how the man who meditates in God's word day and night will prosper in his ways; and he uses the very same Hebrew words as found in Josh. 1:8 in recounting God's charge to Joshua. But David's point is that the man who does these things will not "walk in the counsel of the ungodly"- he won't give in to peer pressure. The fact that Joshua was wrongly influenced by his peers in later life would indicate that he didn't keep the charge given to him.

Forgetting The Commission

Joshua had been charged to be strong, of good courage, not fearful nor be dismayed. Yet he had a tendency to forget those charges, the implications of his having been called by God for a purpose; and needed to be reminded of them as he forgot or lost faith in them. Perhaps this is why he is an otherwise surprising omission from the list of faithful men and women in Hebrews 11. And here of course is the challenge to us. We too have been given commissions and callings. Whether it be to raise a Godly family, to establish an ecclesia in a certain place, to overcome a specific vice...the obstacles will flee before us, every place where the soles of our feet rest, will be blessed...if we truly believe

in God's purpose with us. Yet like Joshua, we usually fail to have a full faith in this. We get distracted by the views of others, peer pressure, worried by lack of resources, discouraged by setbacks; when it is belief in God's most basic initial promises to us that will overcome them. Joshua's fear is all the more reprehensible when we consider the testimony of Ps. 91. Here Moses speaks about Joshua, the one who dwelt in the secret place or tabernacle of God (Ps. 91:1 = Ex. 33:11), and who therefore was miraculously preserved throughout the wilderness wanderings. Thousands of Joshua's generation died at his side from the various plagues which wasted out his generation during those wanderings; but they never came near him (Ps. 91:5-8). As a result of this, he was commanded by Moses to "not be afraid" (Ps. 91:5), perhaps Moses was thinking specifically about peer pressure, with the assurance that truly God would hear Joshua's prayers (Ps. 91:14,15). His amazing preservation during the wilderness years ought to have instilled a faith and lack of fearfulness within him; and yet the implication is that he did very often fall prey to fearfulness in later life. Just as with us, the circumstances of earlier life are controlled by the Father to give us faith with which to cope with later crises; but we don't always learn the lessons we are intended to.

4 Joshua Our Example

Joshua is consciously set up as our example:

- When Paul says that we *each* with unveiled face have beheld the glory that shines from the face of the Lord Jesus, just as the glory to a lesser extent shone from the face of Moses (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). Yet the only person to behold Moses' unveiled glory was Joshua, who alone lived in the tabernacle where Moses received the glory (Ex. 33:11). And it was he who alone accompanied Moses up the mount to meet with God (Ex. 24:13). When Moses left Joshua and went out to the people, he veiled his face. But Joshua would have seen the glory shining off Moses' unveiled face.

- *We* may boldly say that we will *not* be fearful, as Joshua was, because God has addressed to *us* the very words which He did to Joshua: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5,6). In this especially, Joshua is our example. When Heb. 13:13 speaks of *us* going forth outside the camp, perhaps there is a reference to Joshua who dwelt with Moses outside the camp- thus making Joshua symbolic of us all.

Num. 27:20 LXX says that Moses put or gave of his glory upon Joshua- and this passage is alluded to by the Lord in Jn. 17:22: "The glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them". Note that the Lord's prayer of John 17 is full of allusion to Moses, as detailed in *Moses As A Type Of Christ*. So the

disciples, indeed all those for whom the Lord prayed in His prayer, are to see themselves as Joshua. Further, in the same context, the Lord washed the disciples' feet. This would've been understood by the disciples as an allusion to a well known Jewish legend that in Num. 27:15-23, Moses acted as a servant to Joshua by preparing a basin of water and washing Joshua's feet⁽¹⁾. And the LXX of Moses' final charge to Joshua in Dt. 31:7,8 ["fear not, neither be dismayed"] is quoted by the Lord to His disciples in Jn. 14:1,27.

Notes

(1) T.F. Glasson, *Moses In The Fourth Gospel* (London: SCM, 1963) p. 82.

5 Joshua: Potential Messiah?

Joshua's Potential

Joshua didn't give the people rest (Heb. 4:8); but he said he had (Josh. 22:4). He failed to fulfil the potential of Josh. 1:13-15- that *he* would lead the people to "rest". The Messianic Kingdom could, perhaps, have come through Joshua-Jesus; but both Joshua and Israel would not. Dt. 1:38 states clearly that "Joshua...he shall cause Israel to inherit [s.w. possess]" the land. Yet by the end of Joshua's life, Israel were not inheriting the land in totality. He didn't live up to his potential. Note, in passing, that God's prophecy here was conditional, although no condition is actually stated at the time. God's opening commission to Joshua was that the people were to possess the whole land promised to Abraham, right up to the Euphrates (Josh. 1:4). But Joshua ended up drawing up the borders of the land far smaller than these; he didn't even seek to subdue the territory up to the Euphrates, even though God had promised him potential success and even commanded him to do so. Joshua was to divide up the whole land promised to Abraham, amongst the tribes of Israel (Josh. 1:6). And yet in the extensive descriptions of Joshua dividing up the land, we don't find him dividing up that whole territory up to the Euphrates. He seems to have lacked that vision, and fallen into the mire of minimalism, just content with a utilitarian, small scale conquest, rather than seeing the bigger picture of the potential Kingdom which God wanted to give His people.

Joshua and Caleb were earlier characterized by the comment that they "wholly followed the Lord" when they went to spy out Canaan (Num. 14:24; 32:11,12; Dt. 1:36; Josh. 14:8,9,14), and urged Israel to go up and inherit it. This refers to the way that the Angel had gone ahead of them, and they faithfully followed where the Angel had gone, and believed that Israel could follow that Angel wherever it led. When Israel finally did go into the land, they were told that Joshua would 'go before' them, and they were to follow him and thereby

inherit the land (Dt. 31:3). From this we see that circumstances repeat in our lives. As Joshua had been told to be strong good courage in order to take the land, so he had to tell others (Josh. 10:25). As God charged him to be courageous and obedient to the book of the Law, so Joshua on his deathbed charged his people (Josh. 1:7,8 cp. 23:6). Joshua had faithfully followed, and now he became the leader who was to be faithfully followed. Likewise, he led the Israelites in battle whilst Moses stood on the hill with arms uplifted in prayer for his success. And in capturing Ai, it was Joshua's turn to stand on a hill with arms uplifted [also in prayer?] whilst Israel fought. However, Joshua seems to have somehow gotten out of synch with the Angel when he meets Him in Josh. 5:14 and asks Him whether He is for or against Israel. We must walk in step with the Spirit / Angel in our lives; and yet no matter how much we've walked in step with Him, we can always allow pressure of circumstances to let us fall out of step with Him.

Joshua is repeatedly made parallel with Israel; his victories were theirs; what he achieved is counted to them. In the same way, the people of the Lord Jesus are counted as Him. Joshua was to be strong and possess the land (Josh. 1:6), just as they had been told to do, using the same Hebrew words (Dt. 11:8). Indeed, Israel and Joshua are given parallel charges, to be strong and of good courage to take the land (Dt. 31:6,7). Both Israel and Joshua are given the same charge to keep the words of the covenant, that they might "prosper" (Dt. 29:9; Josh. 1:7).

This connection between Joshua and Israel is developed in Is. 59:21, which describes the new covenant which God will make with Israel in the Messianic Kingdom in terms evidently reminiscent of Joshua- as if the new covenant was made with him, thereby enabling him potentially to be part of a Messianic Kingdom even in his day:

"And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: my Spirit that is upon thee ["Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him" Dt. 34:9; Num. 27:18-23], and my words which I have put in thy mouth [Dt. 18:18- God's words were put in Joshua's mouth], shall not depart out of thy mouth ["this book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth", Josh. 1:8, s.w.], nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever".

Indeed, the Messianic prophecy of Dt. 18:18 had a potential Messianic and primary fulfilment in Joshua: "I will raise them up [God 'rose up' Joshua- s.w. Josh. 1:2; 7:10,13; 8:1,3] a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee [Joshua's life was framed to be like that of Moses- e.g. he too was told to remove his shoe when on holy ground, also held his hands up whilst Israel fought their enemies]; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak

unto them all that I shall command him [Joshua is constantly presented as telling Israel what God commanded him- Josh. 4:8,10,17; 6:10; 8:8: “according to the commandment of the Lord shall ye do. See, I have commanded you”; 8:27]. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him”.

The ‘likeness’ between Moses and the prophet like unto him was in that the prophet would also speak God’s words in a similar way. Josh. 11:15 therefore significantly comments: “As the Lord commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua: and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses”. Joshua was a potential Messiah.

We have shown earlier that Ps. 91 is Moses’ commentary upon Joshua, the young man who dwelt in the tabernacle (Ps. 91:1 = Ex. 33:11), Joshua the potential Messiah. The Psalm describes how Joshua was miraculously preserved from the punishments which befell his generation in the wilderness; thousands fell at his side from the various plagues sent to waste away his peer group. But he was preserved. In this context we read that the Angels would be given charge over him, lest he dash his foot against a stone during that wilderness journey (Ps. 91:11,12). Yet these words were understood by the Lord Jesus as relevant to Him personally, when *He* was in the wilderness (Mt. 4:6). The Lord Jesus clearly saw Joshua as a type of Himself. The double application of Psalm 91 to both Joshua and Jesus makes Joshua a potential Messiah.

It would therefore appear that Joshua potentially could have been the Jesus-Messiah figure, leading Israel into what could have become the Kingdom of God. He could have given the people rest; but he didn’t. Yet the possibilities and prophecies relating to Joshua were then reinterpreted and fulfilled in another ‘Jesus’, the Son of God. Solomon was another case of this. God’s servant Joshua was intended to “prosper” (Josh. 1:7); but in the end it was the Lord Jesus through His death who was the servant who would “deal prudently” [s.w. ‘prosper’, Is. 52:13]. And so, in His foreknowledge, God spoke of “another day” when His begotten Son would fulfil what all those men could potentially have achieved, and so much more (Heb. 4:8). The lesson for us is that so much has been potentially prepared for us to achieve. Our salvation may not necessarily depend upon achieving all those things, but all the same, so much potentially is possible which we refuse to reach up to, because we are petty minimalists, like Israel, satisfied with their little farm in the valley, rather than seeking to possess the fullness of the Kingdom prepared for them.

6 Joshua And The Name of God

Here is a chronological list of all the references in the spoken words of Joshua to God:

Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 the living God
 the Lord of all the earth
 Jehovah, the Lord of all the earth
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah your God
 hand of Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 my lord
 Jehovah.
 Jehovah
 Jehovah
 Jehovah
 Jehovah
 O Lord Jehovah
 Lord
 Jehovah, the God of Israel
 Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 my God
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah, the God of your fathers
 Jehovah our God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah
 Jehovah
 Jehovah your God

Last words:

Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah your God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah, the God of Israel
 Jehovah
 Jehovah
 Jehovah ... a holy God ... a jealous God
 Jehovah
 Jehovah
 Jehovah, the God of Israel
 Jehovah
 your God

Only at the end of his days does Joshua make a specific reference to the declaration of the Name of God, when he speaks of "Jehovah ... a holy God ... a jealous God". Yet Moses' comment upon Joshua: "I will set him on high, because he hath known my name" (Ps. 91:14) implies that the Father foresaw Joshua's future spiritual attainment and treated him accordingly. We likewise need to remember this in coping with the spiritual immaturity of our brethren. Moses considered that Joshua would "say of Jehovah, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in whom I trust" (Ps. 91:2). And yet only twice does Joshua use the phrase "my God" or "my Lord". Again, it seems that Moses is imputing to Joshua a higher level of intimacy with God than he actually achieved.

7 Rahab And The Fall Of Jericho

The spies were sent out "secretly" (Josh. 2:1). I'd argue that the sending out of the 12 spies about 40 years earlier was essentially a lack of faith- in the fact that God's Angel had gone ahead of them anyway to spy out the land, and Yahweh Himself had told Israel how good the land was. Perhaps the secrecy involved a sense that this was in fact not really a very spiritual decision and Joshua was somehow furtive about it. Israel had never known urban life nor perhaps even seen walled cities like Jericho. The spies entered the city at evening time, and the gate was shut. Strangers always attract attention in such places- let alone when the city was in the direct line of attack of the Hebrews. The language / accent of the two spies would've given them away. According to the record in Joshua 2, it seems they entered the city gates at dusk, the gates were shut, and they'd have perceived that they were being watched and had been noticed as suspicious strangers. And so they used some desperate initiative, and dived into a whorehouse nearby to the gate. This was the sort of place strangers would go to, as it would be today. We imagine them entering the house, and meeting the madame of the house. "What do you want?" was as dumb a question as the doctor asking the patient "How are you feeling today?". Rahab was a smart woman, accustomed to strangers, and knew what was going on. Within the first couple of sentences, she'd have figured who they were. And it seems they spoke for a short time, maybe an hour or so, realized they were busted, understood they were in a death trap within that walled city, and threw themselves on her mercy.

And there, providence kicked in. James 2:25 calls those men "messengers", with a message Rahab believed. They hardly had an hour to tell her the message, before men were knocking on the door enquiring what Rahab knew about the spies. In that brief time, she believed a very sketchy and incomplete Gospel of the Kingdom. And her works reflected that faith, in telling the men [whom local culture would've barred from entering the house of a single woman] that the spies had come and gone. "That was *quick!*", we can imagine the King's men joking.

There was weakness and dysfunction all around this story. The men "lodged" with Rahab (Josh. 2:1)- but the Hebrew term is often translated "slept with..." in a sexual context. In fact, whenever the term is used in relation to a woman, let alone a prostitute, it implies intercourse. As a word it does mean simply to sleep... but it is strange that no other term for 'lodging the night' is used, and that the term in the context of a female or prostitute does usually carry a sexual meaning. Whilst I don't believe the spies did sleep with Rahab, it's strange that no other word for 'lodging' is used. The ambiguity is, I suggest, purposeful. But they and their message were 'welcomed in peace' by Rahab (Heb. 11:31), she

'received' their message and justified herself by works by protecting them (James 2:25).

This would contribute to an overall theme in the book of Joshua of Israel's weakness- the land wasn't fully possessed, Joshua appears himself as weak in many ways, he didn't fully follow the admittedly hard-to-follow act of Moses, Rahab believed the very words of promise which Israel didn't believe, the spies were sent out secretly by Joshua with no command from God to do this, when God had promised to go before Israel and give them victory... and yet God worked through all this. Even to the extent of using the weakness of the spies in going in to a brothel and "sleeping" with the madame... in order to save that woman and her family, and the lives of the spies, all in a manner which through human weakness glorified the God of Israel. We'll comment later on how Rahab had an extensive knowledge of parts of Moses' words and law, and this was the basis for her faith. Yet where did she, a whore in Jericho, get that knowledge from? Presumably from her clients, who would've been travellers who had heard these things and passed them on to her. All this is wonderful encouragement for all sinners- that God has a way of working through sin to His glory, and He doesn't give up so easily with human weakness.

Heb. 11:31 comments that "By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace". Rahab's faith was faith in God's grace. For Rahab was an Amorite and according to the law of Moses there was to be no pity or covenant with them- only death (cp. Dt. 7:2). Rahab had the spiritual ambition to ask that they make a covenant with her- she requests *hesed*, the common term for covenant relationship ("deal kindly with me", Josh. 2:12 cp. 1 Sam. 20:8). And the spies made a covenant with her. Grace, like love, finds a way. Remember that she was also aware of what Israel had done to their enemies on their way to Jericho- and she appears to allude to Moses' commands to destroy utterly and *not* make covenant with the peoples of the land (Dt. 2:32-37; 7:1-5; 20:16-18). When she says that she was aware that God had "given you the land" (Josh. 2:9), she uses the same two Hebrew words used repeatedly in Deuteronomy regarding God's promise to give Israel the land of the Canaanites. "Your terror is fallen upon us" is likewise an allusion to Ex. 15:16; 23:27 [the same Hebrew word for "terror" is used by Rahab]. Rahab speaks of how her people are "fainting" in fear- quoting Ex. 15:15 about how the inhabitants of Canaan would "faint" (AV "melt away") because of Israel. Knowing all this, she has the ambition to request the impossible- that *she* would be the exception, that with *her* a covenant would be made. When she says that "we *have* heard" about the Exodus (Josh. 2:10), she may be referring to the prophecy of Ex. 15:14: "The people *shall* hear and be afraid". In this case, her emphasis would have been upon the word "have"- 'yes, we *have* heard indeed, as Moses sung, and yes, we *are* afraid'. Seeking God's face is actually to strive for the unachievable

in this life; but it's what we are to do. Spiritual ambition of the type Rahab had lifts us far above the mire of mediocrity which there is in all human life under the sun.

Rahab's Witness

Rahab was told to bind the scarlet cord in her window "when we come into the land" (Josh. 2:18). But Rahab bound it there immediately when they left- as if she recognized that her land was already in Israel's hands (Josh. 2:21). Considering the whole town was wondering how the spies had escaped, and she was under suspicion, to leave the escape rope dangling there, indeed to take it up and then place it there again immediately (so 2:21 implies), was really stupid. She didn't need to do that at that stage. But the joy of the Gospel should make us fools for Christ's sake. But does it, in our postmodern age? When was the last time the joy of the good news we know, lead you to do something humanly foolish? It could be gathered from Heb. 11:31 that Rahab preached to others the message she had received from the spies- for the inspired commentary there notes that Rahab did not perish with those "that believed not"- *apeitheo* suggesting disbelief, a wilful refusal to believe. What message did Jericho not believe? There was no particular message for them from the words of Moses or Joshua. The message was presumably an appeal from Rahab, to repent and accept the God of Israel as she had done- to cast themselves upon His mercy. And in any case, as a prostitute estranged from her family, either due to her profession or because estrangement from them had led her to it, she must have gone to her estranged family and preached to them, bringing them within her despised house.

The question, of course, is: 'Why then was not Rahab killed by the people of Jericho if she openly preached to them about the God of Israel?'. The ancient law code of Hammurabi contains the following statute: "If felons are banded together in an ale-wife's [prostitute's or innkeeper's] house and she has not haled [them] to the palace, that ale-wife shall be put to death" (1). Perhaps she was so despised that she was untouchable, or treated as mad. Perhaps former clients of hers in the city's leadership decided it would be better to let her 'get religion' rather than spill any beans about them. But it could be said that it was a miracle she wasn't murdered for her witness. She certainly ran the risk of it. If men and women with a far less complete understanding of the Gospel could risk their lives for it... what does our understanding and faith convict *us* to do for the sake of witnessing to it? Give money towards it? Risk our lives, health, convenience in travelling for it? Risk our embarrassment and loss of standing in the workplace or family by preaching it...?

Our knowledge of the Gospel of the Kingdom is far more detailed than that of Rahab, who picked up snatches of it from her clients, and had at most an hour's

pressured conversation with the spies before she had to show whether or not she believed it. If it motivated her to do all she did- what about us?

Following The Angel

As Israel were called to follow the Angel after their Red Sea baptism, so we too follow where the Angel leads. The conquest of Jericho is a classic example of following the Angel. Josh. 5:13 speaks of the Angel who was the commander of *Yahweh's* army appearing to Joshua, the commander of God's human army on earth, and standing "over against him", i.e. dead opposite him. Clearly enough, Joshua was being shown that he had an opposite number in Heaven, a representative there before the throne of God- just as each of us do. Note in passing how the Angel answers Joshua's question- 'Are you for me, or against me?'. God has no interest in taking sides in human arguments, demonizing the one side and glorifying the other. The response was simply that the Angel stood for God and was His representative (Josh. 5:14). Religious people so easily fall into this trap of demonizing their enemies, on the basis that "God is with me, and therefore, not with you my opponent, in fact, He hates you because I hate you". The true God and His Angelic servants are far above this kind of primitive, binary dichotomy.

Following the Angel is the theme that lies behind God's statement that because He had already given Jericho to Israel, therefore they should arise and take it. So many victories have been prepared for us in prospect- against addictions, engrained weaknesses of character, habits, impossible situations. Israel had to follow the ark, where the Angelic presence of God was (Josh. 6:2 cp. 6:8). The people were to go up into Jericho "straight before them" (Josh. 6:5,20), just as the Cherubim-Angels have "straight feet" (Ez. 1:7,9,12). They were to follow in the Angel's steps.

The command to "shout" was a reflection of the belief Israel were to have in the fact that God *had already* given them the city- for the Hebrew for "shout" usually refers to a shout of victory. The word is translated "... will I triumph" in Ps. 60:8; 108:9. The same idea of shouting in victory over a city which has been given to God's people recurs in Jer. 50:15- "Shout against her round about [cp. compassing the walls of Jericho]... her foundations *are* [present tense] fallen, her walls [cp. Jericho's] *are* thrown down". And this speaks of our latter day victory against Babylon- thus making the whole account of earnest relevance to us who live in the last days, and who will see Babylon fall by faith. Notice how literal Babylon fell by the water of the river being dried up, and the walls being opened- just the same sequence of events that occurred at Jericho. Likewise 1 Cor. 3:12-15 likens all the faithful to material which can pass through the fire of judgment- and this surely is a reference to the way that Jericho was burnt with fire, and only the metals along with Rahab and her

family came through that fire to salvation. Thus according to the allusion, Rahab and her family represent all the faithful.

God's Battle Plan

Everything about the battle plan was somehow humanly foolish- to yet again attempt to teach Israel, old and new, that victory comes from following God's way, and His way is humanly foolish. The warriors were circumcised before the battle (Josh. 5:2)- and we know from the Biblical record of Shechem how this would've weakened the men- for this was only a week or so before the battle. The manna wasn't phased out- it stopped abruptly just before the battle of Jericho (Josh. 5:12). The people would likely have been short of food, and would've been dealing with the problems associated with a new diet- after 40 years! Walking around the city seven times, starting at dawn, would've made the people tired. There was no advantage of shock or surprise by doing this. Planning the final assault for late afternoon was hardly smart either- humanly speaking! But all this was- and is- to teach God's people that victory *His* way involves shedding our human strength, just as Gideon was likewise taught so dramatically.

Josh. 6:10, "You shall not shout nor let your voice be heard, nor let a word proceed out of your mouth, *until* the day I tell you, 'Shout!'", implies that the people maybe didn't know the battle plan- each day they would've walked around the city in silence, and nothing happened. The command to "Shout!" didn't come- for six days. The whole exercise was surely to develop their faith. Again, this was the most crazy of battle plans, in human terms. Heb. 11:30 associates the circling of the walls with faith: "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been circled seven days".

2 Cor. 10:3-4 is perhaps an allusion to the way that Jericho was taken with such a humanly weak battle plan: "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ". The point of the allusion is for us to see ourselves as those nervous Israelites desperately clinging on to their faith in God's victory rather than human strength. And we each have our Jerichos- habits, life-dominating patterns of thinking, that seem so impossible to shift.

Of course, the deliverance at the Red Sea had been intended to teach Israel these very lessons. And the account of the fall of Jericho is recorded in similar language, in order to teach the same lesson. Rahab's house had to be identified by a scarlet cord- like the blood of the Passover lamb sprinkled on the two doorposts and lintel of the Israelites' homes in Egypt. The silence demanded of

the people was surely to recall Ex. 14:14, there the people standing before the Red Sea were assured: "The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent". Compare the command to keep silent whilst *Yahweh* fought, with the common practice of yelling war cries as an ancient army approached their enemy. All human convention, wisdom and strength, was placed in purposeful opposition to what seemed quite counter-instinctive- to be utterly silent whilst *God* did the fighting.

Undeserved Blessing

There's a distinct theme in the record that actually, God's people didn't do according to His ideal plan, and yet still He gave them the victory. One wonders whether the comment that "So the ark of the Lord compassed the city" (Josh. 6:11) could imply that the entire fighting force of Israel didn't bother doing as commanded on the first circuit of the city- possibly they just sent the ark around it. The people were to shout when the trumpets sounded (Josh. 6:10). But in reality, like a Sunday School play gone wrong, the people shouted, the trumpets sounded, and then the people again shouted (Josh. 6:20).

Likewise, compare the above evidence for Rahab's preaching the message of the spies, with the terms of the covenant thrashed out with her- if she were to "utter" (Heb. to preach, advertise openly] the "business" of the spies, then the covenant would be null and void (Josh. 2:20). She did indeed do this, and yet the covenant still stood. Perhaps the agreement insisted upon by the spies was somewhat self-protective, without the ambition which Rahab had to bring others to throw themselves upon God's grace. This would only make her spiritual perception and ambition stand out the more. All this fits in with the overall theme of the book of Joshua- that Israel were given the land, Ephraim and Manasseh were allowed to return to their lot East of Jordan, despite the fact that they were disobedient and didn't drive out all the Canaanites as required by God. Taking the crossing of the Red Sea as a type of baptism, the wilderness walk as symbolic of our probationary lives now (1 Cor. 10:1-3), the entrance of the promised land speaks of our entrance to God's Kingdom- and this will likewise be by grace, in the face of all the mess ups, disobedience, failure to obey... which we're all so guilty of.

Yet according to Heb. 11:30, "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down ...". Whose faith? What faith? Was Joshua-Jesus' faith counted to the people? Or was their very weak, hope-for-the-best faith all the same accepted as faith by God's grace?

Notes

(1) S.R. Driver and J.C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), Vol. 2 p. 45.

SAMSON

1 A Character Study Of Samson

Biblical history is unlike any other national history of a people in that it seems to emphasize the spiritual weakness of Israel. The heroes are nearly all flawed—and that, surely, is so as to give us realistic inspiration to rise up to their spirit, knowing how flawed we also are. And yet there's a tendency amongst some of us to idealize these men, in the same way as the Catholic and Orthodox churches portray them as white faced, haloed saints. Judaism has done the same. Despite the evident weaknesses of Samson (and other judges, e.g. Gideon) as revealed in the inspired record, later Jewish commentary sought to idealize them. Take Ecclesiasticus 46:11,12: "The judges too... all men whose hearts were never disloyal, who never turned their backs on the Lord...". Perhaps the psychological basis for this tendency is that we simply don't want to be personally challenged by the fact that heroes of faith were *so* much like us...

We know, or we ought to, how weak our moral judgment is, how prone we are to forget the degree to which God has justified us from our sins. This weakness is seen in the difficulty we have in analyzing the characters we read of in Scripture. For example, from reading the record of Lot in Genesis, it would seem that Lot was a materialistic, weak, faithless man who is shown to be the exact opposite to Abraham, who is held up as the example of real faith. Yet in the New Testament record, Peter points out that Lot was a righteous man. We are therefore left to conclude that the Genesis record is highlighting the weaker aspects of Lot's character, without commenting on the good points. We may have the same sort of surprise when we read in Hebrews 11 that Samson was a man of outstanding faith—yet the record we are reading at the moment in Judges seems framed to paint Samson as a womanizer, a man who lacked self-control and who only came to God in times of dire personal need.

But just imagine if only the negative incidents in our own lives, over a period of 20 (or 40?) years, were recorded. Anyone reading it would conclude that we were a complete hypocrite to claim to have any hope of salvation. In our self-examination, we sometimes see only this negative record; we fail to see that God has justified us, that in His record book, we are ranked among the faithful,

as Samson was in Hebrews 11. Any character study of Samson needs to bear this in mind. Samson, over 40 years of service, courted a girl not in the faith and tried to marry her; once went to a prostitute in Gaza; and had an on-and-off relationship with a worthless woman in Sorek for a few months (?). And yet he seems to have lived the rest of his life full of faith and zeal—although I say this not in any way minimizing the mistakes he made. This is hardly evidence that Samson was the renegade sex-maniac that he is sometimes made out to be.

Samson's Aim

Samson lived at a time when Israel were hopelessly weak. His great desire was to do the work of the promised seed, who would save Israel from their enemies. He resented the Philistine domination and sought, single-handed, to overcome it in faith, not only for himself, but for his weaker brethren. As predestiny would have it, in recognition of his zeal for these things, he came from Zorah (13:2), 'the hornet'- a symbol of the Divine power that would drive the foreign tribes out of the land, as Samson dedicated himself to do (Dt. 7:20). And his father's name, Manoah, meant "rest", or inheritance (cp. Josh. 1:13,15). Samson-ben-Manoah was therefore Samson, the son of the promised inheritance.

Jud. 17-21 contain various pictures of and insights into the apostasy of the tribe of Dan, providing the backdrop for a character study of Samson. These chapters seem chronologically out of place; they belong before the Samson story. 18:30 speaks of Jonathan the grandson of Moses, and 20:28 of Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (cp. Num. 25:11), which would place these events at the beginning of the period of the Judges, once Israel had first settled in the land. Dan's apostasy is suggested by the way in which he is omitted from the tribes of the new Israel in Rev. 7. Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and took over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that thou hast done *unto us*?" (15:11). "They had become reconciled to the dominion of sin since it did not appear to do much harm. They could still grow their crops etc." . It is even possible that his parents had elements of weakness in them; for his name doesn't include the 'Yah' prefix, and 'Samson' ('splendour of the sun') may be a reference to the nearby town of Beth Shemesh ('house of the sun-god'). It could be argued that because the father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (12:9; 14:2; 15:2; Gen. 24:3-9; Neh. 10:30), therefore Samson's father was equally guilty for Samson's 'marriage out'. Many of the commands against intermarriage were directed to parents, commanding them not to give their children in intermarriage. All the Judges were preceded by a

period of Israel prostituting themselves to the surrounding nations (Jud. 2:16-19); and this was evidently true of the period in which Samson grew up. From this apostate tribe and background came Samson. The way his own people angrily rebuked him that "Knowest thou not that the Philistines are lords over us?" (15:11) was tacit recognition of the depth of their apostasy. They seemed to have no regret that they were fulfilling the many earlier prophecies that they would be dominated by their enemies if they were disobedient to Yahweh. The fact that Israel were dominated throughout Samson's life by the Philistines is proof enough that they were apostate at this time (13:1; cp. 15:20; 16:31).

Yet Lev. 26:3-8 had promised dramatic success against their enemies *on the basis of* obedience to the Law. The fact Samson had this power was therefore proof that he really was reckoned by God as zealously obedient to the Law; and yet he was like this in the midst of a sadly apostate Israel. This character study of Samson takes this view of his strength. This is in itself no mean achievement: to rise to a level of spirituality much higher than that achieved by the surrounding brotherhood. When Paul spoke of us shining as lights in a dark world, in "a crooked and perverse generation" (Phil. 2:15), he was using language which Moses had earlier used of how apostate Israel were the "crooked and perverse generation" (Dt. 32:5). The point of his allusion may have been that despite the darkness and apostasy of the surrounding brotherhood, we must all the same shine with the constancy of the stars.

His motivation for this came from God's word. Joshua's final exhortation to Israel contains a passage which reads as some kind of prophecy of Samson. It is proof enough that Samson is to be read as a symbol of Israel: "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses...that ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you (true in Samson's time)...but cleave unto the Lord your God...no man hath been able to stand before you (this was Samson)...one man of you shall chase a thousand (cp. Jud. 15:16): for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you (this was exactly true of Samson in Jud. 15:18)...take good heed unto yourselves...else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and make marriages with them (as Samson did), and go in unto them, and they to you (cp. Jud. 15:1; 16:, where Samson went in to the Philistine women): know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you (cp. 16:20); but they shall be snares and traps unto you (Delilah!)...and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish" (Josh. 23:6-13). This passage would associate Samson's God-given strength and victory over the Philistines with his obedience to God's word. It was not that Samson was just an arbitrary tool in God's hand. We will see in our later notes that frequently the things Samson says and does are full of allusion to various passages in the Law, and also

earlier incidents recorded in Judges which would have been known to him probably as the oral word of God. We will also see that Samson was possessed of a finely tuned conscience. The first instance of this is when we read how the Spirit of Yahweh troubled him (Heb.) from time to time in the camp of Dan, in the very places where his people had earlier failed to follow up the victories of Joshua-Jesus by their spiritual laziness (13:25).

There is further evidence, from later Scripture, that Samson's zeal was born from the word. A character study of Samson needs to consider what later Scripture implies about him. It seems that Jeremiah was one of several later characters who found inspiration in Samson, and alluded to him in their prayers to God, seeing the similarities between his spirit and theirs:

" O Yahweh [Samson only used the Yahweh Name at the end of his life], thou knowest: remember me [as Samson asked to be remembered for good, 16:28], and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors [" that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines" , 16:28]...know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke [the Philistines doubtless mocked Yahweh as well as Samson]. Thy words were found, and I did eat them [cp. Samson loving the word and eating the honey which he " found" in the lion]: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart...I sat not in the assembly of the mockers...I sat alone because of thy hand [Samson's separation from an apostate Israel]...why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable?" [the finality of his blindness] (Jer. 15:15-17). If these connections are valid, Samson's love of the word was a very big part of his life.

The Strength Of Samson

Samson's zeal to deliver Israel was confirmed by God, in that he was given gifts of Holy Spirit in order to enable him to deliver Israel. However, this doesn't mean that he himself was a man rippling with muscle. The Philistines wanted to find out the *secret* of his strength; it wasn't that he had such evidently bulging muscles that the answer was self-evident. He told Delilah that if his head were shaved, he would be like any other man (16:17). He was therefore just an ordinary man, made strong by the Father after the pattern of the Saviour he typified. The stress is on the way in which the Spirit came upon Samson (14:6,19; 15:14), as it did on other judges (3:10; 6:34; 11:29). " Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zech. 4:6) may be referring to these incidents; demonstrating that when God's spirit acts on a man, it is not human muscle at all that operates. He is even listed amongst those who out of weakness were made strong (Heb. 11:34). A character study of Samson must remember this about him. This could suggest that he was even weaker than a normal man; or it could be a reference to the way in which out of his final spiritual weakness and degradation he was so wonderfully strengthened (16:28). It should be noted

that his strength was not somehow magically associated with his hair; his strength went from him because Yahweh departed from him (16:19,20). He had to beg his own people not to try to kill him themselves (even whilst he had long hair), because he knew that the strength he had was only for certain specific purposes- i.e., to deliver God's people from the Philistines (15:12). When he was strolling in the Timnath vineyards, a lion came across him (15:5 AVmg.). It was only after it roared against him that the Spirit came upon him and enabled him to kill it. He had to take the first nervous steps towards that lion in faith, and then the Spirit came upon him and confirmed his actions. The fact he didn't tell his parents what he had done may not only indicate his humility, but also suggests he was not naturally a strong man. To say he had just killed a lion would seem ridiculous (14:6). The Spirit likewise came upon him to kill the Philistines in Lehi (15:14). It wasn't a permanent strength. This is in harmony with the way in which the Spirit was used in the NT. The Spirit came upon the apostles and they were filled up with it, as it were, and then drained of it once the work was done; and had to be filled with it again when the next eventuality arose. Indeed, the word *baptizo* strictly means 'to fill and thereby submerge'; hence the use of the term in classical Greek concerning the sinking of ships or the filling of a bottle. Therefore the idea of baptism with Holy Spirit could simply be describing a temporary filling of the Apostles with power in order to achieve certain specific aims. If this is indeed how Samson experienced his fillings with the Spirit, it throws new light on the way he allowed Delilah to apparently suck information out of him. She asked for the secret of his strength; he knew she would betray him; he told her; she betrayed him, which meant a group of Philistine warriors came and hid themselves in the house (full known to Samson); and he then rose up and killed them, using the gift of God's Spirit. He was so sure that God would use him in this way, that he thought he could do anything in order to entice Philistine warriors into his presence- even if it involved gratifying his own flesh. The way he threw away the jawbone after killing 1000 Philistines at Lehi may suggest that he felt that now he had done the job, the instrument was useless; and he begged the Lord to give him drink. He knew that now he was an ordinary man again (15:18). It must be emphasized, in line with this understanding of Samson's strength, that his strength was not tied up in his hair. He only ground in the prison a short time, until the great sacrifice was offered to Dagon in thanks for Samson's capture. In that time, his hair grew- but not very long, in such a short time (no more than months, 16:22,23). The growth of his hair is to be associated with his renewed determination to keep the Nazarite vow. He was reckoned by God as a lifelong Nazarite (15:7); the time when his hair was cut was therefore overlooked by God. His zealous repentance and desire to respond to the gracious way in which God still recognized him as a lifelong Nazarite, although he wasn't one, inspired him to a real faith and repentance. It was this, not the fact he had some hair again, which led to God empowering him to destroy the palace of Dagon.

The Weakness Of Samson

It would be simplistic for a character study of Samson to see Samson as some kind of sex maniac-cum-believer. He was a man of faith who, amidst a weak and indifferent brotherhood, tried to rise up to the spirit of Messiah in delivering Israel from their spiritual enemies. In order to devote himself to this, it seems that he chose the single life. In common with others who trod that path of zeal (e.g. Timothy and possibly Hezekiah), he couldn't maintain it all the time. He stumbled, and his stumbling in this area resulted in him reasoning that the end (i.e. the work he was doing) justified the means, and that therefore he could do God's work in a way which in fact gratified his own flesh. He had to learn the spirit of the cross-carrying Christ; the lesson of the whole burnt offering: that the *whole* of a man's life must be affected by the cross- not just those parts which we are willing to surrender ⁽¹⁾. We can't mix the service of God with the service of self. There is no third road. Because Samson failed to realize this (until the end), he was a man who in many ways never quite made it; he never quite lived up to the spiritual potential which he had. Although he was to be the beginning of serious deliverance of Israel from the Philistines (13:5), the whole story of Samson is prefaced by the fact that during the 40 years of Samson's ministry (15:20 + 16:31), " the Lord delivered (Israel) into the hand of the Philistines" (13:1). It is emphasized in 14:4 that " at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" ; and the men of Judah chode with him: " Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us?" (15:11). The point is hammered home in 15:20: " He judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years" . God's intention was that Samson was to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but somehow he never rose up to it. They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. He made a few sporadic attempts in red hot personal zeal, confirmed by God, to deliver Israel. But he never rose up to the potential level that God had prepared for him in prospect. And yet for all this, he was accepted in the final analysis as a man of faith. It may be possible to understand that the breaking of his Nazariteship was yet another way in which he never lived up to his God-given potential ⁽²⁾. He was " a Nazarite unto God from the womb to the day of his death" (13:7). Yet he broke the Nazarite vow by touching dead bodies and having his hair shaven (Num. 6:6). This may mean that he chose to break God's ideal intention for him, to take a lower and lower level of service to God until actually he had slipped away altogether. However, it may be that God counted *his desire* for the high standard of Nazariteship to him. He saw him as if this never happened, in the same way as He saw Abraham as if he had offered up Isaac, even though ultimately he didn't (Heb. 11:17; James 2:21). Intention, not the human strength of will to do the act, seems to be what God earnestly looks for.

As a final note on the aim and purpose of Samson's life, reflect how the Angel declared that he would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the

Philistines” (Jud. 13:5). Yet he died with the Philistines firmly in control over Israel. This was potentially possible in the Angelic plan; but he didn’t live up to what had been made possible in prospect. Significantly, Samson’s mother omitted to repeat this part of the Angel’s conversation when she relayed the incident to her husband (Jud. 13:7)- perhaps because she didn’t believe that her child would be capable of this. And perhaps this was a factor in his failure to achieve what God had intended for him.

Notes

(1) See *Taking Up The Cross*.

(2) It may be fair comment on the character of Samson that he was a man who never quite made it, and therefore didn't achieve the potential deliverance which would have been possible. However, this must dovetail with the fact that Israel's deliverance at the hands of the judges was related to their crying to Yahweh in faith and repentance (Neh. 9:27,28). It seems that they did precious little of this during the time of Samson, from what we know of them from the record. Therefore Samson didn't deliver them as far as he potentially could have done. And yet in God's perfect planning, this worked together with the fact that Samson himself limited the deliverance he could achieve by his moral weakness.

2 Samson And Deja Vu

2-1 Repetition In Biblical Narratives

It will be apparent to any regular Bible reader that there is a tremendous repetition within the Biblical narratives. Individuals tend to go through very similar experiences, and often the same words are used in the descriptions of the experience or their response to it. Some of these similarities are so specific and humanly unlikely to be replicated that one can only conclude that there was a higher power over-ruling their situations. It may be that the Angels work in human lives according to some kind of Divine pattern, and this accounts for the sense of repetition and *deja vu*. But it may also be because it is God's intention that we meditate upon the lives of previous servants to the point where we see their experiences coming through, in principle, in our own lives; and we are urged on to a like victory as they attained. Consider the following of many possible examples of this repetition in Biblical narratives:

- The way Saul returns from pursuing David because of a rumour of invasion is so similar to Rabshakeh's retreat from Jerusalem after rumours of incursions (1 Sam. 23:27).

- As Samuel tarried longer than Saul expected, so Amasa "tarried longer than the set time which [David] had appointed him" (2 Sam. 20:5).

- The incidents involving Moses and Jacob meeting women at a well are evidently intended to be seen as reflecting some unseen Heavenly template.

- When Joshua was leading the Israelite army, he was given victory because Moses kept his arms outstretched in prayer. Later, circumstances repeated, so that Joshua had the opportunity to make the same effort for others as had been made for him. For Joshua had to keep his hand stretched out, until his men had destroyed all the men of Ai (Josh. 8:26). And throughout life, this occurs for us- a situation wherein we were shown grace repeats, in essence, so that we have a chance to show the same grace to others which we received.

- The Ephraimites came over as offended because they weren't invited to fight in a battle, even though they had shown no inclination; and they did this with both Gideon and Jephthah (Jud. 8:1; 12:1)

- Mephibosheth eating at David's table is somehow similar to Jehoiachin being raised to eat at that of the king of Babylon.

- The similarities between the David / Nabal / Abigail experience and those of Jacob, whilst he too kept flocks (1 Sam. 25:35 = Gen. 32:20; 25:18 = Gen. 32:13; 25:27 = Gen. 33:11).

- The way Abigail asked David to remember her for good when he came in his kingdom, knowing that he was perfect and suffering unjustly....is exactly the spirit of the thief on the cross. And David like Jesus responds that he has "accepted thy person" (1 Sam. 25).

- God created a great wind with which He brought Jonah and his fellows to their knees in Jonah 1:4. God later creates another great wind with which to teach Jonah something else (Jonah 4:8). Jonah ought to have perceived the same hand of the same God at work with him. Jonah's life "ebbed away" inside the fish (Jonah 2:8)- and a very similar word is used about his experience as he sat under the gourd (Jonah 4:8). In the fish, Jonah prayed that God would save his life, and was heard. But when he was made to feel the same again, he instead prayed God to take away his life. Perhaps this shows that even when we

respond well to circumstances, those same circumstances may repeat in order to test us as to whether we will continue to make that right response.

- Joash did right before God whilst the priest Jehoiada was alive, and then apostasized; Uzziah did likewise, with Zechariah the priest (2 Chron. 24:2; 26:5). He didn't reflect upon the personal implications of Divine history. And we too must appreciate that there are Bible characters whose experiences are framed in terms directly relevant to us- for our learning. Interestingly, straight after Jehoiada died, the princes of the land came to Joash with a request, which he wrongly listened to. This has great similarities with the tragic mistake made by Rehoboam after Solomon died (2 Chron. 10:3,4 cp. 24:17). So Joash was given chance after chance to be directed back to previous examples and be instructed by them- but he went on in his own way.

- The genealogies of Genesis 11 reveal how some human lives repeat according to the same outline schema. Thus both Arphachsad and Shelad each lived 403 years after the births of the eldest sons; Shelah, Peleg and Serug were each 30 when their first sons were born. Abraham and Shem both had sons at 100 years old (Gen. 11:10). And it is the very nature of Christian fellowship that God has arranged that our human lives likewise have elements of amazing similarity of pattern.

- The way Peter was given a vision and asked to eat what he had previously thought unclean has many similarities with Ezekiel going through a similar experience (Ez. 4:10-14 cp. Acts 10:14).

- David sent messengers to Nabal meaning well to him, and they were rudely rebuffed, resulting in his anger which only Abigail's grace and wisdom saved him from (1 Sam. 25). And yet the same situation repeated in its essence when he sent messengers to Hanun who were likewise misinterpreted and rebuffed (2 Sam. 10:3). Again, David got angry- but there was no Abigail to restrain him, and he did get into an impossible fight... from which by grace God delivered him. Could it not be that David failed to learn from his previous experience...?

- The signs done by Moses before Pharaoh have evident connection with the later plagues brought upon him- they were all "that you may know" (Ex. 7:17 etc.). The staff, stretched out right hand, snakes, the rod "swallowing" the serpent rods of Egypt (symbols of Pharaoh- Ez. 29:3-5; 32:2) just as the Egyptians were to be swallowed at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12), leprosy / boils, water / blood all repeat. The signs were thus both an encouragement to believe as well as a warning of judgment to come. Pharaoh was presented with the possibility of either faith, or destruction. Note in passing that God's hardening

of that man's heart didn't mean that He made no effort to save him nor appeal to him.

- Balaam is a classic example. His eyes were opened to the Angel blocking his way, and when he realized how he had closed his spiritual vision to the Angel trying to stop him going to Balak, he fell down on his face (Num. 22:31). But when he is later given a vision of Balak's judgment, the vision which Balaam didn't want to see, he describes himself as "the man whose eye was closed" and yet had to see the vision with his eyes open (Num. 24:3,4 RV). He didn't learn the lesson. He closed his eyes so as not to see the vision, and yet God forced him to open his eyes and see it. And again, he fell down upon his face (Num. 24:4,16 RV), as he had when the Angel blocked his path earlier. He wouldn't learn his lesson, he wouldn't perceive how circumstances were being repeated in God's desperate effort to get him to repent.

- Joseph was told to arise and take Jesus to Egypt; and he arose from sleep and did it. And the same double 'arising' occurred when he left Egypt to return to Israel (Mt 2:13,14 cp. 20,21).

- The disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

- Especially do we find the essence of the Red Sea deliverance repeated in life after life, situation after situation, in Israel's history. This happens to the extent that some of the Psalms can speak as if we were there present; and Paul stresses how that passage through water remains a type of the baptism of every believer to this day (1 Cor. 10:1). Take for example how just as Yahweh confounded Israel's enemies at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:24), so He did in Deborah's victory over Sisera (Jud. 4:15); and "not one was left" (Jud. 4:16), just as happened with the Egyptians (Ex. 14:28).

For other examples of repetition in Biblical narratives see 2 Kings 7:9,11,16; 2 Sam. 10:3 [cp. David sending his men to Nabal- but he doesn't learn the lesson this time]; 1 Chron. 7:22 [cp. Jacob being comforted by his sons over the loss of Joseph]; Benaiah killed a lion in order to prepare him for killing two lionlike men (1 Chron. 11:22); Peter, James and John were asleep at the transfiguration, but became "fully awake" and therefore beheld the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32)-

they feel asleep in Gethsemane, and didn't learn from the transfiguration experience.

An extended example of this repetition in Biblical narratives is to be found in the remarkable parallels between the sufferings of Stephen and the Lord Jesus, as tabulated by M. Ashton:

The Lord Jesus	Stephen
Acts 2:22	Acts 6:8
Luke 4:22	Acts 6:10
Mark 12:13	Acts 6:11
Luke 20:20	Acts 6:12
Matthew 26:59	Acts 6:13
Matthew 26:61	Acts 6:14
Matthew 26:65	Acts 6:11
Mark 15:20	Acts 7:57,58
Mark 14:62	Acts 7:56

Realizing, sensing how he was living out the sufferings of his Lord, all this really motivated Stephen; when he asked for forgiveness for his tormentors and asked for his spirit to be received (7:59,60), he was so evidently reflecting the words of the Lord in His time of final agony and spiritual and physical extension (Lk. 23:34,46). He saw the similarities between his sufferings and those of the Lord; and therefore he went ahead and let the spirit of the Lord Jesus live in him. He personalized those words of the Lord which he already well knew, and made them his own.

Samson

The record of Samson has a large number of these repetition in Biblical narrative. They are situations where he was connected into the experience of those who had gone before:

- Manoaah's desire to detain the Angel (13:15 cp. 6:18; Gen. 18:5)
- " The child grew, and the Lord blessed him" (13:24 cp. Samuel, John, the Lord Jesus- all chosen from the womb)
- The dissapointment of Samson's parents cp. that of Esau's (14:3 cp. Gen. 26:35; 27:46; 28:1)
- Judah also did wrong in Timnath (14:1) with a woman, and was deceived and shamed by her (15:1 = Gen. 38:17). Earlier Scripture, which it seems Samson well knew and appreciated, was crying out to Samson to take heed. But he was blind to the real import of it all.
- Samson slaying Philistines with a jawbone suggests Shamgar slaying Philistines with an ox goad (15:15 cp. 3:31).
- Samson dying of thirst crying desperately for water recalls Hagar's experience (15:19 cp. Gen. 21:19).
- Samson in a foreign city " compassed in" by his enemies recalls Paul (Acts 9:24), David (Ps. 118:10-12; 1 Sam. 23:26), the spies in Jericho .
- Samson suddenly called up out of the prison house (16:25) cp. Joseph (Gen. 41:14), John (Mt. 14:9).
- Gentiles praising their gods, mocking Yahweh, and then suddenly being destroyed (16:24) was a scene repeated in Dan. 5:4.

The Samson record seems to be framed to repeat the experiences of those who had gone before him: Job, Jacob and Gideon.

Relevance For Us

One can also recount such instances of repetition in the narratives of our own lives. Our experiences connect with those of Biblical characters- and thus the Biblical records become alive and intensely personal for each of us. Further, we see similarities in patterns and experiences between our lives and those of others contemporary with us. This is surely to enable the principle of 2 Cor. 1:4- that if we suffer anything, it is so that we can mediate comfort to those who suffer as we do. To go into our shells and not do this not only makes our own sufferings harder, but frustrates the very purpose of them. The repeating similarities between our lives and those of others also reveal to us that God at times arranges for us to suffer from our *alter ego*- persons who behave similarly to us, and who through those similarities cause us suffering. In this way we are taught the error of our ways, both past and present. It seems that Jacob the deceiver suffered in this way from Laban the deceiver- in order to teach him and cause his spiritual growth. For example, as Jacob deceived his blind father relating to an important family matter, so Laban deceived Jacob in the darkness of the wedding night. And Jacob learnt from this- whereas Laban [so it seems] just didn't "get it". Indeed, so many themes repeated in Jacob's life in order to teach him. For example, when he first meets Rachel, there are three other flocks of sheep waiting to be watered (Gen. 29:2); but the implication of

Gen. 29:10 is that Jacob rolled away the stone from the well and watered them and ignored the other three flocks. But did not this stone return upon his own head when God rolled away the reproach of the other three women in Jacob's life (Leah and the two servant girls) but not that of Rachel, who initially remained barren?

The repetition of circumstance in our lives is not only to teach us, but to make sure that we learnt the lesson- for what teacher doesn't give pupils exercises to practice the theory they've learnt? It seems that Joseph, acting on God's behalf and as a type of Christ, manipulated circumstances so that his brothers would have *deja vu* experiences. Thus he sets things up to tempt them with freedom if they again betray their younger brother (Benjamin) and are thoughtless to their father's pain. The united, frank and open response of the brothers (Gen. 44:13,16,17) showed how they had indeed learnt their lesson.

All this makes sense of how Biblical characters are indeed "types of us". Once we realize that our lives are being overruled to have similarities with *them*, then we come to Scripture with a far greater personal verve for understanding and insight. Ray Foster put it so well: "Typology is rather more than a matter of literary style: it is a re-calling or re-presentation of the past event so that it becomes a contemporary *kairos*, calling men into obedience and response *now*" (1).

Notes

(1) R.S. Foster, *The Restoration of Israel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970) p. 82.

2-2 Samson And Job

In the time of his humbling and mocking, in the wake of years of spiritual self-assurance, Job set such a clear prototype of Samson that Samson surely must have realized this, as he ground in the prison house. Job too suffered from blindness in his afflictions (Job 11:20; 17:5; 19:8; 30:12).

Job's last words

Job 30:1 mocked by youth

Job 30:6 The wicked dwell in the rocks

Job 30:9 " Now I am their song, yes, I

Samson at his end

Judges 16:26

Judges 15:8

Judges 16:25

am their byword"

Job 30:11 " He hath loosed my cord and afflicted me"

In Judges 16:8 the same word is used of the cords with which Samson was bound, and which the Philistines loosed. Only a few weeks later (?) God was afflicting him through Delilah (16:19)

Job 30:12 " Upon my right hand rise the youth; they push away my feet...they mar my path, they set forward my calamity" . This indicates Job's poor eyesight and how the youth abused him.

This is exactly what happened to Samson. The lad made him dance, according to Jewish tradition, by poking Samson with sticks (16:25,26)

Job 30:17 " My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest" .

Both Samson and Job came to fellowship something of the Lord's future cross: the unnatural darkness, the pierced bones, the constant ache of sinews: as Samson ground and danced, and as the Lord heaved Himself up and down on His sinews to breathe.

Job 30:19 " He hath cast me into the mire (sometimes an idiom for prison), and I am become like dust and ashes"

As Samson in prison came to be like an ordinary man (dust and ashes; 16:11).

Job 30:20 " I cry unto thee...I stand up"

Samson cried to Yahweh, standing up (16:28)

Job 30:24 " Howbeit he will not stretch out his hand to the grave"

Samson likewise would have come to the hope of personal resurrection.

According to Samson's appreciation of these links, so he would have reaped encouragement and hope. Job's last words were followed by a final humbling, and then the glorious justification of himself and the judgment of his enemies, to culminate in his future resurrection. One hopes that Samson saw the point and grasped hold of the hope offered (consider how the Lord's words to Peter in Jn. 21:13 would have offered him tremendous comfort in Acts 12:8, if he appreciated them).

And this is not all. There were other words in Job which would have so comforted Samson at the end: " Behold, God is strong...he withdraweth not his

eyes from the righteous...and if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity...but the hypocrites in heart...*cry not* (as Samson did) when he bindeth them" (Job 36:5-13).

2-3 Samson And Gideon

Manoah's desire to detain the Angel and offer sacrifice (13:15) was exactly that of Gideon (6:18). His belief after he had seen the Angel ascend (13:20 = 6:21), and his subsequent fear, were again expressed in the words of Gideon (13:21,22 cp. 6:22). As Gideon was, perhaps subconsciously, the hero of Manoah, so Samson followed his father's spirituality in this. It seems he lived out parental expectation, and imbibed the spirituality of his father without making it his own. Born and raised believers, beware.

As the Spirit came upon Gideon (6:34), so it is described as coming upon Samson (14:6). It seems that the incident in ch. 15, where Samson visits his wife with a kid and uses this as an excuse to kill many Philistines, was planned by him to reflect Gideon's zeal. The way Gideon brought a kid to Yahweh (6:19) may reflect how Samson came with a kid (15:1). He then takes 300 foxes and puts firebrands in their tails. Why 300? Surely this was in conscious imitation of how Gideon took 300 men and put firebrands in their hands, and with them destroyed God's enemies (7:16). The connection between the faithful 300 and the foxes could suggest that in Samson's eyes, he didn't even have one faithful Israelite to support him; he had to use animals instead. It may be that as Gideon "went down" to destroy God's enemies (7:9), so Samson justified his 'going down' to the Philistines to take their women, as well as to destroy their warriors (14:1,5,7,10). As Gideon was somehow 'separate from his brethren' in his zeal, so was Samson. And yet Samson seems to have copied just the externalities of Gideon⁽¹⁾; not the real spirit. And therefore as Gideon foolishly multiplied women to himself in the spiritual weakness of his middle age, so perhaps Samson saw justification for his attitude. 'If heroic Gideon could indulge the flesh in this area, I surely can'. He fell into our common trap: to compare ourselves amongst ourselves, to measure ourselves against human standards as we find them among the contemporary brotherhood (2 Cor. 10:12). Saul should have realized that Samson, like him, idolized Gideon, but only on a surface level- and should have taken the lesson. But he didn't see the points we've made in this paragraph. He could have done, but he didn't bother. And so with us. The word supplies us the potential power to overcome. It can often happen that the daily readings are almost purpose-designed for our present situation. Yet if we neglect to read them- that help lies untapped.

When Samson decided to attack Gaza by going into a harlot's house, he may have been consciously imitating the way the spies played their part in Jericho's destruction (16:1). And yet it was once again only a surface imitation. He fell for the 'little of both' syndrome, justifying it under the guise of Scriptural examples. He had done this in his youth; he "went *down*" to take a Philistine girl for wife (14:1,5,7,10); and yet by doing so he was seeking an opportunity to slay Philistines. He may well have had in mind the sustained emphasis on the fact that Gideon went *down* to destroy the Midianites (Jud. 7:9,10,11,24). He went down morally and physically, and yet he justified this by thinking that as Gideon went down physically, so would he. Such is the complexity of the process of temptation. And all this is written for our learning. Significantly, the major temptations within the Lord's mind- as far as we can tell from the record of the wilderness temptations- was to misinterpret Scripture to His own ends; to soften the cross.

Jacob

" Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" (13:18) is exactly the Angelic words to Jacob (Gen. 32:29). Their subsequent fear (13:22), cp. Gen. 32:20. The seven day marriage feast, associated with a deceitful father in law offering the sister of the desired bride in marriage (14:12), this is all the same as Jacob experienced (Gen. 29:27)- right down to the fact that the younger sister was fairer (15:2 cp. Gen. 29:16,17). Samson should have learnt from the evident similarities with Jacob; but like Jacob, still trusted his own strength.

Notes

(1) Saul did the same when he prohibited the men to eat anything while they were pursuing the Philistines (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5). He may have followed Samson's weak side when at this same time he demanded to be avenged of his enemies (1 Sam. 14:24); yet this wasn't Samson at his best (15:7; 16:28). See too *Devotion: A Caveat* for more discussion of this tendency.

2-4 Samson And Solomon

Solomon was evidently fascinated by Samson. His writings contain many allusions to him. Thus he speaks of how he found " more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares, and her hands as bands (" fetters" , RSV): whoso pleaseth God shall escape her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" (Ecc. 7:26).

His constant warnings about the danger of the Gentile (AV "strange") woman are all commands to learn from the example of Samson. All these passages allude to Samson (e.g. 5:20; 6:26-28; 7:21-27). Often the Proverbs allude to characters in Israel's history. The references to a wise son rejoicing his father and mother (Prov. 23:25) and saddening them by his folly shout for application to Samson. The warnings about not *looking* at a strange woman recall how Samson *saw* the Philistine girl in Timnath and the prostitute in Gaza (14:1; 16:1). The wicked woman lying in wait to kill the simple man (Prov. 23:25-27) is a clear enough reference to Delilah and her henchmen lying in wait in the bedroom. And yet, for all this reflection upon Samson, Solomon went and did *par excellence* according to Samson's well-studied folly. And we can do the same, in principle. There is this vast distance between knowledge and belief.

There is an undoubted connection between the record of Solomon *catching* the *foxes* and using them to destroy *vineyards* (15:4,5) and Song 2:15, where Solomon suggests that he and his girl go and catch the foxes that destroy the vineyards. He seems to have had Samson in mind. And yet both he and his Gentile girlfriend owned vineyards (Song 1:6; 8:11,12), and both were concerned that the fruit would not be damaged (Song 2:13,15; 6:11; 7:12). However, the implication from Solomon's maybe careless allusion was that in fact he was in the position of the Philistines, worrying about the effect of Samson's foxes.

There is further comment on Samson and Solomon in *Samson And Delilah*.

Not only do circumstances repeat between the lives of God's children, but also within our lives. We may pass through a very similar experience more than once. The human chances of this ever happening again were remote. But the similarity and repetition may be so that we learn the lesson we failed to learn; or it could even be a punishment for not learning the lessons we should have learned. Again, Samson's life demonstrates this. The lion roared against him as the Philistines did (14:5 s.w. 15:14); and not least in the uncanny similarities between the way his first wife enticed him and wrung his secrets from him, and the way 40 years later another worthless woman did the same to him (14:15-17 = 16:5,15,16). He just didn't see the similarities, or if he did, he didn't learn any lessons. Admittedly, it's far easier for us, presented with the records as they are, spanning 40 years within a few pages.

2-5 Samson And David

The point of all this is that God intends us to make character studies of those He has carefully recorded in the word. And that doesn't only mean at Bible

Schools. Job, Samson, Jacob...these men must live in our lives and meditation, to the end we may find the spirit of the Lord Himself in our daily experience. Samson is one of those whose record is evidently designed for meditation. This is why there are so many open ended questions of interpretation of his actions and character- e.g., as to whether he was justified in seeking a Philistine wife as part of seeking an occasion against the Philistines. There is no lack of evidence that later Bible characters found inspiration in Samson, especially in their weakness. Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:12,13 = Jud. 16:19,28); Jeremiah (commented on in *Samson: General Introduction*), Nehemiah (16:28 = Neh. 13:22,31), and not least David, another zealot with middle age lust problems (Ps. 118:10-12 = Jud. 16:2). The Spirit came on David as it did on Samson (1 Sam. 16:13); they were both empowered to kill lions, whilst keeping the fact a secret. And in both those acts they were taught that they would deliver God's people from the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:34-37). Indeed, David's confident words that God would deliver him from the Philistines were evidently inspired by Samson, the renowned one-man deliverer from Philistine armies. Both Samson and David wrought "great salvation" for Israel (1 Sam. 19:5 cp. Jud. 15:18). As Samson was characterized by his love of that riddle (the word occurs nine times in 14:12-19, and 15:16 Heb. is also some kind of riddle), so David uses the same word to describe how he chose to put forth a riddle (Ps. 78:2). Psalm 3 is full of reference to Samson's fight at Lehi. It was also written at a time when David was betrayed by his own people:

" Many are saying of me, 'God will not deliver him'" - the thoughts of the Israelites as they delivered the bound Samson to the Philistines

" But you are a shield around me" - how it must have seemed to a spectator

" To the Lord I cry aloud" - as Samson did

" I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me" - huge armies against one solitary man is a clear reference to Samson at Lehi

" Strike all my enemies the jaw bone" (Ps. 3:7 Heb.)- it could imply 'with the jaw bone'. The Hebrew for 'jaw bone' is the same as in Jud. 15:16.

3 Samson's Marriage (Judges 14:1 - 15:8)

The whole question of Samson's marriage is overshadowed by the fact that " It was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines" (14:4); He used this incident to begin to raise up Samson as a Judge of Israel (2:16,18; 1 Chron. 17:10). This is surely one of Scripture's purposeful ambiguities, designed to provoke us to meditation: it is unclear whether " he" refers to

Samson or Yahweh. There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. And yet this would require that God almost made Samson have a desire for that woman. This may not be impossible- it may be that Paul's God-given "thorn in the flesh" was a similar forbidden passion. It would be an example of God leading into temptation (Mt. 6:13). However, it is more likely that God worked through Samson's wrong desires, through his human weakness, to bring about God's purpose and glory.

Samson's Aim

The context of Samson's marriage does seem to suggest that Samson himself sought occasion against the Philistines; for the Spirit of the Lord had been troubling his conscience as to why the people of Dan had not followed up Joshua's victories, and had allowed themselves to be overrun by the uncircumcised (13:25 Heb.). The only other references to "troubled" are in Gen. 41:8; Ps. 77:4; Dan. 2:1,3. The Spirit of God worked with Samson's spirit, so that it was troubled as he went for his solitary walks of meditation. It was no accident that he was buried in the very place where his conscience was first awakened (16:31); he maybe asked for this burial place, to show he had at last returned to his innocent spiritual beginnings. He is described as wanting to "take" a wife; this Hebrew word is 51 times translated 'take away', 31 times 'fetch'. He evidently didn't intend to live there with her; he wanted her to come and live with him in the Israelite encampment, four miles up in the hills from the valley where she lived. She was 'right in his eyes' (14:3 AVmg.) not for beauty but in the sense that 'she suits my purpose' (Heb.). The same Hebrew is used not concerning beauty but rather utility in 1 Sam. 18:20; 2 Sam. 17:4; 1 Kings 9:12. The way in which Samson set up the riddle, almost expecting that they might tease it out of him through his wife, the way in which he agreed that if they did this, he would give them the clothes of 30 Philistines... it all suggests that Samson set the whole thing up to seek an opportunity against the Philistines. They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (15:12). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They ploughed behind his wife as a heifer, and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (15:18). He speaks to his wife as if she should expect that he was closer to his Hebrew parents than to her: "I haven't even explained it (the riddle) to my father or mother', he replied, 'So why should I explain it to you?'" (15:16 NIV). Gen. 2:24 taught that a man must leave his parents and cleave to his wife in marriage; she must be closer to him than them. It could be that by saying this, Samson was reminding

her that he didn't see their relationship as full marriage; he was only using her (cp. how he 'used' a Philistine as his best man, 14:20). Yet he did what only days before had been unthinkable: he told her his finest and most personal secret, which he wouldn't even tell his dear parents. Such is the fickleness of our nature. And yet there seems reason to think that somehow Samson foresaw his possible failure, and arranged to use the situation to forward God's work. It could even be that the girl was party to Samson's plan; she may have appeared to have a genuine interest in Samson's spiritual aims. The Philistines themselves realized this when they chode with Samson's wife that they had been called to the wedding 'to have our possession taken away' (14:15 Heb.). They saw the aim of Samson's marriage: to dispossess them and take their possession for Israel. It seems no accident that he chose Timnath, 'a portion assigned'- to Israel. This was part of the land promised to Dan, but which they had allowed the Philistines to overrun (Josh. 19:43,47). And Samson would have seen himself as 'Samson-of-Zorah', the hornet- symbol of the Egyptian tribes which drove out the Canaanites in preparation for Israel's later victories (Dt. 7:20; Josh. 24:12). We get the picture of Samson and his parents walking the four miles down into the valley, and Samson goes off for a wander in the vineyards. The vineyard was a symbol of Israel (Ps. 80:15; Is. 1:8; 5:7; 27:2; Jer. 12:10; Mt. 21:41). This may have been already evident to Samson from Gen. 49:11; although most likely the symbol of Israel as God's vineyard was already established by his time. Conscious that Timnath was the 'portion assigned' to Dan and yet they had failed, Samson meditates there in the vineyards, a symbol of Israel, the people who should have been there. Inheriting Philistine vineyards was one of the blessings promised (Dt. 6:11) and initially obtained by Joshua-Jesus (Josh. 24:13). And yet those vineyards were now back in Philistine control. A lion suddenly appeared and roared against him (14:5), just as the Philistines later would (15:14). The lion was a common symbol of Israel's enemies. The Spirit came upon Samson and he overcame it, in evident symbol to him that he really could deliver Israel from the Philistines. There is every reason to think that Samson appreciated all this symbology. And yet did Samson ultimately slay the lion of the Philistines and bring the promised blessings of honey to Israel (cp. Ex. 3:8; Dt. 8:8 etc.)? No, not really. He achieved some tokenistic success against their warriors; but Israel remained enslaved (15:20). He didn't live up to that potential which God had enabled him to achieve. And yet although it may seem that his life was wasted, in that he didn't really bring much deliverance for anyone- the whole process of it saved him personally. Those whose families and converts have turned away from the Faith will identify with this comfort.

However, it must be recognized that God did in fact send the lion against Samson. He did this in order to go along with Samson's symbolic thoughts, and this may afford some justification for Samson's marriage. He was there, wandering in those vineyards, meditating how they were representative of the

blessings which belonged to Israel, and yet they were now in the hands of God's enemies. And then, God furthers the parable: He sends a lion, symbolic of the Philistines, and Samson is given power to overcome him. And further, when Samson returned to the carcass to meditate deeper on 'the fallen one' (14:8 doesn't use the usual word for 'carcass'- s.w. " fall" Prov. 29:16; Ez. 26:15; 27:27; 31:13), " behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion" (14:8). The Hebrew for " swarm" is normally used (124 times) about a congregation of people, often God's people Israel. And the Hebrew for 'Bee' is 'Deborah', a celebrated earlier judge. God was surely teaching him that through his victory over the Philistine lion, God's people would be inspired to be faithful, and would therefore be able to enjoy the promised blessing of honey, taken out of the Philistines. Samson saw all this; for he " took" (Heb. is usually used in the sense of 'to take dominion over') the honey, partook himself, and shared it with others. In all this there is a detailed type of the Lord's representative sacrifice on the cross. On the cross, He won the victory over the lion of the devil (1 Pet. 5:8 cp. Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8 may allude to Samson's victory). This enabled us to be empowered to partake the Kingdom blessings. As Samson walked away from the carcass some days after killing it (14:8 Heb. " a time" = 'days'- three days?), with the honey in his hands, eating it and offering it to others, so the Lord left the empty tomb. The way he ate and gave to his parents and *they also ate* without him telling them where he got it from (14:9) is a clear reversal of what happened in Eden (Gen. 3:6; doubtless Eve didn't tell Adam either where the fruit came from): but here the fruits of spiritual victory rather than failure were enjoyed and shared. The promised blessings of honey were conditional upon Israel's obedience (Dt. 32:13 cp. Ps. 81:16), although granted in prospect (Dt. 32:13). Israel at Samson's time were disobedient and therefore didn't have the Kingdom blessings. And yet the whole acted parable taught that through the supreme zeal of one lonely man, into whose struggle not even his parents could enter (14:6,16), the blessings of obedience could be brought to the disobedient multitude of God's people. And here we have the essence of the Gospel.

And Samson knew all this, rising up to an anticipation of the Gospel which few in the OT must have reached. This allows us to view Samson's marriage more positively. He went down to the valley of Ashkelon, the very place that Joshua had conquered but Judah had been unable to drive out the Philistines from (1:18,19), and slew 30 warriors. And then later he used the whole situation as an opportunity to burn up the corn and vineyards of the Philistines (15:5), in conscious allusion to how the law stipulated that a man who did this to his Israelite neighbour must make retribution (Ex. 22:5). He was emphasizing that these people were *not* his neighbours, they were not in covenant relationship, and he openly showed that he treated them accordingly. Likewise he took vengeance on the Philistines (15:5; 16:28), when the Law taught that Israel were not to take vengeance (same word) *on each other* (Lev. 19:18), but could

do so on their enemies (Num. 31:2; Dt. 32:43 cp. Josh. 10:13). Note, in passing, how he set those foxes up as cherubim- a ball of whirling fire coming in judgment upon the Philistines. The fox was a symbol of apostate Israel in later Scripture (Ez. 13:4); perhaps Samson made the same connection, and wanted to symbolize how through his faith and insight, weak Israel could be turned into the cherubim of God in bringing judgment on the Philistines and deliverance for themselves. The way he used their tails to bring such destruction may have been a reference to Dt. 28:13,44, where apostate Israel, suffering for their sins as they were in Samson's time, are described with the same word: they would be the tail of the nations. He saw that he was the one who could bring salvation and blessing to Israel. His riddle spoke of how " Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness" (14:14). " The eater" (Heb. 'the devourer') and " the strong" not only referred to the lion, but more essentially to Samson himself. The same basic word for 'eater' is used as a verb to describe how Samson 'ate' / 'devoured' the honey from the lion (14:9). And years later the Philistines realized how Samson's riddle described himself: for they rejoiced that " the destroyer (devourer) of our country" was now overcome (16:24). Samson saw that through his God-given strength he could bring forth the honey of blessing to Israel.

And yet although this was what was possible, Samson never fulfilled it. He never quite killed the lion, and therefore God's people at this time lived under the Philistine yoke throughout his life (15:20), never enjoying the blessings which were potentially possible. Places like Zorah and Eshtaol are associated again with apostasy and Philistine domination (18:2,8,11; 2 Chron. 28:18). Samson was but a blip on the screen of general failure and unspirituality in the Israel of God. And yet although Samson limited God in saving Israel, through it all, he himself was saved (yet so as by fire).

Mixed Motives

But whilst the above case for Samson's spiritual commitment can be made, there is evidence galore that his motives were mixed in this matter of Samson's marriage. Consider: why did he as a Nazarite go for a walk in vineyards, among the forbidden fruit (cp. Christians in demanding careers, watching television, reading novels...)? This was typical of him: a great zeal and understanding, mixed with a desire to walk as close to the edge as possible, and to ultimately have a little of both. He had a fascination with vineyards, which the record brings out. Like an ex-alcoholic staring at the bottles in the shop 'just out if interest', so Samson fooled about with what was forbidden- just as we all tend to. He later teased Delilah to tie him with seven "withs", the Hebrew word implying made from a vine. He just would mess with the forbidden. The way he burnt up those vineyards in 15:5 may have been as a result of realizing that the answer lay in total devotion and rooting out of

temptation; cutting out the eye that offends. He burnt those vineyards in a desire to be "blameless from the Philistines" (15:3 AVmg.). The same word is translated unpunished, guiltless, innocent, clean, acquitted; as if he knew he had sinned, but believed that by further fighting of Philistines he could gain his forgiveness. He had to be brought to the shame of Gaza Prison to learn that forgiveness was by absolute faith, not works and hatred of this present world. He seems angry that he had let himself fall too deeply for that Philistine girl (14:19), and "utterly hated her" (15:2). And yet this human anger may also have been mixed with a more righteous anger, in that to give his wife to another was adultery, and it happened that they carried out (perhaps unconsciously?) the punishment for adultery which the law required (Lev 20:14; 21:9). He realized that the Philistines had led him into sin, and he just wanted to destroy the source of his temptation. And yet he then lost that good conscience; he smote the Philistines hip and thigh with a great slaughter, alluding to the sacrifices (s.w. "shoulder" Ex. 29:22; Lev. 9:21; 1 Sam. 9:24; Ez. 24:4- nearly all usages of this word in Samson's Bible referred to the "shoulder" of the sacrifices), as if he was offering them as a sacrifice to Yahweh; and then "went *down* (again!!) and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam" (15:8). You don't go down if you are going up to the top of a rock. But perhaps spiritually he 'went down', to dwell in isolation from the people he was supposed to be judging / leading, in the rocks. Dwelling in the rocks is associated with a bad conscience in Is. 2:21 and 57:5. Yet for all this, God counted him as having judged Israel 20 years at this stage (15:20); even though there was this evident break when he simply ran away from his people. The way they tie him up and he begs them not to kill him (15:12,13) hardly sounds like Samson judging them. And yet this was his desire, and this is what God imputed to him (15:20), in the same way as he was a Nazarite to God (i.e. in God's eyes?) all his life (13:7)- although he broke his Nazariteship by contact with dead bodies (14:19; 15:15 cp. Num. 6:6)⁽¹⁾ and probably by drinking wine at his wedding (14:10 "feast" = 'drinking', Heb.). This was not only imputed righteousness, but God counting the essential intentions of a weak willed man to him as if he had actually achieved what he fain would do.

So Samson had a mixed conscience when he slew the lion. He was in the vineyards, the very place where he shouldn't have been as a Nazarite, although he justified it by spiritual and even Biblical reasoning. He then burns up those vineyards in order to have a blameless conscience. He then loses that good conscience and cowers in the rocks. And then later he goes to the valley of Sorek (Heb. 'the vine') and forges a relationship with another worthless woman (16:4). Samson's marriage looks less acceptable in this context. So he returned to his old desire to walk near the forbidden fruit. His purges of conscience were temporary, and he returned to the old haunts and ways. When he slew the thirty men at Ashkelon, as he seemed to have planned right at the start in his seeking occasion against the Philistines, he was "burning with anger" (14:19 NIV). His

motive was partly bitterness and the revenge of a man humiliated and deceived by a woman; but his slaughter of the Philistines was also done in faith (Heb. 11:32-34), with God given strength to confirm his faith. And yet in the days leading up to this, as "she cried the whole seven days of the feast" (14:17 NIV), she daily "pressed him" (14:17). This is the very same Hebrew word used in many passages to describe how an apostate, Gentile-loving Israel would be pressed / oppressed by their enemies (Dt. 28:53,57; Jer. 19:9; Is. 51:13). Samson was in some sense apostate at this time, yet he had faith and was strongly motivated; and for this he was blessed by God with strength to defeat the Philistines. The daughters of the Philistines *hate* God's people (2 Sam. 1:20; Ez. 16:27,57). The Ezekiel passages stress the paradox: that Israel (whom Samson represented) loved the women who hated them. And yet Samson also despised the uncircumcised Philistines (15:18), as he had been brought up to (14:3). He knew they hated him and yet he loved them and yet he hated them- all this shows the complexity of human nature, and describes our attitude to the world and the things of the flesh. And yet the only real answer is to *cut off* the flesh; to gouge out the eye that offends; not to comfortably go along with the fact that we have such a love: hate relationship with the flesh. For we cannot serve two masters; we can only ultimately love one. The Lord we serve is in many ways a demanding Lord.

Samson's marriage reflects a spiritual brinkmanship which was his spiritual undoing, however. For the same word is used concerning how Delilah later vexed him unto death with her words (16:16), and then Samson rose up and slew the Philistines with God's help. The same word is used concerning how the Gentile enemies of an apostate Israel would afflict them (Dt. 28:55,56,57). Yet at this very same time, Samson had faith. But there came a time- there had to come a time, for the sake of Samson's eternal salvation- when this having a little of both had to be ended.

We surely all feel an identity with this. And yet his situation was serious; we know the final terrible humiliation it resulted in. And our position is likewise serious. No wonder the Lord taught us of gouging out eyes (a Samson allusion?), and Paul speaks of putting to death the passions of flesh. There is no other way. The old nature will be destroyed at judgment day, so we might as well destroy it now. God will vindicate Himself against sin in us; if we go through the putting-to-death process now, then there will be the eternity of the Kingdom in God's nature. If we don't, God will put it to death for us in the process of destruction which will follow judgment- and we will die eternally. There is a powerful, powerful logic in this, if only we would apprehend it.

The Lust Of The Flesh

Samson really loved that girl (14:3,17; 15:1,7,11), even though he also hated her (15:2; he must have gone through this process again with Delilah in the time that led up to her final betrayal). This true love for her makes Samson's marriages look more questionable. When Samson "smote the Philistines hip and thigh" and burnt up their corn, he commented that "as they did unto me, so have I done unto them" (15:11). If we ask 'What exactly did they do to him? What did they kill and burn of his?', the answer must be 'His wife'. He perhaps felt that she was worth hundreds of them, and the burning of their livelihood, leaving famine in its wake, was what they had done to him emotionally. Yet it is curious how he loved the Philistines and yet hated them. She is described as a "woman" (14:7), using a word which means an older, married woman (s.w. 14:15 "wife") rather than a maiden. She had seen something of life, and therefore the fact Samson loved her suggests that it was a serious relationship. His action was quite contrary to the spirit of the Law: that marriage with the local tribes was categorically prohibited (Ex. 34:16; Dt. 7:3,4; 1 Kings 11:2). Joshua's warning that those who married the surrounding tribes would find them "a snare and a trap for you... thorns in your eyes" (Josh. 23:12,13 RSV) was fulfilled in Samson being tied up and blinded by Delilah; and yet it also had an element of fulfilment with his wife. The similarity is such as to suggest that Samson's marriage out of the Truth was definitely wrong because it was a fulfilment of the words of Josh. 23. "Is there *never* a woman among the daughters of thy brethren...that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" (14:3) implies that she wasn't the first one; he had often got involved with Philistine girls down in the valley, despite his conscience for Yahweh troubling him as he walked alone on the heights (13:25 Heb.) ⁽²⁾. Samson gave no good answer to his parents: simply "Get her for me; for she is right in mine eyes" (14:3, repeated in 14:7 for emphasis- he really did fall for the lust of the eyes). This insistence rather than explanation would suggest a bad conscience in Samson. Likewise he crowd only shouted out the more when asked why and for what crime they wished to crucify Jesus (Mt. 27:23). The process of marriage involved Samson in participating in the traditions of the surrounding tribes (this is emphasized: 14:10,11; 15:20). The "feasting" was strictly 'drinking' (Heb.)- and Samson the Nazarite attended this. Even if he didn't partake, he was placing himself directly in temptations' way.

It is emphasized that Samson "went *down*" to her (14:1,5,7,10), as if his literal descent to her in the valley was also a retrograde step spiritually. Samson's marriage was wrong. And so it was. And yet his hero Gideon (see *Samson And Deja Vu*) had likewise 'gone down', the record emphasizes, to liberate Israel from their enemies (7:9,10,11,24). In view of the other examples of Samson consciously imitating Gideon, it is likely that he was seeking an opportunity to deliver Israel from the Philistines. And yet he mixed his motivations. He loved

the girl, he wanted to gratify his flesh with the forbidden fruit. He loved the world, and thereby became in some sense an enemy of God (James 4:4). But then he loved Gideon, he loved the holiness of Yahweh, he hated the world and the Philistines, he loved Israel, weak as they were, and wanted to deliver them from their spiritual bondage. And instead of casting him off as a man of such divided heart that he was not worthy of God's covenant love, God worked with him. And by using a purposeful ambiguity, He has recorded this for us in such a way as unites God's desire for Israel's deliverance with that of Samson: "It was of the Lord that he sought an occasion against the Philistines" (14:4). The "he" can be read as both God and Samson; they both had the same desire, and God worked with mixed up Samson to this end. Working all this out from the evidence presented in the record is hard work. The fact a man does something "of the Lord" doesn't mean that he is guiltless. In the same context of God's deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, men who did things "of the Lord" were punished for what they did (Dt. 2:30; 1 Sam. 2:25; 2 Chron. 22:7; 25:20).

All this may seem a quagmire of evidence that it is almost impossible to put in place and reach a fair conclusion as to Samson's spiritual motivation in the matter of Samson's marriage. And yet the complexity of Samson is only a reflection of the complexity of our own failures; every failure is the result of a long process of complex desire and counter-desire, with the flesh winning the day under cover of some kind of spirituality. God responded to the complexity of Samson's spirituality by the complexity of His dealings with him and Israel. He delivered Israel to the hand of the Philistines during the forty years of Samson's judgeship (13:1), and yet through Samson He also delivered Israel out of their hand (2:16,18). Yet God only "began to deliver" them through Samson (13:5), although the potential was there for total deliverance (2:16,18). God worked both for and against Israel at this time, in reflection of how Samson their intended Saviour had a similar struggle between the Spirit and flesh, never completely coming down on the side of either. And so often we are like Samson; we never completely lose faith, like Israel we eat the bread of Heaven daily and yet rise up and worship our golden calf as part of a supposed service of Yahweh. We can serve God and mammon, even though from the Lord's perspective actually we only serve mammon. And yet we can drift on like this for years. It lead Samson to be eyeless in Gaza in his 60s, and only then did he learn. We may fail that kind of final, desperate attempt to reform us. Samson is written for our learning. Total commitment is the answer, the only answer; cutting off the flesh, putting it to death, living out day by day the process we went through at baptism.

The Nudges Of God

The record of Samson shows God nudging him time and again, and Samson taking no notice; God flashing red lights, and Samson time and again driving

through them. The way that Delilah betrays him regarding his hair is perhaps the most poignant example; but actually it's a theme throughout Samson's life. The incident of Samson and the slain lion, and honey forming in the carcass, must surely have had point and purpose. The record isn't there simply to pad out a story. Samson discovered a congregation (Heb. *'edat*) of bees- *deborim* , in Hebrew. The judge Deborah would've been fairly recent history for Samson; she would have been the heroine of anyone like Samson, who also arose to save Israel from their enemies at that time. Surely he was being gently led to reflect that there were a whole congregation of Deborahs ['bees'] around, and he should eat of them. And yet Samson went his loner road, and suffered the consequences of it- rather like Elijah, who was in denial of the fact there were actually at least another 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Or perhaps Samson was simply being asked to execute his deliverance of Israel after the pattern of Deborah, to 'eat' of her, to fellowship her example and spirit. But he chose not to 'get it'; as we so often do in the countless nudges and prods which God gives us in daily life.

Notes

(1) " Hip on thigh" is apparently a better rendering, implying hand to hand combat. This would serve to emphasize his contact with the dead bodies, as he hurled them to the ground one by one. And yet the Spirit of Yahweh came upon him to enable this- a breach of the letter of the Nazarite law.

(2) " Is there *never* a woman among the daughters of thy brethren" (14:3) could mean that Samson had a number of relationships with Israelite girls but never hit it off with any of them. This may have been because he was a spiritual man in the midst of a sadly apostate Israel. " ...among the daughters *of thy brethren*" could suggest that Samson was a generation above the marriageable girls. Does this imply Samson stayed single for the Lord? The incident relating to Samson's marriage could have happened at any time during the first 20 years in which he judged Israel (15:20).

4 Samson At Lehi (Judges 15:9 - 20)

In this incident of Samson at Lehi we have many of the themes of Samson's life epitomized. Samson's spiritual strength was once again somewhat weak. He says that he had killed Philistines because " I merely did to them what they did to me" (15:11 NIV). There was no mention of the fact that he was seeking occasion against God's enemies (even though he was speaking to Hebrews). He passed off his actions as pure revenge- which on one level, was all they were.

The Philistines had earlier said that "they wanted to take Samson" to do to him as he did to us" (15:10). And Samson replies in the same primitive way: that he only did to them what they did to him. It seems that Samson spoke to them on their level. And yet when the Philistines came upon Samson, roaring against him like the lion in 14:5, God's Spirit once again came upon him in confirmation of his faith. Israel at this time were evidently unspiritual; hence they were dominated by the Philistines (15:12). The way they came to bind Samson has suggestions of Legion (Lk. 8:29); perhaps they considered him to be mentally ill, and attributed his strength to fits? Or worse, did they consider the work of the Spirit of God to deliver them to be that of demons? If so, Samson was typifying the Lord's later experience (Mt. 12:24-27). The way Jesus spoke of himself in this context as the stronger than the strong man (cp. Samson) encourages this view. And yet the strong man who was bound, i.e. the devil, can also be seen as a reference to Samson. Again, we are left with a difficult question: Was Samson telling them the truth when he said that his motive at Lehi was purely personal revenge? Or were they so unspiritual that he spoke to them on their level, even though at other times he pleaded with them to quit their idolatry (2:16-19)? Or were his motives simply hopelessly mixed? Within him was a burning desire to do God's work; he was the one faithful Israelite who could chase 1,000; and yet in the company of his unspiritual brethren, he let his human side come out, and wrapped up his zeal for the Lord in human terms- even though there was some truth in how he expressed it. This kind of thing can so easily happen in our Christian experience; we bring out the worst in each other.

And yet despite such cruel rejection at the hands of his weak brethren, there is reason to think that Samson was not just out for personal glory when he slew those thousand men. Samson grabbed a jaw-bone and exalted that with *that* he had slain a thousand men at Lehi. This was a conscious allusion to Josh. 23:10 (and Lev. 26:8): "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, He it is that fighteth for you". It could be that he counted the bodies, or counted each man he slew, consciously trying to get up to 1,000 in order to fulfill the prophecy. Samson doesn't say that he alone killed the thousand men; he did it with the jaw-bone (coming from a Hebrew root meaning 'soft', 'weak'). It has been pointed out that this jaw bone is one of the seven weak things which are mentioned in Judges as being the tools of God's salvation: left handed man (3:21); an ox goad (3:31); a woman (4:4); a nail (4:21); a piece of a millstone (9:53); a pitcher and trumpet (7:20). God's people are likened to an ass frequently (Gen. 49:11,14; Is. 1:3; Jer. 2:24; Hos. 8:9; Lk. 13:15; 14:5). The first two references would have been known to Samson at Lehi; and he may have reflected that the fact the firstborn of an ass must be redeemed by a lamb was prophetic of how Messiah would save all His otherwise condemned people (Ex. 13:13; 34:20). Could it not be that despite their cruel betrayal of him and utter faithlessness, dear Samson felt he was living out a kind of acted parable of

what was possible for Israel: that through his zeal, and in his hands, the weak people of God could achieve the great victory over thousands which Moses and Joshua had earlier foretold? In this he was a superb type of the Lord.

In the actual slaughter of the Philistines at Timnath, we are again left with questions as to the pureness of Samson's motives. His request for water in that dry place was abundantly answered- in the same way as Yahweh had responded to exactly the same request from a faithless Israel in the desert (Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13). And the way he names the well after the miraculous provision of water, and the way presumably the opened well remained (15:19), has links with pseudo-Israelite Hagar (Gen. 16:19). And yet even in these similarities, it must be noted that there was a certain spiritual culture in Samson's prayer. He didn't make a direct, crude demand for water. He placed his situation before God, and left it to Him to respond as He knew best. This is a feature of many spiritual prayers: not to crudely, directly ask for the obvious; but to simply inform the Almighty of the situation, in faith ⁽¹⁾. Samson's victory song at Lehi smacks of personal vengeance: there is little suggestion of the humble servant merely doing God's will:

" With a donkey's jaw-bone
I have made donkeys of them.
With a donkey's jaw-bone
I have killed a thousand men"
(15:16 NIV).

Samson at Lehi saw them as unclean asses; and yet he loved their women. And yet in the midst of this almost arrogance, he cries: " I thirst" , and so exhibits something of the spirit of Christ in His final hour of agony and ultimate conquest on the cross (Jn. 19:28). And yet again, it must be considered that the Lord's words there must be read in the context of His other Johannine references to thirst (Jn. 4:14,15; 6:35). He was expressing the spiritual thirst He felt, as a man on the brink of the ultimate spiritual failure, and saw this expressed in the literal desire He had for moisture. On the cross He was the root out of the dry ground. Samson's thirst occurred at a time of unspirituality in the midst of great victory. The Lord in His final spiritual crisis, feeling spiritually forsaken by the Father, fearing He had sinned (Ps. 22:1-6), may therefore have feared Samson had been an all too accurate prototype.

Notes

(1) See *The Essence Of Prayer in Prayer*. Examples include: Gen. 19:24; 2 Chron. 14:11; Ps. 3:1-4; 142:1,2; Jn. 11:21,22; 1 Kings 19:10 cp. Rom. 11:2,3; Ps. 106:44 cp. Is. 64:3.

5 Samson In Gaza (Judges 16: 1-3)

The way this passage starts with " Then" is one of several classic conjunctions which occur in the Biblical record. The " But" of Acts 5:1 is another. After the spiritual and personal glory of the fight at Lehi, " Then..." Samson goes to Gaza and sees a whore. It may not have happened immediately afterwards (n.b. 15:20), but it seems purposefully placed where it is in the record. A similar example occurs in 14:19,20 cp. 15:1: after repenting of his marriage with the Philistine girl and using his failure as an opportunity to seek occasion against God's enemies, Samson then relents and lets his human love for the girl take him over, and he goes to visit and sleep with her. And again in 16:3, we see Samson repentant as he lies there at midnight, and he rises up and in the spirit of the Lord's cross, carries away the gate of his enemies. And then, " it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman..." (16:4). He simply couldn't keep up the level of spiritual intensity which he fain would have. And again, we know much about this problem ⁽¹⁾. And yet Samson went to Gaza conscious that his people had failed to drive out the tribes (Josh. 11:22). Judah had captured it in Joshua's strength (1:18), but had let the Philistines return. So Samson chose Gaza from spiritual motives; and yet he schemed out his plan to enable him to gratify his flesh.

We have elsewhere demonstrated (*Samson And Jesus*) how Samson at this time reflected something of the spirit and victory of the Lord Jesus on the cross. And yet once again, as with the fight at Lehi, there was a strong unspiritual element in Samson in Gaza at this time. He schemed to have a little of both; to please his flesh, and yet also do the work of God. It seems that his conscience once again pricked him about this. " He went in to spend the night" with the prostitute, " But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors..." (16:1,3 NIV) ⁽²⁾. If he went in to spend the night there, he presumably entered the house at around 7 or 8. He had what he wanted, and then lay there thinking, the record seems to suggest, and decided to not lay there all night as he planned, but get up and do God's work. Whilst it is unrecorded, surely there were prayers of deep and fervent repentance as he lay there? His conscience likewise seems to have struck him after he attempted to marry the Philistine girl, and also when he burnt up the vineyards. And so again here. He may have justified his behaviour by reference back (in his deep subconscious, maybe) to how the spies sought to destroy Jericho by entering the city and lodging with a whore. The way he chose to destroy the Philistines at the end by bringing down the posts of their temple (16:29,30) has some connection with the way he chose to take up the posts of Gaza. Perhaps he remembered his earlier failure and repentance in Gaza, and now he was back there (16:21), he repented again and wished to replicate his earlier repentance and victory for the Lord.

The Psychology Of Samson

It's inevitable that the record of Samson in Gaza prompts us to reflect upon the psychology of Samson as a womanizer. Why are some men womanizers? Why was Samson a womanizer? The psychological basis for womanizing has been summarized like this: " Some men are womanizers and what is wrong with them is that they have issues with commitment and intimacy that they refuse to deal with and escape into a fantasy relationship with another women time after time. Other men though are seeking something they feel is missing in their primary relationship - understanding, excitement in bed, a woman that is challenging to them" . To that I'd add that most womanizers I know are simply very lonely men. Another psychologist comments: " Womanizers ...often claim to have a high sex drive and a lust for sexual variety. Their therapists say such men often don't like women or even sex. Womanizers have a disease or an addiction, in which they see women as the enemy. They think of " being a real man" as escaping a woman's control and as being someone who can powerfully manipulate and deceive women. Like a rapist, he seeks power and superiority" . How does all this apply to Samson?

If Samson in Gaza had been all rippling muscle, Delilah would not have had to ask where his strength lay. His strength was from God, not from his muscles. And yet he would've been perceived as a " real man" , a strong man... it was just enigmatic to everyone, how this was, when an ordinary man acted so strong. Perhaps the Heb. 11 comment that he was " out of weakness made strong" implies he was actually quite wimpy. And so, perhaps he acted up to how others perceived him. He indulged the 'woman thing' because that's what heroic 'strong men' of his time were supposed to do. He felt he had to act *as if* he had a strong libido, when perhaps he didn't. And of course he was lonely... the picture of the young man wandering off from his parents when they were on their way down to talk with his first wife... meeting a lion... here's the very cameo of a lonely man. And his special calling from God would've made him lonely. This would have led to his problem with intimacy with others, in an Israel of cowards and semi-spirituality. He wasn't much understood by anyone... David had Jonathan, Gideon had Phurah, but Samson apparently had nobody at all. His whole behaviour with women, Delilah especially but actually all the recorded women in his life, speaks of a man who relished " escaping a woman's control and ... being someone who can powerfully manipulate and deceive women" .

But the bottom line is that Samson in Gaza sinned. Reflecting upon the psychology of Samson, we can understand *why* he was a womanizer. But we too are lonely, not understood by our world or even our own brotherhood, we too try to act up to the expectations and images which others place upon us... but this doesn't justify us! This is the lesson of Samson. Sin is sin, even if our

own faith and spiritual commitment has placed us in a situation where the loneliness and lack of being understood of itself creates a psychological situation which leads to temptation. Falling to that temptation, even if like Samson in Gaza we preserve our faith and commitment in our deepest heart, isn't justifiable- and we shall pay the price for it.

Notes

(1) See *Enduring To The End* in *From Milk To Meat*.

(2) " Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight" (16:3 AV) gives a different picture: of Samson 'laying' with her as a man lays with a woman, and then getting up and going out to do God's work. The interplay between sexuality and spirituality was never stronger.

6 Samson And Delilah (Judges 16:4-21)

The purpose of this final tragic incident was to bring Samson to a final realization that there was no third way in the service of Yahweh: it's all or nothing. The Lord worked through Samson's 'little of both' syndrome. The Lord Jesus read the Samson record this way: He recommended that we too tear our eyes out to stop us stumbling from the path of total devotion (Mk. 9:47). We all know how the story turns out. And it's one of those parts of Scripture which I for one don't reading. I don't want to go on from chapter 15 to chapter 16. I know what's coming, and I'd rather not be reminded of the whole tragic sequence. And yet it's there, absolutely for our learning. And *Samson should have already learnt*. As his first wife had vexed her with her words to tease his secret from him, so Delilah did. As the Philistines laid wait for Samson as he lay with the whore in Gaza (16:2), so they laid wait in Delilah's bedroom (16:9). He had already repented of using God's service as an excuse for satisfying his own flesh in the incident with the Gaza prostitute. He had bitterly walked away from his first Philistine wife. He burnt down the vineyards, recalling how he had foolishly strolled in them as a Nazarite. He must have looked back and seen how he had played with fire. And now, he goes and does it all again. He goes to the valley of Sorek, 'choice vines', and Samson falls for Delilah, 'the vine'. He went down to the vineyards again; the Nazarite tried to take fire into his bosom again. It has been suggested from the way the Philistine lords are described as coming up to her, and the way in which she speaks of " the Philistines" (16:18-20), that she was in fact an apostate Israelitess. And thus he justified himself.

And yet there was a fire within Samson at this time. The thongs burst from him as when string comes close to a flame (16:9). This is similar to the scene in 15:14, where because the Spirit was upon him, Samson became like a burning fire which snapped his bonds. In the next two occasions when Samson broke his bands (16:12,14), this description doesn't occur. It may be that although the fire of the Spirit was within him, Samson came to feel that he, of his *own* ability, was doing the miracles: " *he* snapped the ropes off his arms..." (16:12). There is even a sense of unjustified, egoistic sarcasm in the way he gets the Philistines to tie him with flimsy pieces of grass and then breaks them off and kills them. Likewise when he kills the thirty Philistines and brings their armour (14:19 " spoil" only s.w. 'armour' 2 Sam. 2:21-23) as well as their clothes to the young men. He did the outward actions, but the inner awareness that all his ability was only of God slipped away. And his tragic path can so easily be ours.

The Samson: Delilah Relationship

We have seen earlier that Samson was well into spiritual brinkmanship. It had characterized his life, according to the selection of incidents the record presents us with. The sequence of events is worth listing:

Delilah asked Samson to tell her his closest secret,

then Delilah bound Samson as he asked

Samson awakes from a deep sleep with Delilah

Delilah playfully afflicts Samson while he is bound and Samson overcomes Delilah (16:19 implies this happened each time)

then Samson realizes Delilah has betrayed him

and the Philistine warriors were there waiting in the bedroom.

Then Samson goes out of the bedroom, shakes himself and kills them.

Then Delilah says Samson doesn't really love her

and they repeat the experience.

This is the classic material for love: hate relationships. At first sight, Samson appears an incomprehensible fool. But more extended meditation reveals the human likelihood of it all. She would've convincingly repented and asked for

one last chance- time and again. It is hard not to interpret his sleeping exhausted with her and then the bondage session as some kind of sex game. And yet Samson thought he was strong enough to cope with it, as did Solomon years later. He may even have had some kind of desire to simply mock the Philistines when he suggested they should tie him up with seven pieces of grass. He seems to somehow have known that his first wife would wangle his secret from him and betray him, and thus he would have the opportunity to kill Philistines- even though he didn't intend to open his heart to her (14:16). And now the same happened. He seems to have known that she would betray him, although he evidently thought better of her; for he was deeply in love with her. He initially says: " If *they* bind me..." (16:7), but changes this to " If *thou*..." (16:13); he knew beforehand that she would betray him, although couldn't admit it to himself. And so we see the complexity of Samson's situation. It was not that his telling of the secret to Delilah was necessarily a sin in itself. He trusted her and yet knew on another level she would betray him. This is just a psychological condition. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). This was ever a serious contradiction for me, until considering the Samson : Delilah relationship in depth. A man can know something about someone on one level, but act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires. David likewise must have known Absalom's deceit; but he chose not to see it, for love's sake. "They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things [just as Absalom did in the gate]...but I, as a deaf man, heard not" (Ps. 38:12,13). Paul surely knew how Corinth despised him, how little they knew and believed, and as he himself said, the more he loved them, the less they loved him. And yet in all honesty he could say: "As ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence *and in your love to us*" (2 Cor. 8:7). Yet the more abundantly he loved them, the less they loved him- not the more abundantly. Yet he saw them as loving him abundantly. One also gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their better judgment they disregarded the telltale signs (Josh. 9:7). Or Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand...against his better judgment, surely (2 Sam. 20:10). This is a feature of human nature; and for me so far, the contradictions evident in the Jesus : Judas relationship and the Samson : Delilah relationship are only explicable for me by realizing this. The whole thing is an eloquent essay in the Lord's humanity and the depth of His 'in-loveness' with Judas the traitor. And this Lord is our Lord, the same yesterday and today. Our self-knowledge will be deepened by realizing that we too have this spiritual schizophrenia: it's not that we are spiritual one day and unspiritual the next. We are both flesh and spirit at the very same moment. Appreciation of this will help us cope with the more evident failures of our

brethren. It doesn't necessarily mean that they must be written off as totally unspiritual and insincere because of acts and attitudes of evident unspirituality. The Spirit is still there, at the very same moment. Think of how Samson slept with a whore until midnight, and then in faith rose up and was granted the Spirit to perform a great act of Christ-like, cross-like victory over the enemies of God's people.

Samson retained his faith, for we have shown that all his victories over the Philistines were a result of God responding to his faith. And yet he was weak at the same time. Yet he seems to have come to *assume* that he had faith, and that God would never leave or forsake him. Samson tells Delilah that if he is bound with grass, he will be weak "like one man" (16:7 AVmg.). This is surely an allusion to passages like Lev. 26:8 and Josh. 23:10- that one man would chase many. Samson implies that he fights like he is many men; he appropriated those blessings to himself. He came to assume he had faith. Lifetime Christians have the same tendency, with the joy and vigour of first faith now far back in time. Samson had been bound before and had burst those bonds (15:13); he seems to have assumed that one past deliverance was an automatic guarantee of future ones. His great zeal for the Lord's work seems to have lead him to chose the single life; and yet he evidently was in the habit of occasional affairs (14:3 "is there never...."), using prostitutes and having on and off relationships with women like Delilah. Samson thought his devotion and the appalling apostasy of his brethren kind of justified it. Note how Timothy and Hezekiah seem to likewise have stumbled in their commitment to the single life.

The way Samson asked Delilah to fasten the hair of his head with a nail and then try to have mastery over him is a parody of what would have been a well known incident: Deborah's mastery over Barak (4:21). This would indicate that Scripture was never far from his mind. In Samson's relationship with Delilah, he got closer and closer to the edge. Samson tells Delilah to bind him, then he gets closer to showing his hand: he asks her to do something to his hair. And then, he falls to the final folly. It could even be that after the previous teasings he left her completely (16:14 "he went away")- after the pattern of his previous twinges of conscience concerning his first wife, his love of vineyards, his lying with the whore in Gaza... But he evidently returned to her. The Philistines are described as "abiding" in Delilah's house (16:9)- a word normally used in the sense of 'permanently living'. It would seem that Samson didn't permanently live with her, but occasionally visited her, until at the end he was happy to live with her (she pressed him "daily"), co-habiting with her other Philistine lovers. With his hair shaven, he 'went out, as at other times'- deciding bitterly that he had really had enough, and once again he would walk out on her, this time for good, and would 'shake himself' and take a hold on himself. But this time it was too late.

Strength And Hair

The question arises: why did Samson tell Delilah that if his hair was cut, he would become weak? Surely he must have known within him that she would do it, in line with past experience? He went out as before to fight the Philistines, surely aware that he had been shaved, and yet assuming God would still be with him. He had come to realize that his long hair was not the real source of his strength, on some kind of metaphysical level. He saw that his strength was from the Spirit of God, not long hair or Nazariteship. He went out knowing, presumably, that his hair had been shaven, and yet still assumed he would have God's strength. And even when his hair began to grow again, he still had to pray for strength (16:28). He fell into the downward spiral of reductionism. He figured that if his hair was shaved, well it was no big deal. He was supposed to be a Nazarite all the days of his life, and yet perhaps he came to reason that because he had touched plenty of dead bodies, he therefore needed to be shaved anyway (Num. 6:9). He thought that therefore God would accept him in principle as a Nazarite even though he had broken the letter of Nazariteship, and therefore losing his hair was only a surface level indicator of spirituality.

And yet there is also good reason to think that there was an association in Samson's mind between his hair and his God-given strength. For why did he "tell her all his heart" by saying that if he were shaved, he would lose his strength? And of course, when his hair was cut off, then his strength went. Samson saw a link between being a Nazarite and having strength (16:17). When Samson went outside from Delilah and shook himself as he usually did, was he not shaking his hair free before attacking the Philistines, as if he saw in his hair the source of his strength? However, this must all be balanced against the evidence in the previous paragraph, that Samson originally realized that his strength came from God, not his hair. Whilst he even had this realization, theoretically, when he gave Delilah the possibility of shaving him, he also at this time had the conception that his strength was associated with his hair length. I would suggest that this can be resolved by understanding that although his strength was not in his hair, this is how Samson came to see it. And therefore God went along with this view, and treated Samson *as if* his strength was in his hair. And therefore He departed from him when he allowed his hair to be shaved. If Samson had really told Delilah the truth about the source of his strength, he would have said: 'Faith, causing the Spirit of God to come upon me to do His work'. Samson knew this, and therefore he allowed her to shave him; and yet it was also true that in his heart of hearts, he also at the same time believed that his hair was the source of his strength. So he was the victim of reductionism, as well as tokenism. He came to see the mere possession of long hair as a sign of spirituality. And yet at the same time he reduced and reduced the real meaning of Nazariteship to nothing. Difficult as this analysis may be to

grasp, I really believe that it has much to teach us; for the latter day brotherhood is afflicted with exactly these same problems.

The way Samson was so deeply sleeping on Delilah's knees that he didn't feel them shave him, and then he went out and shook himself (16:20; this seems a fair translation)- all this could suggest he was drunk. There is no concrete evidence for this, but his love of vineyards would suggest he had a yearning for the forbidden fruit. He had broken the Nazarite vow by touching dead bodies, he obviously thought that having unshaven hair was only tokenistic and irrelevant to the real spirit of Nazariteship, and therefore he may have reasoned that alcohol was also another tokenism. Thus his reductionism destroyed him (almost). Perhaps it was brought about by a misunderstanding of God's waiving of the Nazarite ban on touching dead bodies; for after all, God had made Samson a Nazarite, and then empowered him to go and kill Philistines in personal combat, thereby touching dead bodies. So God waived one principle for a more important one; and yet Samson abused this, taking the principle far further than God intended, to the point that he ended up justifying sin as righteousness.

The Shame Of Rejection

" He did not know that the Lord had left him" (16:20) is the depth of spiritual tragedy. The Lord Jesus may have had this in mind when He spoke of how the rejected would not know what hour He would come upon them (Rev. 3:3). Samson went through the experience of rejection at the Lord's hands in advance of the actual judgment seat. He was set grinding in the prison- a figure which was later picked up as representative of the unbeliever generally (Is. 42:7; 61:1; 1 Pet. 3:19). He was as it were delivered to satan, that he might learn (1 Tim. 1:20); his own wickedness corrected him (Jer. 2:19). And this finally brought him to himself. His experience was a pattern for the apostate Israel whom he loved. Yahweh forsaking His people is associated with them cutting off their hair in Jer. 7:29- an evident allusion to Samson's shame. As the Philistines rejoiced over Samson and praised their god for their victory, so Babylon was to do years later, as Zedekiah like Samson had his eyes put out.

The shame of the final fight is graciously unrecorded. The events of 16:19-21 seem a little out of sequence. It would seem that Delilah awoke Samson, and he thought he would go outside, shake himself and kill the Philistines whom he was sure were in wait. But she started to tease him as before in their games of bondage; but this time, " she began to subdue him, and he began to weaken" (16:19 LXX; one meaning of 'Delilah' is 'the one who weakens'). " Began" is a strange translation; it is often translated to profane / humble. She spiritually abused him. And then she called the Philistines. He was powerless, physically, beneath that woman, and was therefore no match for them. The fact she was

physically stronger than him when the Spirit of the Lord left him is proof enough that he was not a physically strong man in his own right. The way the apostate woman subdued him physically, in the name of a love / sex game, would have remained in his memory. He, the strong man of Israel, had been conquered by a worthless woman. His humiliation was to be typical of Israel's: " children are their oppressors (cp. the young lad at the feast?), women rule over them" (Is. 3:12). It is quite possible that Peter had Samson in mind, when he wrote of how " they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness...they themselves are the servants of corruption: *for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage*. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world...they are again *entangled* therein, and overcome..." (2 Pet. 2:18-20). Samson had been spiritually overcome, and therefore physically he was overcome and brought in bondage.

Eyeless in Gaza

Joshua's prophecy that those who married the surrounding women would find them " a snare and a trap for you, a scourge in your sides, and thorns in your eyes" (Josh. 23:12,13 RSV) was fulfilled in Samson's relationship with Delilah. But the similarity is such that surely Samson must have been aware of it, when he asked Delilah to tie him up with cords. Joshua's words were not too distant history and surely Samson knew them. This is Samson at his darkest. He was mixing up his sex game with Delilah with Joshua's words. Joshua had said that these women would tie up the Israelite man if they married them. Samson didn't marry her; it is possible that she was a renegade Israelite, not a Gentile; and he wanted to show that actually Samson could handle a bit of fun with Delilah without really breaking the spirit of Joshua's words. And so as he broke those bands each time to go out and kill some more Philistine warriors, he doubtless felt he was still in spiritual control. Solomon made exactly the same mistake; he took foreign wives. And the record comments: " of the nations concerning which the Lord had said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for *surely* they will turn away your heart...and his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kings 11:1-3). The implication is that Solomon took those wives thinking 'Well, I know the law says they will surely turn away my heart, but actually they won't, I can handle it'; and he didn't handle it. Solomon seems to have realized, in the bitterness of Ecclesiastes, that he had made the same mistake as Samson: " I find more bitter than death [i.e. it would be better to be dead than be in this position] the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" (Ecc. 7:26). These were surely Samson's thoughts in those eyeless weeks in Gaza: better to have died than to have been snared by Gentile women. He let her snare him, conscious of the allusion to Joshua's words; and thought he could break free from the relationship at will. But in the end, he couldn't. Any form of sin is by

nature addictive. The only way of dealing with it is to break completely. The Lord taught this when He spoke of the need to gouge out the eye that offends our spirituality. And He was alluding to how Samson's eyes were 'picked out' (Young), "gouged out" (16:21 RSV). We either do it to ourselves, or the Lord will do it to us. He will have the conquest over sin in our existence, ultimately. Either we work with Him in this, and thereby remain with Him eternally; or we foolishly resist Him, and He has His way against our will, and in doing so destroys us. With a logic like this, any sacrifice is logically given. But more than logic. If we *truly love* the Lord God and His Son, the desire to give, to serve for nothing, will render this logical encouragement unnecessary.

7 The Death Of Samson (Judges 16:23 - 30)

A read through all the recorded words of Samson will reveal a growing humility and spirituality. "Suffer me that I may... that I may" (16:26) reflects a courtesy and humility distinctly lacking in his previous recorded speech. His growth came to its intended climax in the repentance and final peak of spirituality which he achieved in his time of dying. He was made weak by Delilah, and yet out of weakness he was made strong by pure faith (Heb. 11:34). Paul, Job, Jacob, Moses, the Lord Himself, all reached their spiritual pinnacle at the end. And so surely with us. Like Paul and the crucified thief, Samson by his death came to a deep realization of the reality of judgment to come: "Remember me" (16:28) must be read in this context. It carries the connotation of 'remember me for good and therefore forgive me at the judgment' in Ps. 25:6,7; Lk. 23:46. It seems that Nehemiah was inspired by this at his end (16:28 = Neh. 13:22,31; did he too come to a finer realization of his failures at the end?). "Remember me" was a cry only used prior to Samson by men in weakness: Gen. 15:8; Josh. 7:7; Jud. 6:22 (Gideon, Samson's hero, had used it). Yet now Samson appropriates it to himself in faith that he will be mercifully treated at the judgment. And his example in turn inspired Nehemiah. The intensity of Samson's repentance was quite something. It must have inspired Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:11), who like Samson was bound (16:21) and humbled (16:5,16,19 AVmg.)- and then repented with a like intensity. And Zedekiah went through the same basic experience, of capture by his enemies, having his eyes put out, his capture attributed to false gods; and he likewise repented (2 Kings 25:7).

Not only did Samson at his death repent. He reached a very high level of appreciation of the grace of God, and the principles through which He articulates this grace. The record seems to suggest there was a link between the growth of his hair, and God giving him strength again. This doesn't mean that there was some metaphysical link between his strength and his hair. Rather does it show how God responded to his faith and *what was behind the growth*

of his hair, and therefore gave him strength to destroy the Philistines. It would seem that Samson decided to keep the Nazarite vow again. He was in no position to offer the inaugural sacrifice which the law required; and yet he threw himself upon God's grace, trusting that his zeal would be accepted by God; that he, the sinner and failure and shamer of Yahweh, could be allowed to make that special act of devotion in Nazariteship. And he was accepted in this, as witnessed by the great power of the death of Samson.

Samson's desire to die with the Philistines could be read as suicidal (16:30). In this case, he had elements of weakness at the end, and yet he was accepted as dying in faith. Or it could be understood that he wanted to die because he believed that through his death, he would achieve God's plan for taking the gates of his enemies. In this case he would have had the spirit of Christ. Samson's death plea for vengeance against the Philistines for his two eyes (16:28) sounds woefully human. Indeed, the RSV and RVmg. speak of him asking for vengeance " for one of my two eyes" , as if he felt that even if God gave the destruction he asked for, this would only half avenge him. This would indicate a real bitterness, an unGodly hatred of both sinner and sin. In some ways, for all the intensity of weeping before God in repentance (16:28 LXX), Samson had not progressed much from his attitude in 15:7, over 20 years before- where he once again had admitted that his motive for 'seeking occasion against the Philistines' was partly just personal revenge. The spirit of not avenging oneself but leaving it to God to do was evidently something he never quite rose up to in his life (Rom. 12:19). " That I may be *at once* avenged of the Philistines *for my two eyes*" seems to be quite without any desire for the vindication of God's Name. Although it seems to me it was wrong, and betrayed some unspirituality, yet it is taken as the epitome of the desire of all the faithful for vindication through the coming of Christ (Rev. 6:10).

However, it could be argued that he had earlier taken vengeance on the Philistines (15:5), knowing that the Law taught that Israel were not to take vengeance (same word) *on each other* (Lev. 19:18), but could do so on their enemies (Num. 31:2; Dt. 32:43 cp. Josh. 10:13). He was thus treating the Philistines as out of covenant relationship, whereas his weak brethren were all too willing to forget the fundamental difference between them. We would surely be happier if Samson had asked if God would let him take vengeance on God's behalf against God's enemies. This was surely in Samson's mind, but the shame of the loss of his eyes was all too humanly strong within him. I can only conclude that therefore it would seem that he died with this weakness still conquered: a desire for personal retribution against the Philistines. Jacob and Paul likewise died with some weaknesses evidently still showing; and there is not one of us who will die with every weakness conquered. And yet, without wishing to inspire any complacency but rather a thankful appreciation of God's grace, the point must be made that they were all graciously accepted by a

loving Father. Samson's death was died in faith, and at his time of dying he had been made strong out of weakness, on account of his faith (Heb. 11:32-34). " Let me ('my soul', AVmg.) die with the Philistines" (16:30) was surely a recognition that in his heart he had been a Philistine, for all his hatred of them and despising of them as uncircumcised, and thus outside the covenant (15:18). It could be that he was too hard on himself: for even at his weakest, Delilah had observed that his heart wasn't with her: it was somewhere else, i.e. with the God of Israel (16:15). Yet Samson wanted to receive the just desert for his life: to die with the Philistines. His mind may well have been on Scripture as he died: on Joshua 23:10,11, which spoke of how one man would chase a thousand (he had earlier appropriated this to himself in 16:7)- *if* Israel took good heed to their *souls* (AVmg.). And perhaps Samson realized that he hadn't taken good heed to his soul, and therefore had ultimately been unable to chase a thousand men. And yet he died in faith, even though with a deeply appreciated recognition of his sinfulness. As with Paul and Jacob, deep recognition of personal sinfulness was a feature of their spiritual maturity. And as with Jacob, Job and Moses, Samson seems to have reached a progressively higher appreciation of the Name of God. His calling on Yahweh Elohim at the end, weeping before Him, was the first and only time he ever used that title; and the first time we actually read the covenant Name on his lips (cp. 15:18).

God patiently worked through the weakness of Samson to achieve not only a great final victory over the Philistines, but also Samson's own salvation. The way Samson asked the lad to guide him to the pillars in the Philistine language, learnt in his mis-spent relationships with women, the way he knew the architectural structure of the Dagon-temple, where presumably he had been in his earlier love-hate affair with the Philistines- God didn't reject him for these earlier failures, but worked with him, making use of the knowledge and experience which Samson had picked up along the road of earlier failure. This is how God works with us, too- if only we would have the humility to realize it. And the least we can do is to replicate it in our dealings with our failing brethren.

8 Samson A Type Of Christ

There is no doubt that we are intended to see Samson as a type of Christ. All the Judges in some way prefigured the Lord; for they were " saviours" raised up to deliver God's weak and failing people in pure grace, when according to God's own word, they should have received the due punishment of rejection (Neh. 9:27,28). He who delivered " them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15) was typified by all those earlier deliverers of God's people from bondage (cp. Mt. 1:21). The " great salvation" of Heb. 2:3 which the Lord achieved was foreshadowed by the great

deliverance wrought by Samson (15:18). He would have meditated upon the promises of the seed, that he was to deliver Israel from their enemies, and to possess the gate of his enemies. When Samson took away the gates of Gaza, he surely saw himself as being that seed. The way he openly "sought occasion" against the Lord's enemies was therefore perhaps a self-conscious desire to in some sense do what the promised seed would do.

Consider the more obvious points of contact between Samson and Jesus which make Samson a type of Christ:

- The birth of both of them was foretold by an Angel
- at a time when Israel had been handed over to their enemies.
- The record of Samson's birth frequently uses the phrases "the man" and "the woman" (e.g. 13:10,11), as if to send the mind back to Eden- with the implication that Samson was the seed of the woman, in type of Christ. "The woman" is a phrase nearly always associated in Scripture with the birth of someone who was to be a seed of the woman ⁽¹⁾. "Of all that I said unto the woman, let her beware", coming from the mouth of an Angel (13:13), surely confirms the Eden allusions.
- Both married Gentiles; both were betrayed for pieces of silver.
- The supreme strength and courage of Samson in fighting and killing the lion points forward to Christ's spiritual verve and fervour in destroying our adversary the devil, which is likened to a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8).
- 'Samson' means "the sun" - linking with the Lord's title as "the sun of righteousness" in Malachi 4.
- The incident in Gaza is evidently typical of the Lord's work. There was Samson, "the splendour of the son", 'compassed in' by his enemies (as Christ on the cross, Ps. 118:5,10-12) in Gaza ('fortified stronghold', cp. death). Then he arose in the darkness, rendered powerless the gates of death and carried them up 30 miles to a high altitude (cp. Heaven), to Hebron, 'the city of fellowship', where the tomb of Abraham was (Gen. 23:19), and where Gentile giants had once lived (Num. 13:22), conquered by faithful Israelites. Joshua had taken Hebron (Josh. 10:36) but Israel had not followed up his victory, and the Philistines had returned; Caleb then took it (Josh. 15:13), but again, by Samson's time, the Philistines were back. And Samson, although a type of Christ, was intensely aware of all this failure (cp. how he chose Gaza and Timnath, areas with a similar history, for his other exploits). It would seem that

Samson killed the men at the gates, the leaders of the city, and then took the gates with him (16:3 cp. 2). The Hebrew used for Samson 'taking away' the gates is that translated 'possess' in the Genesis promises. Thus he possessed the gates of his enemies and slew their figureheads, as the Lord did through the cross. Samson obviously saw some specific meaning in taking the gates to Hebron and the tomb of Abraham. He surely saw that he was prefiguring Messiah's work of taking the gate of his enemies, as promised to Abraham. Or perhaps he saw himself as 'in' the Messiah, and sharing in what He would do in the future. Archaeologists have found tablets that refer to the power of Baal to possess the gates of all who oppose him; and Samson evidently wanted to show the superiority of Yahweh over Baal. The fellowship ('Hebron') which was enabled by the Lord's victory should never be undone by us; He died that He might gather together in one all God's people, to reconcile us all in one body both to each other and to God. To break apart the body is therefore to deny the essential intention of the cross. There are other points of contact with the Lord's passion. The men of Gaza laid wait in the gates of the city; they were therefore the rulers? But they decided to only kill him in the morning. The rulers of the Jews decided likewise.

" Through death..."

Samson at his death was Samson at his finest; and this was true of the Lord. Thus Samson was a type of Christ. The way he was betrayed for silver by the one he trusted means is an obvious link with the Lord's experience. The way he died with such a deep, deep sense of betrayal must have found an echo with the Lord. We must have all asked: 'Why, oh why, did Samson go on trusting her, when it was so obvious she was going to betray him?'. It may have been because she was an Israelitess (even if a renegade). The way she says " The Philistines be upon thee!" (16:20) and the way the lords of the Philistines came up to her (16:5) may suggest this. Their offer of money to her was exactly after the pattern of the Jews' approach to Judas. The way " pieces of silver" feature in both records leads us to wonder whether the correspondence was so exact that she also betrayed the helpless Samson with a kiss, as Judas did. It is suggested in *Samson And Delilah* that her betrayal of Samson was done in the spirit of some kind of loving teasing. She started to afflict Samson, and had the better of him. She may well have betrayed him with a kiss as she called the Philistine warriors in. We can reason on, and consider how she like Judas would have avoided eye contact, how Samson would have looked at her with a pain and disbelief and disappointment that is beyond words, altogether ineffable... and how she as Judas must have lived a wretched life afterwards, until her (premature?) death. Prov. 6:26,27; 7:1 make clear allusion to Samson and Delilah, and they suggest that Delilah was a " whorish woman" . In this case, her motivation for betraying Samson was fundamentally financial, apart from other lesser factors which there probably were. The bribe she was offered

has been estimated in modern terms as around US\$1,000,000 (2008). And Judas likewise went to the chief priests and asked how much they would give him for betraying the Lord. Again, Samson was a type of Christ. This all indicates the unbelievable materialism which is in our natures: to betray a good man, even the Son of God, ultimately for pieces of metal.

I think it wasn't only that love is blind. In all such deep relationships there is a sense that we may know full well the weakness of the one we love, and what they will do to us in the end; and yet our nature has a tendency to overlook this. This is true not only of male: female relationships. The problem we have in understanding Samson (if we do have a problem with it) occurs again, in exactly the same form, when we consider the Lord's relationship with Judas. He knew from the beginning who should betray him. He knew that the one with whom He shared especially sweet counsel would betray Him (Ps. 55:12-14). And surely the Lord Jesus had reflected on David's experience with Ahithophel. And yet He spoke of how the twelve (including Judas) would sit on twelve thrones, sharing his glory (Mt. 19:28). He loved Judas and treated him as a close friend, even though he knew that this very close friend would betray Him. There is, to my mind, no satisfactory explanation of this apart from to realize the utter humanity of the Lord; that just like Samson, He could sincerely love a man whom he knew would betray Him. This same Lord is the same today and forever. He isn't a hard man. He loves and actively fellowships *at the time* with those whom later He knows will betray Him, even now. He doesn't just not bother because He knows they will later turn nasty. Lord, we salute you for this, your utter grace.

Micah 7 is a prophecy shot through with Messianic allusion ⁽²⁾. Christ openly quoted Mic. 7:6 concerning himself and His men in Mt. 10:35,36. Mic. 7:1 is alluded to in Mt. 21:19; 7:4 in Mt. 7:16. There are many references to Christ's betrayal and arrest: " They all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net" (7:2 = Jn. 8:59; 10:31,39; 11:8). " The prince (Herod) asketh (for a sign, Lk. 23:8), the judge (Pilate) asketh for a reward; and the great man (Caiaphas he High Priest) he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up" (7:3), i.e. hatch their plot together. Because of this, " the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh" (7:4 = Lk. 19:44). " Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide (reference to Judas- Ps. 55:13): keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom" . This begins a reference to Samson's experience with Delilah. " I will look unto the Lord (Samson first used the Yahweh Name when he cried in his final suffering)...my God will hear me (cp. " Hear me this once")...rejoice not against me, O mine enemy (the Philistines mocking Samson): when I fall, I shall arise (Heb. elsewhere used about the resurrection); when I sit in darkness (Samson sitting in blindness in the prison), the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him (Samson's thoughts,

surely), until he plead my cause (" Remember me!")...he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Then she that is mine enemy (Delilah, symbol of the Philistines to Samson) shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me (as Delilah did?), Where is Yahweh thy God? mine eyes shall behold her (is this Samson imagining the judgment, with restored eyesight?)" . If these connections are valid- and it is hard to deny this- then Samson died full of vision of the resurrection, judgment and the final manifestation of his forgiveness which he would then receive. Paul likewise has plenty of these references in his final writings in 2 Tim. 4. One question remains: why are there these Samson references in a prophecy of the Lord's betrayal? Surely Samson was a type of Christ. It could be that the Lord Jesus was being warned, prophetically, of how a particular woman could be his undoing, as she was Samson's. The way the Messianic Proverbs warn the Son of God against a particular woman lend weight to this. Or it could be that in the same way as Delilah betrayed Samson, so Judas was to betray Jesus, and He would go through the same gamut of emotions. This would be why this prophecy of His betrayal is described in terms of Delilah's betrayal of Samson.

You will recall the words of Heb. 2:14,15 about Jesus: " through death he (destroyed) him that had the power of death" . This is exactly the idea of Jud. 16:30: " Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" . Through his own death, Christ destroyed the power of sin, epitomized in the dead Philistines. Perhaps there is an allusion in Hebrews 2 to this passage. Heb. 2:15 goes on to say that Christ delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" . Now that's packed with allusions to the time of the judges- Israel in hard bondage to their Philistine masters, living in fear, until judges or 'deliverers' like Samson delivered them from their oppressors. The same great relief which Israel felt after Samson's deliverances of them, can be experienced by us spiritually. The sins, the doubts, the fears which we all have as we analyze our spiritual standing, should melt away when we recall the great deliverance which we have received. In practice, Samson must have become a larger than life figure. We get the impression that the Israelites had a problem relating to him due to his fantastic physical strength; his wives likewise must have felt distanced from him, knowing that he had a spiritual inner being which they had no access to. We too can feel distanced from Christ as we perceive more and more the supreme spiritual strength which he had. Yet in all his ways, Samson sought the glory of God, and means of overcoming Israel's Philistine enemies. Even his first marriage with a Philistine woman was " of the Lord, that he (Samson) sought an occasion against the Philistines" (14:4). Here we see his all consuming desire to actively seek conflict with the powers of sin which debilitated and crippled Israel. As we see the forces of sin so strong in our own

lives, as well as in the new Israel generally, we too should have the zeal which he had in seeking an occasion against our own flesh. It is easy to think that we are just asked to passively resist temptation whenever it arises. But the example of Samson and the Lord Jesus was of active warfare against the flesh, going on to the offensive rather than being only on the defensive.

There are several other parallels with the Lord's death, following through Samson as a type of Christ:

- The Jews wanted the Lord's death because they saw Him as their destroyer (Jn. 11:50). And the Philistines likewise (16:24).

- The way they made sport of Samson (16:25) links with how the Lord was mocked, and was even the song of the drunkards (Ps. 69:12).

- The Lord's silence was due to His complete humiliation (Acts 8:32,33). That extreme humiliation can be entered into through a consideration of Samson's ineffable shame. He was given women's work in prison, grinding at the mill, in order to rub the point in (Ex. 11:5; Mt. 24:41). 'Grinding' was some kind of figure of speech for the sex act (s.w. Job 31:10). The "fethers of brass" with which he was bound would have recalled his games of bondage with Delilah, and the same word is translated "filthiness" in a sexual context (Ez. 16:36). The word used for 'prison' means literally 'house of binding'- n extension of Delilah's house, they would have joked. One can imagine how the story of how Delilah enticed him would have become the gossip of the nation.

- The utter exhaustion of Samson from their afflictions (prodding with sticks?) is revealed when he asks the lad "Suffer me..." (Heb. 'allow me to rest / take a break'). The Lord's physical exhaustion, driven to the limit of human endurance, must be imagined.

- The Philistines didn't kill Samson immediately; they wanted to prolong the agony of his death. It was evidently their intention to kill him. Perhaps it was their plan to torture him and then finally torture him to death at the feast to their god- cp. the Lord's planned death at Passover. The great sacrifice which they planned to offer (Heb. 'kill') was probably Samson (16:23).

- Samson dying between the two pillars is broadly similar, as a kind of silhouette, to the Lord's death between two other crosses. The way the lad (also a Hebrew? for they spoke the same language?) "held" Samson's hand is significant, for the same word is translated 'to strengthen / encourage'. Perhaps the lad strengthened Samson as the repentant thief did the Lord.

- The final effort of Samson, both to speak and to act, bowing himself (Heb. 'stretching himself out to his full extension') with all his spiritual and physical energy: this was the final effort of the Lord. Again, we see in both how we are lead to a final crescendo of spiritual effort at the end of probation, although this may be articulated in various forms.

- The way the body was taken up by brave Israelites after Samson's death recalls the action of Joseph and Nicodemus.

Samson's Awareness Of Christ

There is reason to think that to some degree, Samson would have appreciated all this- that he was a type of Christ. Samson may have recognized the strength of the future Saviour when he gave his riddle to the Philistines. He meditated upon that dead lion with the sweet honey in it, and formulated his comment: "What is sweeter than honey? What (or, Who?) is stronger than a lion (Heb. 'the strong one'- this is one of Samson's many word plays)?" . 'Who is stronger than the strong one?' was an idea picked up by the Lord Jesus in, I suggest, conscious allusion (Mt. 12:29); although it is masked in the English text. He was the strong one who was stronger than the strong man of sin. Through His victory, the roaring lion of the devil lays dead. And in his skull is sweet honey; did Samson see in this the same meaning as David did in Ps. 119:103? Did he so understand the nature and method of the Lord's work that he appreciated that the Lord's victory over all His people's enemies would be through the power of God's word, lying there in the place of the mind of the beast He overcame? Yet Samson killed the lion himself; surely he felt that to some degree *he* was the strong man who had overcome the beast, through his application to God's word. His frequent references and allusions to God's past revelation, both in his words and actions, would indicate that he was a man of the word. And yet despite this, he fell so miserably. Proverbs contains a number of Samson allusions (16:32; 25:28). But the most powerful are in 7:1,5,22,25-27, where the young Israelite is commended to God's word, because this will keep him from falling to the wiles of the Gentile woman, who throws down strong men into the way of miserable death. Solomon evidently writes with allusion to Samson; that here was the man who loved God's word, and yet went so astray with women. And tragically enough, Solomon himself did just the same! He realized and lamented the tragedy of Samson, as a lover of the word who fell for the Gentile woman; and then, with all his wisdom, he did the very same thing! Here, for all to see, is the crucial difference between knowledge and faith.

However, due to the weakness of the flesh, Samson was a man who never quite made it, spiritually. In his time of dying he must have had a strong desire for salvation in the future seed. The way he pleads with God to remember him for

good at the end, as he bows himself with all his physical and spiritual might, was picked up years later by the repentant thief. In a similar plight, he likewise pleaded, this time with the Lord Jesus, to be remembered for good, even though he was unworthy. And could it be that after the pattern of many others (e.g. Paul, Jacob) we all come, at the end of our mortality, to a peak of appreciation of the Lord Jesus, of our own sinfulness and His saving grace, and of our desperation for His salvation?

Notes

- (1) See Andrew Perry, *The Doctrine Of Salvation* (Sunderland: Willow, 1993).
- (2) For a fuller exposition, see H.A.Whittaker, *Bible Studies* pp. 94-99 (Cannock: Biblia, 1987).

Elijah

9.1 Elijah's Strength: Elijah And Prayer

Elijah bursts upon the scene in 1 Kings 17:1, describing the Lord as the One “Before whom I stand”. ‘Standing before the Lord’ refers to prayer- Ps. 106:23; Ezra 9:15; Jer. 15:1; 18:20. To live a life standing before the Lord is to live a life of prayer. Hence David and Paul say that prayer can be continual- in that life becomes a lived out prayer, with the practice of living in the presence of God. And straight away we ask ourselves, in lives just as busy as those of David and Paul, whether our self-talk, our minute by minute inner consciousness, is “before the Lord”...or merely the sheer and utter vapidness of the 21st century mind.

Elijah really is the great example of believing that what we have prayed for, we have already received. He tells Ahab that he hears “the sound of a abundance of rain”, well before the prayer for rain had even begun to be answered (1 Kings 18:41). Elijah announced that there was not to be dew nor rain but “according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). Here is an example of being sure of God’s will in what we pray for. If the Lord’s words abide in us, then we will ask what *we* will and it will be done; yet John also records that if we ask according to *God’s* will, it will be done for us. Our will and that of the Father come to co-incide as His word takes an ever deeper lodgement in our consciousness. And this is how close Elijah must have been to knowing the will of God. Elijah alludes to Dt. 28 in saying there would be no rain (and 1 Kings 19:14 forsaken thy covenant= Dt. 32)- therefore he could be so sure of being heard. His request that there be “no dew” was inspired by the prayers of Gideon and David, who had prayed just the same things (Jud. 6:37; 2 Sam.1:21; and 1 Kings 18:33 = Jud. 6:20). Likewise the two witnesses of the last days will be inspired in their turn by Elijah’s example to pray that Heaven will be stopped. When it comes to prayer, there clearly is a positive pattern of influence and example both amongst us and from our absorbing the spirit of countless Biblical examples. The righteous man ‘decrees a thing in his heart and it is done’ through his prayers (Job 22:28). The same Hebrew words for ‘according’ and ‘word’ occur in both 1 Kings 17:1 and 24: “There shall not be dew nor rain but according to my word...The word of the Lord in [according to] thy mouth”. Elijah’s word and will had become parallel with those of the Father. This was taken to the ultimate extent by the Lord, in whom the Father’s word was made flesh. But

that same word slowly becomes flesh in us too. No longer do we request things that are not the Father's will as through His word we become more attune to Him. Our experience of answered prayer becomes increasingly positive, reinforcing our faith in Him and our attention to prayerfulness. And this dovetails with our increasingly sensitive reading of His word daily. The Lord intended that we should all pray the prayer of command as Elijah did; for He taught that with faith, we should be able to tell a sycamore tree to be rooted up and planted in the sea (Lk. 17:6). He doesn't advise that we pray to the Father that the tree, according to His will, be rooted up and transplanted. He wants us to come to so know the will of the Father that we can pray the prayer of direct command. And this is quite some challenge.

Elijah could be so sure his prayer would be heard because he knew that he was genuinely motivated. His reason for withholding the rain and dew was so that Israel would come to repentance (James 5:16-18)- perhaps through them perceiving that lack of rain was a sign that they had broken the covenant. In this case, Elijah was somewhat harsher than God Himself, who had not yet withdrawn rain from His people. Elijah "shut the heavens", even though Israel rejected him at that time (Lk. 4:25,26). Their rejection of him is unrecorded in the Kings record, but we are left to reflect upon the wonder of the fact that Elijah's response to rejection was not to merely hurt back, but to earnestly seek their restoration to God. He "prayed in his prayer" (James 5:17 Gk.)- there was a deep prayer going on within his prayer, words and feelings within words- the prayer of the very inner soul. This was how much he sought their repentance. The James passage sets Elijah up as a pattern for our prayer for our wayward brethren. He really is our pattern here. He clearly saw prayer as requiring much effort; and the way he prays at the time of the evening sacrifice on Horeb suggests that he saw prayer as a sacrifice (1 Kings 18:36).

This kind of faith in prayer enables a believer to truly follow the Lord's exhortation to ask for things and believe and feel that we have already received them. Elijah chose the terms of the contest on Carmel to be an answer by fire- for Baal was originally the fire god. Yet Elijah appears utterly certain that God will answer by a bolt of fire, without having asked Him first. He asks God to "answer me" (1 Kings 18:37 NIV) without specifically requesting for fire to be sent down; he brings the situation before God and asks Him to 'answer' that situation. And this is why so many of David's prayers are more a bringing of the situation before God, than a specific request for answers. In 1 Kings 18:41, Elijah tells Ahab that there is a "*sound*" of rain coming. The same word has just been used earlier, translated as "voice" (1 Kings 18:29) in the context of there being a voice / answer to prayer. So Elijah is saying that there is an answer speaking of much rain to come. There was no sign of rain coming at the time when he started praying, until the little cloud arose. But he calmly tells Ahab that there is a sound / answer of rain coming. Elijah believed in the answer

coming before he prayed; he had a *very* firm faith. And thus ahead of time he told Ahab to eat and drink because of it [had Ahab been fasting? If so, to Yahweh or Baal?]. But all this required quite some passion in prayer. 1 Kings 18:42 says that he *cast himself* down in prayer. The word occurs only in 2 Kings 4:34,35, as if it was Elijah's example which inspired Elisha likewise to cast himself down [AV "stretch"] upon the child. The implication is that Elisha did so in prayer; and in passing, we wonder whether this implies that Elijah's stretching himself upon another child, although a different Hebrew word, was also in prayer. Again we see that Elijah's prayerful example inspired another. Our attitude to prayer is so easily influential upon others, and we ourselves are likewise easily influenced. It should be no shame nor embarrassment to us to instantly break into prayer, nor to kneel down to further our intensity in prayer, regardless of the social embarrassment this may involve in some cultures. But I have to ask: Do we *cast ourselves down* in prayer as Elijah?

Elijah was evidently in touch with God and knew His will. At the end, he is described as the charioteer of the cherubim; for his prayers had controlled their direction. This really is how much God is willing to be influenced by our prayers. Elijah had a very developed sense of how God works with us. Thus he asks God to make Israel know how that He "didst turn back their heart" (1 Kings 18:37 RVmg.), he wanted them to know how that potentially, God had made their return to Him possible; Elijah perceived that God may prepare something in prospect that never gets realized in practice because of human weakness [and this should be an endless inspiration to us too]. Yet despite this union with the Father, this didn't preclude him questioning God. Thus in 1 Kings 17:20, in the midst of another tremendously powerful prayer, Elijah remonstrates with God: 'Have You *brought evil*...?'. The Hebrew for 'evil' usually means evil in the sense of sin- 'have You brought the result of sin...on her as well as upon this people?'. This is all part of a passionate, living relationship with a living God. And perhaps the way that the first six prayers of Elijah for rain went unanswered, his need to pray three times for the child to resurrect, were all part of God teaching Elijah that no matter how close we are to Him, we have no right to expect automatic answers to prayer, even if they are according to God's will.

For all Elijah's weaknesses which we may dwell on in later sections, his basic faith and prayerfulness must never be lost sight of. His ascension to Heaven has remarkable similarities with that of the Lord- a group of men sent to take him; Elisha cp. Peter saying 'I will not deny thee' (2 Kings 2:2 Heb.); a cloud of Angels receive him; men stand watching on earth; the Holy Spirit given on his ascension...

Further Implications

As an aside, it's worth reflecting how the drought brought about by Elijah's prayer likely affected people other than Israel, in the same way as the famine which brought Joseph's brothers to Egypt affected many other people. The whole of God's purpose with this earth is centred around His people; we are *so* important to Him. I have no doubt that Communism fell in Eastern Europe in the inexplicably quick way that it did, simply because a few of us wanted to preach there; and thousands heard the Gospel and were baptized as a result of it. This is how important we are to God!

“When Jesus saw the faith of *the friends* , He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, *thy* sins be forgiven *thee*” (Mk. 2:5). That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22); and thus Heb. 11:35 alludes to this incident by saying that through faith- in this case, the faith of Elijah, a third party- women received their dead raised to life. The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36).

2 Elijah In Weakness

Despite Elijah's absolutely undoubted faith, spiritual perception and prayerfulness, there is a painfully apparent weaker side to him as we analyze the records. His weakness was in despising others, in being spiritually self-centred in terms of considering he alone was in relationship with God, and in justifying his native anger and disagreement with others as all part of a spirituality which God expects of the righteous. And this sense that we get is Biblically supported.

9.2.1 Fire From Heaven

We become suspicious of Elijah's motives when we read of him asking God to show all Israel “*That I* am thy servant, and *that I* have done all these things” (1 Kings 18:36). “That I...that I...” sounds like there was a large element of self-justification in his spirituality, just as there can be in our, e.g., desiring to prove someone else wrong and ourselves right, to win a debate, to abuse our superior Bible knowledge... The incident in 2 Kings 1:10 of calling fire down from Heaven is specifically rebuked by the Lord Jesus as not being of *His* Spirit (Lk. 9:54,55). And He rebukes His followers for assuming that their natural prejudice against others can be justified by an appeal to Elijah's example. When Elijah was asked to “come down” from the hill, he responds by saying

that *fire* would come down (2 Kings 1:9,10); he saw himself as the fire / judgment of God. Yet behind that bold façade was a very insecure man; for the Angel had to assure him not to fear, and to go down with the third captain (2 Kings 1:15). Beneath his apparent zeal for Yahweh, Elijah was basically fearful, of himself, of others, even perhaps of God. So often, fear is the basic reason for our failures and misperceptions and harsh judgments. His motives were mixed; he clearly saw the similarity with how he had called fire down to consume the sacrifice on Carmel, in order to convert Israel back to God. But he clearly failed to see the value of those 100 lives he had now taken by doing the same thing in consuming people. The value and meaning of persons was lost on him. All he could think of was fighting apostasy and judging it. Elijah called the fire down in evident allusion to how fire came down from the Lord to destroy Nadab and Abihu and also Sodom (Lev. 10:2; Gen. 19:24). He did the wrong thing from wrong motives and yet he Biblically justified it- for the prophets themselves saw an apostate Israel as being like Sodom (Is. 1:10). Now this is probably how most Christians sin. We rarely harden ourselves and sin in wilful defiance. In the heat of the moment the ‘devil’ of our own self-talk persuades us to find a pseudo-spiritual justification for actions which only later we reflect were wrong. The Lord’s wilderness temptations were all about doing justifiable things for wrong motives, based on a self-justifying recollection of Bible passages. And this in essence is how it is with most of our failures. The Lord’s victory and Elijah’s failure should serve to stop us in our tracks in careful and sustained self-examination.

The Lord’s comment that He had “not come to *destroy* men’s *lives* but to *save* them” (Lk. 9:56) must surely be connected with what He has just said: “Whosoever will *save* his *life* shall *lose* [s.w. “*destroy*”] it” and vice versa (Lk. 9:24,25). The three words *save*, *life*, *lose* / *destroy* are all the same. There is surely a connection of thought here. But what is the Lord saying through it? The disciples like Elijah would have had their prayers heard- the fire of destruction could have come. But the Lord says that they don’t know the type of spirit they are of. His Spirit is one of saving and not destruction. Men *destroy themselves* by seeking to save themselves without Him. This is why the Lord could say that He Himself judged / condemned no man- each rejected man will have condemned himself. The same point is actually made within the Elijah story too. In 1 Kings 18:28 the prophets of Baal worshipped “*after their manner*”- a Hebrew word normally translated 296 times “judgment”; they judged / condemned themselves, rather than needing Elijah to do so. And the word translated “cut” essentially means ‘to gather’. They gathered themselves together to condemnation and poured out their own blood. “Knives and lancets” is a phrase normally translated “swords and spears”. They lived out judgment upon themselves rather than Elijah needing to condemn them.

Elijah like the disciples thought that he was the judge on God's behalf, and that he was justified in calling down fire, evocative as that was of the way God Himself judges sinners. But Jesus puts it all another way- our focus, if we have His spirit, should be on saving people by getting them to destroy / lose their own fleshly lives through following Him. Jn. 12:25,26 makes the same point- he who loves his life *loses / destroys* it, but he who picks up the cross and follows Jesus will *save* it. Our absolute focus must be on the salvation of others through helping them condemn / destroy / lose themselves for the Lord's sake; and we achieve this by following Jesus in the life of the cross, not by destroying others ourselves. The Lord came to save not destroy; to save the lost / destroyed (Lk. 6:9; 19:10- the same words are used; note how this theme is developed specifically by Luke). But He did this through getting people to destroy their lives. And He begged- and begs- His followers to have His spirit / attitude in all this. And His point was that Elijah didn't have His Spirit. Note that God worked with Elijah- He heard his prayers. Elijah like the disciples had the "Spirit", the power that God was willing to let them have; and yet the Spirit of Jesus is more than raw power. And so it could be said of us, that we so often know not what manner of spirit we are of. We may be correctly reflecting the judgment of God, we may have Biblical justification for the hard line we adopt; but this doesn't mean that we fully have the spirit of Christ. Yet as with Elijah, the fact our prayers are heard, that Scripture appears to back us, can make us blind to such major insufficiencies in our spirituality. We have a choice in how we respond to others' weakness; there are different levels of response. "If thy brother sin against thee", the Lord said- we can ultimately take others with us and then treat him as a Gentile or tax collector. But He continues- if our brother sin against us, we should forgive to an unlimited extent. This is the higher level of response to your brother's weakness. Elijah and the disciples took the first of those options, as many of us do; but in doing so we so easily forget what manner of spirit we are of; for we are to be of the spirit of Christ, not Elijah. And His attitude / spirit was most definitely to save rather than to destroy, to share table fellowship rather than disassociate... The Lord Jesus purposefully inverted the common assumption that the duty of a righteous man was to condemn the sinners. When He said that there is much joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents (Lk. 15:10), the Lord was purposefully inverting the common contemporary Jewish saying that there was much joy in Heaven whenever one sinner is destroyed in judgment ⁽¹⁾. His desire is to seek to save rather than to destroy. And Elijah had not attained to this spirit of Christ when he called fire down from Heaven.

The repeated "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:13) implies that it was wrong for Elijah to have been living in the cave on Horeb / Sinai. It seems from 1 Kings 19:8 that he himself chose to go there; dwelling in a cleft / cave of the rock is reminiscent of Moses in Sinai in Ex. 34. But Moses was praying for Israel, whereas Elijah was interceding against them, Paul tells us. Could it

even be that Elijah went down there to Sinai with the idea of somehow asking that a new Israel be formed out of him, as God had offered Moses? Whether this be so or not, the clear implication is that God was not pleased with what Elijah was doing there. When asked what he was doing, he just repeats verbatim his prayer of intercession against Israel. So on one hand, he shouldn't have been praying that prayer. On the other, he was heard- for God's response is to tell him to anoint Jehu, Hazael and Elisha to destroy apostate Israel, even though He would preserve the 7,000 remnant. So again we see the same theme with Elijah- his undoubted faith in prayer is recognized; he prays for judgment on Israel in a way that is not altogether wrong, and yet sadly differs from the higher spirit of grace which there is in Christ. It is interesting to compare Elijah's attitude with how Elisha weeps tears over Hazael, knowing how much damage he is going to do to Israel in response to Elijah's prayer (2 Kings 8:12). Yet significantly, Elijah doesn't actually do what he is told; he doesn't anoint Jehu nor Hazael to destroy Israel (2 Kings 9:3). It's hard to decide whether this was disobedience or rather an awkward realization that he had been praying with too harsh a spirit for something that would have been best left to God. It's such a warning.

The idea of fire from Heaven is of course found in the Lord's teaching in Lk. 12:49-54, where He associates it with division in the brotherhood. And the Lord went on to say that the Pharisees could interpret a cloud arising in the West as a sign that rain was coming, but they could not forgive their brethren, which was what was essential (Lk. 12:54). This just has to be a reference to Elijah, who saw a cloud arising from the West as a sign of rain. The Lord is, it seems, sadly associating Elijah with the Pharisees. And yet... despite all this, Jesus likens Himself to Elijah. Jesus sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). And the context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be "received up", and "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1). And elsewhere Jesus quotes Elijah's words "Thy son liveth" (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn't separate Himself from someone who didn't have His Spirit. He simply wanted His followers to learn better from him.

Elijah prayed to God against Israel when he told Him that he alone was left faithful- i.e. he was asking God to destroy the nation now (Rom. 11:2,3). Note in passing that our essential feelings are read by the Father as prayers. Elijah's description of himself in this prayer as being very jealous / zealous for God (1 Kings 19:10,14) is an allusion of his to Phinehas, whose zeal in destroying the apostate in Israel saved the nation (Num. 25:11,13). But Elijah is praying against Israel, for their total destruction, and making only a surface level allusion back to Phinehas. And likewise, much of the unbrotherly behaviour that has divided our own community has been justified by half-baked allusions

to Biblical examples of ‘defending the faith’. God had sought to gently teach Elijah his need for others when He told Elijah to go to the widow woman in Zarephath who would “sustain thee” (1 Kings 17:9); it worked out that Elijah sustained *her*. And he must have reflected upon this. But perhaps, therefore, God’s intention was that *spiritually*, his experience with that woman would sustain *him*.

God’s response was that He had “left” 7,000 others in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. The Hebrew for “left” can imply that God had preserved potentially the 7,000- or, that there simply were 7,000 faithful right then in Israel. Yet Elijah clearly discounted them. The more God sought to teach Elijah that he really was not alone, that his view of others was far too dismissive, the more Elijah became almost bitter with God. The conversion of Israel on Carmel turned out, I suggest, a surprise for Elijah. He wasn’t expecting them to start chanting “El is Yah”, “The Lord, He is the God”. They were chanting his name- Elijah. But he turns and runs to Jezreel, and then goes out into the desert and becomes suicidal. Effectively he preferred the life of the lonely spiritual hero, with the people in apostasy; and there are many such examples of brethren who prefer a life of self-imposed exile because of the supposed errors of God’s people- no matter what good there is amongst their brethren. And actually, deny it as we may, we all have an element of this deep within us. He announces that “it is enough...take away my life” (1 Kings 19:4). “Enough” is the same Hebrew word picked up and used by the Angel- “the way is *too great* [‘enough’] for thee” (1 Kings 19:7), and he does eventually eat and not die, living life now only thanks to the provision of food by Angels, going on a 40 day wilderness journey towards Sinai. All this of course is replete with reference to Israel’s wilderness journey, during which they only survived by eating “Angel’s food”, the food provided by Angels (Ps. 78:25). And as Elijah well knew, that generation were sinful and worshipped the idols they had smuggled out of Egypt with them. To stay alive, he had to eat that food and go in that miraculously provided strength. And so he was *forced* to see the similarity between himself and rebellious Israel in the wilderness. Likewise earlier God had fed him through the medium of the unclean raven, and the unclean Gentile woman. But Elijah had had enough of these pointed digs, and he asks God to take his life away- alluding to how Jezebel wanted to do this, as if trying to pressurize God into taking away his life rather than Jezebel (1 Kings 19:4, 10).

But God wanted to teach Elijah still. He showed him that it wasn’t the big noise of the earthquake, wind and fire that was how He worked. In 1 Kings 19:20 God Almighty spoke to the man Elijah in a still [Heb. whispering] small [s.w. thin Lev. 13:30; beaten small Lev. 16:12; dwarf Lev. 21:20] voice. The awesome God of Sinai spoke in the whispering voice of a dwarf, which compared to Elijah’s loud voice. This is not only an essay in the humility of

God. It is an essay in how God so earnestly seeks to persuade His children that He works in the small, humble way. And this is contrasted with the loud, booming voice and personality of Elijah. And it isn't what God wants. Here there is a lesson for any loud mouthed, self-confident, razzamatazz way of presenting the Gospel; it just isn't to be done. For this is not how God works. And thus in 1 Kings 19:13 the question comes: "*What does thou here Elijah*"- literally the text reads: "Elijah, Elijah, Elijah". The three repeats of his name in the Hebrew text connect with the earthquake, wind and fire, and Elijah's triple repeating of the same prepared statement. In his bitterness, Elijah sought to cut himself off from all consideration of his possibility of being wrong, or sensibly dialoguing with the Father. He just repeats the same words three times, as meaninglessly as the earthquake, wind and fire. Elijah hid his face in his mantle rather than face up to the true glory of God, the true fire from Heaven. The only other time Elijah sees the glory of God he threw away his mantle- as if he finally recognized he had been shielding himself from the real reality of it so that he could seek his own glory? The glory of God is His Name and character. To face up to this, believing it rather than merely knowing it, will bring us to repentance and a real facing up to the reality that we are truly not better than anyone else, in the light of the surpassing excellence of His glory. And Elijah just didn't want to face up to it, just as we can not want to face up to the realities of what we know.

And Elijah continues his miserable self-justification. He laments in 1 Kings 19:14 that Israel had "thrown down" Yahweh's altars, perhaps pointing the contrast with the way he threw himself down in prayer to Yahweh. The same word is used in Ex. 23:24 about throwing down pagan altars. Elijah was saying that they treated Yahweh's altars as if they were pagan. But is there any evidence they ever rejected Yahweh like this? Is not Elijah imputing motives to them? Derelict altars of Yahweh- the "high places" which they were repeatedly criticized for- Elijah interpreted as thrown down. To throw them down was a good thing if done from the right motives. But Elijah was in a mindset of seeing and imagining the very worst of his brethren. 1 Kings 19:19 then goes straight on to explain Elijah's rejection as a prophet in the long term. Perhaps this comes where it does in the record to show that reason for God's rejection of Elijah as prophet was that he didn't recognize his brethren. And straight after this 1 Kings 19:20 records how Elijah responded to one who wanted to follow him but had to return home: "go back". Jesus makes an allusion here when He says that if anyone wants to follow Him but firstly must go home, then such a person is unworthy of Him. He shows by this that He expects more of us than Elijah did; He is a more demanding Lord than Elijah, precisely because He is the more gracious.

Notes

(1) Cited in William Barclay, *God's Young Church* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew's Press, 1990 ed.), p. 41.

2.2 Playing God

Elijah said that there would be no rain " but according to *my word*" (1 Kings 17:1). His faith was undoubtedly based upon being attune to the will of God and His ways of working with His people, to the extent that he knew that because the word abided in him, he could ask what he wanted and it would be heard, because he asked according to God's will. But when the time comes for rain, we read that " the word of the Lord [not Elijah's word] came to Elijah...saying...I will send rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 18:1).

When Elijah is ordered by the captain of 50 to "come down", Elijah responds by saying "let fire come down" (2 Kings 1:9,10). Elijah sees himself as the fire sent from God; he associates himself directly with God and His judgments. He hadn't learnt the lesson that God wasn't in the fire but in the small voice. The captain wanted Elijah to come down from the high hill (cp. Heaven), so Elijah calls fire to come down from Heaven. He sees himself as the fire, as God coming down. He had the wrong attitude and yet God still heard his prayers; God worked with Elijah as Elijah wanted. And so we perceive the subtleties of a man's relationship with God. Prayer may be answered, and the extent of Elijah's faith in 'commanding' the fire to come down is indeed awesome, but we may even then still be 'playing God' in a wrong way. This playing of God, this over certainty that God was behind him, led Elijah into some arrogance. We read in 1 Kings 17:13 how he asked the widow woman to *first* feed him, and *after* feed herself and her son. The Hebrew word translated "after" is that translated "last"- 'put me first and yourself last', Elijah is saying. Wasn't this arrogant? He was so sure he was manifesting God that he could demand that she put him first and herself last. But God *is* demanding, and yes He worked through Elijah. But one does get the sense that Elijah felt *he* should be put first. God can be demanding, but we don't have the same right to be upon others. 1 Kings 17:11 in Hebrew has Elijah asking the woman: 'Bring me a *handful* of bread'- and she replies that she has only a *handful* of flour (1 Kings 17:12). Yet even this is demanded of her. In passing note that her "meal in a *barrel*" (1 Kings 17:12) uses a Hebrew term which really means a pitcher. The idea is of a handful of meal in a very large container; it's an eloquent picture of her poverty, and how she was down to the last little bit of flour in a large container that was once full. And the Lord through Elijah demanded this of her, that He might save her.

In 1 Kings 21:21 Elijah simply announces to Ahab: “Behold I will bring evil upon thee...”. We expect this to be prefaced by a “Thus saith the Lord”- but Elijah was so close to God he assumed he was speaking directly from Him. And yet Elijah doesn’t repeat what God had told him to say in v. 19. Was he too familiar with God? Assuming he knew God’s will and words? But it must be said that he improves- in 2 Kings 1:6 he says that what he says is the word of Yahweh, and he repeats verbatim what he was told to say. We too know God’s word. We know the Bible text well. But this can lead to an assumption that we speak for God; that we must be right in all our attitudes and positions we adopt on issues.

One of Elijah’s problems was that because he spoke the truth, God confirmed his words; but this didn’t mean that Elijah himself was always morally acceptable to God. Thus Ahab accuses Elijah of being the one who troubles Israel, like Achan, for whose sake many of the people suffered. Elijah replies that it is Ahab who is the troubler of Israel, the Achan character. And he lived up to this, for in his days they sort to rebuild Jericho, and the curse associated with Achan came true at that time (1 Kings 16:34). Elijah’s words were justified, just as the truth we speak to those around us may be- because it is the truth of God. But this doesn’t of itself mean that we are right before God personally, nor does it mean that we can in any way presume to ‘play God’.

Another example of Elijah playing God is when he proposes the contest on Carmel- and then claims that he did all that at God’s command (1 Kings 18:36). And yet there’s no record of any such word from the Lord to him. He appears to have set it all up at his initiative- and then assumed that actually God had told him to do so and that God would respond as he expected. We can so very easily do the same. And yet- despite all that, he had undoubted faith, and God rewarded that faith, despite Elijah’s crude sarcasm about Baal being in the rest room (1 Kings 18:27). God didn’t give up working with Elijah, and Elijah still had a relationship with God. And this is how we have to see those brethren whom we perceive as arrogant and so terribly deficient in the spirit of Christ. When Elijah demands that the people chose which lord they will serve- Baal [=‘lord’] or Yahweh, he is really getting to the very crux of spirituality- for truly, there can be no halting between the two opinions of serving Baal and serving Yahweh. The Lord Jesus surely based His words of Lk. 16:13 on those of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”. So although on one hand the Lord Jesus Himself quotes Elijah’s ‘truth’ approvingly, there is evidence galore that at the very same time, Elijah’s attitudes were far from Christ-like, as we will show below. At the very same time, Elijah mocks the Baal worshippers, teasing them to shout louder, because maybe their god has gone ‘in a journey’- a Hebraism for ‘gone to the toilet’ (1 Kings 18:27). This kind of mockery and

crudeness is surely not how the Father and Son would have us act. Yet Elijah did this whilst at the same time deeply believing the fire would come down, and bringing it down by his faith. And saying other words which were alluded to with deep approval by the Lord. Elijah's mocking attitude is also shown by the way in which he demands they find him four barrels of water- on the top of a mountain, after a major three and a half year drought (1 Kings 18:33). Presumably they took the water from the sea at the bottom of the mountain- and thus Elijah's sacrifice would be offered with salt. He was strictly obedient to the requirements for sacrifice- yet amidst an abusive, self-justifying mindset. The very possession of truth can take our attention away from our need for self-examination and right attitudes towards others. In this lies one of our most subtle temptations.

2.3 Elijah And Others

Elijah purposefully set up the contest with the Baal worshippers so that he was alone against so many Baal worshippers; he rejoices almost that "ye are many" (1 Kings 18:25). He didn't invite any other worshippers of Yahweh; he was convinced that it was him against the world / the rest of the ecclesia. When we read Elijah inviting all the prophets of Baal to be gathered to Carmel, we expect him to match this by inviting the prophets of Yahweh- for we have just read that Obadiah hid 100 of them in a cave. But Elijah doesn't. He asks Ahab to call "all Israel" there- he wanted to set himself up as alone against all Israel. Elijah almost seems to have revelled in assuming *all* Israel were apostate when he met them on Carmel. " Call ye on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:24) definitely sounds as if he was setting himself up against them. And thus he asks God to make all Israel know Him (1 Kings 18:37). Elijah's hyper sensitivity to he alone being acceptable before God is perhaps shown in the way he repairs the Lord's altar and then himself builds another one (1 Kings 18:30-32). It was as if he felt some kind of guilt by association- he could only serve Yahweh on the altar of his own making. Perhaps he justified it by suspecting that the first altar has been built contrary to Mosaic law, perhaps an iron tool had been used on it...and so, Elijah had to go his own way. And how often have our brethren done this. Nothing is any good unless we ourselves are doing it; we can't be made guilty by association with the work of others whom we doubt. God tried to correct Elijah's despicability of the other prophets of the Lord. Elijah was in a cave, and was also fed bread and water- just as the other prophets were (1 Kings 18:4). And yet Elijah didn't see, or didn't want to see, that connection- after having been reminded of this experience of the other prophets, he claims that "I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:22)- he wrongly believed that all other valid prophets had been slain (1 Kings 19:10). In fact the record shows how that during Elijah's lifetime there were other prophets of Yahweh active in His

service (1 Kings 20:13,35). And yet the lesson is that God still works through the conceited, the spiritually superior, those who despise their brethren. God didn't give up on Elijah because he was like this, and neither should we give up in our relationship with such brethren.

Elijah's focus on Israel's sinfulness may have been tainted with the syndrome of pulling others down to make yourself look taller. He says repeatedly: " I have been very jealous for the Lord... *for* the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant...and I, even I only, am left" (1 Kings 19:10). It's as if he felt that his zeal [s.w. " jealous"] was in the fact they were apostate and he wasn't. His zeal for the Lord was, he reasoned, in being the only one left when they had all quit. And this basic mistake has hamstrung us- you are righteous, zealous, a defender of the Faith, if you merely hold on to a certain academic proposition of truth which others are rumoured or assumed to have apostasized from. Zeal for the Lord surely involves infinitely more than this. Elijah prayed his prayer from the cave mouth, protesting his own righteousness as he cowered before the glory of the Lord. Yet the same word occurs in Is. 2:12,13, where apostate Israel will hurl away their idols and then cower in a cleft / cave of the rock before the presence of Yahweh's glory. The connection perhaps shows that although Elijah was so proudly not an idolater, yet his pride and arrogance was essentially the same. On one hand Elijah may have gloried in the similarities between his position and that of Moses, when God's glory passed by him in the cleft of the rock; and yet Moses too was effectively being rebuked and humbled for his pride.

2-4 Elijah And Moses

When he was told to go and stand upon mount Horeb [i.e. Sinai] before the Lord, this was evidently seeking to invite him to see himself as Moses (1 Kings 19:11 = Ex. 24:12; 34:12). Consider the following parallels:

Elijah as a Type of Moses

Confronted Ahab (1 Kings 17:1)

Confronted Pharaoh (Exod. 5:1)

Fled into the wilderness fearing for his life (1 Kings 19:3)

Fled into the wilderness fearing for his life (Exod. 2:15)

Miraculously fed "...bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening..." (1 Kings 17:6)

Miraculously fed "...meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning..." (Exod. 16:8, 12)

Spoke authoritatively for the Lord in his own name (1 Kings 17:1)	Spoke authoritatively for the Lord in his own name (Deut. 5:1)
Gathered all Israel to Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:19)	Gathered all Israel to Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:17)
Combated the prophets of Ba'al (1 Kings 18:20-40)	Combated the magicians of Pharaoh (Exod. 7:8-13, 20-22; 8:1-7)
Successful in his intercession for Israel to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (1 Kings 18:36-39)	Successful in his intercession for Israel to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Exod. 32:11-14)
Elijah took twelve stones at Carmel "...according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob..." (1 Kings 18:30-32)	Moses had twelve pillars set up at Sinai "...corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel..." (Exod. 24:4)
The Lord accepted Elijah's offering by sending fire from heaven and consuming it completely. The people threw themselves down on their faces. (1 Kings 18:36-39)	The Lord accepted Moses and Aaron's offering by sending fire from heaven and consuming it completely. The people threw themselves down on their faces. (Lev. 9:22-24)
By Elijah's authority 3 000 idolatrous prophets were slain (1 Kings 18:40)	By Moses' authority 3 000 idolaters were slain (Exod. 32:25-29)
After killing the prophets of Ba'al Elijah climbed Carmel to pray. (1 Kings 18:42)	After killing the idolaters Moses climbed Sinai to pray (Exod. 32:30)
Went without food for forty days and forty nights (1 Kings 19:8)	Went without food for forty days and forty nights (Exod. 34:38; Deut. 9:9)
Elijah (re)commissioned at Horeb (=Sinai) (1 Kings 19)	Moses commissioned at Sinai (Exod. 3)

Elijah was in “the cave” on Horeb (=Sinai) when the Lord “passed by” (1 Kings 19: 9-11)	Moses was hidden “in the cleft of the rock” when the Lord passed by Sinai. (Exod. 33:21-23)
Elijah saw storm, wind, an earthquake and fire upon Horeb (=Sinai). (1 Kings 19:11-12)	Moses saw storm, wind, an earthquake and fire upon Sinai. (Exod. 19:16-20; 20:18; Deut. 4:11; 5:22-27).
Prayed that he might die. (1 Kings 19:1-4)	Prayed that he might die. (Num. 11:10-15).
The Lord brought down fire from heaven upon his enemies. (2 Kings 1:9-12)	The Lord brought down fire from heaven upon those who rebelled against him. (Num. 16; cf. Lev. 10:1-3)
Elijah parted the waters of the Jordan by striking the waters with his cloak and passed over on dry ground. (2 Kings 2:8)	Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea by stretching out his staff and passed over on dry ground. (Exod. 14:16, 21-22)
His successor was one who had served him and came to resemble him in many ways, parting the waters of the Jordan as he had. (2 Kings 2)	His successor was one who had served him and came to resemble him in many ways, parting the waters of the Jordan as he had the Red Sea. (Josh. 3)
Was taken away in the Transjordan. (2 Kings 2:9-11)	Died in the Transjordan. (Deut. 34:5)
Mysteriously translated (2 Kings 9-18)	Died mysteriously and buried in a valley, but his burial place was unknown. (Deut. 34:6)

Table based upon Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993) pp. 40-42.

The point of these similarities was that the Angel wanted Elijah to be like Moses; to pray for the peoples’ salvation, to return to the people and lead them and teach them. Moses had begged for God’s mercy for His people; but Elijah was so full of self-justification that he prayed *against* Israel. And so with us,

we are potentially led into situations where we are to discern the similarities between us and Bible characters; we are set up with opportunities to respond in a way that reflects how we have learnt the lessons from them. The way the Lord Jesus perceived this in His wilderness temptations is a great example.

3 How God Worked With Elijah

God knew all Elijah's weakness as He knows ours, and He perceives them far better than we do. And He actively worked with Elijah to bring him to a greater perception of Him. 1 Kings 21:29 has Elijah being told by God that Ahab "humbleth himself *before me*". Yet Elijah also lived a life "before the Lord" (1 Kings 17:1); it's as if God was trying to get Elijah to see himself in a similar position to Ahab. Living "before the Lord" is not only about faith in prayer and being aware of God. It's also about being contrite before our Father, aware of our own very personal spiritual desperation. And it was this humility which Elijah lacked. And the Father sought to teach him it by drawing a similarity between Elijah and the man whom he spiritually despised- Ahab. In many Christian lives, we are much more spiritual than others around us. Yet we may be lead to perceive that actually we are in essence no better than those to whom we consider ourselves so spiritually superior. When the Lord passed by, there was a whirlwind which broke "in pieces the rocks *before the Lord*" (1 Kings 19:11). Yet it was Elijah who described himself as the one who stood before the Lord- and even prided himself on this (1 Kings 17:1). He was the rock being broken in pieces by the display of God's glory. And insofar as we too meditate upon the glory of His character, the attributes outlined in, e.g., Ex. 34:4-6, we likewise will be broken men and women. The "earthquake" is the same word found in Ez. 3:12,13 about a theophany / passing of the cherubim chariot. That whole display of God's physical glory was intended to stop Elijah just repeating his prepared statement [he says the same thing 3 times]. Grasping the wonder of who God really and essentially is can and must shake us from the mediocrity of entrenched positions, of forms of expressing and understanding our faith which are mere set formulas...

The whole incident on Horeb was to make Elijah see the supremacy of the still small voice; that it is in humble, quiet service rather than fiery judgment of others that the essence of God and spirituality is to be found. But God had prepared Elijah for this earlier. Elijah had to hide by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:3) for three and a half years (Lk. 4:25,26). Elijah was characterized by wearing a hairy garment like sackcloth (2 Kings 1:8 RV). In Rev. 11:3,6 we meet another Elijah figure- also clothed in sackcloth, with the power to bring fire down from Heaven, who for three and a half years...prophesies / preaches. We would expect Elijah to have been preaching during his time hidden by

Cherith- but there is not a word of this in the record. Could it not be that the Father wishes to show us what He was then trying to teach Elijah- that the essential prophetic witness is through us being as we are, the still small voice of witness through example...? It is also significant that the triumph on Horeb involved making an offering on an altar of Yahweh which was in one of the “high places” (1 Kings 18:30)- whereas Israel were repeatedly criticized for offering on these “high places” and not in Jerusalem. Elijah even criticizes Israel for throwing down these “high places” altars of Yahweh (1 Kings 19:10,14). Surely Elijah knew that the use of the high places was not what Yahweh ideally wanted; and yet he was driven to use a high place in this way. And with us, God will work through circumstances to remove from us the crutches of mere religion, to challenge the essence of our faith and relationship with Him. The way Ezekiel had to eat unclean food and defile himself is another such example.

Elijah evidently didn't have too positive a view of anyone apart from himself- and that included faithful Obadiah. Obadiah repeatedly calls Elijah “my Lord” and describes himself as “thy servant”; but Elijah responds to this by calling Obadiah the servant of Ahab- he tells him to go and tell “thy Lord”, i.e. Ahab (1 Kings 18:7-14). Elijah is insisting that he and Obadiah have nothing in common- Obadiah serves Ahab, and he is nothing to do with Elijah. ‘Obadiah’ means ‘servant of Yahweh’- the name surely reflects very faithful parents to have called him that at the time of the Baal cult. But Elijah insists that Obadiah is really a servant of Ahab, not of Yahweh. The fact Elijah was hidden by God meant that he was forced into fellowship with the prophets of Yahweh whom Obadiah hid in a cave (1 Kings 18:4). Elijah was thus intended to see a link between Obadiah and God, and himself and the other prophets of Yahweh. But Elijah's pride didn't let himself make the connection, just as ours often doesn't. For he continued doubtful of Obadiah's sincerity, and still insisted that he alone remained a faithful prophet of Yahweh- even though Obadiah had hidden one hundred other prophets from Jezebel's persecution. Those one hundred prophets were presumably part of the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. And maybe they weren't that strong- they are set up as representative of those who will only be saved by grace, not their works (Rom. 11:4-6). But, by implication, Elijah, for all his love of Israel, did not look upon them through the eyes of grace. Elijah insisted that he alone was “left”; yet God says that He has “left” Himself the 7,000 (1 Kings 19:18). The preservation of the people of God, or ‘the truth’, can be done, and *is* done, by God Himself; yet the likes of Elijah consider that it is *they* who ‘preserve the truth’. Again, Elijah had to learn that we are all saved by grace. God will leave for and to Himself His people, without requiring the help of man. Elijah struggled with this issue of accepting others and not thinking he was the only one who could do the job right up to the end of his ministry; for he ascends to Heaven clutching his mantle, the sign of his prophetic ministry. It seems to me that he took it with

him because he felt that not even Elisha was really fit to do the job and take his place; but perhaps in what were possibly the last seconds of his mortal life, he learnt his lesson and let go of it, allowing it to fall to the earth to let another man take it up.

Admittedly Elijah was depressive, and I think God took that into account as He did with Job. Lk. 1:17 gives the Spirit's commentary upon Elijah's achievement. The "spirit and power" of Elijah had been to turn "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" and to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord". And yet Elijah felt his ministry had been a failure; that nobody had responded. And yet his achievement is used as a prototype for the later achievement of both John the Baptist and the latter day Elijah prophet. There's a great encouragement for us here. We may feel our witness, our ministry, even our life's work- be it in formal preaching, in raising children, in seeking to be the salt of the earth- has been without fruit. But actually, according to the pattern of Elijah, we may achieve far more ultimately than we realize, even if the fruits are seen after our death. What's important, as it was in Elijah's life, is the spirit and power we personally develop and set as an example; even if concretely and materially we don't achieve what we aim to in the lives of others. It was in this sense that God used Elijah, and uses us.

Circumstances Repeat

Elijah felt he was the only faithful man left in Israel. Yet 1 Kings 18:4 records how he was reminded that Obadiah had fed Yahweh's prophets in a cave with bread and water. Elijah also had been hidden in a cave and fed with bread and water. 1 Kings 17:4,9; 18:4,13 all use the same Hebrew word for feed / fed / sustain. The connection was to try to teach him his linkage with the prophets, whom he felt were still apostate. God tries to teach us things but we often fail to grasp the potential understanding made possible; be aware that He is trying! Elijah was fed by both ravens and a widow, as the prophets were fed by Obadiah. The raven and the Gentile widow woman were both 'commanded' [s.w.] to feed Elijah by God. Both would have been seen by him as unclean. God repeatedly tried to teach Elijah that true spirituality is about doing what is counter-instinctive in terms of personal self-control- rather than about blasting others for their apostasy, hard words when provoked, etc. Hence God begins by making Elijah's very life depend upon being fed by unclean birds bringing him food. Those ravens had to avoid bringing him dead meat- which is their usual food. They had to surrender their food to him, when there was little food around; and they had to come up to a man and give him their food, all of which was counter-instinctive for ravens. And thus Elijah was shown that life itself, especially spiritual life, depends upon counter-instinctive behaviour.

The woman “gathering sticks” (1 Kings 17:10) would likely have stimulated his Bible-steeped mind to think of the illegal gathering of sticks in Num. 15:32,33. Later, the Angel gave Elijah cake and water (1 Kings 19:6) just as the unclean ravens and Gentile widow woman had done- to teach Elijah that God works through those people. There were two occasions in which God fed Elijah with a cake when he was hungry. Once when the widow woman baked him one (1 Kings 17:13), and once when the Angel did (1 Kings 19:6). Surely God was trying to show Elijah that He was manifested through that desperately poor, weak, sick, starving widow woman who was at the point of death from starvation. It was the same message- that God wasn’t in the earthquake and fire, but in the still small voice. And the way the woman talks about “Yahweh *thy* God”, to which Elijah responds by speaking of “Yahweh, the God of Israel”, implies that she did not even believe in Israel’s God (1 Kings 17:12,14). She didn’t even believe at that time that Elijah was a man of God (1 Kings 17:24); and so, we can conclude, the daily miracle of the meal and oil not drying up did not deeply touch her, just as the daily provision of manna did not seem to register with most of Israel in the wilderness. She even seems to have been cynical in calling him a “man of God”, because only later did she say that she really believe he was this (1 Kings 17:18, 24).

But this was all to teach him that God works not only with the clean, and not only with those in covenant with Him. And he was being paralleled with an apostate Israel, who were also sustained by food ‘commanded’ by God (s.w. Neh. 9:21); the brook is described as “dried up”, using the same word about the Red Sea drying up. Yet Elijah felt himself to be so superior to Israel generally. But God was trying to teach him that in essence, he wasn’t. We have shown earlier that God sought to again show Elijah the same lesson when he went into the Sinai wilderness and was fed by an Angel. Perhaps he did learn the lesson when he says that he felt that he was not better than the Jewish fathers? For they walked 40 years as he walked 40 days in the very same place, also fed by Angels. God told Elijah that He had commanded unclean ravens to feed him (1 Kings 18:4); and thus He reminded Elijah of a basic fact, that God speaks to even unclean animals (Gen. 1:22; Job). Elijah likely considered that the fact God spoke to him meant that he must therefore have some automatic superiority over others. But not so. It’s the same with us. We can consider that because we have heard God’s true voice, we thereby are justified before Him. But He speaks to and uses all, clean and unclean.

Another example of circumstances repeating is found in 1 Kings 19:8, where he goes in the strength of a little food just as the widow’s flour didn’t run out. He is being paralleled with the Gentile widow woman- either to reinforce the lesson taught, or because he had failed to learn the lesson that he truly was no better in essence than a Gentile woman. One wonders whether he not only

despised Gentiles but women too...hence the way God sought to teach him the parallel between himself and that woman.

Taking this line of thought further, it's apparent that God 'set up' Elijah's experience at Horeb / Sinai to compare *and contrast* with that of Moses. There are so many intended similarities between Elijah's meeting God at Horeb and Moses' meetings with God at Sinai- the same place, it seems. In both records it is called "the mount of God" (Ex. 3:1; 18:5; 24:13); there was a journey through the desert both before and after the meeting; the use of the number forty (Ex. 34:28; Num. 14:34 cp. 1 Kings 19:8); miraculous provision of food by God; an accompanying Angel; a cave, standing on a rock, Yahweh passing by, covering the face (Ex. 33:21-23; 34:5,6), earthquake, wind and fire (Ex. 19). Moses met with God there, and received the words of God. Elijah was all set up for the same. But it doesn't happen. Yahweh Himself doesn't appear; and instead of words of command, there is a deafening silence- for I understand the "still small voice" to actually be silence, and that silence was in itself a voice / word to Elijah. And then when God finally does say something, it is simply: "What are you doing here, Elijah?". Surely Elijah saw himself as Moses, and was looking forward to being given a covenant, and seeing a special manifestation of Yahweh. But instead, silence. No appearance of God, and finally, the great anticlimax of being asked what exactly he's doing there. The similarities with the Moses history were arranged by God, but surely they played along with Elijah's assumption that he was the next Moses. Perhaps he idolized Moses, as men today idolize heroes, e.g. from earlier days of their denomination. Elijah was being taught that actually, he was not Moses; God had no such message or covenant or special revelation to give him. And there is a type of believer who needs this same lesson; that God speaks through silence and insignificance to us. We are to be ourselves, and not to ever seek to replicate the experiences or spiritual path of faithful men who have gone before us. Such desires are really a running away from our personal responsibilities.

4 Elijah And Angels

In achieving all these things with Elijah, God worked through His Angels. When Elijah introduces himself as being a man who stood 'before the Lord' (1 Kings 17:1), he used a phrase which is very often, if not normally, applied to standing before an Angel- Gen. 18:22; 19:27; Ex. 14:19; 17:6; Dt. 4:10; Ps. 106:23; Zech. 3:1,3. Elijah sensed his Angel always before him and lived life as if in the Angel's presence as we should. He assured Obadiah that he was really telling him the truth, because Yahweh of Hosts (Angels) is real, and he stood before those Angels (1 Kings 18:15). A sense of Angelic presence and observation will likewise inspire us to transparent lives, seeing that "thou God seest me" too. Angels also stand before the Lord (1 Kings 22:21; 2 Chron.

18:20), as we stand before the Lord in standing before them; they are our representatives in the court of Heaven. In this sense, therefore, our Angels behold the face of our Father, as do those of the “little ones” in the ecclesia or in our lives. Therefore to turn our faces away from the little ones is to make a breach between our attitude and God’s. For their Angels who represent them are constantly before the presence of God Himself in Heaven.

The Mantle Of Elijah

In 1 Kings 19:11 the Angel tells Elijah to actually go and stand before the Lord and learn what it really meant; so he had to literally stand before the Angel as He passed by. Yet Elijah hid his face; he was no longer so happy to be before the Lord once he realized the humility and breaking in pieces of a proud man’s spirit that it really implies. So (1 Kings 19:13) he wrapped *his face* [s.w. “before” the Lord] in his mantle and “stood” [s.w. ‘stand’ before the Lord] in the cave mouth before the Angel. In Hebrew, the words for ‘face’ and ‘before’ are the same. Too ashamed to really stand before the Lord, Elijah therefore wrapped his face. Earlier, he had been so keen to use this phrase of himself (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15); he had prided himself on the fact that he stood before the Lord. But now he hid his face, a common idiom often used by God for withholding fellowship. The fact we too are God’s covenant people can initially be a source of pride to us as we do our theological gladiatorship with others. But the implications are so far deeper; and through Angelic work in our lives, we too are brought to see this. The word for “Mantle” is translated “glory” in Zech. 11:3; Elijah wrapped his presence in his own glory, rather than face up to the implications of God’s glory. A desire for our own glory prevents us perceiving God’s glory. Perhaps Elijah was being pseudo-humble, misquoting to himself a Biblical precedent in all this, namely that the cherubim wrapped their faces (Is. 6:2). In this case. Elijah was doing a false impersonation of the cherubim, manifesting himself before God’s manifestation of Himself. Only at the very end does Elijah cast away his mantle (2 Kings 2:13), his human strength, allowing himself to merge with God’s glory. He should have cast away his mantle earlier, when he stood before the still small voice on Horeb. The question of 1 Kings 19:13 “Why are you still here, Elijah?” may imply that Elijah should have allowed himself to be carried away by the cherubim, he should have surrendered himself to the progress of God’s glory, rather than so obsessively insist upon his own personal rightness and the wrongness of others. And this was why God’s ultimate response to Elijah’s attitude on Horeb was to dismiss him from his prophetic ministry and instate Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19:16). Elijah seems to have finally learnt his lesson, for he calls Elisha to the ministry by ‘passing by’ Elisha as in a theophany, taking off his mantle and throwing it upon Elisha (1 Kings 19:19). He realized that he had hidden behind that mantle, using it to resist participating in the selfless association with God’s glory [rather than his own]

to which he was called. But he got there in the end; hence the enormous significance of Elijah giving up his mantle when he finally ascends to Heaven in the cherubim chariot (2 Kings 2:13).

We read that whilst in the cave, “the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What does thou here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9). This personification of “the word of the Lord” surely refers to an Angel who spoke to Elijah. When we read that the Lord was not in the fire etc., but was in the “still small voice”, perhaps the idea is that the Angel was not visible in the fire, earthquake, wind etc.- but He simply stood there at the end in front of Elijah and quietly spoke to him. The Angel, in a magnificent manifestation of the ‘humility’ of God, was quietly spoken and calm (“still”). The Angel was inviting Elijah to be like Him, to be God manifest by following the pattern of his guardian Angel.

It could be that after the triumph on Carmel, there had been another vision of God’s glory in order to humble Elijah. I say this on the basis that the description of the cloud in 1 Kings 18:44 “like a man’s hand” recalls “the likeness of a man’s hand” under the cherubim in Ezekiel’s visions. Clouds and rain are invariably part of theophanies. Elijah spoke of how, by faith, he heard “the feet of rain” (1 Kings 18:41 LXX), as if he believed that the Angels were coming with rain. Perhaps Elijah therefore told Ahab “prepare *thy* chariot” and ride with the rain- i.e. ‘be part of the vision of glory / cherubim chariots on the ground as it passes overhead’. This was the point of Ezekiel’s vision; Israel were to reflect the Cherubim on earth, just As David moved in step with the Spirit / the sound of marching in the mulberry trees. Therefore in 1 Kings 19:42 when in the face of all this, Elijah places his face between knees, he may be doing the same thing as when he hides his face in the mantle. He sensed the glory of God near him but didn’t want to face up to it personally. He didn’t want to become part of the Cherubic vision of glory, even though he advised Ahab to do so. We must identify ourselves with the vision of God’s glory, and face up to the life-changing implications of it. Elijah ultimately did this, although it took him a lifetime- he was caught up in another cherubic vision and threw away his mantle and became part of the vision of glory; and hence he was called “the chariot of Israel and the [great] horseman thereof” [reading “horsemen” as an intensive plural]. The chariots and horsemen of God appeared; and Elisha perceived that Elijah had finally become identified with them. For Elisha sees them and then describes Elijah as being them- the chariot and horseman of Israel (2 Kings 2:11,12). Finally, Elijah became part of God’s glory; He merged into it rather than resisting it for the sake of his *own* glory. He was the charioteer of the cherubim; for his prayers had controlled their direction. This identification of ourselves with God’s glory, this losing of ourselves and our own insistence upon our rightness, and our focus on others’ wrongness...this is the end result of our lives if they are lived out after the pattern of Elijah’s.

Elijah And Us

Elijah's example clearly influenced Elisha, both in the nature of the miracles which he performed, and in how when Elisha died, he was likewise seen as "My father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings 13:14). How Elisha related to Elijah, was how people came to relate to Elisha. This is not only a neat cameo of the immense personal influence which we have upon each other; it reflects how Elisha learnt the lesson from Elijah, which we too must learn, of freely and totally absorbing ourselves in the progress of God's Angelic, cherubic work to bring about *His* glory and not our own.

Elijah was a "man of like passions" with us, James says. Contrary to how Judaism perceived him, Elijah is set up as truly our example. Elijah like Moses was seen in very exalted terms by the Jews of Christ's day. Yet He invites the disciples to see themselves as Elijah, when He comments that they "will not taste of death" until they have seen Him in His glory- a clear reference, in the context, to the appearance of Christ in glory at the transfiguration, along with Elijah. Those who did not "taste of death" "is an expression from the world of Jewish apocalyptic where it refers to men who have been removed from the earth without dying, especially... Elijah"(1). Yet the Lord applies this well known reference to Elijah to all His followers.

Notes

(1) Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering The Teaching Of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) p. 19.

Jonah

12.1 Jonah: A Type Of Christ

The prophecies of the crucifixion often draw on the language of Jonah, for clearly Jonah was a type of Christ. The following notes on the book are based on the fact that on the Lord's own authority, Jonah being in the whale represented him being in the tomb. The whale died; it vomited Jonah onto dry land, not into the surf breaking on the shore. It vomited up Jonah in its death throes. The beached whale died once Jonah had been ejected; pointing forward to how the grave was destroyed by the Lord's resurrection.

The sailors who threw Jonah to his figurative 'death' must represent Pilate in their unwillingness to be guilty of innocent blood (Jon. 1:14); yet they also seem to have been Jews, from their use of the covenant name and sacrificing to Him after the sea calmed (Jon. 1:14,16). Seeing the ship left from a Jewish port, it is not unreasonable to think that the sailors were Jews. Yet they also believed in the pagan gods (Jon. 1:5), suggesting they were apostate Jews- the type who crucified the Lord.

Jonah's prayer to God is packed with allusions to the Psalms and Lamentations- it appears to have more connections with other Scriptures than almost any other Bible passage. This for one thing indicates the spiritual mindedness of Jonah which was required for one who would so accurately typify the Lord. If Jonah's mind was so full of the word in his sufferings, our Lord's was even more so. It also indicates that his refusal to go to Nineveh was not just rank disobedience to God, but rather an unwillingness to give Assyria a chance to repent- he wanted to see God's glory executed in her judgment. Likewise Jesus must have been tempted to disregard the calling he had received to preach, especially in connection with the Gentiles. But he was able to reflect that " (unlike Jonah) I was not rebellious, neither turned away back" (Is. 50:5).

" All thy billows and thy waves passed over me" (Jon. 2:3 cp. Ps. 42:7) perhaps indicates a throbbing sense of continuous waves of opposition- seen in the different groups of people coming up to the cross to hurl their abuse, as well as in the throb of pain due to the posture of crucifixion.

" I will look again unto thy holy temple" (2:4) is quoting the words of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, that Israel in their sin and dispersion could always pray towards the temple and be heard. So firm was Jonah's belief in this that even inside a whale somewhere in the Mediterranean he knew that it applied to him. Likewise our Lord took upon himself the curses of Israel, and also prayed as no man has ever done toward the Heavenly temple.

" The depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head" (2:5). These feelings of gradual suffocation, loss of vision and control of the head, all echo the crucifixion situation. " My soul fainted within me" (2:7) indicates Jonah's tremendous fear of death, which our Lord, as any man, also shared.

It took Jonah three days to walk through Nineveh (3:3). On the first day in the city, he told them that in 40 days God would destroy them (3:4); it follows that by the time he was in the middle of the city he was telling them that they had 37 days left. So too the Jews had between 37 and 40 years notice of the destruction of Jerusalem. It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did ⁽¹⁾. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that " the judge standeth before the door" . What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

Notes

(1) See Dudley Fifield, 'Jonah and the Ninevites', *The Testimony*, Vol. 54 (1984) p.112 for an excellent devotional study of the Ninevites.

2 The Preaching Of Jonah

Reluctance To Preach

Jonah had initially been told to “cry” over Nineveh (1:2). He ran away from this commission, and yet he ended up in the whale of the belly using the very same Hebrew word- this time, to describe how he “cried by reason of mine affliction” (2:2). The same word is translated “preach” in 3:2; Jonah ‘preached’ by reason of his affliction. He realized that it was his “affliction” which led him to “cry” in any case. We are each called to witness; and there is no way out. That witness flows out of our deeply personal experiences. If we won’t make that witness, then God will work in our lives to bring us to a position where we have no choice but to do so. This was how the Lord worked with the family of Lazarus. The Jews had commanded “that if any man knew where he was, he should shew it” (Jn. 11:57). And “Jesus *therefore*...came to Bethany” (Jn. 12:1 RV). He purposefully attracted attention to His connection with the Bethany home. And so it was that “much people of the Jews learned that he was there” (Jn. 12:9), and the context makes it clear that this was a source of witness to them (Jn. 12:10,11). The Lord sought to expose their secret discipleship, to take the bucket off their candle. And He will do likewise with us. Jonah is of course the great example. He refused to “cry” the message of repentance to Nineveh; he wanted to be an incognito prophet. But an incognito prophet is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron. So the Lord brought about a situation in which he desperately “cried” to God; and then told him to go and “cry” to Nineveh. The very same Hebrew words are used about his crying to God and his crying / proclamation to Nineveh (Jonah 1:2; 2:2; 3:2,4). Jonah was forced by circumstance to share his relationship with God with the world around him which he despised. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this.

Jonah perhaps didn’t want to preach to Nineveh because the contemporary prophets, Hosea and Amos, had predicted that Israel would go into captivity there (Am. 5:27; Hos. 11:5-7). Jonah, like many conservative Christians today, didn’t want to entertain the notion that God’s word can be changeable, so sensitive is He to human repentance. And out of all the prophets, Jonah had to learn that this is not the case; for he pronounced an unconditional doom on Nineveh, which did in fact change because of their repentance. He didn’t somehow want God to be that sensitive to human repentance; and he was therefore led through his own failures to realize that grace means that God does ‘repent’ in response to human repentance. And further; Jonah evidently didn’t want Israel to go into captivity to Nineveh. He just wanted to cut out of his mind the possibility that Israel would go to Nineveh; and he lived this out, by refusing to go there himself. Yet he was brought to see that owning up to sin

simply has to be done; he simply had to go to Nineveh. Refusal to face up to the result of our sin is a very real problem for us all.

So strongly did Jonah feel this that he effectively wished to resign from being a prophet. “He fled ‘from the presence of the LORD.’ To stand in the presence of someone is often used in the sense of acting as one’s official minister. (Cp. Gen. 41:46; Deut. 1:38; 10:8; 1 Sam. 16:21f.; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kings 3:14, etc.) To flee from His presence = to refuse to serve Him in this office” (1). But there is no way we can resign from our calling to be witnesses. We are now with the Lord, and we cannot just resign from His purpose and calling. Jonah intended to flee to Tarshish, the very end of the known world; going the very opposite direction to Nineveh. And we too need to be impressed by the reality of the fact that we can never resign from the Father and Son; we are in their grip. We cannot just ‘pass’ on the piercing issues of commitment day by day.

But Jonah got there in the end. Finally, as God intends for each of us, he got to a position where he was preaching with the spirit which God intended. Jonah wrote the book of Jonah. His prayer of Jonah 2 was uttered within the belly of the fish; yet it is praise for deliverance, full of careful allusions to the Psalms and organized as a poem. It seems unlikely that he composed it whilst in the fish, but rather that these were his basic thoughts whilst there, which he later wrote up as a poem.

The Repentances And Preaching Of Jonah

Jonah is described as going progressively ‘down’- down into the ship, down into the hold of the ship, and then down into the depths of the sea (1:3,5; 2:6). Yet he was brought up from it. This was the depth of his degradation. Jonah was like Nineveh- the “wickedness” of Nineveh (1:2; 3:8) is the same word used in 4:1 Jonah was displeased “exceedingly”, i.e. ‘wickedly’. Their wickedness was paralleled with the wickedness of his hard heartedness towards them. When the sailors awoke him with the words “Get up and call ...”, they were using the very words which God had used perhaps just days earlier to call him with. We can’t escape the call- God will repeat it to us through life’s circumstances, even through our very efforts to avoid the call. The obvious lesson is to willingly and in love respond to the calls we receive, rather than go through the agonies of seeking to avoid them. Jonah’s response: “I am an Hebrew...” was basically his response to God...he didn’t want to give Nineveh a chance of salvation because he was a patriotic Jew. Perhaps as soon as he uttered the words, he realized what God was doing to him...

It was his repentant spirit which had been the power behind his conversion of Nineveh; Jonah had been through what was threatened to come upon the

Ninevites, had repented, and was alive to tell the tale. He had been cast into the sea (2:5), a figure elsewhere used in Scripture to describe condemnation and the destruction of sin (Ex. 15:4; Mic. 7:19; Zech. 9:4; Mk. 9:42; Rev. 8:8; 18:21). He had cast himself into the sea voluntarily, realizing his worthiness of condemnation. He fled from the presence of God- which is exactly the language of the rejected fleeing from God's presence at the last day. He realized that he had lived out his own self-condemnation. He recognized "I am cast out of thy sight" (2:4), the very language of condemnation used at his time (1 Kings 9:7; 2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15). He seems to have drowned and then been swallowed by the whale, in whose belly he then resurrected (2:5; and this is the whole point of the Lord's allusion to Jonah as a type of His resurrection). He was condemned; but saved by grace. And this was exactly the position of Nineveh. Their condemnation had been pronounced. Only grace could change it.

Jonah's conversion of 120,000 people is probably the greatest record of conversion for any single handed preacher. The same realizations are required of any successful preacher; that he too has sinned, is worthy of condemnation, has in fact been condemned but has been saved from it; and now seeks to witness to those still in his position. This, it seems to me, was what the Lord Jesus was referring to when He spoke of the sign of the prophet Jonah. The sign to Jesus' generation was not just His resurrection after three days- for most people never actually saw Him. The sign was His compelling witness to the world through His church. The Ninevites were ignorant of God's ways (4:11), but this didn't mean they were not culpable to judgment. The sheer tragedy of the world around us who like Nineveh do not know, and yet are speeding to destruction, ought to weigh as heavily upon us as it does upon our Father. And yet like Jonah, we may prefer to see ourselves as prophets to Israel, as he was (2 Kings 14:25), operating within the comfortable environment of God's people whom we know, rather than reaching out to a distant world... If we seek to write down the actual prophetic words spoken by Jonah, they are very few. Rather, like Hosea with Gomer, he was a prophet, a teller forth of God's word, by his experience of life. This ties in to a major Biblical theme; that as the Heavens silently declare God's word, their voice unheard, as the faithful wife witnesses without words to her unbelieving husband, so the essential witness is in who we are and how we have responded to sin.

The boat was not far from land- for the sailors tried to row the boat to land. Jonah would have come ashore somewhere on the coasts of Israel. We are left to imagine him walking away up the beach from the dying whale, naked, disfigured by the acids of the whale's belly, determined to pay his vows of sharing God's grace with others, getting some clothes, gathering some money, and making his way on camel to Nineveh. In this he is our pattern. In the parable of the two sons, the Lord divides us into two groups- those who

respond to a calling to 'go' by saying they will, but don't go; and those who refuse to go but afterwards go. This is clearly an allusion to Jonah. But Jonah is thus made typical of each and every one of us.

Repentance And Preaching

Jonah says he will "look again" towards God's temple (2:4); yet the same words are used in Ps. 102:19 (and Is. 63:15) to describe how God looks from His temple to His people on earth. For a mind as familiar with the Psalms as Jonah's was, this cannot be accidental. He perceived the mutuality of His relationship with the Father; as He looked to God in His holy temple, so God was looking to Him from His temple. This is where true repentance and renewed devotion lead- to a wonderful mutuality between a man and his God.

When Jonah recognizes that his life has been brought up from "corruption" (2:6), his mind may again be in the Psalms; for we have seen how very often he is alluding to them. Ps. 9:15 says that the Gentiles are "sunk down" into "the pit" [s.w. "corruption" in Jon. 2:6]. Jonah is perceiving that he is sharing what was to happen to the Gentiles; he too had sunk down [drowning language!] into the same pit as they had. And so it was on this basis that, once delivered, he was able to so powerfully appeal to them. For he had grasped the simple fact that he had been in just their position, and yet had been saved by grace; and he needed to share this wonderful news with them. Likewise Ps. 55:23 speaks of the wicked, those who had 'broken the covenant' which Jonah was so proud to be part of, being 'brought down' into "destruction"; and these very same two Hebrew words occur together in Jonah 2:6. They also occur together in Ez. 28:8, speaking of how the Gentile king of Tyre was to be 'brought down' to "the pit". This would have been the sort of prophecy which nationalistic Jonah would have loved to hear; but now he recognized that he was essentially like a wicked Gentile, and had shared their condemnation- but been graciously saved from it. The preaching of Jonah is surely our example.

In 1:12 Jonah asks the sailors to "take me up"- the Hebrew means 'to lift up' in the sense of exaltation; the very idea used by the Lord to describe His exaltation and 'lifting up' on the cross. The language of Jonah suffering in the whale and drowning in "great waters" is full of allusions to Messianic Psalms which point forward to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus- and His saving out of it in resurrection. Yet Jonah was suffering for his sins, as it appears David was when he wrote Psalms like Ps. 23 and Ps. 69, evidently prophetic as they are of the crucifixion. What is the point here? Surely that in suffering for sin, in grappling at close quarters with the reality of our sins and the result of them, in realizing our own desperation and urgency of need for salvation, we find ourselves drawn closer to the spirit of our Lord in His time of dying. And in perhaps the finest and most complex of all paradoxes, it is that feeling of being

‘lifted up’ with Him in crucifixion which is also related to our ‘lifting up’ in exaltation with Him. And further; in probing *why* the Lord suffered as He did, He who never once sinned, we stumble towards some kind of an answer: He suffered as He did in order to be able to know the feelings of the sinner, even though He Himself never sinned. Repented sin in this sense need not separate us from God, therefore, but rather it brings us closer to our Lord.

When Jonah heard the men of Nineveh praying that they ‘might not perish’, he should’ve thought back to how the men in the boat to Tarshish prayed the very same words. The men in the ship prayed earnestly that they ‘might not perish’, both in the storm and for the sake of Jonah’s life (1:6,14). The men of Nineveh prayed to God that they too ‘might not perish’ (3:9)- the record uses the same Hebrew word in both cases. Jonah should’ve learnt his lesson; the men in the ship didn’t perish because of his self-sacrifice- and the implication could be that they turned to Israel’s God as a result of the whole dreadful experience. And Jonah’s self-sacrificial preaching, just as painful for him as voluntarily suggesting he be thrown to his death, was eliciting in Jonah the same response from those he was preaching to. But he couldn’t maintain the intensity of the self-sacrificial life of witness; he gave up and got angry that they were responding, and, it seems, stopped preaching once he had entered into the city and the response had started. Take another lesson from this; we would likely have been inspired to continue preaching by such a good response. But for Jonah, the response was what discouraged him. What is encouraging for one in the work of witness is a great discouragement for another.

In summary, there was real bridge building between Jonah and his audience on the basis that he had sinned and been saved by grace, just like them. The resultant mutuality between Jonah and his converts is further brought out by bearing in mind that the word used about Jonah ‘preaching’ to Nineveh is that used about their ‘proclaiming’ a fast in response (3:4,5). His ‘crying out’ to them elicited a crying out in them. They ‘cried unto God’ (3:8) just as Jonah had done in the whale (2:2). Likewise the king of Nineveh “arose” in response to the word he heard, just as Jonah ‘arose’ and obeyed the word which he heard (3:3,6). The preaching of Jonah is surely our example.

Notes

(1) Theodore Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 222.

3 Jonah And The Gourd

This incident was to make Jonah understand how God valued Nineveh. God had made each of the Ninevites to “grow” (4:10,11), just as He had made the gourd grow (4:6). Jonah was so grateful for the gourd; he valued it. And this was to show him God’s value of Nineveh. Yet Jonah was angry with the worm, who had made the gourd perish. The perishing of Nineveh (3:9) and the perishing of the gourd (4:10) are clearly parallel. He was being led to realize who he really was- a worm, who unthinkingly had sought to fell and cause to perish a wonderful and beautiful part of God’s creation. Jonah’s anger that Nineveh had been preserved is set against his anger that the gourd had perished. He was being shown that he was not in step with God’s thinking / Spirit here. If Nineveh had perished, God would have been angry and sad and depressed, just as Jonah felt on the perishing of the gourd. This was the whole purpose of the gourd incident, and it is the purpose of many incidents in our lives- to show us how God feels. Jonah was angry that Nineveh had been preserved, when instead he should have been angry if it had perished. His anger, his feelings, were not in step with God’s. And the gourd incident beautifully brought this out to him.

Jonah “fainted” as a result of the gourd perishing, just as he “fainted” [s.w.] when he refused to preach to Nineveh initially (2:7; 4:8). Circumstances so often repeat in the lives of God’s people, and this is in order to seek to teach us something. It seems that Jonah only preached on the outskirts of Nineveh and then gave up; for it was only word of his message that reached the King (3:3,4). Jonah couldn’t maintain the intensity; he wilted as the gourd did. He couldn’t maintain a sense of God’s grace, of His tremendous desire to save, and his motivation waned. And so, circumstances repeated. His half hearted preaching was like his refusal to preach; and he fainted as a result of each of these things.

Sharing Heaven’s Joy

As thousands of people repented, there was joy in Heaven. But there was sadness on earth, because Jonah would not walk in step with the Spirit, reflecting Heaven’s joy on earth. Right at the start, he had been told to go to Nineveh because “their wickedness is come up before me” (1:2). This was exactly the language of Sodom, to whom Angels had been sent, as Jonah was now being sent. Note how both Sodom and Nineveh were to be “overthrown” (Gen. 19:21,25,29) as Nineveh was. The implication was surely that he would be walking in step with an Angel in going to Nineveh. But he fled from the presence of the Lord (1:3)- perhaps a reference to a literal Angel who appeared to him. Another likely possibility is that the presence of the Lord refers to

Jonah's own conscience. For whenever the Lord touches our conscience with the call of the need of others, we are in His presence. Jonah knew his Bible well; his poem is absolutely full of references to the Psalms. And yet Ps. 139 had clearly stated that we cannot flee anywhere from God's presence; for even in the deep sea, He will find us. Jonah knew this; and yet he didn't know it. He had to learn what this meant in practice. And so, incident by incident, blow by blow, our theoretical knowledge is turned into flesh, into reality for us; for the same God who worked *so* hard in Jonah's life is at work in ours.

Our community has failed tragically in this, in the same way as Jonah did. This is the lesson of Jonah and the gourd. Let's imagine a brother we dislike or another fellowship makes a convert in China. Or anywhere. What should our response be? I get the impression from some that the response would be anger and sadness, because 'they' are 'getting a foothold there!'. But look at this from God's perspective. There is *joy* in Heaven over one sinner who repents. We should share that joy. Phil. 1:17,18 RV are directly relevant. Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached, even if the motive was "faction" . I have to assume that each of my brothers and sisters is preaching Christ from a pure motive. I wouldn't dare impute any other motives to any preacher amongst us. But *even if* it happens they are preaching from a motive of what Paul calls faction, then, what should our response be? To *rejoice!*

Nineveh repented; thousands repented, and there must have been a party of joy in Heaven! But on earth, God's preacher, Jonah- didn't share Heaven's joy. He was angry. He didn't walk in step with the spirit. He didn't reflect Heaven's joy on earth. The Lord said: " Is your eye evil [i.e. are you clouded by a mean spirited feeling], because I am good?" . We are all prone to this; to respond to God's grace by being evil-eyed, by our worldview, our " eye" , becoming narrower and clouded because of the extravagance of His grace. By these comments I do not in any way underestimate the sadness and urgency of resolving divisions in the body of Christ; but we must remember that all true Christians who are in the one body preach, by that token, the same true Gospel. Their baptisms are valid- so, we can rejoice. For who, after all, is Paul or Apollos, or Steve Z or Steve A, or Andy A or Andy Z, or any of us, but ministers. The essence is Christ.

Jonah didn't share Heaven's joy. He was angry. He didn't walk in step with the spirit. It is apparent from the lesson of the gourd, and God's final approval of Nineveh's repentance, that His motive in asking Jonah to preach judgment to come upon Nineveh was because God wanted their repentance. Jonah's initial response had been to refuse to preach, because He feared God's grace might incorporate them too (4:2). We need to probe the motives for our reticence in not preaching as we might. It's too easy to excuse it as our personal shyness.

Can there not be a sense in us too that we actually don't want our potential audiences to share in God's grace, even though we may not express this to ourselves directly? And another lesson arises for our preaching. It was God's intention, surely, that an upfront confrontation of Nineveh with their sins and the reality of God's coming judgment *if proclaimed with love in the heart and a sense of our own unworthiness* would bring about their conversion. We must ask whether we have perceived this in our approach to preaching.

The Meaning Of Persons

“Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than 120,000 persons” (4:11) reflects the tremendous value that God places upon people. The greatness of the city was the basis for His feeling of compassion, His desire that they would not perish [although they were worthy of it] and come to repentance. This enables us to read 1:2 in a somewhat different light: “Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against”. When God described Nineveh as a “great city”, the very fact of its size elicited a desire to spare it. And of course we meet the same phrase in Revelation (Rev. 18:21), where a condemned Babylon is described as a “great city”. This was not God gleefully preparing to destroy a huge city. He surely had Nineveh in mind when He inspired those words. This was, and will be, a God whose very heart is touched by the tragedy of sinners having to be punished, and who is open to a change of purpose if they will repent. Thus the latter day appeal to “Come out of her!”, whether we understand ‘Babylon’ as false religion, the Moslem world, the world of sinners or whoever, is rooted in God's spirit of passionate love towards Nineveh. As Jonah “cried” against Nineveh, so God ‘cries’ against Babylon (Rev. 18:2). We who make that appeal in these last days should be reflecting here on earth the mind of God in Heaven; not merely pronouncing doom and gloom against ‘Babylon’, but warning them of God's stated intentions towards them *with a heart that bleeds for them and seeks their repentance*. The heart of God Almighty responded in harmony to the hearts of the Ninevites- brought out by the repeated word play in Jonah 3:8-10, whereby the ‘turning’ of Nineveh in repentance is reflected in how God ‘turns’ and repents of what He had said He would do to them.

The Pattern Of The Preacher

In all true spiritual endeavour and genuine spiritual progress, there seems almost inevitably to be a process of two steps backward and three forward. Consider the pattern of Jonah's life:

- Encounters the presence of God

- Flees from his preaching responsibility; faints
- Saved by God's grace
- Repents and obeys the call to preach
- Loses his intensity
- God shows Jonah how He feels about Nineveh
- Jonah faints
- Repents and obeys the call to preach by writing up his poem and writing the book of Jonah.

Within the course of a few hours, we can go through the essence of this process, learning again the lesson of Jonah and the gourd. We are encountering the presence and call of God to minister every hour; for the need of the world around us is the call.

4 Jonah and Nahum

Nahum also prophesied against Nineveh. When we read his words, it would appear that there was no chance for Nineveh. And yet presumably there was always a chance for them, just as there was at Jonah's time some years previously. But it seems to me that the essential message of Nahum was that of Jonah. They could have repented, even then. Not surprisingly, we find many allusions by Nahum back to Jonah:

Nahum

God is slow to anger (1:3)

“Who can abide in the fierceness of His anger?” (1:6)

Jonah [re. Nineveh]

4:2 [same Hebrew words]- and therefore He saved Nineveh.

God turns away from “the fierceness of His anger” [s.w.] against Nineveh (3:9)- Nineveh had survived God's fierce anger by repenting, and so they could even in Nahum's time. The Hebrew word translated “abide”

in Nah. 1:6 is that used in Jonah to describe how the King of Assyria “arose” (3:6) in repentance. The answer to the question: “Who can abide / arise in the [presence of] the fierceness of His anger?” is: ‘The King of Assyria if he repents’.

The wickedness of Nineveh “came up” before God’s face (2:1)	The same words are used about Nineveh (1:2).
God was “against” Nineveh (2:13)	Same word in 1:2
Judged for “wickedness” (3:19)	Same word in 1:2; 3:8

It becomes apparent that the Ninevites of Nahum’s day are being directed back to the repentance of their city at the time of Jonah; but clearly they are also being invited to share in Jonah’s personal repentance.

Nahum

Jonah [re. Jonah]

God has His way in the storm (1:3)	Jonah’s experience in the storm
God rebukes the sea (1:4)	As God stilled the storm which Jonah was in
Who can stand before God? (1:5)	Jonah had to be ‘stood up’ [s.w.] from his hiding in the ship when fleeing from God’s presence (1:15)
The Lord is a stronghold “in the day of trouble” (1:7) to those who trust Him.	Jonah cried to God in his “affliction” [s.w. “trouble”] (2:2)

An “overrunning flood” will overtake Nineveh (1:8) “The floods...passed over [s.w. “overrunning”] Jonah (2:2); but Jonah repented and was saved. Note how the connections between Nah. 1:7,8 and Jonah 2:2 are in close proximity- surely an allusion is intended here.

Affliction (1:9)

Affliction [s.w.] (2:2)

From this it becomes apparent that Jonah is seen by God as in essentially the same position as the Ninevites. This was why his appeal to them was so strong. For he had been in just their position, in essence, yet had repented. The fact Nahum makes all these allusions to Jonah’s personal repentance indicates that they well knew the story of Jonah; and his repentance had inspired that of the audience he preached to. In these we see a very real pattern for ourselves; it is our identity with our audience, as repentant sinners ourselves, which will elicit their response.

Nahum’s message was not only a warning of judgment to come upon Nineveh. It was an appeal to Israel, that unless they repented, they would likewise perish. The appeal to Judah to “perform thy vows” (Nah. 1:15) is couched in the very same words as Jonah used in Jonah 2:9: “I will pay [s.w. perform] that which I have vowed”. Judah were being asked to be like Jonah, and not despise Nineveh, but rather appeal to her to repent.

Daniel

1 The Character Of Daniel

Reading through Daniel it is evident that we are being invited to try to enter into the character of Daniel. Our fascination with the prophecies can result in us failing to realize that a lot of information is being given about his character. Daniel always seems to me to be portrayed as actually part of the prophecies he gave; he was no fax machine just relaying God's words. He seems to be presented as representative of all those of later times who would hear the word of prophecy. It is for this reason that we are given so much insight into his character. For example, Daniel's spirit of "How long...?" is so exactly reflective of the attitude of all God's children down the years that it is hard to deny that Daniel is being framed as the representative of all the saints. Indeed, these very words are quoted in Rev. 6:10 concerning the attitude of the slain saints of the last days. Daniel's representative role is most clearly shown in the figurative death, resurrection and judgment which he receives in Dan. 10. In this Daniel is acting out the experience of each of the approved. His refusal to obey the command to worship Babylon's King is alluded to in Rev. 13:5; 14:9, which prophesy how the saints of the last days will be tested just as Daniel was, with a like miraculous deliverance. Thus Daniel seems to especially symbolize the latter day believers. The comforting "Fear not Daniel" (Dan. 10:12,19) slots in to many other instances of Angels saying these words to frightened men. Fear was part of the character of Daniel. This makes it appropriate to speculate that the latter day believers will hear the same words from the Angel who comes to gather them (and cp. Is. 35:4, which gives the same "fear not" message to the generation which sees the second coming). Again, Daniel's relationship with the Angel appears to be representative of that enjoyed by all the saints.

Gritting teeth

So there seems little doubt that Daniel is representative of the us. The character of Daniel is so similar to ours. And yet this makes the following observation hard to come to terms with: Daniel is without doubt portrayed as depressed, at odds with his surrounding world, earnestly desiring an understanding and relationship with God which seemed denied him, desperately lonely, disappointed that he was not seeing God's purpose reaching its climax. The

New Testament message of joy, hope and peace must be balanced against the typology of Daniel. It seems that our Christian thinking and perception goes in cycles; we started in the nineteenth century with the grim, hard almost Puritan attitude of British Protestantism; now we seem to have gone the other way, towards a view of God and Christian life that focuses solely on positive experience, e.g. peace, joy and hope. It may be significant that both these attitudes are related to those seen in the contemporary religious world. I'm not suggesting that we swing back to the nineteenth century; instead, what we need is a truly balanced approach.

Yet in Daniel we see not only the grim gritting of teeth of the true servant of Yahweh; we sense (rather than learn explicitly) his exaltation of spirit at the prophecies of the Kingdom. This balance of attitude is brought out by a series of allusions to Daniel which show him to be representative of all those in Christ:

1 Peter 1 (re. the saints)

Daniel

" An inheritance...reserved...for you"
(v.4)

" Thou shalt... stand in thy lot
(inheritance) at the end of the
days" (12:13)

In heaviness of spirit (v.6)

Daniel's heaviness of spirit

" The proof of your faith...is proved
by fire...unto praise and honour and
glory" (v.7 RV)

The experience of Daniel's
friends

Daniel praised, honoured and
glorified (2:6 cp. 4:37)

" Whom having not seen ye
love...now ye see him not, yet
believing, ye rejoice" (v.8)

The spirit of Daniel?

" Receiving the end of your faith,
even the salvation of your souls"
(v.9)

Cp. Daniel's assurance of
salvation (12:13)

" The prophets have *enquired* and
searched diligently...*searching*
what manner of time the spirit...did
signify" (v.10,11)

Peter was certainly writing
here with his eye on Daniel's
enquiring and diligent
searching " what manner of

time" his prophecies referred to (8:15,27; 9:2; 12:8)

" Unto whom it was revealed (in response to their enquiries) that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister...

... which things the Angels desire to look into" (v.12)

This is definitely alluding to Dan. 12:4, where Daniel is told that he cannot understand his own prophecies, but they will be understood by latter day believers to whom they will be relevant.

Angelic interest in prophecy is mainly demonstrated in Daniel.

Enthusiasm for prophecy

There is an impressive intensity in Daniel's desire to understand the prophetic word. By all means this needs to be contrasted with a Christendom growing sadly indifferent to the study of latter day prophecy. That prophecy is difficult to interpret and apparently confusing should inspire us to study it more rather than de-motivate us; Daniel was in an even worse expositional dilemma than we are, and yet this very dilemma inspired him even more to want to understand. We need to really soberly consider the force of the descriptions of Daniel's yearning to understand: " My thoughts much troubled me, and my countenance was changed in me: but (i.e. despite the trouble it gave) I kept the matter in my heart" (7:28). This suggests that it would have been easy to allow his inner turmoil to be visibly expressed in his appearance; but he kept the intellectual pain within him. Such deep *pain* at not being able to fully understand the word of prophecy needs to be contrasted with our easy indifference to finding prophecy a closed book. " I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me" (Dan. 7:15) expresses the deep physiological effects of Daniel's lack of understanding. This grief of spirit can be connected with the words of Is. 54:6, describing a woman " forsaken and *grieved in spirit* , and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused" . The same level of spiritual and emotional pain was seen in Daniel. It may be that Daniel felt his lack of understanding was somehow related to his own moral weakness (or that of his people).

" The wise shall understand"

The same deep frustration is found in 8:27: " I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; then I rose up, and did the King's business: and I was astonished at the vision, but there was none to make it understood" (RVmg.). We are

invited to imagine Daniel earnestly explaining the vision to the other priests in Babylon, and finding no one to explain it. Daniel was doing a high-flying, executive job; a job where you didn't take days off. Yet his frustration at not being able to crack open Bible prophecy made him so intellectually frustrated that he just had to take some sick leave. "Then I rose up" suggests he was bed ridden for those few days, his physical energy sapped by his vast expenditure of mental effort. *Do any of us come anywhere near to this kind of zeal?* There is reason to think that the believers of the last days will need special strength to overcome the special temptations they face; part of that strength will be given through being able to accurately understand the prophecies of the last days, so accurately that everything will just be mapped out before us ⁽¹⁾. "Knowledge shall be increased...the wise shall understand...Understand, O Son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the (understanding of the) vision" (12:4,10; 8:17). Note that "the vision" seems to be used by metonymy for "the understanding of the vision" (as in 8:26; 9:23,24; 10:14,16; 11:14; 10:1 cp. 7). Most of us, including the present writer, have fallen into the trap of thinking that we can't expect to accurately understand the pattern of events in the last days. Yet perhaps we are only finding excuse for our own lack of spiritual effort in searching the word.

It is significant that all Daniel's recorded petitions are asking God to either explain or fulfill His word. In 6:10-12 we read of Daniel making some unspecified request to Yahweh, praying facing Jerusalem; it seems fair to assume that he was asking to see the fulfilment and explanation of God's purpose with Zion. Yet there can be no doubt that Daniel was going out of his way to put his life on the line in doing this. He was fully aware of the King's decree that anyone caught praying like this was for the lions; and even more aware that he was being constantly watched to see if he towed the line or not. Most of us (and presumably most of the others in the Jewish ecclesia in Babylon) would have prayed silently, to ourselves, without opening the window to advertise the fact. Yet it seems that in Daniel's conscience, prayer to God was something which was so important that it was worth dying for. In this we see a cameo of how earnest was Daniel's desire for the understanding and fulfilment of God's word. And let's remember what we said at the outset; we really are intended to see Daniel as our example and representative. Do we really long for Messiah's coming as he did? For the restoration of Israel's kingdom, for the coming of Zion's King? The more clearly we understand the basic doctrines of the Hope of Israel, the more we daily *delight* in God's Law, the more we will capture the spirit of Daniel.

In the last days, "the wise shall understand" (12:10). Wisdom and Daniel are clearly associated, at least eight times (Dan. 1:17; 2:13,14,18,24,27,48; Ez. 28:3); as are Daniel and a desire to understand. Yet Daniel did not fully understand his latter day prophecies; "the wise shall understand" in the last

days, Daniel was comforted. In other words, there will be a 'Daniel' category in the last days who will share his wisdom, sharing the character of Daniel, and who will be given the understanding he so earnestly sought. We showed earlier that Rev. 6:10; 13:15; 14:9 describe the persecuted Christian remnant of the last days in the language of Daniel ⁽²⁾. The conclusion is that they (we?) will find strength to endure through the understanding of prophecy. Those who can't find time to do their daily readings in this era of ease will either go under- or abruptly wake up to the vital power of the word.

Clear conscience

We each have our reasons for not having the spirit and character of Daniel in our Bible searching. 'Too much else on my plate', or some such related excuse, will be the response of most. Yet Daniel was one of the highest flying Christians of all time; Prime Minister of Babylon was analogous to being President of the USA in the Middle Eastern world of those days. In the face of almost every conceivable spiritual distraction, Daniel fought hard to maintain his fine spiritual conscience through devoting himself to a love of God's word. The importance of *constantly* maintaining a clear conscience is demonstrated throughout Daniel's life. The book begins with Daniel refusing to eat the meat offered to idols; it must surely be intentional that the Spirit in Paul declares that there was nothing wrong with eating this- it was purely a matter of conscience, seeing that the pagan associations of the meat are meaningless to the true believer. Yet at sweet seventeen, the young Daniel dug his toes in, at whatever cost, to maintain his conscience; and, by implication, is commended for it.

The record reveals that Daniel went through a yo-yo pattern of being promoted into the limelight, and then (in an unrecorded manner) slipping out of the limelight into relative obscurity, from which he was promoted again. Thus in 2:48 Daniel is made Prime Minister, in the events of Chapter 3 he seems to be strangely absent, in 4:8 Daniel is brought in to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's second dream almost as an afterthought, implying he was out of the limelight; by 5:11 King Belshazzar was unaware of Daniel, but promoted him to "third ruler in the Kingdom" (5:29). Daniel was "made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers" by Nebuchadnezzar; but by the time his son was reigning, this had largely been forgotten (Dan. 5:12)- because Daniel evidently was nowhere near that job to which he'd been promoted.

Why did Daniel slip out of the limelight? Was it not for the sake of his conscience? As a member of the Jewish community, it would have been so easy for Daniel to stay where he was, reasoning that holding down a job like that would enable him to do so much for the Truth. But he realized that his personal conscience and devotion to the spiritual life must be given number one priority if he was to help his people. There is an exact correspondence between

the mind of Daniel here and the fervent believer who refuses promotion, jumps out of a career that is rubbing too strongly against the conscience... would our community featured more examples of men and women like this ⁽³⁾.

The character of Daniel refused to allow the world around him to push him into its mould; rather was his mind transformed after the mould of God's word (Rom. 12:2 J.B. Phillips). His Hebrew name, 'Daniel', was changed to 'Belteshazzar' - the prince of Bel. And yet by the time of Belshazzar ⁽⁴⁾, he was remembered as 'Daniel' - "Daniel, whom the King named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he shall shew the interpretation" (Dan. 5:12). The changing of the young men's names had clearly been an attempt to force them into the mould of Babylonian paganism. But Daniel had evidently gently insisted that he be known by his Hebrew name - 'God is / will be judge'. The record gives several examples of the Babylonians and Persians calling Daniel by his Hebrew name - Daniel (6:13,20; 7:15). This is quite some testimony - considering that they had purposefully changed his name to a pagan, Babylonian one, to make him forget his God and adopt their worldview. But he must have made it very clear that he was to be called by his Hebrew name. There are few Bible characters who use their own name so much - but Daniel is always calling himself "I, Daniel" (7:28; 8:1,15,27; 9:2; 10:2,7; 12:5). His self-perception was very clearly that he was a Hebrew, and a witness to God's justice / judgment. Daniel has much to teach the man or woman caught up in the corporate life, the engrossing pull of business, education or social contact. His self-perception was that he was not of his surrounding world, even though those around him wanted to see him as one of them. And further, God Himself frequently addresses Daniel by his name - "Daniel". Daniel realized that this was how *God* perceived him; and he wished to perceive himself as God perceived him. And he didn't show one face to the world, and one to God. He openly showed himself to the world as he perceived himself, and he perceived himself as God perceived him. We too should show no shadow self to this world, no appearance; but the person whom we essentially are, and whom God perceives us as being. His children, His witnesses, His people.

Loving the word

The book of Daniel gives the exact dates when Daniel had both his promotions and his visions. Careful analysis of the record shows how his exaltations in this life occurred at the same time as major steps forward in his own personal Bible study and spiritual growth. When Darius came to power, Daniel was made chief of the three presidents of the Kingdom, promoted from being the third ruler of the Kingdom, i.e. the *least* senior of the three (5:29-6:2). Yet in that very same first year of Darius, "I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet... and (at

that time) I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes...and whiles I was speaking..." Gabriel came to give him the prophecy of the 70 weeks (9:2-4,20). It doesn't take much imagination to picture the pressure on Daniel as Prime Minister in a new Government with a new King; probably he was the only survivor from the previous Government. Yet in the midst of this, he took time off to fast and wear sackcloth. His real enthusiasm was not for that high flying career he found himself in; rather it was for prayer, and coming to understand Jeremiah's prophecies. 'I've started a new job, I can't do my readings *every* day....I've got exams on at the moment, I can only pray briefly before meals... I've got to build up my new business, I'll just have to glance at the Bible readings for the next 6 months or so'. These are all common Christian attitudes. I have wandered close to each. The example of Daniel *mocks* each of them. " I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22).

We have suggested that Daniel chose to slip out of the limelight in the changeover from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar. Thus he was exalted under Nebuchadnezzar, but appears insignificant at the time Belshazzar sees his vision (5:11). Significantly, Daniel was blessed with a vision in the first year of Belshazzar (7:1), presumably in response to his desire for further understanding. This could imply that Daniel was blessed for his resignation by more spiritual insight. Do we see things in those terms? Do we not suspect God may compensate us materially if we resign the things of this life? Do we dream of deeper spiritual knowledge as a response to our separation from the world? Or do we write such things off as unnecessary intellectualism, fascinating for those who are into Bible study but unnecessary for our personal relationship with God?

Double life

Daniel lead a double life in this world; and he was all too painfully aware of it. No doubt this had a part to play in his depressions. He was at one stage official interpreter of the King's dreams; yet he had his own dreams, which he could not understand. He went through deep depression because of this, and then struggled up off his bed to " do the king's business" , i.e. interpret his dreams (8:16 cp. 27). This neatly highlights the duality of Daniel's life. The book of Daniel is not written in chronological order. One reason for this may be to give the sense that his visions of God's word increasingly dominated Daniel's thinking. We start off reading much information about his worldly life, interspersed with the visions; but increasingly, the emphasis is on the visions. This is not because Daniel got older, retired from political life and then had more time for visions. He seems to have had a 'career' all his life, but the implication from the way the record is put together is that the word of God progressively dominated his thinking and sense of priority.

The word of God so dominated the Lord Jesus that he became "the word...made flesh". He died as soon as he reached the necessary level of spiritual maturity; as soon as the word of God achieved the desired effect. On the cross we see him spiritually perfected, at the ultimate, highest level of spiritual maturity a human being could reach (Heb. 5:7-9). Daniel as the "Son of man", innocently thrown to the lions and miraculously delivered from death, is an evident type of the Lord Jesus. The spirit of Christ was certainly in him as a prophet (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Christ too ran the gauntlet of this worldly life, day by day, he too fought for his conscience every moment. He too, he too, he too....

Daniel As A Type Of Christ In Daniel 6

6:14 Ruler labouring not to kill a righteous man, manipulated by his own underlings = Pilate

6:17 Den of lions- den s.w. pit Is. 14:15, where it is paralleled with the grave.

6:17 Stone sealed and put on the mouth of the cave [den]. Mt. 27:66

6:17 the purpose could not be changed regarding Daniel's death- Jesus died by the determinate counsel of God, Acts 2:23

6:22 An Angel sent

6:19 'resurrection' early in the morning

6:22 Daniel not hurt because innocence found in him = Acts 2:24

6:23 Daniel taken up out of the den = resurrection and ascension, s.w. Ps. 139:8 who shall *ascend* to Heaven

6:23 no damage was found on Daniel implies they examined his body- as Lk. 24:39; 1 Jn. 1:1

6:25,26 decree = great commission to spread the knowledge of God's Kingdom which we must fulfill after the Lord's resurrection.

Notes

(1) These reasons are presented in *The Last Days* pp.192,281.

(2) In no spirit of glib suggestion do I conclude from many Scriptures that the ecclesia will almost certainly go through a period of persecution in the last days. See *The Last Days* pp.144-182.

(3) Real life examples of this will be found chronicled in Robert Roberts, *My Days And My Ways*.

(4) Note how the names 'Belshazzar' and 'Belteshazzar' are almost identical in Chaldee. Is it possible that Daniel could have been prince of Babylon? For the name means 'He whom Bel makes prince'. He came very near to being the leader of Babylon several times. If 'Belshazzar' is simply a title for the King of Babylon, is it not possible that Daniel like Moses *could* have been the most powerful man in the world- yet always pulled away from the possibility, just as the Lord did in the wilderness?

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