

# JOB and the PATRIARCHS

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## Chapter 1: THE ABRAHAM FAMILY

### 1.1 The Abraham Family

#### Repetition in the record

Throughout the records of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his children there is continual repetition in the manner in which the record is written. This repetition is of both experiences (e.g. lying concerning their wives: 12:13; 20:3,13; 26:7) and of the language used to describe those experiences. Gen.39:1- 8 provides an example of this: " Joseph was brought down to Egypt...the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither...down to Egypt" (37:25). " The Lord was with Joseph...and his master saw that the Lord was with him" . " His master the Egyptian...his master" . " Joseph...was a prosperous man...the Lord made all that he did to prosper" . Potiphar " made him overseer over his house...from the time that he had made him overseer in his house" . " All that he had he put into his hand...over all that he had...the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had...he left all that he had in Joseph's hand" . " His hand...into his hand...Joseph's hand...to my hand" . This kind of linguistic device suggests that the Spirit in Genesis is inviting us to observe the development of theme and to note emphasis. The above example from Joseph's life is one of many such sets of evidence.

The repetition of certain descriptions and common experiences in the lives of Abraham's family members is to enable us to build up a very clear picture of what they were like as people. We are being enabled to get to know them as a family. This is necessary for us if we are to realistically obey the New Testament commands to see Abraham and the patriarchs as our spiritual fathers, to model our daily walk upon them, to see in them the examples which should dominate our lives and thinking. The way the record repeats their similar experiences reveals certain family traits; the majority of which are *negative* . This takes some appreciating.

#### Lifting Up The Eyes

The Hebrew phrase "to lift up the eyes" is used very extensively about the Abraham family. Most Bible characters have the term used at most once or twice about them; but the Genesis record emphasizes this characteristic of this family. It's as if we're being bidden to really visualize them as a family, and to enable this we're even given an insight into their body language. Consider the emphasis on the way this family had of lifting up their eyes:

Lot lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:10)

Abraham lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:14)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and noticed the Angels (Gen. 18:2)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place of sacrifice (Gen. 22:4)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the ram caught (Gen. 22:13)

Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw camels coming on which Rebekah was riding (Gen. 24:63)

Rebekah, as part of a marriage made in Heaven, lifted up *her* eyes and saw Isaac at the same moment (Gen. 24:64)

Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw the vision of the speckled cattle (twice recorded- Gen. 31:10,12)

Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw Esau coming (Gen. 33:1)

Esau lifted up his eyes and saw Jacob's family (Gen. 33:5)

Jacob's sons lifted up their eyes and saw the traders coming (Gen. 37:25)

Joseph lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin (Gen. 43:29)

Of course the classic epitome of this feature is when Abraham lifts up his eyes to Heaven and is asked to count the stars, and there and then believes God's word of promise that "so shall thy seed be". Yet *we*, as Abraham's family, his children by faith, are likewise asked [with the same Hebrew words] to lift up *our* eyes to Heaven and consider the stars, and take strength from the fact that their creator is our God (Is. 40:26; 51:6; 60:4). In passing, the way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12).

## **The weakness of the fathers**

In my own thinking I've gone through at least three stages in trying to figure out the Abraham family. Initially I felt that every one of their actions was an expression of their faith in the promises, any apparently negative behaviour (e.g. going down to Egypt, lying about their wives) being explicable on the basis of prudence, men doing their human part while God did His (this is the view of Robert Roberts in *The Ways of Providence* ).

Reading Harry Whittaker's books on *Abraham* and *Wrestling Jacob* I came to conclude that the occasional negative behaviour was not morally justifiable; it was the down swing on the oscillating pendulum of their faith, and that out of weakness their faith was perfected by the end of their lives. This, of course, makes them truly our spiritual fathers.

Continued reading of the records brought me to a third stage; it is evident that the more sensitively we read the accounts, the more insight there is into the human weakness of the Abraham family. It is not just one or two isolated incidents that betray a possible weakness of faith (e.g. Abraham doubting that the promised seed would be born in 20:1-5). In almost every chapter of the record there is evidence of weakness *as well as strength* . The way in which faith triumphed over weakness is the great inspiration to us. The way in which the literary and linguistic style of the narrative forces us to tease out the weaknesses encourages our sense of familiarity and identification with the Abraham family. The style of the narrative also has the result of progressively opening up the weaknesses of the family the more we study it. For example, take a chapter like Gen.27 (re. Jacob's stealing of the birthright and blessing). Ask the question (preferably to a *group* of Bible students) 'How many weaknesses do we see in Isaac, Jacob, Esau and Rebekah in this chapter?'. The list goes on and on and on, particularly as allusions to other Scripture are discerned (e.g. Rebekah and Jacob = Eve and Adam, dressing up in skins etc.). In other words, the human weakness of the patriarchs and

thereby the intensity of their connection with us *progressively* opens up. This is why the weaknesses are not explicitly labelled in the narrative. A more complex literary style is employed *which encourages our close and progressive identification with the Abraham family*.

The weaknesses of the patriarchs provides great inspiration to our feeble faith when we consider how they are held up in such exalted terms. The geographical record of Abraham's entry to Canaan describes him as appearing at certain key points in the land. Those same areas became the key points in the conquest of the land in Joshua's time- it was as if Abraham was seen as the example for all Israel. Thus the people pitched "between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai" (Josh. 8:9,14)- the very expressions found about Abraham in Gen. 12:8. Israel, natural and spiritual, are bidden look to Abraham as the rock out of which they were hewn (Is. 51:1), to "walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he had...Abraham, who is the father of us all" (Rom.4:12,16). Heb.11:4-32 contains the record of faithful men, brought before us as examples to encourage and inspire. Yet 15 of those 28 verses are devoted to the Abraham family; this is quite some emphasis. The faith of Abraham is held up in Rom.4:16 as the ultimate definition of the faith which will characterize all those who attain salvation (see Greek text). The Spirit of God puts Abraham, Isaac and Jacob on a pedestal upon which no other mortals have been placed. This is undisputable. This makes the fact that their weaknesses are so emphasized such a wondrous encouragement! God really does stay with His weak, slow to learn children; He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac and (this is stressed statistically) of wayward, self-willed Jacob. Time and again throughout His self-revelation, God reminds us that He was their God, the One who stuck with them and out of weakness made them the strongest in faith. Quite rightly do we sing and rejoice that the God of Bethel is our God too.

## **The Abraham Family**

And so now let's examine the Genesis record, noting the repetitions and sensing the emphases:

- Abraham married an attractive woman, Sarah; their son Isaac fell for good looking Rebekah; and their son Jacob married beauty queen Rachel. Little wonder that they produced handsome Joseph. This is quite some emphasis, considering the usual dearth of information in this area in the Biblical record. Surely we are being invited to picture a good looking family, with all the potential pride and self assurance associated with this.
- Perhaps this has something to do with another theme: envy. The Philistines envied Isaac (Gen.26:14); as (we can assume) Laban did Jacob; Rachel envied Leah (30:1); Joseph's brothers envied him (37:11; Acts 7:9). Family friction certainly stalked the generations. Jacob against Esau, Isaac against Jacob, Ishmael against Isaac, Sarah against Hagar, Joseph's brothers amongst themselves (Gen.45:24). Envy of Israel by the world and friction within Israel has been a continued characteristic (what similarities with spiritual Israel?). Yet there was also a soft streak there; Esau and Jacob evidently had a certain affection for each other and willingness to truly forgive (Esau more so than Jacob!); Abraham truly cared for Lot's fate in Sodom on at least two occasions; and the brothers genuinely cared for Benjamin and the grief of their father.
- There was a definite trait of energy and industrious activity amongst them, indicated by the record of Rebekah running to respond to the call of Eleazer to marry Isaac

(Gen.24:18,20,28,58). Laban too was spritely (Gen.24:29). And Abraham as an old boy *ran* to meet the Angels, he *hastened* into the tent, and personally *ran* unto the herd rather than wave his wand at the servants (or the wife) to do it (Gen.18:2,6,7). The way in which it is stressed that he got up early in the morning gives the same impression (19:27; 20:8; 21:14; 22:3; the same is said of Jacob, 28:18 and Laban, 31:55). The mixture of zeal and business acumen is reflected in the way both Abraham and Lot greeted the Angels in a similar, outgoing, gentlemanly manner (19:1-3 cp. 18:1-6). Note how Rebekah immediately says "I will go" (Heb. *elek*)- just as Abraham had been called to "go" from Ur (*lek*, Gen. 12:1); "and he went" (*wayyelek*, Gen. 12:4). This would seem to suggest an undesigned similarity of character between the family members.

- This zeal partly accounts for the family's considerable wealth. " Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great" (26:12,13) is quite some emphasis of the same point. Eleazer commented on Abraham's material wealth: " The Lord hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great (note the repetition)" ; he then goes on to enumerate a long list of possessions: flocks, herds, silver, gold, menservants, maidservants, camels, asses. Truly " The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things" (24:1). This suggests that the patriarchs' material prosperity was a primary fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing in their lifetime. Peter interprets the blessing as the forgiveness of sins (Acts 3:25,26). The stress on their material blessings therefore points forward to our spiritual riches of blessing in Christ. Even earlier in Abraham's life, " Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold" (13:1). Other references to Abraham's wealth occur in 13:6; 14:23. Jacob too was blessed with material wealth (31:16; 33:11 AVmg.). His parting with Esau because they were both so wealthy (36:7) echoes the division between Abraham and Lot and Abraham and Abimelech for the same reason (13:6). The similarities between these incidents serves to emphasize the wealth of the family. The prosperity of Lot in Sodom is also highlighted (14:12 Heb.). Each of them seems to have accumulated wealth in their own right in addition to inheriting it.

- Associated with this desire for the high life is the evident problem these men had with women. One man, one woman was the declared standard of God at this time. Adam, Noah, Noah's sons, Aaron, Moses were all one man: one woman cases. The patriarchs having more than one wife at a time sticks out like a sore thumb. Abraham's apparently casual relationship with Hagar, Judah's use of a harlot (apparently the sort of thing he often did), Esau's many carnal wives, Dinah's love affair, Reuben's incest (49:4)...all this creates a certain impression of weakness in this area. Joseph's evil report regarding his brothers may well have featured news of their playboy escapades while far away from usual family life (37:2 = 1 Sam.2:23,24). The repeated way in which they lied about their wives also indicates that they didn't take their marital responsibilities as they should have (12:13; 20:3,13; 26:7).

- Another recurrent weakness is the attempts by the patriarchs to as if they were force God's hand when it came to which of their children should continue with the covenant blessings. As Abraham used his handmaid to try to produce the promised seed (Gen. 16:2), so Jacob, Rachel and Leah did. God had told Abraham clearly that the covenant would continue through Isaac rather than Ishmael, and that circumcision was the sign of that covenant; and yet Abraham remonstrates with God: "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen. 17:18), employing the idea of 'living before God' in a covenantal sense. When God again repeats His purpose with Isaac, Abraham goes and circumcises Ishmael, as if he was to still participate in the covenant God wished to continue through Isaac (Gen. 17:23). The fact that Abraham's

circumcision of Ishmael is specifically recorded highlights his insistence on trying to make God's promises fulfil as *he* would like them to. Isaac did the same, insistent upon giving the covenant blessing to Esau rather than Jacob; Jacob likewise did something similar when he tried to reverse the blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:18).

- One of the strongest family characteristics was fear, almost to the extent of psychiatric paranoia. Abraham (15:1; 20:11), Hagar (21:17), Lot (19:30), Sarah (18:15), Isaac (26:7,24; 31:42, 53), Jacob (32:7,11; 46:3; 28:17; 31:31), his sons (42:35; 43:18,23; 50:21), Joseph (42:18). This is really some emphasis. Fear and lack of faith are often associated (Dt.20:8; Jud.7:3; Mt. 25:25; Mk.4:40; Lk.12:32; Rom.8:15; Heb.13:6; 1 Jn.4:18; 2 Tim.1:7; Rev.21:8). Again, this list is impressive. Yet despite their fear, their lack of total certainty *at times* that God would keep His promises, the patriarchs are held up as examples of faith. If their fear had not been recorded, would the record of their faith mean much to us? Unlikely. They had so much which militated against a life of faith: by way of hereditary characteristic, surroundings, past experience of life etc. Both Isaac and Jacob feared they would die well before they did (47:9; 27:2); they feared death in that their future was ever on their mind. Yet evidently their fear was mixed with faith.

- Jacob's dishonesty was proverbial- Hos. 11:12; 12:2-6 charge Israel with continuing the family characteristic of Jacob by being deceitful and untruthful. Abraham and Jacob especially were characterized by great dishonesty.

- It is possible to construct graphs of faith for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Put time along the bottom and faith up the side. Go through the records and give them a mark out of ten for faith in each incident of the narrative. The graphs go up and down like yo-yos, but steady out over time.

## Materialism

As we might expect, there is more than a hint that this industrious family were tempted to get carried away with their materialism due to their natural drive and acumen. We read of all the substance that Abram had *gathered* in Haran (12:5); the Hebrew for "gathered" implies an element of hoarding and materialism. It only occurs in passages concerning the patriarchs, as if to show that this was one of their characteristics. Gen.31:18 comments on Jacob using his own wit and cunning to accumulate material wealth: "he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had *gotten*, the cattle of his getting, which he had *gotten*". The humanness of all this is strongly hinted at in 30:43: "The *man* increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels and asses". This list is identical to that in 24:35 concerning Abraham. Jacob and Sons left Canaan with "their cattle, and their goods, which they had *gotten*" (46:6). Esau too piled up his possessions; 36:6 speaks of his sons, daughters, servants, cattle, beasts, "and all his substance which he had *got* in the land of Canaan". The way this Hebrew word for materialistic accumulation is used only about the Abraham family ought to be seen by us as a flashing light, pointing us to a definite characteristic in all of them. Against this background we can better appreciate Abraham's faith that he did now possess the land. He walked around in it with the attitude of a stranger just passing through, although he was probably the most powerful man in it. The record of his purchase of Machpelah seems to exemplify this. Not only is the presence of the children of Heth highlighted (23:3,5,7,10,11,12,13,16,18), but the record of Abraham's words demonstrates his appreciation that he was only passing through: "*Intreat* for me to Ephron...that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which *he hath*... for full money he

shall *give it* me for a possession...*amongst you* ...and Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land...and the field...in all the borders round about (was) made sure" (23:9-17 AVmg.). The mention of the borders really rubs it in. Not only was the land promised to Abraham, but he was politically more powerful than the children of Heth; he could have annexed it for himself at ease. The children of Heth were willing to give it to him for free anyway (23:11). Yet the realization by Abraham of his present position, the humility created by faith, shines through the narrative. Zacchaeus is called a son of Abraham in that he too repented of his self-centred materialism (Lk. 19:9).

Abraham's focus on material issues can be discerned from the double description of how he pursued after his captured nephew Lot, "and he brought back all the goods, and his brother Lot, and his goods" (Gen. 14:16). Abraham's concern about the "goods" is perhaps significant. And yet given this mindset, it is to Abraham's credit that he utterly refuses to take even a "shoe latchet" of the spoil lest it be said that any man had made him rich- he knew that it was *God* who had made him rich (Gen. 14:23), and Abraham wanted the world to know that. I also note the way that Abraham speaks of how he is the servant of the God who is the *purchaser* of Heaven and earth, i.e. the land which God had potentially given Abraham (Gen. 14:22- the Hebrew translated "possessor" in the AV is usually translated 'buyer' elsewhere). Ps. 74:2 and Ps. 78:54 use the same word to describe how the land God gave Israel had been "purchased" by Him. Perhaps there is here a recognition by Abraham that God's gifts to us cost Him something. He had meditated upon the promise of the land, and concluded that God was giving him something which had cost Him. Perhaps this may even indicate that Abraham had reflected that the promise of the land was on account of God's willingness to purchase it through the death of the "seed of the woman" promised in Genesis 3... At the very least, we need to ask ourselves how much *we* have meditated upon the implications of the same Abrahamic promises which have been made to us. And we likewise must avoid the assumption that because God owns all things, therefore it's painless for Him to give them to us. Poor people often assume that it's painless and effortless for a rich person to give them something- but actually it isn't. And we need to perceive the same about our wonderfully generous Father in Heaven. We are slaves now, owning nothing, but then we will be gloriously free (Rom. 8:21). So this idea of owning nothing, not even ourselves, is only true of this life; the day of release from slavery will dawn, we will receive that true freedom and that true concept of personal possession- if *now* we resign it. Abraham really grasped this idea that we now can own nothing. He swore to Yahweh as " the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine..." (Gen. 14:22,23). He knew that Yahweh is the owner of all, and *therefore* he was not going to yield to the temptation to increase what appeared to be 'his' possessions.

In Gen. 13:9, Abraham gives Lot the choice as to what land he would like to live in. Lot was the orphaned nephew of Abraham- such magnanimity would've been unheard of in those societies, for the elder to give the junior dependent such a choice. The elder in the relationship would've chosen the best for himself, and that was that. It seems to me that Abraham's unusual attitude in this matter was a direct outcome of his faith in the promise that the whole land really would one day be given to *him*. If we have the faith of Abraham... we won't fight for our corner in this world. It'll be *so* much easier to 'let go' as Abraham did, and take an attitude to material wealth and possessions which is radically counter-cultural in *our* societies. The way that Lot lifted up his eyes and looked around the land is matched by the way in which God then bids Abraham to likewise lift up his eyes and view the very same territory which Lot had just chosen (Gen. 13:10,14)- and was told that the land which Lot had chosen, along with all other land, would be Abraham's eternally. When God told Abraham at



this point "All the land that you *see*, I will give it to you and your seed for ever" (Gen. 13:15), He was alluding to what He had initially told Abram back in Ur: "Get thee out... unto a land that I will *shew* (s.w. "see" in 13:15) you" (Gen. 12:1). It was as if God was saying: 'Well Abraham, this is it. This is the land I told you about'- and yet the best of it has now been given to Lot! The whole thing could have seemed some kind of cruel, just as many of our life experiences do. Abraham had given up all, made a long and dangerous journey, to receive a land from God- and when he arrives there, the best of it is given to his younger relative. But God's purpose was to focus Abraham's faith upon the fact that he would *eternally* inherit this land. And so it is with many of the twists and turns of our lives which can appear nothing but cruel fate to the unbelieving observer.

This tendency towards materialism is to be associated with another tendency: to go down to Egypt when this was to their spiritual detriment, to go out and see the daughters of the land and consider marrying them (34:1), to use the harlots of the land on the quiet (38:15). There was certainly a strong desire in that family for the high life, for fast living. Lot's opting for Sodom and Esau's marriages to a series of dumb blonds epitomize this. Abraham's conscious choice of the barren uplands away from the cities, his obedience to the command to leave city life and live as a nomad, were therefore acts of faith that went right against his grain. It could be that the way the Lord described Zacchaeus as a "son of Abraham" (Lk. 19:9) may be suggesting that this man had the characteristics of Abraham in that he quit materialism as a result of accepting the Gospel.

### **Contemporary Christianity...**

If we summarize these characteristics we find an amazing similarity with contemporary Christianity:

- Afflicted with potential pride
- Successful in this world
- Prone to materialism
- Envied by the world
- Prone to be attracted by the world, to have the occasional fling on the quiet, yet by and large keeping a distance from full scale involvement with them
- Moral / sexual weakness an especial problem
- Friction within the family
- Yet a high level of potential love, softness and forgiveness to each other
- Fear / lack of faith in times of crisis
- Faith going up and down but steadily improving.

All of these characteristics can be seen in natural Israel. It is to be expected that they will be in spiritual Israel too. The Lord Jesus was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he would have been

intensely Jewish as *the* seed of Abraham. He too, therefore, would have been afflicted in the above ways- and gloriously overcame. Quietly go through the above list of characteristics, and (perhaps with the help of the book of Proverbs) reflect how each of them would have been a problem for the Lord Jesus- and *glory* to yourself in the way in which he overcame. In doing this is the exhortation without words.

## 1.2 The Call Of Abram

### 1-2-1 Terah and Abram

Reading through the record of the call of Abram, a number of questions present themselves. The answer to these provides powerful practical exhortation.

1. Terah, his son Abram and the rest of the family left Ur to travel to Canaan. How was Abram fulfilling the command that he was given in Ur (Gen.12:1; Acts 7:2) to "get thee out of thy country *and from thy kindred and from thy father's house*" ? Surely they went with him?
2. Why did Abram stop for a while in Haran, instead of going straight from Ur to Canaan? Why did not Abram *immediately* fulfil the command to leave his kindred and "father's house" ?
3. Why is it recorded that " *Terah took* Abram (not the other way round)...and they went forth with (their wives) from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan" (Gen.11:31)? Were the promises made to Terah too?

Close study of the narrative is necessary to piece together the likely scenario. First, we must define the difference between leaving "thy kindred" and leaving "thy father's house". The word "house" is often used in Scripture, and particularly in Genesis, to describe a household including servants, and can also refer to one's descendants. The Hebrew for "Kindred" comes from a stem meaning 'to be born', leading Strong to define it as referring to those born in one's own fatherland. Acts 7:3 says that when Abram was in Ur, he was told "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred" - pointedly omitting mention of "thy father's house". Gen.12:1 records that the Lord had told Abram to leave his country, kindred *and* his father's house, but goes on to say that "So Abram departed" from *Haran* "as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen.12:4). The implication is that the command which he was given in Ur, was repeated to him in Haran, with the additional information that he must now also leave "thy father's house". Again we ask, Why?

There can be no doubt that Abram was a man of great faith. Yet as with those who would fain follow his example, that faith was developed by God through the providentially arranged circumstances of his life. The fact has to be faced that Abram was called to leave his country and kindred (his fellow countrymen), but when he left Ur his countrymen came with him. And additionally, "*Terah took* Abram...to go into the land of Canaan" (Gen.11:31). Yet in Gen. 15:7 we read that it was *God* who brought Abraham out of Ur. So God almost as it were forced Abraham's obedience, working through the idolater Terah to bring Abraham out of Ur and thus fulfil a precondition for receiving the promises. Abram did not respond *immediately* and *completely* to God's command. The call of Abram is an essay in partial response. Yet we know he had faith. Terah was an idolater (Josh. 24:2); the command to leave was given to Abram, not Terah. Because God was going to promise Abram a massive new family stemming from *him*, he therefore had to come out from his own natural family. He was going to be promised many descendants- therefore he had to separate himself from his "father's house" or posterity. He was to be promised a land for eternal inheritance- therefore he had to

leave his own native land. And in this life, Abram's seed must separate themselves from their present, worldly inheritance if they are to receive the promised blessings. It was therefore imperative that to receive the promises, Abram must separate from his natural family and land inheritance. There seems little doubt, in the light of this, that it was God's intention for Abram to leave Ur *and* his natural family, just taking his wife and their children with them. Yet Abram did not do this. And yet he had faith!

The suggested explanation is that Abram was in the spiritual dilemma faced by so many of God's servants. He had faith, but not quite enough to motivate him to the fullness of action which he so dearly wished to achieve (cp. Rom. 7:18,19). "I believe; help thou mine unbelief". "Lord increase (add to) our faith" (which the disciples already had). God recognized Abram's faith, and for some reason Terah *took Abram* and the whole family, announcing that they were to emigrate to Canaan. For some unrevealed reason, the workings of providence made Terah take this decision. Because 'Canaan' would have been relatively unheard of (Abram "went out, not knowing whither he went", Heb. 11:8) and uncivilized compared to Ur, it is possible to speculate that Abram had told Terah about the promise he had received. Terah then may have decided that such a promise ought to involve *him* as Abram's father, and decided to go with Abram. Terah must have had a very high level of motivation to leave cosmopolitan Ur for uncivilized Canaan. "Terah *took Abram*" certainly implies that some unrecorded circumstances took the decision out of Abram's hands; he had to leave his own country, because his father had ordered a mass emigration of the family. How hard it must have been for Abram to make sense of all this! He had been told to leave his family and country, and travel to a land God would show him. At that point in time, he was unaware that that country would be Canaan. How God would lead him was unexplained.

But he believed God, and "when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed" (Heb. 11:8). Therefore when his father announced that they were emigrating to Canaan, Abram would have realized that this was the call from God to get up and leave. Unlike the rest of Terah's unrecorded family, who would have mocked such a crazy plan, Abram willingly submitted. But how was he to leave his kindred and father's house? For they were coming with him! Indeed, Terah "took Abram". Thus Abram had faith in God's promise, yet may have balked at the command to leave his country and family. Providentially arranged circumstances then resulted in his aging father taking him, implying some degree of compulsion, and leading him out of his native country. Whilst not fully understanding how he could leave his father's household whilst they looked set to be accompanying him on this journey to a strange land, he went ahead in faith. It is emphasized that *God* "brought out" (s.w. to lead, pluck or pull out) Abram from Ur (Neh.9:7; Gen.15:6,7). The calling came through Abram's hearing of the word of promise, and providentially arranged circumstances encouraging his faithful response to it.

Abraham's attachment to his father and father's house is even indicated in his name, Ab-ram- meaning "my father is exalted" (1). In that family, Abram's father named his son like this because he wanted his son to exalt him- not break away from him, as God required of Abram. Abraham's connection with his father is shown in the various possible meanings of the name Abram. If 'Abram' were used as a Western Semitic word, it would mean "he is exalted through his relationship to his father"; 'Abram' in Akkadian would mean "he loved the father" (2). Yet Abraham gave up all this for the sake of God's promises to him; he lost it all in order to gain the new family which God offered him in return, just as all his seed must do. And later Scripture seems to refer to these meanings of the word 'Abram'- for Is. 41:8 and 2

Chron. 20:7 speak of him as "the friend [lover] of God". He had once 'loved' his father's house, but in response to the promises he left them, and loved God; and thus God loved him, and Abram became Abraham, the 'exalted father'.

It was equally radical for Abraham to be told that God would impute righteousness to him. For in those times, righteousness was a concept associated with a person remaining within their existing communal relationships. Von Rad quotes contemporary documentation to this effect: "A man is called righteous who conducts himself properly with reference to an existing communal relationship... just [justified] is the man who stands with his community" (3). The whole message to Abraham of justification by faith and imputed righteousness must be seen against this backdrop. The same radical call to break away from our surrounding society and its worldviews and concepts of righteousness is required by all who have received the same promises made to Abraham.

### **A Radical Call**

In the near East, each family had their own gods. When a man became head of the family, he had the right to choose his own god; there was no requirement that he maintained the same god as the previous head of the family. The choice of a god was confirmed by a covenant; the Amorites and Arameans therefore called their family god "The Lord of the house", and the sons of the family often were named with "theophoric names", reflecting the name of the family's god (4). Against this background, therefore, it was a radical thing for Yahweh to appear to Abraham and order him to do something as radical as break from his family (Gen. 12:1). It was God who chose Abraham, not Abraham who chose Yahweh, contrary to the accepted norm of the man choosing a family god when his father or previous head of the family died. The surrounding nations or tribes were comprised of various families each with their own god; nations had no one fixed god. When we repeatedly read of how Yahweh was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that Yahweh is the God of all the families and tribes of Israel, we are therefore encountering a new paradigm. There were to be no other gods in Israel apart from Yahweh. He was to be the sole national God; the unity of Yahweh, and His being the sole national God of Israel, was therefore a new concept in the near East. And we can better understand the way that both the Lord Jesus and Paul saw in the unity of God a call to unity amongst His people; for this had been the intention from the start. The unity of God isn't so much a numerical statement as a call to profound unity. But it could only become real for Abraham, as it can for us today, if we leave, come out from, the culture and worldviews which surround us.

Yahweh's call of Abraham to be His, taking the initiative which Divine grace does when calling someone, was therefore radical. The Biblical record states simply that Yahweh spoke and Abraham believed with no proof or prior relationship. The rabbinic midrash and the Koran embellish upon this silence with various tales of Yahweh's prior relationship with Abraham- perhaps psychologically motivated in the desire to make Abraham's faith and obedience the more understandable and normal. Whether or not there was any previous encounter between Yahweh and Abraham is beside the point- the Biblical record invites us to see God as taking the initiative, and Abraham faithfully responding. This is characteristic of God's call; Saul out looking for lost cattle, the disciples mending their nets- are suddenly called, and some respond well and others like Saul for ever try to slip out of it.

It has been pointed out that Abram or Abiram was one of the most common names in the near East- it was common in Babylon as Abirami, and in Egypt as Abu-reheni or Abram (5). Into this very common name- as normal and common as the names we bear in our societies- was added the Name of Yahweh. Abram became Abraham. The central letter of Yahweh's Name became the central letter of Abraham's. But Abram means 'my father is exalted', or more strictly as W.F. Albright suggests 'I am exalted with regard to / because of my father'. To jettison this name was to trash all Abraham and his culture held so dear- definition in terms of their father, where they came from. The call of the Lord Jesus in our age is in essence no different- to reject father and mother and instead follow Him, to be His. Not in the sense of hating them, but in being new persons, carved out as a totally new family. The 'h' in the middle of Yahweh's Name was now inserted into the middle of Abraham's name; Abram became Abraham, father of a multitude, a new family. Some miserable philological critics have claimed that 'h' was an unknown sound in the near East of Abraham's time (6). And maybe they're right, in which case 'h' would've been a new sound. It would be rather like importing the single Russian letter pronounced 'shch' into the English alphabet. The answer to the question 'What's your name?' would've been arresting and challenging to Abraham's contemporaries: 'Abraham' would've sounded strange and new to them. There will be something equally challenging and arresting to the world surrounding Abraham's seed as people come to know our name, to perceive who we really are. All this would've made life difficult for Abraham, as it does for us. The Midrash at Bereshit Rabbah 38:13 tells tales of Terah accusing his son Abraham before the gods for having destroyed idols, and Abraham being thrown into a fiery furnace for rejection of his father and his father's gods.

## From... unto

The meaning of 'holiness' is both to be separated *from* and separated *unto*. Separation isn't only something negative; it's more essentially something positive. We are separated *from* this world because we are separated *unto* the things of God's Kingdom; the separation *from* is a natural, unpretended outcome of our involvement in the things of God's Kingdom. It's not part of a cross which the believer must reluctantly, sacrificially bare. Like all spiritual growth, it is unaffected; the number of hours spent watching t.v. goes down (to zero?) *naturally*; the friendships with the world *naturally* fizzle out, the way we dress, the things we hope for and talk about... all these things will alter in their own time. Israel were brought out from Egypt through the Red Sea (cp. baptism) that they might be *brought in* to the land of promise (Dt. 6:23). The Nazarite was separated *from* wine, because he was separated *unto* the Lord (Num. 6:2,3). Dt. 4:19 warns Israel not to worship the stars, because God has shared them with "all the peoples under the whole heaven" (RV)- but He Has shared Himself only with Israel. Because of this unique and awesome entrance into their lives by God, they ought to have naturally separated themselves from any other god. The positive separation *unto* naturally resulted in the negative separation *from*.

Abraham was told "Get thee out..." of Ur; and obediently "they *went forth* to go *into* the land of Canaan: and *into* the land of Canaan they came" (Gen. 12:1,5). This must be the pattern of our lives, until finally at the Lord's return we are again called to go *out* to meet the bridegroom; and we will go *in* with Him to the marriage (Mt. 25:6,10). The New Testament preachers urged men to turn "*from* darkness *to* light, and *from* the power of satan *to* God" (Acts 26:18); *from* wickedness *to* God, *to* the Lord (Acts 3:26; 15:19; 26:20; 9:35; 11:21). In

Nehemiah's time, the people "separated themselves *from* the peoples of the lands *unto* the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters...they *clave to* their brethren" (Neh. 10:28,29). Close fellowship with one's brethren arises from having gone out *from* the surrounding world, *unto* the things of God's word. That, at least, was the theory. In reality, those exiles who returned found this separation very difficult. In fact, the account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similar to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by 10:11 likewise; then they separate (10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Neh. 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated *from* the surrounding world *unto* God's law (Neh. 10:28).

This separation from the world *unto* the things of God is brought out in the way Ps. 45:10.16 alludes to the Mosaic laws about a Gentile woman forgetting her father's house. Indeed the Psalm appears to have relevance to Solomon's marriage to a Gentile [and note the allusions to Joseph's marriage to a Gentile]: "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house [this is the 'separation from' the world]...instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, which thou mayest make princes in all the earth [land- of Israel]". The emotional pain of separation from her father's world would be offset by her bringing forth Godly children within the hope of Israel. The whole process of separating from and yet also separating *unto* seems to me to create a kind of synergy from the whole dialectic. It's by separating *from* the world that we go back into this world in service and witness and caring concern. And if we don't find ourselves 'separated *unto*' those things- have we actually separated *from* this world in the way God intends?

## Notes

(1) See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: S.C.M., 1963) p. 152.

(2) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) Vol. 2 p. 267.

(3) Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: S.C.M., 1963) p. 180.

(4) W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (New York: 1957), p. 246; Angel Gonzales, *Abraham: Father of Believers* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) p. 19.

(5) J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1950) p. 242, p. 329 note 9.

(6) See the discussion in Gonzales, *op cit*, p. 26.

## 1-2-2 The Call Of Abram

So the family came to Haran. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham was 23 years in Haran. Again, " from thence...*God* removed him into (Canaan)" (Acts 7:4 R.V.). But if God had *forced* him to be " removed" , Abram's response to the promises would not be held up for us as the great example of faith which it is. The call of Abram is an essay in partial response being confirmed by God. *God* removed him through repeating the promises to Abram in Haran, and the providential fact that Terah died there. Again, the fact that Abram " dwelt" in Haran, despite his call to leave, with his kindred and father's house shows a slow reaction to

the command to leave those things and go to the unknown land, which by now Abram must have guessed was Canaan- or at least, he would have realized that Canaan was en route to it. There are marked similarities between the record of the exodus from Ur, and that of the call of Abram to leave Haran:

**Gen.11:31**

Terah took  
 Sarai...Abram's wife  
 Lot the son of Haran  
 They went forth from Ur  
 To go into the land of Canaan  
 They came unto Haran

**Gen.12:5**

Abram took  
 Sarai his wife  
 Lot his brother's son  
 They went forth (from Haran)  
 To go into the land of Canaan  
 Into the land of Canaan they came.

These similarities may mean that the same processes occurred in each move- a word of promise made, Abram struggling to show his abundant faith in that promise and call, and the providence of God acting to make his expression of faith possible. There may also be the hint that when Abram left Haran, he still had the same fundamental problem as when leaving Ur- he had still not fully left his kindred and father's house. It has been pointed out that around the time Terah and Abraham left Ur, the city was threatened by and then destroyed by the Elamites (1). It's a very strange 'co-incidence' (if that's indeed what it is) that Noah, Peleg and Nahor all died in the same year- when Abraham was about 50 years old, living in Ur. Whilst we have no evidence that these men were all living together, it's not impossible that they were. Perhaps they died in some calamity in Ur. So it could well be that the motive for leaving Ur in the first place was therefore mixed- it was fleeing from a material threat more than plain obedience to a Divine command. This would explain why the family settled in relatively nearby Haran, and remained there for so long. Abraham's weak attitude to leaving Ur is reflected much later too, when he tells Abimelech that "the gods caused me to wander from my father's house" (Gen. 20:13) (2). The Hebrew *ta'ah* ("wander") has the idea of wandering aimlessly (Gen. 21:14; 37:15) and even sinning (Is. 53:6). It wasn't a very nice term to use about God's providence. That seems to me to be a believer in a moment of weakness speaking about his faith in very worldly terms, as one pagan to another. He doesn't see his leaving of his father's house as obedience to Divine command and promise; but rather he portrays that response as his being somehow manipulated by the gods, picked up and taken out of the situation. Abraham's comment that *God* caused him to go astray from his father's house (Gen. 20:13) would likely have been understood by those who first heard it as a negative reference to God- for the word "gone astray" is used of a lost sheep (Jer. 50:6; Ez. 34:4,16; Ps. 119:176); and it was understood that "A bad shepherd causes a sheep to go astray from the flock because he is careless" (3). Perhaps God recognized Abraham's failure by instructing His people to confess every year that "An Aramaean gone astray was my father" (Dt. 26:5). I take this to be a reference to Abraham and not Jacob; for it seems that the people of Aram migrated to Ur, and that Abraham having settled in Padan Aram, Abraham could also for that reason be called an Aramaean (4). So Israel were asked to remember that their forefather Abraham had gone astray both literally and spiritually; and thus Abraham's God was a God of grace, and was thereby their God too.



Abram evidently found it so hard to sever the family ties, and move straight on from Haran. The call of Abram required breaking with family. Perhaps Terah was too old and ill to move on further (he died at 205, a great age by post-flood standards), and Abram found it hard to leave his old and ill father in a strange city. Or perhaps Terah's strong influence on Abram meant that he found it just too hard to go against him. How he must have wrestled with the pain of leaving his family and father! Yet he believed God's promises, and he knew that these things were necessary if he was to attain the promised land. Many a convert to Abraham's seed in these last days has been through the same process. The call to "come out" of mystical Babylon is surely rooted in the call for Abram to "come out" from Ur and Haran. Whilst this evidently occurs at the time of baptism, when these same Abrahamic promises are made to us personally, our whole lives are a process of 'coming out' from the world. As we do so, our appreciation of God's promises is progressively expanded, as God works with our faith.

### Separating From Lot

Immediately Terah died, Abram may have felt he had truly left his "kindred" and eagerly moved on towards the promised land of Canaan (so Gen.11:32-12:4 implies). It is likely that many of Abram's "kindred" would have come along with Terah, responding themselves to the call of Abram. Presumably they settled in Haran after Terah's death. It is even possible that the family were from this city originally, seeing that Abraham's brother was called Haran. We saw earlier that just before leaving Haran, Abram was further told to separate from his "father's house" too, i.e. *all* of his father's household. This must have included Lot. Abram could understand separation from his idolatrous father and the rest of the family retinue; yet Lot was "a righteous man"; Abram evidently rated Lot's spirituality (Gen.18:23,32). Again, Abram was in a quandary. He had left all but one of his father's house in Haran. Was he really intended to separate from his father's house to the extent of leaving Lot too? It is likely that Abram often agonized about Lot. There he was in Canaan, knowing that his seed would inherit this land, which was then full of Canaanites (the record twice emphasizes, in 12:6 and 13:7). But Lot, part of his kindred and father's house, was still with him. We saw that the Hebrew for "kindred" implies one born in one's own country. A closely related word is found in Gen. 11:28, describing how Haran, Lot's father, "died in the *land of his nativity*, in Ur". If Lot's father lived and died in Ur, it is fair to assume that Lot was born in Ur. So Abram knew he must separate from Lot, his "kindred" - but how? What reason could he give Lot? Yet he had faith in what God had told him; therefore he *wanted* to leave Lot, but just found it hard to do. And so God made a way.

Because the promises were to be made to Abram and not Lot, this separation was indeed necessary (although nothing should be inferred from this regarding Lot's spirituality or standing with God). It is stressed in the record that "Lot went with him" out of Haran (Gen.12:4), and that in Abram's subsequent passing through the land of Canaan, "Lot...went with Abram" (Gen.13:5; 13:1). Having been through so much together (they were together in the Egypt crisis, Gen.13:1), it is unlikely that they would suffer from a personality clash. Yet the great wealth of them both resulted in "strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle, and the herdmen of Lot's cattle" (Gen.13:7). Abram reasoned that it would be a shame to let this incident between their employees drive a wedge between them personally; "for we be brethren" (note Abram's intense awareness that they were of the same household), and close spiritual friends too, it may be inferred (Gen.19:8). Abram's subsequent concern for Lot indicates that they did not fall out personally over the problem.

Abram would have noticed Lot's desire to settle down in the cities of the plain. Now he saw that providence was giving him the means he needed to separate from his father's house completely. He knew that if Lot chose, of his own volition, to separate from him, then there would no longer be the emotional agony of him separating from Lot. "Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me", Abram invited Lot, knowing that now it was very easy and attractive for Lot to agree (Gen.13:9). "And they separated themselves the one from the other" (Gen.13:11). Yet a third time the record emphasizes their separation, and implies that as soon as this occurred, the full Abrahamic land covenant was made, featuring Abram's eternal inheritance of the land: "The Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him...all the land which thou seest, to *thee* will I give it, and to *thy* seed for ever" (Gen.13:14,15). Again we see God's patience in the development of Abram's faith.

It must have seemed impossible for Abraham to imagine that Lot would ever separate from him of his own volition, as earlier he would never have dreamed that leaving his own country could be achieved without major opposition from his father. But providence overruled that Terah actually became enthusiastic for this move! Abram's faith was presumably in being *willing* to make these moves. These experiences remained firm in Abraham's memory. Later in life, he used his own experience of how God had opened a way for the expression of his faith, to inspire his servant to have faith that God would somehow find a suitable wife for Isaac. It must be significant that Abraham told Eliezer to take Isaac a wife from "my country...my kindred...thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" (Gen.24:3,4). It follows that there were none of Abraham's country or kindred, which he had been commanded to leave, living anywhere near him. He had truly and fully obeyed the command to separate from them! As with many Christian youngsters living in isolation in the mission fields, the avoidance of marrying those in the surrounding world just seemed too much to ask. But Abraham knew that a way would be made: "The Lord God of Heaven, which *took* me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred...he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt *take* a wife unto my son" (Gen.24:7). As God had *taken* Abram from Ur and Haran and Lot, so God would *take* a woman from there, suitable for Isaac. That Abraham did finally break with his family is hinted at by the way that Laban speaks of "the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor- may they judge between us (Gen. 31:53 Heb.). Laban recognized that Nahor and Abraham worshipped different gods- whereas we know that initially, they worshipped the same gods.

Do we admit that we just don't preach as we should, failing to engage people with the Gospel because we assume 'nobody's interested'? 1 Tim. 2:1-6 has something for us. The Lord's death on the cross was a ransom payment "for all men"; and in this context, Paul urges that because God therefore wishes "all men to be saved" we should therefore pray "for all men, [even] for kings and those in authority". If the Lord's death truly was for all, in that He was representative there of all men, He there "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9)... then we should pray for "all men" quite literally to be saved, knowing that God is willing that "all men be saved". And Paul makes this point in the context of appealing for us to pray for all men, even Kings. This means that we should pray for even those we consider most unlikely- that they might be saved. For the cross of Christ has potentially saved them- if they will accept it. Thus Paul comments in 1 Tim. 2:6 that the cross was "a ransom for all, to be testified". The testifying or witnessing to it is to be done by our preaching. Notice how Paul draws a dynamic parallel between praying for all men and witnessing to all men (1 Tim. 2:1 cp. 6). Preaching- when it is truly inspired by the cross- can never be a prayer-less exercise, a mere presentation of information. It will be done prayerfully, thoughtfully targetted at specific individuals whom we're praying will accept the message.

Left to human response *alone*, our faith will not always result in the necessary actions. "How to perform that which is good I find not", laments the spiritually frustrated apostle (Rom.7:18). God saw Abram's willingness, and appreciated the difficulty he had in appearing to act unreasonably to his kindred and father's house. And so God made a way. At the time of each of Abram's moves, from Ur to Haran and from Haran to Canaan, and again after the separation from Lot, the promises were re-affirmed and expanded to Abram (Gen.12:1 cp. Acts 7:3; Gen.12:7; 13:14). His faith was first kindled by the promise made to him in Ur. That faith, encouraged by God's hand in his life, led to action, which resulted in God revealing even more of His word to Abram. This stimulated yet more faith, more action, and an increase in appreciation of the faith-generating word of promise. This same upward spiral, in which the word is the dynamic, can be found true in the experience of all Abram's seed. For we have all received the call of Abram.

### **God's Grace to Abraham**

The impression can be given that Abraham was a giant of faith, and as "father of the faithful", thereby requires colossal responses of faith from us who are his seed. But the reality was that Abraham didn't respond as he might have done, just as we don't; and God by His grace led Abraham to respond simply because He wished to save Him. God told Abram to leave Ur, his family and relatives (Gen. 12:1). The requirements were to leave Ur and to leave his relatives- and neither of these requirements were fulfilled much by Abraham, but rather by God working to enable them to be met. That this call refers to Ur not Haran is made clear in Acts 7:2-4: "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land". The impression is given of immediate, obedient response. But in fact it was his own father Terah who took him and the rest of the family out of Ur. He didn't break with his family- he went with them. Presumably he didn't obey the call to leave them as an individual; so God arranged that Abraham at least obeyed the requirement to leave Ur, and later worked to ensure he left his family. It was God who caused him to wander from his father's house (Gen. 20:13)- not his own strength of obedience to the call to individuate before God. It appears that Elamite aggression at the time would explain why there was an exodus from Ur. It's a very strange 'co-incidence' (if that's indeed what it is) that Noah, Peleg and Nahor all died in the same year- when Abraham was about 50 years old, living in Ur. Whilst we have no evidence that these men were all living together, it's not impossible that they were. Perhaps they died in some calamity in Ur. So it could well be that the motive for leaving Ur in the first place was therefore mixed- it was fleeing from a material threat more than plain obedience to a Divine command. This would explain why the family settled in relatively nearby Haran, and remained there for so long.

Abraham in fact did anything than separate from his family. Gen. 20:12,13 could be translated as meaning that Abraham married Sarah at the time he left Ur: "She [Sarah] is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife when it happened that God caused me to wander from my father's house; at that time, I said to her, 'This is your kindness which you shall show to me. Everywhere that we go, say of me, He is my brother'". In this case we see that Abraham didn't at all leave his family- he married his half sister! In doing so he was repeating the behaviour of his brother in marrying close family relatives- Nahor married his brother Haran's daughter (Gen. 11:29). They left Ur and went

to live in Haran- and it's surely not coincidence that they had a brother of the same name, Haran. Surely there was a connection between the man and the city- and that's where they went to live. This was hardly the individuation from family members which God had required of Abraham.

Abraham only left Haran after his father died, suggesting Terah didn't want to travel further, and so Abraham didn't do so. He simply didn't leave his father's house / family. And when he does leave, he takes his family with him- Lot, Lot's family and Sarah, his half sister (Gen. 12:5). And yet God continues working with Abraham; after he leaves Haran, God appears and tells him that He wishes to give "thee", 'you' singular, the land (Gen. 12:7). In other words, the fulfilment of the promises was to Abraham personally, and that is why he was required to individuate from his unbelieving family in order to receive them. And because God simply wanted to fulfil the promises to Abraham, He arranged Abraham's separation from his family in order to fulfil those preconditions.

It has been pointed out that Abram or Abiram was one of the most common names in the near East- it was common in Babylon as Abirami, and in Egypt as Abu-reheni or Abram . Abraham's attachment to his father and father's house is even indicated in his name, Ab-ram- meaning "my father is exalted" . In that family, Abram's father named his son like this because he wanted his son to exalt him- not break away from him, as God required of Abram. Abraham's connection with his father is shown in the various possible meanings of the name Abram. If 'Abram' were used as a Western Semitic word, it would mean "he is exalted through his relationship to his father"; 'Abram' in Akkadian would mean "he loved the father". Von Rad quotes contemporary documentation to this effect: "A man is called righteous who conducts himself properly with reference to an existing communal relationship... just [justified] is the man who stands with his community".

It is stressed in the record that "Lot went with him" out of Haran (Gen.12:4), and that in Abram's subsequent passing through the land of Canaan, "Lot...went with Abram" (Gen.13:5; 13:1). Abraham didn't separate from Lot of his own volition- he invites Lot to separate himself from him, rather than Abraham telling Lot that he was separating from him (Gen. 13:9). Abraham's subsequent concern for Lot, rescuing him from captivity and then begging God to save Lot from Sodom, show how Abraham certainly considered Lot his beloved family member. "We be brethren" was his position. "Lot separated from him" (Gen. 13:14) rather than Abraham separating from Lot, as was required by God's command to Abraham. As soon as Lot separates from Abraham, God repeats the promise to Abraham- that "thy seed", you singular, will inherit the land. To receive a new land and a new family, Abraham had to separate from his natural, earthly land and family. The fulfilment of the promises was conditional upon Abraham's individuation from his family, his separation from them and unto God- and God worked to enable this precondition to be fulfilled despite Abraham's weakness in separating from his own land and family. It was God who brought Abraham out of Ur (Gen. 15:7; Neh. 9:7)- not Abraham's obedience to the call to leave Ur. We see a similar grace in how Lot was told to leave Sodom, but he dithered in doing so; God "sent Lot out of Sodom" (Gen. 19:29), and eventually took his hand and dragged him out of the city, "the Lord being merciful to him" (Gen. 19:16).

Our own calling out of this world is likewise a matter of God's grace; He wishes to save us, and leads us out of situations and into new ones, when we ourselves ought to have made the moves of our own volition. He makes us wander from our father's house (Gen. 20:13). This is all part of the "blessing" to Abraham, which involves turning us away from sin (Acts 3:25,26). God was the one who brought about Abraham's obedience. "From thence [Haran]... *God* removed him into (Canaan)" (Acts 7:4 R.V.).

Yet Abraham was, in the end, a willing participant in the process. He later reflected: "The Lord God of Heaven, which *took* me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred... He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt *take* a wife unto my son" (Gen.24:7). It could be argued that even here, Abraham was slipping backwards- because he wants his son to marry into his own family, just as he had married Sarah and his brother had married his own niece. Yet Abraham believed that as God had *taken* Abram away from Ur and Haran and Lot, so God would *take* a woman from there, suitable for Isaac. That Abraham did finally break with his family is hinted at by the way that Laban speaks of "the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor- may they judge between us (Gen. 31:53 Heb.). Laban recognized that Nahor and Abraham worshipped different gods- whereas we know that initially, they worshipped the same gods.

## Notes

(1) Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (London: Tyndale Press, 1967) p. 111; also documented in W.F. Albright, *From The Stone Age To Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1940).

(2) This is the implication of how *elohim* is used here; see Kidner, *op cit.* pp. 138,139; Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary make the same point, calling it an 'accommodation' "to the polytheistic standpoint of the king".

(3) Martin Buber, *On The Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) p. 127.

(4) Buber, *op cit.*

## How God Worked With Abraham

Terah and his family departed "to go into the land of Canaan" (Gen. 11:31). These are the same Hebrew words as in the command to Abram: "Get thee out of thy country" (Gen. 12:1). We can therefore conclude that Abram received this call to quit his country, but didn't obey it, until some unrecorded situation led his father to announce the family's emigration to Canaan. Abram was therefore very slow to obey the call. Note too that the command to Abram had been to leave his land and also his "kindred and... father's house". This he didn't do- for he left Ur with his father and brothers, i.e. his kindred. His brother Haran died, and his father then died in Haran, where they temporarily lived on the way to Canaan. We see here how God seeks to almost make us obedient. And Gen. 15:7 records that it was God who brought Abram out of Ur- even though Abraham failed to rise up and be obedient in his own

strength, God manipulated family circumstances to make him obedient to the call; and in essence He does this for us too. The first promise to Abraham was actually conditional- if he did these things, then "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:2). If he left his natural kindred, then God would give him a huge new family. But he hardly fulfilled those conditions, and yet still the promises were ultimately fulfilled to him. And he is set up as the "father of the faithful". We all know that really our faith is pathetically weak, and this recognition can cause some to stumble altogether. Yet Abraham our pattern hardly started with a strong faith either. The comment "So Abram departed [Heb. 'went'- s.w. Gen. 11:31; 12:1], as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen. 12:4) is surely the beginning of the wonderful theme of righteousness being imputed to Abraham! Heb. 11:8 records things from a positive perspective too, as if there was instant obedience from Abraham: "By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went". Truly, the Biblical record imputes righteousness to Abraham, and thus sets a pattern for all of us, the equally faltering and stumbling children of Abraham.

All that said, Abram's leaving of Haran was still a great act of faith- he had "gathered" much in the years of staying in Haran (Gen. 12:5). According to Jewish tradition, Abraham stayed 23 years in Haran. All he had to go on was a word from the Lord which he'd received some years ago whilst living in Ur. There's no reason to think that Angels regularly appeared to him and kept urging him to leave, or that he could read the Lord's word in written form as we can. Presumably that one word which he received worked in his conscience, until he said to the family "Right, we're quitting this nice life for a wilderness journey to some place I don't know". We can underestimate the power of "just" one word from the Lord. We're so familiar with possessing His entire word in written form that we can forget the need to be obedient to just one of those words, to the extent of losing all we once held dear... In this I find Abraham a wonderful example. He must, presumably, have wondered whether he really had heard right, whether the whole thing wasn't just a weird dream- just as we may wonder whether *really* we are supposed to take God's word as it is and allow it to radically upset our settled, mediocre lives.

Gen. 12:3 states that through Abraham, all the offspring of the earth / *adamah* were to be blessed. This is an evident allusion back to the cursing of the *adamah* / earth in Eden (Gen. 3:17). The implication was that the promised seed of the woman, who was to be the way of escape from that curse, was to somehow be "in Abraham". Although there's no mention yet of a specific son or seed, it seems to me that God was setting Abraham up to meditate upon the promise of the earth being blessed "in him", and figure out that this must mean that he was to have a descendant or son who would be the Saviour. Perhaps the subsequent specific promises about this were as it were God's reward for Abraham following through with where God was leading him. Gen. 28:14 makes explicit that the blessing of the *adamah* was to be "in thy seed". I firmly believe, indeed have experienced, the way in which God prompts our minds to think of something, to work something through, and then reveals this specifically, or confirms our understanding, directly from His word. In our day and context, it would seem that daily reading of God's word is what's required in order to 'allow' as it were this process to happen. This, surely, is how God seeks to work out the same process with us as He did with Abraham. Even if at the time of reading we feel we 'get nothing out of that chapter', there will be prompts to thought and later reflection which are all in God's longer term educational purpose with us. Heb. 11:33 says that the likes of Abraham obtained promises by their faith. Yet the Old Testament record clearly enough states that the promises were just given to them by God; they weren't requested by the patriarchs. Indeed, David was surprised at the promises

God chose to make to him. Conclusion? God read their unspoken, unprayed for desires for Messiah and His Kingdom as requests for the promises- and responded.

There are other examples of Abraham being progressively set up by God so that his spiritual growth would be an upward spiral. Initially, he was told to walk / go to a land which God would shew him (Gen. 12:1); when he got there, he was told to "arise", and "walk" through that land of Canaan (Gen. 13:17). And Abraham, albeit in a faltering kind of way, did just this. But this was to prepare him for the test of Gen. 22:3 in the command to offer Isaac. His obedience this time isn't at all faltering. He "arises" and 'goes' [s.w. "walk"] "unto the place of which God had told him" to offer Isaac (Gen. 22:3). This is exactly what he had been called to do right back in Ur- to arise and walk / go to a land / place which God would show him (Gen. 12:1). Events in Abraham's life paved the way for others- for his life was under God's ultimate guidance. The call to go out "to the land which I will show you" is in essence repeated when he is asked to offer Isaac "upon one of the mountains of which I shall show you" (Gen. 22:2). Obedience to one challenge paves the way for the next one. And so our obedience in one challenge of God leads us to obedience in others. I've elsewhere pointed out how circumstances tend to repeat both within and between the lives of God's faithful. One experience is designed to lead us to another. Nothing- absolutely nothing- in our lives is senseless chance. All- and this takes some believing- is part of a higher plan for our spiritual good, in our latter end.

Time and again we see this in Abraham's life. He was taught that he really could be a blessing to others by the circumstances which God arranged relating to Lot being blessed / saved for his sake. Or take how Sarah murmured that it was impossible for her to have "pleasure" in childbearing (Gen. 18:12). She uses the word *ednah*, related to the word *Eden*. Yet in the events of Gen. 19, she sees how the land around Sodom that was once "like the garden of Eden" (Gen. 13:10) is made barren and sowed with salt so that nothing could grow there (Gen. 19:25; Dt. 29:23). She was being taught that God can give and take away fertility on a huge scale. Likewise in Gen. 20:17, Abraham's weakness leads Abimelech's wives to become barren; yet through the faith and prayer of an undoubtedly spiritually weak Abraham, their fertility is restored. Again, God was teaching Abraham through circumstances. It could also be reasoned from Gen. 20:6 that God weakened Abimelech's body so that he had no sexual desire for Sarah- and again, this was to teach Abraham the impotent old man that virility is a gift which God can give and take at ease. The wonderful thing is that all these lessons were taught to Abraham through the incident of lying about and betraying his wife, which shows the weakness of his faith in God's promises. The way God works with and through human weakness is awesome.

God never let go of Abraham, even when Abraham didn't readily obey what God required of him. He was told to "walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; *for* [because] I will give it unto you" (Gen. 13:17). But Abraham didn't willingly do this- because perhaps he doubted that he would be given it. It's like saying to a child: 'Come and look at this! I am going to give it to you!', and the child doesn't even want to look. In this context we read of how Abraham "*dwelt* in the plain of Mamre"- that's stressed twice (Gen. 13:18; 14:13). Instead of travelling around in his land to see it, he tried to settle down. But God brought circumstances into his life which made him travel around the length and breadth of Canaan- thus Abraham had to pursue Lot's captors "unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus" before he recovered Lot (Gen. 14:15). Hobah is in the far north east of Canaan- Abraham had to go all the way there from Mamre in the centre of Canaan. For unknown reasons, Abraham also lived in Beersheba for a while (Gen. 22:19); he had a meeting with the

local rulers at Shaveh, near Jerusalem (Gen. 14:17); and at the time of Gen. 16:14 Abraham was near Kadesh Barnea, in the very South of Canaan on the Egyptian border. One wonders whether the attraction of Egypt had led him there once more- in which case it was his own weakness which was used by God to ensure that he travelled to the very south of Canaan. Maybe the record includes all these geographical markers in order to demonstrate how Abraham did indeed travel around Canaan through providentially arranged circumstances, although not it seems as an act of direct obedience to the Divine command to do so.

### **What the Promises Demanded**

The promises to Abraham were couched in terms that were a real challenge to Abraham, and that required a total inversion of his value system. Those same words of promise to us require nothing less. In those days, pedigree and family, and even one's city of origin, were fundamental to one's self-definition. Abram was called to quit Ur, to separate from his kindred and family, to become a nobody for the sake of a calling to God's invisible Kingdom and new family. God changed his name- Abram means 'high / exalted father', and can mean "he is of exalted i.e. good ancestry" (1). Yet Abram's name was changed. He was to be the father of a new family, as 'Abraham' implied, and to sever all connection with his human ancestry and family. The way 'Abram' was changed to 'AbraHAM' and 'Sarah' to 'SarAH' shows how God wishes to mix syllables of His Name with that of men. Jacob was changed to Isra-el, mixing God's name with that of his father. This is indeed mutuality between God and man- and it demands so much. According to Jewish midrash, Abram and his father Terah were leading diviners of the stars in Ur (2). 'Terah' can mean 'brother of the moon', and Ur and Haran were noted centres of moon worship (3). In this case, the invitation to Abram to count the stars and discern there his future seed was a calling to reject his entire former world-view, to admit his helplessness in counting the stars, to throw himself upon God's grace rather than the strength of his own former education, wisdom, and inherited ability to discern the stars.

Grammatically, Gen. 12:3 can be read as passive ("be blessed", as AV, RV) or reflexive "bless themselves" (as RSV), i.e. implying those blessed have to do something to appropriate the blessing. In this we see how God will play His part, but we must play our part. And yet the covenant in Gen. 15 was one way, unconditional, from God to us. It's as if *His* part in our salvation is so much greater than our response. Yet there is still an obvious element of choice which we have to make. God repeated the promise of blessing to Abraham at Shechem (Gen. 12:6), where later Israel had to choose between blessing and cursing (Dt. 11:29,30)- as if they had to make the choice to appropriate the promised blessing to themselves, or not. God's promise to Abraham was made more specifically at "the oak of Moreh" (Gen. 12:6)- evidently a Canaanite shrine; and it's emphasized that "the Canaanite was then in the land". It's as if God's invitation to Abraham to have a unique relationship with Him was made amidst the calls and presence of many other gods, and in the thick of the Gentile world. The same promises are offered to us (Gal. 3:27-29), in a similar context. Perhaps it's worth suggesting that there may be an intended contrast between Abraham *building* an altar in recognition of the promises, at the same time as he *pitched* his tent (Gen. 12:7,8)- as if to highlight the temporal nature of our present material situation in contrast to the permanence of the things we stand related to in God's promises. Abraham's belief in *God's* blessing of him is reflected in the way he is insistent to the King of Sodom that he will not take any of the spoil, lest anyone should think that man rather than God had blessed Abraham (Gen. 14:22). It could be pointed out that this rather contrasts with his not returning to Pharaoh the things he gave him in return for Sarah becoming his wife (Gen. 12:16). Perhaps Abraham later



reflected upon his failure in this incident, realizing he'd not displayed faith in *God's* blessing of him... and learnt his lesson when the same temptation occurred in Gen. 14 to be made rich by the men of this world. Our stumbling response to the same Abrahamic promises often develops in the same way.

The command "Be perfect" can be translated "Be perfected" (Gen. 17:1). There's some support for this when we consider the inspired commentary upon the promises to Abraham in Heb. 11:39,40: "[He] received not *the promise*: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be *perfected*". "The promise" and being "perfected" are thus paralleled. In this we may have in Gen. 17:1 another promise to Abraham- to 'be perfected', and this could only come true through God's perfect righteousness being imputed to him. The New Testament informs us quite simply that Abraham believed the promise of being in the Kingdom, and he was therefore 'justified', or counted righteous (Gen. 15:6). But God led him in appreciating what those promises really implied. If he was going to live eternally in God's Kingdom, then he would only be there because God counted him righteous. And so it seems to me that God developed Abraham's mind further by promising him in Gen. 17:1 that he would indeed "be perfected", which could only have come about through God imputing righteousness to him. It could be that when Abraham "believed" the promise of the Kingdom in Gen. 15:6, he didn't realize that in Heaven, God was so thrilled with his faith that He counted Abraham as righteous, in order to fulfil the promise of giving him eternal life. And then in Gen. 17:1, God communicated this to Abraham in the promise that He would 'perfect' him. And God patiently works with us likewise, as we struggle to really, really believe that we will live eternally in His Kingdom; and as we progressively realize throughout life that this can only be possible by the Lord's perfection being counted to us.

### **The Covenant Grace of God**

Abraham and Sarah aren't merely examples of faith- for they didn't always have faith! God predicates what He is prepared to do for them- and for us- upon faith. But even when the faith is lacking, God's grace and love are so strong that He doesn't always insist upon the condition of faith which He has required. Sarah mocked at the promise of a child- but it still came true, with no record of Sarah ever actually having faith in it. God's desire to lavish blessing upon His people is stronger, in the end, than His *offer* of blessing *if* we can believe. And we who are experiencing this need to think long and hard about whether our grace to others is as senseless and pure as God's is to us.

God's grace shines through again and again. Abraham went down into Egypt because of how "grievous" or 'heavy' the famine was; and comes up out of Egypt, thanks to betraying his wife, "heavy" [same Hebrew word] with riches (Gen. 12:10; 13:2). Everything he did was blessed, despite his weakness. The way God confirmed the covenant in Genesis 15 was another example of this grace. The covenant God made with Abraham was similar in style to covenants made between men at that time; and yet there was a glaring difference. Abraham was not required to do anything or take upon himself any obligations- only God passed between the pieces, not Abraham. Circumcision [cp. baptism] was to remember that this covenant of grace had been made. It isn't part of the covenant [thus we are under this same new, Abrahamic covenant, but don't require circumcision]. The promises to Abraham are pure, pure grace. Yahweh alone passed between the pieces of the animals, represented by the flaming torch- presumably in the form of an Angel as a pillar of fire. There's no record of Abraham being asked to pass through them as was usual custom. The promise of God was therefore unilateral- pure grace. And yet by its very nature, such unilateral grace from God

cannot be received passively. Although there was no specified response from Abraham, clearly enough he simply *had* to respond to such grace. It's been pointed out that Abraham was blessed by God, and yet the Hebrew form of the promise implies that he was commanded to therefore go forth and "be a blessing"- and his intercession for Lot and Sodom, his rescue of Lot in Gen. 14, were providentially arranged for him to practice that. A similar construction (an imperative verb string *hyh* + a noun) occurs in Gen. 17:1, "be blameless / perfect". The way Gen. 12:1-3 is structured implies that Abraham receives an unconditional blessing, yet he therefore is to go forth and "be a blessing". And it's the same for us- and note how the "blessing" is interpreted as forgiveness in Acts 3:27-29. We are to forgive and generally bless others, in all forms of gracious generosity, as God has blessed us. Note too that the idea of the dead animals in the ceremony of Gen. 15 was to teach that 'So may I be dismembered and die if I fail to keep my promise'. Jer. 34:18 speaks of how Israelites must die, because they passed between the pieces of the dead animal sacrifices in making a covenant. But here in Gen. 15, it is none less than the God who cannot die who is offering to do this, subjecting Himself to this potential curse! And He showed Himself for real in the death of His Son. That was His way of confirming the utter certainty of the promises to Abraham which are the basis of the new covenant which He has cut with us (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:17). The "blood of the covenant" doesn't mean that the blood of Jesus *is* or was the covenant; the covenant is a set of promises to us, namely the promises to Abraham and his seed. The blood of Jesus is the token of that covenant, the sign that this is all so utterly and totally true for each one of us. The Lord died, in the way that He did, to get through to us how true this all is- that God Almighty cut a sober, unilateral covenant with us personally, to give us the Kingdom. It's as challenging for us to believe as it was for Abraham and his earlier seed: "This divine-human bond gave to Israel its most distinctive religious belief, and provided the basis of its unique social interest and concern. Outside the Old Testament we have no clear evidence of a treaty between a god and his people" (4). What the theologian calls a unique basis for "social interest and concern" we can re-phrase more bluntly: We simply can't be passive to such grace, we have no option but to reach out with grace to others in care and concern- and we have a unique motivation in doing this, which this unbelieving world can never equal. Yet if unbelievers can show the huge care and self-sacrifice which they do- we ought to be doing *far* more, seeing we have an infinitely stronger motivation.

The command to preach to "all nations" would ring bells in Jewish minds with the promises to Abraham, concerning the blessing of forgiveness to come upon "all nations" through Messiah (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Therefore God's people are to preach the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ to "all nations". The offer of sharing in that blessing did not close at the end of the first century. Putting the "all nations" of the Abrahamic promises together with Christ's preaching commission leads to a simple conclusion: The Hope of Israel now applies to all nations; so go and tell this good news to all nations. Perhaps this is why there appears to be an intended grammatical ambiguity in the 'promise' that Abraham and his seed would be a blessing for all nations. It's unclear, as we've commented elsewhere, whether "be a blessing" is purely a prophetic prediction or a command. The commentary upon the promises to David in Ps. 72:17 is similar: "May his name resound for ever... may men bless themselves by him, may all nations pronounce him blessed". It is for us to go forth and be a blessing, and to make His Name great to the ends of the earth.

### **The Personal Nature Of The Promises**

The Abrahamic covenant is made personally with every member of the seed "in their generations" (Gen. 17:7). The records of the renewing of the covenant to Isaac and Jacob are

but indicators that this is the experience of each one of the seed. This means that the covenant love of God and the promise of personal inheritance of the land is made personally, and confirmed by the shedding of Christ's blood, to each of us. God promised Abraham that through Christ, His seed, blessing would come on people from all nations, with the result that God would be the God of Abraham's multitudinous seed: "To be a God unto...thy seed ...I will be their God" (Gen. 17:7,8). The seed is Christ, and the "God" is Yahweh. Let's not confuse them. Now in Revelation 21:3 this fundamental promise is alluded to; God Himself will be our God then; we will see Him and have a personal relationship with Him. This would mean that this idea of personally being with God is a fundamental part of the Gospel preached to Abraham.

It's hard to grasp how personal all this is- that the promises to Abraham really are made to us personally; we truly are in essence in his position. Perhaps it's the reason for the way God promises to bless *them* (plural) who bless Abraham, and curse *him* (singular) who curse Abraham (Gen. 12:3). In other words, the blessings are to come specifically and individually to many people; whereas those who curse Abraham and his seed are just treated as one homogenous mass. Time and again in the Biblical record, Abraham is held up as a very real example, in whose steps all God's people are to tread. For example, as Abraham was bidden leave Ur and go and "see" the "land" of promise which God would "give" him (Gen. 13:15), so the spies were told to go and "see" the "land" which God had "given" them (Num. 13:18; 32:8,9- the same three words as in the promises to Abraham)- yet they lacked the faith of Abraham to believe that really, they could possess that land. They did "see" the land, yet they were punished by being told that they would not now "see the land" (Num. 14:23; Dt. 1:35). They saw it, but they didn't "see" it with the eyes of Abraham. And so it can be with our vision of God's Kingdom. Remember that Moses was the author of both Genesis and Numbers- such connections aren't incidental. Moses wished the people to see themselves as going forward in the spirit of Abraham- and hence he wrote up the Genesis record for Israel's benefit an inspiration.

This personal nature of the promises resulted in a mutuality between God and the patriarchs, as it can between Him and all Abraham's seed. God's present judgment of us is actually related to how we 'judge' God to be. There's a mutuality between God and man in this business of present judgment. This theme is played on throughout Hebrews 11. Sarah "judged" God as faithful, and He 'judged' her as faithful (Heb. 11:11). As Abraham "was offering up Isaac" (RV), with the knife raised, he was "accounting" God to be capable of performing a resurrection, just as Moses quit the riches of Egypt, "accounting the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:17,19,26 RV). And yet God 'accounts' us to be faithful, imputing righteousness to us. Through these acts and attitudes of faith, "these... had witness borne to them through their faith" (Heb. 11:39 RV). It was as if their lives were lived in the courtroom, with their actions a constant presentation of evidence to the judge of all the earth. Our judgment of God to be faithful thus becomes His judgment of us to be faithful.

All this takes on a yet more beautiful relevance when we consider historical research into the blessings given at the time of Abraham. Blessings of many children, a specific seed / son who would bring glory and blessing, and a name change... are all frequently found in records of wedding blessings (5). In making those promises to Abraham, in mixing the letters of His Name with that of Abram... Yahweh was entering a marriage covenant with Abraham the impotent, the childless, the humanly hopeless. And He does the very same for each of us who are baptized into that same Name and become recipients of the very same promises. What

was weird and *so* counter-instinctive in this wedding- was the token of the marriage covenant. Abraham was to mutilate his male generative organ as a sign that God would generate him a great seed and family. Academics are divided as to whether such circumcision was in fact a common practice at the time [in which case it would fail to be a very unique token], or whether this was actually a radical and unusually intimate and shocking requirement from God (6). The unique nature of God's covenant with Abraham, that he *alone* had God known of all families of the earth, suggests to me that the latter view is likely to be correct. And remember time and again, that these same promises, this same covenant, is made to us in Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Our response to what God has promised us requires us to likewise respond in a counter-cultural and counter-instinctive way . To give up this world in order to gain it, to lose now in order to win ultimately and eternally.

## Notes

(1) P.R. Williamson, 'Abraham', in T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary Of The Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Leicester: IVP, 2003) p. 8.

(2) See M.E. Stone and T. Bergren, eds., *Biblical Figures Outside The Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998) pp. 151-175 for references.

(3) M.W. Chavalas, 'Terah' in T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary Of The Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Leicester: IVP, 2003) p. 829; V.P. Hamilton, *The Book Of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

(4) Ronald Clements, *Abraham And David: Genesis 15 And Its Meaning For Israelite Tradition* (London: SCM, 1967) p. 83.

(5) Claus Westermann, "Promises to the Patriarchs," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Keith Crinn et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976),p. 692.

(6) This is the view documented by J.G. Janzen, *Abraham And All The Families Of The Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) pp. 50,51.

## 1.3 " Even as Sarah..."

### 1-3-1 Moments Of Faith

There is abundant Biblical evidence that faith and the faith-motivated way of life are vital to our salvation. Heb. 11:1,2 defines faith in absolute terms; as the real mental vision of the invisible. This doesn't just mean occasionally achieving a vivid imagination of (e.g.) the future Kingdom, or the present bodily existence of the Lord Jesus, or other moments of faith and insight. It means living , hour by hour, with these things actually existing in our mental vision. Without this faith, the apostle reasons, we cannot please God. He cites a whole string of Old Testament examples, and then goes on to say that we too, like them, are surrounded by this great cloud of faithful examples, and therefore this should inspire us to the life of faith, as it did them (Heb. 12:1). And yet it's apparent enough that all these examples of faith, not least Abraham, wavered at times. The reference to Abram pitching his tent between Bethel ['the house of God'] and Hai ['the house of ruin'] could imply that he was caught between the two- his faith was not firmly decided (Gen. 13:3).

## *Moments of faith*

And yet, to a man and to a woman, we have a sense of inadequacy; of a separation between their level of faith and our own. But a closer examination of those examples reveals a feature which crops up time and again. It's a feature which of it only occurred once, we might shrug it off. But it is there, time and again throughout Heb. 11. It's this: Many of the examples quoted are moments in the lives of men when they did *not* show absolute faith, moments when their motives were mixed, moments when they had faith, but not without needing human qualifications. Examples of moments of faith will best show what I mean:

- Heb. 11:8 (Gk.) implies that *as soon as* God called Abram, he got up and left Ur. But a closer examination of the record indicates that this wasn't absolutely the case. It is stressed that both Abram and Sarai left Ur because " Terah *took* Abram his son...and Sarai his daughter in law" (Gen. 11:31). Abram had been called to leave Ur and go into Canaan. But instead he followed his father to Haran, and lived there (for some years, it seems) until his father died, and then he responded to his earlier call to journey towards Canaan <sup>(1)</sup>. The Genesis record certainly reads as if Abram was dominated by his father and family, and this militated against an immediate response to the call he received to leave Ur and journey to Canaan. At best his father's decision enabled him to obey the command to leave Ur without having to break with his family. And yet, according to Heb. 11:8, Abram immediately responded, as an act of faith. But it was a moment of faith.

- Abraham's faith in the promises is repeatedly held up as our example (11:8,12,13 and elsewhere). Abraham " believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6) is quoted three times in the New Testament. But how *deep* was Abraham's faith? Straight after Abraham's profession of faith, God told him: " I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur...to give thee this land to inherit it" . But Abraham then goes straight on to ask God: " Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (Gen. 15:7,8). And immediately before Abraham's oft quoted profession of faith, he had said: " Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless...behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir" (Gen. 15:2,3). His faith in the promise of a seed was surely shaky at this time <sup>(2)</sup>. Yet, sandwiched in between these two expressions of his partial faith, Abraham rises within his heart to a level of faith which so pleased God. " He believed in the Lord" seems to refer to an attitude deep within Abraham's heart, as he gazed up at the stars and reflected in God's promise: " So shall thy seed be" . God saw that moment of faith, even if it was only a temporary peak, and was pleased with it; even though at the time, Abraham was weak in faith and even in a sense " ungodly" <sup>(3)</sup>.

- Sarah was "reproved" by King Abimelech for going along with Abraham's lie about her not being his wife (Gen. 20:16). And yet Kings were reprov'd for her sake, and were not allowed to do anything harmful to her (Ps. 105:14)! And Abraham reproves Abimelech later- for something Abimelech claimed he had not done (Gen. 21:25). The repeat of the word "reprove" is surely meant to indicate that here is an example of Abraham and Sarah being counted righteous because of their faith- when clearly they were not wholly righteous. Abraham, the man who had to be reprov'd, was used by God to reprove the man who had reprov'd him...it would have sounded very hypocritical to Abraham's neighbours. Yet the point was, that God saw him as being righteous. Indeed the Abimelech kings appear far more gracious and honourable than the Abraham family who wandered in and out of their territory; the way Abimelech threatens his own people with death if they touch Isaac or his wife, after they had been deceitful to him, is an example (Gen. 26:11). Yet it was not the nice people of

the world, but this wandering, spiritually struggling family whom God loved and worked with.

- " By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Heb. 11:20). Yet the record of this in Gen. 27 doesn't paint Isaac in a very positive light. " Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). The AVmg. seems to bring out Isaac's superficiality: " Isaac loved Esau, because venison was in his mouth" . This seems to connect with the way Esau threw away his birthright for the sake of food in his mouth. Esau was evidently of the flesh, whilst Jacob had at least some potential spirituality. Yet Isaac preferred Esau. He chose to live in Gerar (Gen. 26:6), right on the border of Egypt- as close as he could get to the world, without crossing the line. And he thought nothing of denying his marriage to Rebekah, just to save his own skin (Gen. 26:7). So it seems Isaac had some marriage problems; the record speaks of " Esau his son" and " Jacob (Rebekah's) son" (Gen. 27:5,6). The way Jacob gave Isaac wine " and he drank" just before giving the blessings is another hint at some unspirituality (Gen. 27:25). Isaac seems not to have accepted the Divine prophecy concerning his sons: " the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23), seeing that it was his intention to give Esau the blessings of the firstborn, and thinking that he was speaking to Esau, he gave him the blessing of his younger brothers (i.e. Jacob) serving him (Gen. 27:29 cp. 15). *And yet*, and this is my point, Isaac's blessing of the two boys is described as an act of faith; even though it was only one of his passing moments of faith and was done with an element of disbelief in God's word of prophecy concerning the elder serving the younger, and perhaps under the influence of alcohol. Yet according to Heb. 11:20, this blessing was done with faith; *at that very point in time*, Isaac had faith. So God's piercing eye saw through the haze of alcohol, through Isaac's liking for the good life, through Isaac's unspiritual liking for Esau, through his marriage problem, through his lack of faith that the elder must serve the younger, and discerned that there was some faith in that man Isaac; and then holds this up as a stimulant for our faith, centuries later! Not only should we be exhorted to see the good side in our present brethren; but we can take comfort that this God is our God.

- " By faith (Moses) forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the King" (Heb. 11:27). But Moses *did* flee Egypt, because he feared the wrath of the King (Ex. 2:14,15). It seems that Moses had at best a mixture of motives, or motives that changed over time; yet God sees through his human fear, and discerns an element of calm faith within Moses as he left Egypt. In similar vein, at the time of the burning bush, Moses seems to have forgotten God's covenant name, he didn't immediately take off his shoes in respect as he should have done, and it seems he feared to come close to God due to a bad conscience, and he resisted God's invitation for him to go forth and do His work (Ex. 3:5-7,10,11,18; 4:1,10-14) <sup>(4)</sup>. And yet at this very time, the New Testament says that Moses showed faith in the way he perceived God (Lk. 20:37). But it was a momentary faith, valid all the same.

- Israel's deliverance through the Red Sea seems to be attributed to Moses' faith (Heb. 11:28,29; Acts 7:36,38). Yet in the actual record, Moses seems to have shared Israel's cry of fear, and was rebuked for this by God (Ex. 14:15,13,10). Yet in the midst of that rebuke, we learn from the New Testament, God perceived the faith latent within Moses, beneath that human fear and panic.

- Samson killed a lion, escaped fire and killed many Philistines by his faith (Heb. 11:32-34)- so the Spirit tells us. Yet these things were all done by him at times when he had at best a partial faith, or was living out moments of faith. He had a worldly Philistine girlfriend, a sure

grief of mind to his Godly parents, and on his way to the wedding he met and killed a lion-through faith, Heb. 11 tells us (Jud. 14:1-7). The Philistines threatened to burn him with fire, unless his capricious paramour of a wife extracted from him the meaning of his riddle. He told her, due, it seems, to his human weakness and hopeless sexual weakness. He then killed 30 Philistines to provide the clothes he owed the Philistines on account of them answering the riddle (Jud. 14:15-19). It is evident that Samson was weak in many ways at this time; the Proverbs make many allusions to him, the strong man ruined by the evil Gentile woman, the one who could take a city but not rule his spirit etc. And yet underneath all these weaknesses, serious as they were, there was a deep faith within Samson which Heb. 11 highlights.

### Notes

(1) See *The Call Of Abram*.

(2) Abraham's fear that he would be killed by Abimelech and his willingness to give Sarah a child by having a relationship with Hagar also seem to suggest a lack of total faith in the promise that he would have a seed.

(3) It may be that Abraham realised his own spiritual weakness at this time, if we follow Paul's argument in Rom. 4:3,5: " If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory...(but) Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness...to him (alluding to Abraham) that worketh not, but believeth (as did Abraham) on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith (like Abraham's) is counted for righteousness" . Surely this suggests that Abraham felt *ungodly* at the time, unworthy of this great promise, recognizing he only had moments of faith, and yet he believed that although he was ungodly, God would justify him and give him the promise, and therefore he was counted as righteous and worthy of the promise. There is certainly the implication of some kind of forgiveness being granted Abraham at the time of his belief in Gen. 15:6; righteousness was imputed to him, which is tantamount to saying that his ungodliness was covered. In this context, Paul goes straight on to say that the same principles operated in the forgiveness of David for his sin with Bathsheba. . It would actually appear that Paul is writing here, as he often does, with his eye on deconstructing popular Jewish views at the time. Their view of Abraham was that he was perfect, "Godly" in the extreme- and Paul's point is that actually he was not, he was "ungodly", but counted righteous not by his acts but by his faith. For documentation of Jewish sources, see S.K. Stowers, *A Rereading Of Romans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons For Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988).

(4) The spiritual weakness of Moses at this time is discussed in *Moses In Weakness*.

### Abraham's Imperfect Faith

The promises to Abraham were extended in Genesis 15, with more specifics added about the "seed". But the context of the giving of those promises is again Abraham's weakness. After the conflict with the surrounding kings recorded in Genesis 14, Abraham is comforted: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield" (Gen. 15:1)- as if Abram was starting to doubt in God's continued ability to protect him. God's assurances continued: "I am thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). The Hebrew mind would've understood "reward" in this context to refer to children- Ps. 127:3 is explicit: "Children are the inheritance given by the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (s.w.). The "reward" is paralleled with the inheritance of



children given by God. Jer. 31:16 likewise speaks of a woman bereft of her children being "rewarded" with more children. Yet Abraham doesn't just accept that on faith. He speaks as if he somehow didn't believe that those promises meant that he personally would have a child; for his response is to say: "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless... Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and lo, one born in my house is mine heir" (Gen. 15:3,4). It's as if Abram were saying 'OK, I hear You, but whatever these promises of Yours mean, reality is, I am old and childless... can't You find a way to give me children?'. "Since I *continue* [Heb.] childless" indicates his frustration. God had already promised to "give" the land to Abraham and his seed (Gen. 12:7; 13:15); and now Abraham complains that God hasn't 'given' [s.w.] him a seed. One can possibly detect an anger with God, at best a frustration, when he comments that all he has is his steward Eliezer ("this Eliezer of Damascus") as "the son of my house / family" (Gen. 15:2, Heb. *ben bayith*, son of my family)- as if to say 'All this You've promised me- is to go to *him*, is *this* guy to be this wonderful promised seed, and I for now get nothing? Was that the whole purpose of calling me out of Ur?'. Indeed, Keil and Delitsch suggest the correct interpretation and translation here as being: "Of what avail are all my possessions, wealth, and power, since I have no child, and the heir of my house is Eliezer the Damascene? ????, synonymous with ????? (Zeph. 2:9), possession, or the seizure of possession, is chosen on account of its assonance with ??????. ??????, son of the seizing of possession = seizer of possession, or heir". Abraham could even be viewing Eliezer as effectively grabbing what he thought should be his personally.

In my opinion, Abraham's comment "this Eliezer of Damascus..." is another indicator of weakness in this undoubtedly great man. Eliezer is presented as a man of faith, of extreme loyalty to Abraham, with a wonderful humility in seeking the good of Isaac, the man who displaced him as heir of so much. His comment that God "led me- even me- straight to the house" (1) further indicates a commendable humility. Indeed, the way Eliezer refuses the greetings of polite custom in order to get on with God's work (Gen. 24:33) appears to be used by the Lord as a model for His preachers (Lk. 10:4). A window into Eliezer's faithfulness is provided by considering how Laban calls him "O blessed of the Lord", but Eliezer replies that in fact "the Lord has greatly blessed *my master*" (Gen. 24:31,35). His focus was not at all upon himself but rather upon Abraham his master. Yet Abraham appears to almost despise Eliezer, his bitterness at not having a seed by Sarah got the better of him at that moment- so it seems to me. There seems a designed contrast between Eliezer and Jacob. Eliezer with utter integrity says that God has given him "success" (Gen. 24:12) in seeking a wife for Isaac; whereas Jacob uses the same word in lying to his blind father about why he had so quickly brought venison: "Because God granted me success" (Gen. 27:20).

Straight after receiving the promises, Abraham goes down to Egypt [an act with spiritually negative overtones], and lies about his wife. Not only does he show a strange lack of protection for her, but his actions reflect a weakened faith in God's promises to him. For if Abraham was to have died at the hands of jealous Egyptians at that stage, how would the promises to him be fulfilled? In urging Sarah to deny she was his wife, Abraham comments to her in Gen. 12:13: "my soul shall live because of thee". Ps. 33:18,19 appears to comment upon this: "Behold, the eye of Jehovah (Angelic language- and Abraham dealt with Angels) is upon them that fear him, Upon them that hope in his lovingkindness; to deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine (Abraham told the lie he did about Sarah because he trusted in Egypt to keep him alive in famine). Our soul hath waited for Jehovah: He is our help and our shield"- and it is God, not Sarah, who is described as Abraham's shield (same Hebrew word) in Gen. 15:1.



So Abraham was hardly at his spiritual best when God gave him the promises of Genesis 15. The first use of a word in the Bible is often significant- and the first time we meet the Hebrew word *nathan*, to give, is in Gen. 1:17, where we learn that God 'gave' the stars to humanity on earth. It's as if God is now testing whether Abraham will make the connection or not- for He takes Abraham out to see the stars, shining up there in the sky as proof that God really can give stars, has already done so and continues to do so... and challenges Abraham as to whether or not he can believe that truly, his seed *will* be given to him likewise, as many as those stars (Gen. 15:5). And Abraham made it through the hoop. His awareness of the word of Gen. 1:17, that God really had given us the stars, his faith in the word, worked within him to bring forth the yet greater leap of faith- that really, so would his seed be. And God was thrilled. That man, standing there in the Middle Eastern night and beholding the stars, touched the heart of God by his internal attitudes... the sense within his heart that yes, OK, yes, somehow, yes, so will my seed be, somehow I *will* have my own child... And it was counted to him for righteousness. The same desperate struggle for faith was seen in the Lord in His final moments upon the cross- for He there reflected, according to Ps. 22:30, that a seed would indeed serve God, and it shall be accounted [s.w. "numbered" as in 'a seed which cannot be numbered'] for a generation. The childless Lord Jesus, with all against Him, facing His death with His lifework apparently a failure, His spiritual children [the disciples] having fled... was in the position of Abraham. And Abraham's faith surely inspired Him. And so it will each of us, when it seems that really life has failed, our efforts have got nowhere, family has broken up, children hate us, our best aspirations just never worked out... in those moments, in whatever form they come, we are to be inspired by Abraham. And we too can go out and view the stars which God has given, and keeps on giving, and believe again that ultimately He will give us the land, and in some form our seed will eternally endure.

Abraham had been promised a son in Genesis 15; and yet there was no specific mention that this would be by Sarah. God had promised that "one born of your own bowels" would be his son (Gen. 15:7). Yet according to Rom. 4:19, Abraham at that time did not consider the "deadness of Sarah's womb" (Rom. 4:19) to be a barrier. That indicates to me that he considered Sarah as his "own bowels". Note how in Semitic thought, Paul used the same idea when he asked Philemon to receive Onesiphorus as "mine own bowels" (Philemon 12). Another person could be considered "mine own bowels" if they were that close. When God promised Abraham that "of [his] own bowels" he would have a son, Abraham didn't selfishly think that this just meant that *he* would have a child. He considered his wife Sarah as his "own bowels", and so he assumed this meant that she would bear the child. In this we see a commendable unity of Abraham and Sarah; he thought of her as he thought of himself. In an age of polygamy and concubines, this was unusually wonderful. He could so easily have just gone off and slept with a woman to test out God's promise and have a child. And yet, as often in Abraham's life, he didn't maintain that level of spirituality. For he gave in to Sarah's badgering him to sleep with her slave girl Hagar, and the whole incident has been recorded with allusion to Adam wrongly hearkening to his wife. It has been pointed out that in case of a wife being infertile, the man usually took another wife and didn't just sleep with his slave girl. The 300 or so Nuzi tablets record history, legal codes and case history of situations contemporary with Abraham; and the comment has been made that deciding to sleep with your wife's slave girl was almost unheard of. So it seems to me that Abraham again gave in, in a moment of weakness; but didn't take another wife, because he really clung on to his faith that he would have a child by Sarah. The whole incident with Abraham and Hagar seems to me to reflect weakness in both Abraham and Sarah. Neither of them ever refer to her by her name, but rather by her title, "handmaid", as if she were just an object. Yet God and the inspired narrator refer to her by her name, Hagar, as if recognizing the value of her person in

a way that Abraham and Sarah didn't. It seems to me that Israel's later experience re-lived that of Hagar- flight into the wilderness of Sinai, miraculously provided with water, found and preserved by an Angel. God heard the cry of Israel's affliction at the hands of the Egyptians, just as He heard the cry of the mother and child whom Sarah had afflicted. This deliberate coincidence was perhaps to make Israel realize on a national scale how wrongly their forefather had treated Hagar- and it has some relevance to modern Israel's treatment of the Arabs. For Israel suffer and will yet suffer what they have put Hagar's descendants through.

And yet, it would seem that Abraham at this time had other children by Keturah, another "concubine", as she is described in 1 Chron. 1:32. This term is only really applicable to other women taken during the lifetime of the wife or wives. Although the children of Keturah and Abraham are only recorded in Gen. 25:1-4, it seems to me that this isn't chronological; it seems to me that this a notice inserted at this point as a genealogical note, rather than implying that Abraham only took Keturah after the marriage of Isaac in Gen. 24. Remember that at the time of the promise in Gen. 15, Abraham was impotent- hence his bitterness at not having any child, and Rom. 4:19 describes his having faith that he would overcome this problem. Having recovered his virility, it could be that he eagerly had children by Keturah to as it were prove himself. Yet one wonders therefore how long he maintained the intensity of his faith that specifically by Sarah he would have a child. Yet that faith of Abraham at the time of the promise in Gen. 15 was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness, is held up as our example and glorified throughout the New Testament- when it would seem that in fact Abraham didn't always maintain the intensity of the faith he had at that time. And God Himself had to reassure him: "Know of a *surety*" (Gen. 15:13), as if God recognized the element of doubt within the faith of Abraham- although God elsewhere holds up that faith to us as such a wonderful example.

That Abraham really is our example is proved not only by the way Paul writes about him as "the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16), and the fact that by baptism into Christ, we are his "seed" (Gal. 3:27-29). There are many more subtle hints that we are to be as Abraham- and the watchful Bible student will note them. An example would be the way in which the Lord Jesus calls us His friends, because He has told them what He is going to do (Jn. 15:15). This is exactly the language God uses about Abraham- because He was His "friend", He showed Abraham what He was going to do (Gen. 18:17-19). Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac leaves us all shaking our heads and feeling that we simply wouldn't have risen up to that level of sacrifice. For not only was Isaac the son Abraham had so longed for, but he was the longed for fulfilment of the promises which had been the very core of Abraham's life. Yet 1 Cor. 10:13 appears to allude to God's provision of another sacrifice and thereby a way out of Abraham's temptation / testing- and this passage implies that each one of us are in Abraham's shoes: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted / tested (=Gen. 22:1) beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also *provide* the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it". No longer can Abraham be seen as a Sunday School figure of faith to be merely admired. For we are in his shoes, and the same God will likewise work with us in *our* weaknesses, both testing and providing the ways of escape.

Abraham's weakness at the time of the Genesis 15 promises is perhaps behind how Paul interprets the star-gazing incident in Rom. 4:3-5. He quotes the incident, and God's counting of righteousness to Abraham, as proof that a man with no "works", nothing to glory before God with, can believe in God to "justify the ungodly", and thereby be counted righteous. Understanding Abraham's mood as revealed in Gen. 15:1-4 certainly helps us see the relevance of all this to Abraham. And it helps us see Abraham more realistically as the father

of us all... and not some Sunday School hero, well beyond our realistic emulation. No longer need we think "Abraham? Oh, yeah, Abraham... faith... wow. But me... nah. I'm not Abraham...". He's for real, truly our example, a realistic hero whom we can cheer and pledge to follow. For Abraham is an example to us of God's grace to man, and a man in all his weakness and struggle with God accepting it and believing it, even when he is "*ungodly*", rather than a picture of a white-faced placid saint with unswerving faith:

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, hath found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God. For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Rom. 4:1-5).

It is in the very struggle for faith that we have that we show ourselves to have the family characteristic of Abraham. That moment when the "*ungodly*", doubting, bitter Abraham believed God's promise is to be as it were our icon, the picture we rise up to: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:6,7).

The struggle within Abraham at the time is brought out by Paul in Rom. 4:18-24, which seems to be a kind of psychological commentary upon the state of Abraham's mind as he stood there looking at the stars in the presence of God / an Angel ("before him [God] whom he believed", Rom. 4:17):

"Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be. And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead".

There are some implied gaps within the record in Gen. 15:5,6: God brings Abraham outside, and asks him to number the stars [gap]; then He tells Abraham "So shall thy seed be" [gap]; and then, maybe 10 seconds or 10 hours afterwards, "Abraham believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness". Those 10 seconds or 10 hours or whatever the period was, are summarized by Paul as how Abraham "in hope believed against hope". His no-hope struggled against his hope / faith, but in the end his faith in God's word of promise won out. "According to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be" implies to me that he kept reflecting on those words: "So shall thy seed be" (three words in Hebrew, *ko zehrah hawya*). And we too can too easily say that we believe the Bible is God's word, without realizing that to just believe three inspired words can be enough to radically change our lives and lead us to eternity. I'm not sure that Abraham's ultimate belief of those three words *ko zehrah hawya* just took a few seconds. According to Paul, he "considered... his body" - he reflected on the fact he was impotent (see Gk. and RV). *Katanoeo*, "consider", means to "observe fully" (Rom. 4:19). He took full account of his impotent state, knowing it as only a man can know it about himself. And he likewise considered fully the deadness of his elderly wife's womb,

recalling how her menstruation had stopped years ago... but all that deeply personal self-knowledge didn't weaken his faith; he didn't "waver", but in fact- the very opposite occurred. He "waxed strong through faith... being fully assured that what [God] had promised, He was able also to perform". As he considered his own physical weakness, and that of his wife, his faith "waxed" stronger (RV), he went through a process of becoming "fully assured", his faith was progressively built up ("waxed strong" is in the passive voice)... leading up to the moment of total faith that so thrilled the heart of God (2). And so it can happen with us- the very obstacles to faith, impotence in Abraham's case, are what actually leads to faith getting into that upward spiral that leads towards total certainty. Abraham's physical impotence did not make him "weak" [s.w. translated "impotent" in Jn. 5:3,7] in faith- it all worked out the opposite. For his physical impotence made him not-impotent in faith; the very height of the challenge led him to conclude that God would be true to His word, and he would indeed have a child. For when we are "weak" [s.w. "impotent"], then we are strong (2 Cor. 12:10). Thus the internal struggle of Abraham's mind led his faith to develop in those seconds or minutes or hours as he reflected upon the words "So shall your seed be". He "staggered not at the promise" (Rom. 14:20), he didn't separate himself away from (Gk.) those three Hebrew words translated "So shall your seed be", he didn't let his mind balk at them... and therefore and thereby he was made strong in faith ("waxed strong in faith" Rom. 4:20 RV). This process of his faith strengthening is picked up in the next verse: Abraham was "fully persuaded that what [God] had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). There was a process of internal persuasion going on- leading to the moment of faith, which so thrilled God and was imputed to Abraham for righteousness. And of course Paul drives the point home- that we are to have the faith of Abraham. As he believed that life could come out of his dead body ("dead" in Rom. 4:19, with a passive participle, implies 'slain'), so *we* are to believe in the resurrection of the slain body of the Lord Jesus, and the real power of His new life to transform our dead lives (Rom. 4:23,24). Gal. 3:5,14 puts it another way in saying that if we share the faith of Abraham at that time, we will receive "the promise of the spirit through faith", the enlivening of our sterile lives. And this takes quite some faith for us to take seriously on board; for as Abraham carefully considered the impotence of his physical body, so we can get a grim picture of the deadness of our fleshly lives.

It seems to me that these various processes climaxed in a peak moment of faith. James 2:23 speaks as if the comment "Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness" was a one-off statement made at that time when Abraham believed; and it was subsequently justified when Abraham demonstrated his faith by offering Isaac. So the comment that "Abraham believed" surely must refer to Abraham's response as he stood there looking up at the stars. When we read that Abraham "put his trust" in God (Gen. 15:6) we are to understand that he 'said amen' to God's promises. "Amen" comes from the same Hebrew root as *he'min*, to believe, or, more strictly, "to affirm, recognize as valid". He got to a specific point where he said "Amen" to God's word; and I wonder whether he said "Amen" out loud, as the crowning pinnacle of the belief in God which was going on within him. For this reason I suggest we say "Amen" at the end of a prayer, out loud.

Yet this peak of faith in Abraham is found between evidence of his weakness of faith. We've seen this in the early verses of Gen. 15. And now, having risen up to this peak of faith, we find him doubting again: "How shall I know that I shall inherit [the land]?" (Gen. 15:8). And again, this makes Abraham yet the more real to us, who likewise find it so hard to maintain peaks of faith. God condescends to Abraham by cutting a covenant with him. It's perhaps significant that Abraham laid out the required animals, and drove away the birds that kept trying to feed on the carcasses- but then, Abraham falls asleep, and can't do this any more.

And the birds are warded off instead by the burning torch- the same Hebrew words are used about the cherubim (Ez. 1:13; Ex. 20:18), and the idea of a burning torch is used to describe the Lord Jesus on the cross (Jn. 3:14-19 Gk.). It's as if again Abraham had to be taught that all these promises and the covenant ensuring them were all of grace and not his own strength. For he would lay down in the sleep of death, the horror of great darkness, and it will be the grace and glory of God which fulfils the covenant and preserves Abraham's seed from the birds of prey- and not Abraham's own efforts.

And the theme of Abraham's weakness continues over into chapter 16- where Sarah asks Abraham to sleep with her servant girl in order to have a child. Why did Sarah ask Abraham to do this, at this stage in their lives? Why not earlier? Surely the promise of a seed had restimulated her pain regarding her barren state. Yet Abraham had previously worked through with the Lord the possibility of Eliezer, one born in his household, being the promised seed. And God had clarified that no, Abraham's own child would be the heir. It's as if Sarah could believe that Abraham's impotence could be cured, but not her barrenness. "And Abraham hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (Gen. 16:2) is of course framed in the language of Adam hearkening to Eve's voice. I can only take this incident- and the less than honourable treatment of Hagar afterwards- to be another trough in Abraham's faith graph. It's been pointed out that all historical and cultural evidence from the time points to Abraham's action as being most unusual. In the case of a barren wife, the man chose himself a second wife. It's almost unheard of in contemporary records for a man to have his wife chose him a woman to have a child by- let alone for it to be one of her slavegirls (3). This historical background provides a window into Abraham's faithful commitment to Sarah- for it's significant that he's not recorded as taking another wife. Instead, his fine faith and character slips up in a moment of weakness by giving in to Sarah for a moment.

Thirteen years later, God appeared again to Abraham, and made a conditional promise: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect... and I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly" (Gen. 17:1,2). The Hebrew certainly reads as if Abraham had to be "perfect" and walk before God, and then, God would make a covenant with him and multiply him. Abraham falls to his face; and then God announces that actually, He will make the covenant anyway, and the promises which are part of that covenant, Abraham should consider as having been fulfilled already, they were so certain of fulfilment (4). Consider the wording: "Behold, my covenant *is* [present tense- right now, i.e. Abraham didn't have to prove himself "perfect"] with thee, and you shall be [future] a father of many nations... your name shall be Abraham, for a father of many nations *have I made thee*" (Gen. 17:4,5). The Abrahamic promises, which we too have received, are a reflection of unconditional love and grace on God's part. At the end of all the Divine announcements, we read that Abraham again falls on his face and laughs for joy (Gen. 17:17). Perhaps by Angelic invitation (as with Daniel), Abraham had stood up from the floor to hear God's promises from the mouth of the Angel- and now he collapses again. The sheer *wonder* of God's grace in these promises is simply *so* great. What is conditional upon our walking 'perfectly' has been given to us anyway, by grace- for righteousness has been imputed to us as it was to Abraham. As a side comment, it seems to me that surprised laughter occurs when we encounter a difference between the expected, and an unexpected reality that takes us pleasantly by surprise. That observation would indicate Abraham's seeing by faith the reality of what God had promised; and yet it would also suggest that prior to this, Abraham was not really expecting God to completely fulfil the implication of the promises.

### **Abraham's Limited Vision**

If Abraham had had enough spiritual vision, he could have asked for Sodom to be spared for the sake of one man (Lot)- and surely it would've been. He asks six times for the city to be spared, each time decreasing the number of faithful for whose sake it should be spared. The implication may be that he failed to go on unto completion, the seventh time; for had he asked a seventh time [and we sense it was in his mind to do so but he bottled out], surely he would've been heard. Perhaps Abraham feared to ask for Sodom's salvation for the sake of one because he failed to perceive the huge value of the individual to God; he assumed there must at least be a small community of faithful [10 people] in order for God to save, just as some struggle to understand how they can acceptably serve God alone if there is no community of believers. The righteousness of a single man [cp. that of the Lord Jesus] wasn't perceived by Abraham as powerful enough. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he writes in Romans of how for the sake of "the one", the Lord Jesus, many sinners can be counted righteous. And surely God was trying to bring out the same possibility when we read of how Lot asked for the sake of Zoar- just for his singular sake. And God spared Zoar- just for the sake of one man, Lot. Note how the Hebrew word used for "spare" in Gen. 18:24,26 recurs in Gen. 19:21, where God assures Lot that He will indeed *spare* Zoar [AV "I have *accepted*"]. We are surely intended to reflect that God would have spared Sodom for Lot's sake too. Perhaps God is alluding to the same point when He says that for the sake of just one righteous man He would have spared Israel in Ezekiel's time (Ez. 22:30). Surely there was one righteous man in Ezekiel's time, not least Ezekiel himself. But there was nobody with the spiritual vision to intercede with God to spare Israel for the sake of that one man; their lack of vision of His grace and pleasure in the righteousness of even one person was akin to Abraham's lack. And are we not intended to see some allusion to Abraham's failure in the way that Moses, just one man, prayed for and received Israel's salvation? And could not Abraham have asked for Sodom to be spared for his own sake, had he had a broader vision of God's grace? Perhaps his legalistic attitude is reflected in his appeal for "the judge of all the earth" to do what was *right*, in not destroying the righteous with the wicked. He perceives God as legalistic judge, not gracious Father. He asked for justice- not mercy. His basis is that the Judge of all the earth shall "do judgment"- note that "do right" is a poor translation. The Hebrew word translated "Judge" is the same root as "do judgment / justice". It's as if Abraham is almost simply observing that the Judge / Justice will of course do justice, and so he's drawing to His attention that there are in fact just people in Sodom, and therefore God's justice will surely preclude Him from destroying them. He assumed there were ten people in Sodom who were righteous; but perhaps later Scripture alludes to this by stressing that there is not one truly righteous person, not one (Rom. 3:10). Paul brings out the point that therefore salvation is by grace, not personal righteousness. And in the end, Lot was saved- but only because he threw himself upon God's grace. Yet he too perhaps suffered from Abraham's legalism; it is possibly referred to by the men of Sodom when they complain that he who had come in to sojourn amongst them "would play the judge" (Gen. 19:9). Significantly, Lot's salvation out of the burning Sodom is applied to all God's people in Am. 4:11. His entire people are saved by a like grace.

One can't help but notice that God stressed to the later children of Abraham that since they had a covenant with Him, they were not to make covenants with the people who lived around them in the land- time and again God references His covenant with His people, and in that context tells them not to make covenants with the peoples of the land (Ex. 34:10-12,15,27; Dt. 7:29; Jud. 2:1,2,20). Yet Abraham made covenants with those very people (Gen. 14:13; 21:27,32)- perhaps indicating his lack of appreciation of his covenant relationship with Yahweh?.

Romans 14 and 15 have many allusions back to the earlier, 'doctrinal' part of Romans. Between them, those allusions teach that we *are* to be as Abraham; and yet we will be accepted if we can't rise up to his standard. Rom. 14:1 exhorts us to "receive the *weak in faith*"- when we have been told that Abraham was *not* weak in faith (Rom. 4:19) and we should seek to be like him. But we are to receive those who are in his seed by baptism, but don't make it to his level of personal faith. Rom. 14:5 bids us be *fully persuaded*- as Abraham was "fully persuaded" (Rom. 4:21). Yet, Rom. 14:23 he who *doubts* is damned- and Abraham didn't *stagger* [s.w., Rom. 4:20]. Thus ultimately, he must be our example, even if some in the ecclesia will take time to rise up to his standard, and unlike him are "weak in faith" .

## Notes

(1) Translation of E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1964) and Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (London: Tyndale Press, 1967) p. 148.

(2) In passing, note the purposeful allusion to Abraham's *not* being weakened in faith later on in Romans- Rom. 14:1 says that we should accept a brother who *is* "weak in faith"- the same Greek words are used.

(3) See A.R. Millard & D.J. Wiseman, eds., *Essays On The Patriarchal Narratives* (Leicester: IVP, 1980) pp. 116,117.

(4) The Hebrew translated "fell on his face" is exactly the same as that translated "his countenance fell" in Gen. 4:5,6 (see too Job 29:24). Another reading of this incident could therefore be that Abraham's face fell on hearing that the covenant would be conditional upon his walking perfectly- but then God made the covenant anyway with him, and therefore in verse 17 he falls on his face and laughs with joy. This, perhaps, is the more likely, realistic reading; and it also avoids the problem of Abraham falling to his face twice with no record of him standing up again.

## Abraham's Growth

Progressive appreciation of the Lord Jesus can be seen in the lives of Paul, Peter and many others. But it has been pointed out by David Levin that Abraham's appreciation of the promises relating to the Christ-seed also grew over time. When the promise was first given, he seems to have assumed it referred to his adopted son, Lot. Thus Abraham offered Lot the land which had been promised to Abraham's seed (Gen. 12:7 cp. chapter 13). But after Lot returned to Sodom, Abraham looked to his servant Eliezer as his heir / seed (Gen. 15:2,3). Thus God corrected him, in pointing out that the seed would be from Abraham's own body (15:4). And so Abraham thought of Ishmael, who was a son from his own body (although Yahweh didn't specify who the mother would be). When Abraham's body became dead, i.e. impotent, he must have surely concluded that Ishmael was the son promised. But again, Abraham was told that no, Ishmael was not to be the seed; and finally God told Abraham that Sarah would have a child. Their faith was encouraged by the incidents in Egypt which occurred straight after this, whereby Abraham prayed for Abimelech's wives and slaves so that they might have children- and he was heard. Finally, Isaac was born. It was clear that this was to be the seed. But that wasn't all. Abraham in his final and finest spiritual maturity came to the understanding that the seed was ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in wondrous appreciation of the Saviour seed and the way of forgiveness enabled through Him. Note the huge paradox in the promises- a paradox of grace which comes true in some form for all

those who receive them. The sign of circumcision was given as the confirmation that the promise regarding a son would be fulfilled. Abraham had to figuratively cut off part of his vital organ in order to be assured that *God* would provide a son for him. Accepting God's promises means that we too must give up our human strength and attempts to fulfil them. Likewise when Jacob was given the repeated covenant acceptance, he was wounded in his "thigh" and thereafter walked with a limp. "It is not impossible that the damage to the "thigh" means Jacob was assaulted in his vital organs. Thus, the "limp" refers to the mark left on his very manhood and future" (1).

Spiritual ambition means that we will desire to do some things which we can't physically fulfil- and yet they will be counted to us. Abraham is spoken of as having offered up Isaac- his intention was counted as the act. And Prov. 19:22 RV appropriately comments: "The desire of a man is the measure of his kindness". It is all accepted according to what a man has, not what he has not. Faith is perfected / matured by the process of works (James 2:22,23). The works, the upward spiral of a life lived on the basis of faith, develop the initial belief in practice. Thus Abraham believed God in Gen. 15, but the works of Gen. 22 [offering Isaac] made that faith "perfect". Through his correct response to the early promises given him, Abraham was imputed "the righteousness of faith". But *on account of* that faith inspired by the earlier promises, he was given "the promises that he should be heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). That promise in turn inspired yet more faith. In this same context, Paul had spoken of how the Gospel preached to Abraham in the promises leads men "from faith to faith", up the upward spiral (Rom. 1:17).

The offering of Isaac was without doubt an act of faith by Abraham. His trust in the invisible God, His reflection upon a series of promises which amount to no more than about 200 words in Hebrew, was balanced against his natural hope for his family, human affection, common sense, love of his beloved son, lifelong ambition... and he was willing to ditch all those things for his faith in God's promises. You can speak 200 words in a minute. The total sum of God's recorded communication with Abraham was only a minute's worth of speaking. Abraham had so much faith in so few words; and perhaps the number of words was so few so that Abraham would memorize and continually reflect upon them. Yet the total number of words God or an Angel spoke to Abraham about anything was pretty small- the total [including the words of the promises] comes to only 583 Hebrew words- which can be spoken in less than three minutes [Gen.12:1-3 = 28 words; 12:7 = 4 words; 13:14-16 = 44 words; Gen. 15 = 117 words; Gen. 17 = 195 words; Gen. 18 = 87 words; Gen. 21 = 26 words; Gen. 22 = 82 words]. And remember that all these words, these snatches of brief conversation, were spoken to Abraham over a period of 100 years or so. His faith in God's word, His mediation upon it and following its implications, really does make him a spiritual "father of us all".

## Notes

(1) Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) p. 270.

## Humility And Integrity

One senses a growing humility within Abraham. Despite being a great man, called a "mighty prince" by local people, with a large household and private army, he personally runs to entertain the strangers who later turned out to be Angels. He so believed in the promised land being ultimately his that he could offer to his younger relative Lot the choice of the best land to live in- when in their culture, the leader of the community, the elder, naturally had the best



of everything. Progressive faith in the promises led Abraham to greater integrity and openness. In Gen. 21:25-32 we see Abraham as a secretive, furtive character, secretly digging wells in Abimelech's territory without telling him. By Gen. 23:1-20 we see Abraham buying land from the Hittites in a very public manner, sealed by witnesses- the record emphasizes the integrity and openness of the whole transaction. And this purchase of land is quoted in the New Testament as an example of Abraham's faith that he would inherit the land ultimately. The same effects will be seen in the lives of all those who truly believe in those same promises. Seeing it was traditional to bury people with their ancestors, the purchase of a family "burying place" was also a statement that Abraham had finally separated from his father's house back in Ur and Haran. From now on, he saw Canaan as truly his land. We saw earlier how Abraham had struggled with this commanded separation from his father's house.

### **The Conditional Nature Of The Promises**

Circumstances were overruled by God to teach Abraham that he really would be a blessing to others, as He had promised. Twice he intercedes for blessing upon Sodom (Gen. 14:14; 18:23-33); just as e.g. we may be called to care for a sick person, in order to teach us about how we really are to be a blessing to others. Perhaps the most telling example of the limitation of God's potential by men is in Abraham's request that God would spare Sodom for the sake of fifty righteous men there. He then lowers the number to 40, and then finally to ten, assuming that surely Lot's family were righteous and would comprise ten righteous. If Abraham had left off praying at, say, forty...then this would have been the limit God set. If there were ten righteous there, the city wouldn't have been saved. But Abraham went on to set the limit at ten. But we wonder, what would have happened if he had gone further and asked God to save Sodom for the sake of one righteous man, i.e. Lot? My sense is that the Father would have agreed. But the city wasn't saved for the sake of the one man Lot, because Abraham limited God's desire to save by the smallness of his vision. This principle can possibly be extended even wider. David asks: "Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee" (Ps. 33:22). And whoever prayed Ps. 132:10 asked to be heard "for thy servant David's sake" - he or she believed that God would remember David and for *his* sake respond favourably [and how much more powerful is prayer uttered for the sake of the Son of God!].

Abraham saved Lot out of Sodom by his earnest prayer for him; and there is ample reason to think from the Genesis record and his subsequent reaction to the Angel's invitation to leave that Lot of himself was simply not strong enough. Without those prayers and the concern of Abraham read by God as prayer, Lot may well have been left to suffer the condemnation of the world he preferred to live in. And yet Lot fleeing from Sodom is used in the NT as a type of our latter day exit from the world at the Lord's coming. Is this not to suggest that the latter day believers will be saved only by grace, they will not be strong and ready to leave; and their salvation will only be on account of the prayers of the faithful? Lot was not without spirituality; but he was simply swamped by the pull of the world in which he had become entangled, not to mention his unspiritual wife. He was the type on which one could have compassion, making a difference, and pull out of the fire. Indeed, it could even be that Jude's words about pulling a brother out of the fire may be a reference back to Lot being pulled out of the fire that came upon Sodom. Those in his position sin a sin which is not unto death only in the sense that we can pray for them, so that their sin will not lead them to condemnation. But only in this sense is sin not unto death; for the wages of sin, any sin, is death (Rom. 6:23). But in some cases this sentence can ultimately be changed on account of our effort for our brother.

The entire promises to Abraham and the fathers depended for their realisation upon human obedience: "If ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep with thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers" (Dt. 7:12). That covenant was initially given in terms which omitted direct reference to any conditions for fulfilment. But it would be 'kept' by God if His people 'kept' His ways. The promises that God would multiply the seed of Abraham were conditional also; *if* Israel separated themselves from the peoples of the land, *then* He would "multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers" (Dt. 13:17). The strength of God's grace also makes some of His promises 'conditional' in a different sense; thus He had promised Reuben and Manasseh that they could return to their possessions only when the others had possessed the land (Dt. 3:20). This condition never happened- yet they were allowed to return. And our very salvation from death and the consequences of sin is in a sense another example of this kind of thing.

Isaiah 48:18,19: "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river...thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof". The promises to Abraham and the coming of the Messianic seed of Abraham could have been fulfilled; but because Israel chose to be wicked, there was no such peace: "There is no peace...unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22).

### **Angels And Abraham**

At present it is the Angel-cherubim's job to "keep the way of the tree of life". They have been given this charge, and yet they chose men to fulfil it who will keep the way pure- thus the Angels decided concerning Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children. . and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Gen. 18:19). It will be our duty to take over as the way keepers from the Angels, although we should have had good practice in this life. Thus we will say to the mortal population "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Is. 30:21).

The promises which form the basis of the "hope of Israel" were made by Angels- many of them were given in visions, which were strongly associated with Angels. Thus the Lord "brought (Abraham) forth abroad and said, Look now toward Heaven, and tell the stars. . . (after a silent pause) So shall thy seed be. . . I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land" (Gen. 15:5-7). It must have been an Angel that led Abraham out of his tent to a suitable spot and made those promises. The Angel which brought Israel out of Egypt to the land promised to Abraham is frequently described as bringing Israel out of Egypt to give them the land in similar language to which the 'Lord' in Gen. 15 speaks of giving Abraham the land. Gen. 17:3 says that "Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him", making the promises. Men often fell on their faces in the presence of Angels, and God talking with Abraham seems similar to the Angel talking face to face with Moses later. In Gen. 18:1 "the Lord appeared" to Abraham regarding the future of Sodom in the form of an Angel, we are told later in the chapter. The same phrase "the Lord appeared" is also used to introduce the giving of the promises to Abraham in Gen. 17:1. Even clearer, "the Angel of the Lord. . . said. . . in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of Heaven" (Gen. 22:15-17). The Angel that appeared to Moses in the bush said that He was the God of the patriarchs who had appeared to them and "established My covenant with them. . . I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham. . . " (Ex. 3:2-9 cp. 6:2-8). Similarly the Angel that made the promises to Abraham could say to Hagar "I will multiply thy seed (as well). . that it shall not be numbered for multitude" (Gen. 16:10). The promises made to Abraham were made by an Angel. This is implied in the Genesis account and repeated later- e. g. Judges 2:1 describes the Angel which

led the people of Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan reminding them of "the covenant which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you". Thus when we read passages talking of the covenant God made with them and with Abraham, let us watch out for further allusions to Angelic work.

Because the Angels are of limited knowledge, it seems that they bring some trials upon us in order to find out more about us- e. g. the Angel said to Abraham when He saw he was prepared to offer Isaac "Now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen. 22:12). This is language of limitation- God Himself knows all things, but the Angel wanted to test Abraham. Indeed, the apocryphal *Book Of Jubilees* claims in so many words that it was an Angel called Mastema who was responsible for the idea of testing Abraham in order to determine his level of obedience.

## Sodom

God's way of using the Angels to punish Sodom gives insight into the relationship between them and God. God Himself knew exactly what He would do because of the wickedness He knew was in the city. The Angel who debated whether to reveal to Abraham His purpose with Sodom (Gen. 18:17) says "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great. . I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me". The Angels responsible for Sodom had brought the "cry" or news of Sodom's sins to the attention of this senior Angel, who then investigates it further to see whether or not their news was correct. "And if not, I will know"- the emphasis being on the "I"- i. e. 'whether their news was correct or incorrect, I will know because I am blessed with greater powers than they'. This senior Angel seems to manifest God to a very great degree, as Gen. 19:13 describes the other two "men" (Angels) saying to Lot "we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord (the third "man"- the senior Angel); and the Lord (senior Angel) hath sent us to destroy it". These two Angels sent to execute the judgements were under specific guidelines- v. 22 "I cannot do anything till thou be come thither". Thus these Angels were given power conditional on certain things happening. Perhaps this was part of the work of Palmoni, the "wonderful numberer" of Daniel, who is the Angel responsible for all timing; maybe He decreed that they could only have power once the condition of Lot leaving the city was fulfilled. Maybe this Angel co-ordinates all the huge number of timings which go to make up God's purpose? This would explain the passages which imply that a set time is allowed to some human beings to bring about repentance and response to God's offers. Thus Pharaoh was condemned because he "let the appointed time pass by" (Jer. 46:17).

And in Gen. 18 we have an example of Angels discussing their policy with regard to one of their charges in the physical presence of the saint: . . "and Abraham went with them (the Angels) to bring them on their way (they were therefore in his presence). And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him. . " (v. 17-19). This conversation was presumably inaudible to Abraham. Who knows what conversations go on between our guardians as we sit with Bibles in our hands, obedient to God, and our Angels decide how much to reveal to us in accord with how they know we will behave in the future? The cherubim and living creatures are representative of the Angels.

Gen. 48:15,16 is the key here: "God, before whom my (Jacob's) fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me

from all evil. . ". The God of Abraham and Isaac meant to Jacob the same as the Angel who had daily protected him. The use of Angels as God's means of revelation to the patriarchs would explain why they would have conceived of God in terms of an Angel. This lays the basis for the Angel later being called "the God of Jacob" and the "God of Israel", especially seeing that Michael was the Angel (God) who represented Israel (Dan. 12:1). Gen. 31:42,53 provide the link with "the fear". Jacob there says "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had been with me. . . the God of Abraham. . . the fear of his father Isaac". Gen. 48 shows how Jacob believed the God of Abraham and Isaac to be the Angel which redeemed him from all evil. Gen. 31 shows that he thought the God of Abraham and Isaac to be "the fear"; it is therefore also an Angelic title.

- This would explain why Abraham should say when in Egypt "surely the fear of God is not in this place" (Gen. 20:11). The record seems to gently emphasize that Abimelech, the king of those parts, was 'God fearing'- were there many pagan kings who would not "come near" (Gen. 20:4) an apparently single beauty queen who had been requisitioned for him for that purpose, and who made no protest? Especially for a period of a few months! (Until the other women realized for sure that their wombs had been closed). The patriarchs' subsequent dealings with Gerar show its rulers to have been honourable and upright- even when under provocation from Abraham's sly dealing. Thus "the fear of God" not being in Gerar may refer to Abraham sensing that the presence of God in the Angel was not with him- and therefore he resorted to fleshly scheming. The phrase does not necessarily mean that the place was not God-fearing. We too can convince ourselves that the Angel is not physically with us, even when He is, and do likewise.

This lack of ultimate knowledge results in the Angels taking time to think things out and discuss their action with each other, which may result in an apparent delay to we humans. Thus in Gen. 18:17 "The LORD (an Angel) said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?". However, this same incident shows that there are varying degrees of knowledge amongst Angels or in the same Angel over time. The Angel who destroyed Sodom reasoned: "I know him (Abraham), that he will command his children and his household after him" (Gen. 18:19). Yet perhaps the same Angel, or the mighty Angel of Israel which made the promises to the patriarchs (see later), said to Abraham a few months later after his offering up of Isaac: "Now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen. 22:12), implying that he did not know whether Abraham's faith was genuine before that incident, and that the knowledge of Gen. 18:19 was merely that Abraham would 'teach his children the truth' and did not reflect any knowledge of Abraham's personal faith. In this case, Sodom might have been preserved by reason of Abraham's known willingness to teach others 'the truth' rather than because of any personal faith in God he may have had. Thus the lesson comes home that a man's zeal or success in preaching can be unrelated to his personal faith or spirituality. The elohim "found" Abraham's heart to be faithful (Neh. 9:8). This was by a process of research and drawing of conclusions. And our Angels are in the process of doing the same with us this very day.

### **1-3-2 " Even as Sarah"**

The lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons are held up in the NT as our examples. And yet those records are absolutely shot through with reference to the spiritual weakness of those men, and even the suggestion that as men they were not 'nice' people. They, the archetypical believers, aren't good people. Indeed, the records seem to juxtapose their weakness against the more humanly acceptable behaviour of the world around them. The whole business of Jacob obtaining the blessing from his slightly drunk father Isaac is almost comical; dressed

up with skins, with his mum prodding him under the ribs saying " Go on, go on, it's my sin not yours" ; Jacob must have been willing the old boy to hurry up, knowing as he did that Esau was about to come in with his meal. Yet this was the most Godly family on earth at the time. Consider further examples:

### **The household of faith**

Abraham tells Sarah to say she is his sister, not his wife, and (by implication) let the Egyptians sleep with her rather than kill him. And straight after this, God blesses Abraham with riches (Gen. 12:11 - 13:2).

Abraham made the very same mistake with Abimelech of Gerar (Gen. 20:1-13); and it seems he did it many other, unrecorded times (Gen. 20:13).

Isaac does just the same with Abimelech (Gen. 26:7-11). And again, God blesses Isaac straight after this faithless, immoral incident (Gen. 26:12). Believers aren't good people!

Isaac's criticism of them seems unreasonably aggressive and paranoiac: " Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me?" (Gen. 26:27-29).

Abraham and Sarah doubt God's promise of a seed, and so Sarah pushes Abraham to have an affair with Hagar her servant. When Hagar gets (understandably) full of womanly pride at her conception, Sarah persecutes her and drives her out to certain death in the wilderness. True believers aren't good or nice people!

Sarah again tries to kill Hagar and her son Ishmael, apparently because of the teenage Ishmael mocking the baby Isaac. Whilst this incident is symbolic of the persecution of the righteous by the wicked (Gal. 4:29),

### **The surrounding world**

Pharaoh was attracted to her, and took her into his house. But he didn't sleep with her, and was willing to allow a period of time to elapse before marrying her, in order not to insult her dignity (cp. Dt. 21:13).

Abraham ought to have apologized to Abimelech. But instead Abimelech gives him a present (Gen. 10:14-16).

Again, Abimelech and his people do the honourable thing. The people of Gerar surely had the impression that the Abraham family were a faithless, unprincipled lot compared to themselves.

Truly could they reply: " we saw certainly that the Lord was with thee... we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace" .

God seems to take Hagar's side, He hears her affliction, He looks upon her, and makes a covenant with her (Gen. 16). Hagar believes God's promise to her, and praises Him for it. Sarah laughs at God's promise to her as being a joke (Gen. 18:12-15). And even worse, when she is reprimanded for doing this, she flatly denies she ever laughed.

God again justifies Hagar and takes her side against a rather unreasonable mistress (Gen. 21:12-20)- who is held up in the NT as our example, although, it is stressed, not in her weaker aspects (1 Pet. 3:6).

this in no way justifies Sarah's behaviour. And yet straight after this shameful business, God blesses Abraham in all that he does (Gen. 21:22).

Jacob, on a human level, compares unfavourably to Esau. He cruelly deceived his brother, and all his life long hated him and lied to him (consider 33:13-15).

Mal. 1:4 makes the point that Edom (Esau) was zealous to return and rebuild the ravaged land which God had once given him, whereas Israel wasn't.

Judah took a Canannite woman and shamefully treated her (38:2)

Dinah goes downtown to have a fling. She ends up sleeping with the prince of Shechem. As a result of this, her brothers trick the men of Shechem into being circumcised and then come and murder the lot of them. Humanly, the sons of Jacob, unrepentant as they were (34:31), should have taken the consequence of their evil at the hand of the vengeful surrounding tribes. But God, in His grace, preserves them by a miracle (35:5).

When Esau had the chance to take vengeance on Jacob, he wonderfully forgave him. He never lied to Jacob.

And yet despite this, God says He still chose to love Israel (Jacob) and hate Esau. His behaviour in this is an example of how He saves by pure grace and not works.

Esau took Canaanite women, but married them and treated them responsibly (36:2).

The inspired comment is that "Esau despised his birthright", not "So Jacob supplanted his brother"- even though Hos. 12:4 implies that God took a dim view of this- for Jacob's poor behaviour to Esau is contrasted to his later spiritual manhood.

The Prince of Shechem didn't rape her, and he didn't just discard her. He could easily have just taken her as his wife with no more discussion with her family. He did the honourable thing in that he honestly wanted to marry her, and would do absolutely anything to enable this (Gen. 34).

Abraham's behaviour towards Hagar and Ishmael was actually illegal in terms of the near Eastern legal codes. Those of Lipit-Ishtar and Hammurabi, as well as the laws of Nuzi amongst the Hurrians, all specifically stated that a husband with a barren wife may take a concubine through whom he could have offspring, but if his wife then has children, he must not ever disinherit or expel from the family the concubine and her children (1). Yet Abraham did exactly this, effectively casting out Ishmael and Hagar into the desert, to walk until they

perished of heat exposure. Perhaps God's later demand of Abraham to sacrifice his son, "your son, your only son, Isaac" (Gen. 22:2) was an implicit criticism of Abraham for having rejected Ishmael as his son; and he was asked to enter into the loss of a child, as he had effectively sacrificed Ishmael to the desert.

It's often been observed that there are so many people in the world who are 'nicer', 'better' than we are. And in some ways, on a human level, this seems true. Christian believers aren't good people. And yet we have been called to salvation, not them. I would guess that the more reflective among the Abraham family had exactly the same thought. And yet God chose weak, apathetic Israel- not because they were righteous, but because they were predestined, unconditionally as far as we can understand it, to this calling. And the calling of spiritual Israel is no different. In the fact God called Israel to be His people we see the depth, the very essence, of salvation by grace, not works or committed righteousness. The desperate sinners, not the apparently righteous, are the ones God calls. Israel were warned that they were being given the land (cp. salvation) "not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thy heart...for thou art a stiffnecked people" (Dt. 9:5,6). These words are picked up in Tit. 3:5 and applied to the new Israel: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing (baptism) of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit" - by His grace alone.

## Conclusions

Those who enter the Kingdom will genuinely, from the very depth of their being, feel that they shouldn't be there. Indeed, they shouldn't be. For Christian believers aren't good people. We are saved by grace alone. The righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18). The righteous remnant who spoke often to one another about Yahweh will only be "spared" by God's grace (Mal. 3:17). The accepted will feel so certain of this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that He hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome (Rev. 21:4). We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away clutching their penny, thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay". Therefore if we honestly, genuinely feel that we won't be in the Kingdom, well, this is how in some ways the faithful will all feel. Although by the very nature of being in this state, just knowing this won't change how we feel. We won't think "Oh, I feel I'll be rejected, so, great, that means I won't be". But we must simply be aware that it is God's earnest desire to save repentant sinners. He will even bend His own laws to enable this. Consider how within His own law, it was an abomination for a man to re-marry the woman he had divorced. Yet this notwithstanding, God abases Himself in asking worthless Israel to re-marry Him (Dt. 24:4 cp. Jer. 3:1). Even though leaven was prohibited in offerings (Lev. 2:11), God was willing to accept a peace offering with leaven in it (Lev. 7:13). And for a freewill offering, He would accept a deformed animal (Lev. 22:23), even though this was against His *preferred principle* of absolute perfection in offerings. There was no atonement without the shedding of blood; and yet for the very poor, God would accept a non-blood sacrifice. This all reflected the zeal of God to accept fallen men. The relationship between Solomon and his bride in the Song is evidently typical of ours with the Lord. Yet she has major problems: he always addresses her directly, yet she always answers indirectly ("he cometh...he standeth...he brought me"), often with some awkwardness and sense that she is unworthy of his love, and that his glowing descriptions of her are exaggeration. She is

depicted as in doubt, lost, asleep, uncertain, reluctant, moody, sometime in love with him sometimes not, in need of reassurance despite the greatness of his love ("let him kiss me...").

Believers aren't good people. But the Biblical evidence is that those who will be in the Kingdom basically love God, but really feel they shouldn't be in His Kingdom. There is much Biblical reason to believe that we should be positive about the fact we will surely be in the Kingdom. And yet the Biblical pictures of the judgment indicate that the accepted will not have grasped this aspect as strongly as they might have done. And this is exactly, exactly the position which I sense so many of us are in: not believing as strongly as we might the positive fact that we really will be in the Kingdom because we are in Christ, and yet experiencing answered prayer, basically holding on, albeit with a deeper sense of their unworthiness than of God's grace. These characteristics, which are clearly seen in so many of us, are the very characteristics of the faithful in the Biblical descriptions of the judgment. And therefore, many of us *will* be in the Kingdom of God. This isn't playing with logic or the semantics of Biblical exposition. Like Peter, I am "exhorting and testifying, that this *is* the true grace of God wherein ye stand" (1 Pet. 5:12).

## **Sarah**

To my mind, there is one example which stands out most remarkably. The record seems to anticipate this in the way the case of Sarah is introduced: "Through faith even Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed" (Heb. 11:11 RV). "Even Sarah herself" is clearly making a point, holding up a flashing light over this particular example. There is every reason to think, from the Genesis record, that Sarah not only lacked faith in the promises, but also had a bitter, unspiritual mind. The account alludes back to Eve's beguiling of Adam when it records how "Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (Gen. 16:2) in acquiescing to her plan to give her a seed through Abram marrying his slave girl. The whole thing between Sarah and Abraham seems wrong on at least two counts: firstly it reflects a lack of faith in the promise; and secondly it flouts God's ideal standards of marriage. Sarai seems to have recognized the error when she bitterly comments to Abram: "My wrong be upon thee" (16:5). Her comment that "the Lord hath restrained me from bearing" (16:2) would suggest that she thought she hadn't been chosen to bear the promised seed. Yet because of her faith, says Heb. 11:11, she received strength to bear that seed.

Hagar was so persecuted by Sarah that she "fled from her face" (16:6). God's attitude to Hagar seems to reflect a certain amount of sympathy for the harsh way in which Sarah had dealt with her. These years of bitterness and lack of faith came to the surface when Sarah overheard the Angel assuring Abraham that Sarah really would have a son. She mockingly laughed at the promise, deep within herself (18:15). Yet according to Heb. 11:11, she rallied her faith and believed. But as soon as Isaac was born, her bitterness flew to the surface again when she was Ishmael mocking. In what can only be described as unrestrained anger, she ordered Hagar and Ishmael out into the scorching desert, to a certain death (humanly speaking). Again, one can sense the sympathy of God for Hagar at this time. And so wedged in between incidents which belied a deep bitterness, lack of faith and pride (after Isaac was born), the Spirit in Heb. 11:11 discerns her faith; on account of which, Heb. 11:12 implies ("therefore"), the whole purpose of God in Christ could go forward.



## *Bitter Prophet*

Sarah's screaming indignation can be well imagined. Consider which words were probably stressed most by her: "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir (just hear her voice!) with my son, even with Isaac" (Gen. 21:10). This is in harmony with her previous bitterness and aggression to Hagar and Abraham. Her attitude in implying that Ishmael was not the seed is gently rebuked by God in his subsequent words to Abraham concerning Ishmael: "He is thy seed" (Gen. 21:13). And yet Sarah's words are quoted in Gal. 4:30 as inspired Scripture! Here we see the wonder of the God with whom we deal, in the way in which He patiently bore with Sarah and Abraham. He saw through her anger, her jealousy, the pent up bitterness of a lifetime, and he saw her faith. And he worked through that screaming, angry woman to be His prophet. According to Gal. 4:30, God Himself spoke through her in those words, outlining a principle which has been true over the generations; that the son of the slave must be cast out, and that there must always be conflict between him and the true seed. Sarah in her time of child-birth is likened to us all as we enter the Kingdom, full of joy (Is. 54:1-4); and yet at that time she was eaten up with pride and joy that she could now triumph over her rival. And yet Sarah at that time is seen from a righteous perspective, in that she is a type of us as we enter the Kingdom. God's mercy to Sarah and Abraham is repeated to us daily.

## *The Discernment Of God*

The way in which God chooses the good side of Sarah and recognizes it for what it is can be seen even more finely in 1 Pet. 3:4-6. Here sisters are bidden follow Sarah's example of

1. Having a meek and quiet spirit
2. Not outwardly adorning herself
3. Obeying Abraham
4. And calling him her "Lord".

It can be shown that the Spirit in Peter is adopting an extremely positive reading of Sarah.

1. She isn't revealed as having a meek and quiet spirit at all; but presumably, God saw that underneath her anger and bitterness there was a meekness and quietness, perhaps especially seen as she grew older.

2,3. Concerning not outwardly "adorning", the Greek text is alluding to the Septuagint of Gen. 20:16, which says that Abimelech told Sarah that he had given Abraham many silver pieces "that these may therefore be for thee to adorn thy countenance"<sup>(2)</sup>. Abimelech is speaking sarcastically (note how he calls Abraham "thy brother", referring to Sarah and Abraham's family relationship). It was a custom for married women to wear their silver pieces on their face (cp. Lk. 15:8). Presumably she had taken these off, in order to appear single and sexually available. Abimelech is saying: "I've given your so-called 'brother' Abraham 1000 silver pieces, so just make sure you wear them in future and don't lead any more men into sin". And what does the Spirit comment? "Thus she was reprov'd" (Gen. 20:16). Her willingness to pretend she was single and not refusing the sexual advances of Abimelech can only be seen in a negative light from the Genesis record. She lacked

continued faith in the promises of a seed, and she disregarded God's marriage principles for the sake of an all too convenient 'obedience' to her husband. It may have been that she regarded her inability to have children as partly his fault (cp. the deadness of Abraham's body, Rom. 4:19). The thing is, she had already shown enough faith to conceive (Heb. 11:11), and presumably the effect of this was seen in the physical rejuvenation of her body, which made her so attractive to men, although she was 90 years old. Both Sarah and Abraham had shown faith, she was living with her own body as the constant reminder of God's faithfulness, and yet in the incident with Abimelech she wavered and had to be reproved. Yet she is seen in a positive light by the Spirit; her lack of wearing ornaments, even though it was to show she was single, is commended; as is her obedience to her husband, even though she was reproved for this. The point is, like all of us, her motives were probably mixed. She did want to be truly obedient to Abraham, she did want to have a meek spirit rather than outward adorning. Her wrong motives surfaced, and were rebuked. But God saw deep inside her heart, and saw the good motives, and drags them out and holds them up as an example.

4. Sarah is commended for calling Abraham her "Lord" (1 Pet. 3:6). She is recorded as doing this in one place only: "Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Gen. 18:12). She doubted God's promise; she is rebuked for this by the Angel. Yet in doing so, when she came to think of Abraham, in her heart she called him "my lord". So in the midst of her lack of faith in one respect, she also had a commendable attitude to Abraham. All this, don't forget, was going on "within herself". God searched her thoughts, He saw her wrong attitudes there deep in her heart, and He saw what was commendable there too; and through Peter He drags this out and reveals it to us all as an inspiration.

#### *"Thou God seest me..."*

All this opens up a wider issue. There are many Bible characters who appear to behave wrongly, but are spoken of in later revelation as if they were righteous. Lot is a classic example. Why is this? Why, for example, is the Genesis record about Sarah so open about her weakness, but the New Testament commentary sifts through this and reveals the righteous aspect of her motives? Surely it's to show that God sees us very differently to how we appear on the surface, both to our brethren and even to ourselves. He knows every motive, He alone untangles our motives and thoughts; He sees what is truly behind our actions. It is not just that He has the power to do this if He wishes; He does it all the time. God is thinking of us and our inner thoughts and motives every moment. Every piece of body language reveals something, every thought.

Or consider Elijah. Here was a man of genuinely outstanding faith. He heard in the ears of faith the sound of rain, before he even formally prayed for it (1 Kings 18:40-42 cp. James 5:17,18). And yet, reading through the record, there is ample evidence that at the very same time as he showed such faith, he had a hardness and arrogance which was contrary to the spirit of the Lord Jesus. And Paul had the same feature. Samson's remarkable faith amidst a pathetically apostate Israel was marred by an insatiable desire for women. Although articulated in a more respectable way, David's fine spirituality was plagued with a similar malaise. Each of these men (and examples could be added) must have been smitten at times with a sense of hypocrisy. And yet ultimately, they won through in the battle of faith. The fact we may feel deep contradictions within our spirituality should not therefore, and cannot therefore, be shrugged off as an inevitable result of bearing human nature. Such

contradictions are deadly serious. But the fact is, many who have endured them all their lives did eventually make good, in God's eyes.

Because of our nature, we are largely blind to our true spiritual selves. Because of this, the parables imply, the day of judgment will be such a surprise (e.g. Mt. 25:34-40). Both righteous and wicked will find that they are criticized and commended for things which surprise them. There are several indications that because of this, the rejected will begin to argue back with Christ (e.g. Mt. 7:22), until eventually they realize their errors, stop speaking (Mt. 22:12) and gnash their teeth in anger against themselves (Mt. 22:13). This should truly be a sobering thought to us all. We must strive, really, to examine ourselves, to know ourselves, to try to see our motives and actions a little more from God's perspective; because it is His perspective, not ours, which is ultimately important; and it is this lesson which the day of judgment will ultimately teach each of us. Contemplation of the death of the Lord Jesus is intended to stimulate our self-examination and self-knowledge. Those who saw it "smote upon their breasts" (Lk. 23:48), an idiom only used elsewhere for true penitence and realization of personal sinfulness (Lk. 18:13). However, the lesson of how the Spirit writes in Heb. 11, the lesson of how God perceives Sarah's thoughts, is extremely encouraging and positive. Sarah would have been seen as an angry, frustrated old woman. And in her honest moments, probably she recognized that this was all she was, and this in turn probably made her the more bitter. But God saw the good in her which she herself probably didn't recognize, and which her surrounding world almost certainly didn't see; although He never revealed this to her during her mortal life.

So as and when we feel hypocritical, reflect on these examples of Sarah and Abraham and so many others. Remember too that it is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. The father of the epileptic boy is the clearest example: "I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mk. 9:24). Some of "the Jews" and men like Nicodemus are described as believing, when it is evident that at the time they also harboured serious reserve. The disciples believed (Jn. 16:27; 17:8), and yet at the same time they disbelieved (Mt. 17:20; Lk. 24:25). They perhaps realized their half faith when they asked for their faith to be increased (Lk. 17:5). This in itself shows that in practice, faith is not an absolute. Study 9 shows how several remarkable believers still had elements of disbelief and weakness in them, right to their dying moments. It is, sadly, only to be expected that we too have our hypocrisies now. This is not to preach complacency, rather an appreciation of what our nature and likely spiritual growth pattern is all about.

## Notes

(1) Angel Gonzales, *Abraham: Father of Believers* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) p. 74.

(2) Gesenius comments on this: "The LXX... gives the meaning correctly". See H.W.F. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* p. 407 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992 Ed.).

## 1.4 Joseph And Jesus

It is evident from a careful study of the record that Joseph is one of the fullest types of the Lord Jesus. Yet significantly, there seems no *explicit* statement in the New Testament that Joseph did typify Jesus. This is interesting, seeing that Joseph must be one of the clearest and most detailed types of Christ. Surely this should inspire us to search for types in all Old

Testament characters without being put off by the lack of direct reference to those types. It is sometimes argued that we can go too far in seeing types of Christ if we only rely on inferences rather than explicit New Testament indication that we are to see a type. Yet the type of Joseph rests solely on inferences put together, rather than on any explicit statement. We can therefore conclude that we may observe valid types of Christ from inferences, without explicit New Testament reference to it.

The following points suggest that almost every detail of Joseph's recorded life is prophetic of some aspect of the Lord Jesus. Joseph is simply one of the clearest types of Christ. There are many *echoes* of Christ which seem to have no specific purpose apart from to confirm us in our enthusiasm to constantly see the spirit of Christ in this record (e.g. 46:30 = Lk. 2:29,30). So we have in the life of Joseph a *richness* of instruction concerning our Lord Jesus. And this is exactly why we sit here before the emblems; to be instructed concerning the exquisite beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to wade through the types in order to persuade ourselves that Joseph's life *really is* typical of Christ. A desire to enrich our appreciation of the Saviour should be our motivation for going through the types in detail; it is not just an academic exercise, performing intellectual tricks with Scripture. The following could perhaps be skim-read before you break bread, pausing to follow up any particular themes that catch your interest.

### **Joseph A Type Of Christ**

1. The seed of Abraham, in whom the promises of fruitfulness and blessing upon all nations were fulfilled (47:27; 46:3 cp. 12:2; Dt. 26:5; Ps. 105:23,24).

*The seed of Abraham.*

2. The beloved son of his father.

*Jn. 3:16*

3. "The servant" (37:2 Heb.)

*The suffering servant (Zech. 3:8; Is. 42:1 etc.)*

4. Loved and exalted above his brethren

*Heb. 1:9*

5. "They hated him" because of his dream that one day he would reign over them (37:4,8).

*Christ had problems with His brothers (Jn. 7:3); the Jews hated Christ and would not have him reign over them (Lk. 19:14)*

6. Joseph was likened to a sheaf (37:7)

*Christ was the wave sheaf (Lev. 23:11,12)*

7. A progressive growth in hatred of Joseph (37:4,5,8)

*The Gospels give the same impression concerning the Jews and Christ*

8. Rebuked by his natural father (37:10)

*Lk. 2:48*

9. Israel would bow down to Joseph, although they refused to believe this at first and tried to kill him because of it (37:10)

*Ditto for Christ*

10. " ...but his father observed the saying" (37:11)

*As did Mary , mother of Jesus (Lk. 2:19,51)*

11. " Let us slay him...and we will see what will become of his (prophetic, inspired) dreams" (37:20)

*Christ's inspired prophecies of His death and resurrection must have motivated the Jews' slaying of Him [\(1\)](#).*

.12. One of his persecutors tried to save him at the last minute (37:21)

*As did Nicodemus and Pilate.*

13. Cast into a pit with no water in it (37:24)

*Ditto for Jeremiah, another type of Christ; pit = grave (Zech. 9:11; Ps. 69:15)*

14. " They *stript* Joseph out of his coat" (37:23); was Joseph naked in the pit?

*Same LXX word in Mt. 27:28; was Christ naked on the cross? See Heb. 6:6 " open shame" .*

15. " And they sat down" after symbolically killing him.

*Mt. 27:36.*

Sold him for pieces of silver.

*Ditto for Christ. Jesus was "him...whom they priced on the part of the sons of Israel" (Mt. 27:9 RVmg.). The reference to "the sons of Israel" is surely an allusion to the sons of Jacob selling Joseph for his value.*

16. His brothers said: " He is our brother and our flesh" (37:27)

*" We are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30)*

17. " Let not our hand be upon him" (37:27). They thought that the rigours of slavery would be enough to kill him.

*The Jews handed Jesus over to the Romans. Does the type indicate some of them thought this fact would absolve them of guilt?*

18. At least 2 of his 10 persecutors were unhappy about what they were doing , and said so (37:22,26). Perhaps the whole group egged each other on to adopt an attitude none were totally happy with in their conscience.

*Ditto for first century Israel?*

19. A blood drenched coat

*Is. 63:2; Rev. 19:13.*

20. Sent on a mission to his brethren, on which they symbolically killed him.

*Christ sent first and foremost to redeem Israel (Gal. 4:4,5).*

" Go...see whether it be well with thy brethren" (37:14)

*Same Hebrew as 1 Sam. 17:18, also typical of Christ.*

21. Symbolically killed by the shepherds of his father's flock (37:12).

*Christ killed by the Jewish priests, the shepherds of God's flock.*

" The anguish of his soul" and pleas for deliverance (42:21), ignored by the brothers.

*" The travail of his soul" (Is. 53:12), ignored by Israel (Is. 53:1-4). Did the Lord shout for deliverance in His pit?*

22. " When they saw him afar off...they conspired against him to slay him" (37:18)

*" When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves (i.e. conspired), This is the heir; come, let us kill him" (Mt. 21:38) [\(2\)](#). Mt. 21:38 is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18.*

23. " Joseph is...rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes" (37:33,34); Jacob shared in Joseph's death .

*This is a fine prefigurement of the (sadly ignored) pain of God.*

24. Judah disgraced after the condemnation of Joseph (Gen. 38)

*Ditto for Judah as a nation after their rejection of Christ.*

25. His master committed all that he had into his hand (39:8)

*The Potiphar: Joseph and Pharaoh: Joseph relationship reflects that between God and Christ.*

He "prospered", s.w. Ps. 1:3 concerning the righteous man prospering because he meditates on God's word.

*Did the Lord's carpenter business likewise flourish, for the same reasons? He was in favour with God **and man**.*

26. Joseph lost his garment before he went into the pit and before he went to prison (39:13) [\(3\)](#).

*Jn. 19:23*

27. Falsely accused of adultery, but with no remonstrance on his part; cast into prison.

*Christ dumb before his shearers. In the 'Joseph as a type of Christ' story, prison = death; the ideas of prison and darkness are often associated (e.g. Is. 49:9). There was darkness at the death of Christ.*

28. All the prisoners in the prison committed to Joseph's hand; "and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it" (39:22)

*An eloquent echo of Christ's relationship with us?*

29. "The Lord...gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (39:21).

*Christ in favour with God and man (Lk. 2:52) [\(4\)](#).*

30. In prison with two malefactors (one good and one bad?)

*Christ on the cross with two thieves (one good, one bad)*

31. "Remember me when it shall be well with thee" (40:14)

*"Remember me"*

32. Great pain in Joseph's heart because he knew his innocence (40:15); therefore the shame of a righteous man suffering as a sinner (cp. Christian AIDS victims).

*Ditto for Christ- even more so.*

33. The shame of Joseph in the dungeon (40:15); the lowest of the low, according to Ex. 12:29.

*A type of the supreme degradation of Christ on the cross.*

34. "They made him run hastily out of the dungeon...and changed his raiment" (41:14 mg.).

*The energy of Christ's resurrection; change of clothing = change of nature, Zech. 3:3,4.*

35. Because he knew Pharaoh's mind, he was exalted over Pharaoh's house and people (41:40).

*Christ knew God's mind; now over both Angels (God's house) and us (natural & spiritual Israel)*

36. " According unto thy word shall all my people be ruled" (41:40). Egypt would have been intricately obedient to his word.

*The supremacy of the word of Christ in our lives; obedience to his word has a sense of urgency about it.*

37. " Only in the throne will I be greater than thou" (41:40)

*Christ rules on God's behalf, but God is still King.*

38. " I have set thee over all the land of Egypt" (41:41)

*Christ given all power in heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). All Egypt ruled by his word, therefore 'Egypt' = the church now, and also the future Kingdom.*

39. " Bow the knee" (41:43).

*Phil. 2:9.*

Bread laid up in preparation for the famine.

*Laying up the word as a foundation against the judgment (1 Tim. 6:19).*

40. Given a new name: " Zaphnath-paaneah" : 'Saviour of the world', or 'bread of life'

*Christ given a new name on ascension (Phil. 2:6-9; Rev. 3:12).*

41. A Gentile wife from a pagan king-priest background (41:45).

*Marriage of Christ to us, king-priests (Rev. 5:10). Psalm 45 is full of allusion to Joseph (vv. 2,4,5,7,10,14, 16 etc.). Yet it is also a prophecy of the marriage of Christ to His bride, modelled on the marriage of Joseph.*

42. " Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt" (41:45).

*Christ's active involvement in our working out of our salvation.*

43. Joseph's (half-Gentile) sons were counted as the twelve tribes of Jacob (41:51)

*We are Christ's sons (Heb. 2:13). Joseph was called " tender father" (41:43 mg.) as Christ will be called 'Father' in the future age (Is. 9:6 Heb.)*

44. Pharaoh's total confidence in Joseph and the power of his word (41:55)

*God's attitude to Christ.*



45. " According unto *thy* word shall all the people be ruled" (41:40) suggests a change in Egypt's legal system when Joseph came to power (cp. Ps. 105:22).

*The changeover between the law of Moses and the word of Christ.*

46. Throughout the record there is the unwritten sense that the brothers had a niggling conscience that Joseph might be alive.

*This typifies the underlying Jewish conscience towards the Lord Jesus. They knew Christ as Messiah, but blinded themselves to the fact (Jn. 6:36; 9:41; 15:24 cp. 14:7). When Nicodemus secretly informed the Lord Jesus that "We know that you are a teacher come from God" (Jn. 3:2) it seems he was speaking of the situation he knew existed in the hearts of Israel's religious leaders- hence the Lord replied: "You [plural] receive not our witness" (Jn. 3:11).*

47. Joseph's brethren fulfil his predictions without realizing it (fully, at any rate) by bowing before him (42:6).

*Latter day Israel likewise?*

48. Even under pressure, the brothers came out with the same old lie (42:13). They kept repeating it so much that they believed it.

*Exact replica of the Jewish attitude towards Jesus of Nazareth.*

49. The brothers suffer in prison for three days to prod their conscience about Joseph (42:17).

*Three year tribulation of Israel in the last days to bring them to accept Christ?*

We get the impression that Joseph changed his plans for them several times; he recalled them when already on their journey etc.

*Does this show that he hastened the day of revelation to them from purely emotional considerations- and will the Lord do the same with His Israel?*

50. Joseph wept (this is recorded seven times in the record) (42:24). He must have found it hard to prolong the agony of not revealing himself to them immediately; he was motivated by a desire to make them see the enormity of their sin, for their spiritual good rather than his own vindication.

*Joseph as a type of Christ makes his story prophetic. This is a stunningly deep prophecy of the intensity of Christ's feelings, as the mighty Son of God, towards wayward Israel in the last days. He was a man of sorrow in his mortal life, and will still have an element of this characteristic in the future.*

51. The brothers delay in their return, doubtless because of the struggle with their conscience; never spoken of together, but operating on each man individually (43:10)

*Will there be a 'delay' in Israel's repentance, and therefore in the full manifestation of Christ? Every Jew in the last days will go through the silent struggle of conscience about Christ.*

52. Joseph celebrates their repentance with a meal together, at which they sit in their proper places (43:16)

*The marriage supper of the lamb, with each in his proper place (Lk. 14:10; 22:30; Rev. 19:9)*

53. "Slay and make ready" (43:16) for the meal.

*This is the basis of the prodigal son parable (45:14,15 = Lk. 15:20); father = Christ; prodigal = repentant Jews, wanting to be servants and nothing else.*

54. "The men marvelled" at his discernment.

*Ditto for Christ- it is emphasized (Mt. 8:27; 9:8,33; 21:20, 42; 22:22; 27:14; Lk. 2:33; Jn. 4:27; 7:15)*

They were merry with him (43:34)

*He would fain have them enter into the joy of their Lord.*

55. Joseph's cup is how he discerns (44:5)

*The cup of the Lord likewise.*

56. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short.

*"For the elects sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22). The same Hebrew word is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days.*

57. "All them that stood before him" not present at his revelation to his brethren (45:1)

*The Angels who accompany Christ will not be present at his meeting with Israel (Zech. 3:4; Is. 63:3)?*

Communication without an interpreter.

*A new paradigm of relationship with the Lord Jesus, face to face.*

"Fear not: for I am in the place of God" (50:19 Heb.); "thou art even as Pharaoh" (44:18)

*Joseph as a type of Christ reveals the revelation of God's essential love through the face of Jesus Christ.*

The struggle to make the brothers believe the extent of his grace.

*Our difficulty at the judgment (see The Lord Of Judgment).*

58. " A great deliverance" (45:7).

*Heb. 2:3 " that great salvation" .*

Israel saved, all the surrounding world also blessed with deliverance from the famine.

*Ditto for the last days; the nations around Israel blessed materially to overcome the problems of the latter day judgments. These judgments are to make Israel repent, but in that time of trouble the whole world suffers.*

## **Joseph As A Type Of Christ: Finer Details**

In the light of all this, the following points give extra insight into our Lord's experience. Taken by themselves they would be stretching a point; but in the context of the above typology they take on a powerful validity:

- It must have taken Joseph quite some courage to explain the dreams to his brethren. " He dreamed yet another dream, *and* told it his brethren" (37:9). There was quite likely a certain bucking up of courage in the spirit of the Lord Jesus at age 30, when he 'came down from Heaven' and started preaching the glories of his future Kingdom to a cynical Israel.

- Joseph readily responded to his father's desire that he go to his brethren: " Here am I" (37:13). Isaiah, another type of Christ, uttered similar words before his mission to Israel (Is. 6:8). Yet in both Joseph and Isaiah there must have been a sense of apprehension, sensing the persecution that would come. There was a point when Christ said to God: " Lo, I come..." (Heb. 10:5-7). This would indicate that in line with the typology of Joseph and Isaiah, there was a point when Christ received and responded to His Father's commission. This may have been some time in His teens; perhaps 17, as with Joseph? Or at 30 when he began His ministry and came " into the (Jewish) world" ?

- " See whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again" (37:14). Christ was sent to the shepherds and the sheep of Israel. This accounts for the special effort he made to appeal to the Jewish religious leaders, even when it seemed he was wasting time with them.

- " Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured" (39:6) clearly means he was good-looking (like his mother, grandmother and great-grandmother). The record seems to stress that the family was good looking. Perhaps this gives another angle on an old chestnut: Was Christ good looking and handsome as the Son of God, or weak and ugly as the suffering servant? On the cross, " his visage was so marred more than any man...there is no beauty that we should desire him...despised...we hid as it were our faces from him" (Is. 52:14; 53:2-4). Yet Joseph was strong and good looking, pleasing in the eyes of men (and women). So may we suggest that Christ too was naturally strong and attractive, but he lost this due to the mental trauma of his life, resulting in his repulsive physical appearance as he hung on the cross.

- The woman who tempted Joseph seems to be the prototype of the temptress of the Proverbs. Her reasoning that the good man of the house was absent (Prov. 7:19) seems a direct allusion to Potiphar's wife. We have shown elsewhere that the Proverbs are largely a commentary on Old Testament historical incidents, and that the warnings to " My son" are also prophetic of

God's instruction of His Son Jesus<sup>(5)</sup>. If this is the case, it is reasonable to think that Christ too was tempted by a similar woman.

- The sensitive reader will perceive that Joseph had a strong fatherly image, even from a young age (40:7; 41:43 mg.; 45:8). The Lord Jesus likewise; hence He referred to the disciples as His children when they were in the same peer group. This is understandable in that He is the supreme manifestation of *the* sovereign Father.

- So many aspects of human weakness were tested in Joseph: pride with his brothers, lust with women, bitterness in prison, the meteoric rise to success in a career, the glamour and glory of the high life. And the Lord Jesus likewise went through it all, absolutely all- for our sakes.

- Two changes of clothing for Joseph; immediately on release from prison, and also when he was made ruler over all Egypt (41:14,42). This looks forward to the two stage glorification of Christ in both resurrection and ascension (or ascension and second coming in glory?).

- Joseph's wife had to forget all about her pagan past (41:45 = Ps. 45:10 = Dt. 21:13), especially her father's house. Joseph alluded to what she had gone through when he spoke of how he too had forgotten all his past suffering and his father's house (41:51). What a pair they were! Both had broken free of their pasts and were dedicated to the new life together. As such they typify the relationship between Christ and His bride.

- *God* (this is important) made Joseph forget all his "toil", his mental sufferings (42:51). This was a miracle; no amount of steel-willed suppression of his past could have made Joseph paper over all the pain. But God did a psychological miracle upon him. Has God done the same to Christ now in His glory, as He will to us one day soon (Rev. 21:4)? Yet Christ will be factually aware of His sacrifice and the associated pain. God presumably did not obliterate Joseph's memory cells, but He made him "forget" the pain. This is surely what God has done to Christ, and what He will do to us: take away the pain on a psychological level whilst still leaving a factual awareness. Is it too much to suggest that even now, God is ready and willing to do something like this?

- Joseph as a type of Christ means that his brothers also have significance. The brethren meeting Joseph at the end has many echoes of the judgment seat of Christ. The whole purpose of the painful process which led up to that meeting was for the benefit of the brethren, to make them realize the enormity of their sin and the greatness of Joseph's grace. Likewise the judgment is for our benefit; the outcome is known to God beforehand. Does the (emphasized) emotionalism of Joseph at this time indicate anything about Christ's attitude then? "What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves?" strikes a chord with Dan. 10:17, where even righteous Daniel in his figurative judgment finds it hard to speak. Our awareness of our sinfulness will doubtless have a like effect upon us. The moral desperation of the brethren ("how shall we clear ourselves?") will then be seen in us. Speechlessness is a characteristic of the rejected (Mt. 22:12); the brothers slunk away from Joseph's physical presence (45:4), as the rejected will (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.). This all suggests that those accepted at the judgment seat will go through all the emotions of the rejected; they will realize that rejection is what they deserve. Those who judge (condemn) themselves now in their self-examination will not be condemned then.

- The intellectual and psychological ability of Joseph as the brothers stood before him was quite something. Joseph was indeed a type of Christ as he stood there. It seems to me that he cooked up his whole plan with them in a split second. He recognized them, remembered his dreams, and then started the process of accusing them of being spies, etc. His accusations seemed designed to draw out of them true news about their family affairs back home. The Lord's piercing vision and ability to elicit our ultimate truth from us in our own words will be manifest at the day of judgment.

- The desperate desire of Joseph for them to relax with him and accept his forgiveness led him to make them drunk so as to ease their relationship (43:34 AVmg.). This otherwise unethical act reveals the earnestness of his desire for them to be relaxed with him and open themselves to him. The Lord will have the same basic desire with us at the judgment.

- The news that Joseph was alive and glorified was received rather like that of Christ's resurrection: initial disbelief, but then the family of Jacob who believed it rose up and left all they had to go to be with Joseph; Israel in AD70 and the last days are likewise bidden leave their stuff and go to be with Christ (45:20 cp. Lk. 17:31). The brethren went forth on this journey with the admonition not to fall out with each other by the way (45:24). The wonder that was ahead of them should have made petty differences disappear.

- The Joseph:Jesus typology would have been surely understood by the Lord. It could be that the way Joseph was saved from the pit and then from slavery in Egypt, when it seemed to all others he had died, may have encouraged the Lord to think that somehow he would have been saved from the actual experience of death- hence His pleas for deliverance and the actual cup to pass.

## **Closer To The Cross**

And so the study of Joseph as a type of Christ leads us closer to the cross, to knowing the Son of God hanging upon it. We know that Joseph in prison was typical of Christ's death. Ps. 105:17-23 is the Spirit's commentary upon the sufferings of Joseph: " He (God) sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant; whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him...Israel *also* came into Egypt" . In the context of the Psalm, God is comforting Israel that all their sufferings had been experienced by Joseph. Israel as a nation are often spoken of as being in prison in a Gentile world (Ps. 79:11; 102:20; Is. 42:7,22; 49:9); just as Joseph was. Prison and death are often associated because a spell in prison was effectively a death sentence, so bad were the conditions. Israel being in prison is therefore a symbol of a living death. On the cross, Christ was the great, supreme prisoner (Ps. 69:33- this is an intensive plural, referring to a singular great prisoner). Like Joseph, He went through all the emotions of the prisoner; the shame, depression, introspection. As Israel were comforted in their living death by the fact that there was an individual in the past who had gone through all they were going through as a group; so the new Israel ought to take comfort together in contemplating the experiences of Christ. He bore *our* communal sorrows, griefs and sins; this is why we as a community rather than purely as individuals need to be bound together in remembering Christ.

The sufferings of Joseph were supremely in His mind. They had to be so varied and yet also intense so as to include the traumas of each of us. Ps. 105:18 highlights the mental aspects of Joseph's suffering. The verse is badly translated in the AV: " Whose feet (the same word is

translated ability, endurance, journey) they hurt (Heb. 'to browbeat or depress') with fetters: (i.e.) his soul (AVmg.) came into iron" . His very soul was in iron, trapped, oppressively boxed in as he lay in the darkness. As Christ hung in the darkness He too was depressed by the weight of His mental burden, a burden so great it must have pushed His brain to maximum neurological capacity. The spirit of the crucified Christ is in Ps. 142:7: " Bring my soul out of prison...the righteous shall compass me about" (cp. Ps. 22:22). Christ poured out His soul unto death; " he was taken away by distress" (Is. 53:12,8 AVmg.) suggests that it was the mental crisis in the brain of Christ on the cross which resulted in His death. This is why Pilate marvelled that He died so quickly. It is evident from this that the physical process of crucifixion did not kill Christ, but rather the heartburst (both figurative and literal) which it brought upon Him. Do we not sense that striving in our minds as we fellowship His sufferings? Surely we do, but from a great distance. Yet we should sense it more and more, it should make us get out of this sense of drifting which we all too often have, day by day *drifting* along with very little stirring up our minds. Here is the challenge of the Joseph record and seeing Joseph as a type of Christ; to just begin to capture the mental anguish of the Son of God as He hung there.

## Notes

(1) They crucified Him because they rejected the words He spoke from God (Jn. 12:48). The language of *rejection* is used both about the Jews' crucifixion of Christ (Lk. 17:25; Mk. 12:10) and their rejection of His words. Thus Heb. 6:5,6;10:28,29 connect despising the word with crucifying Christ afresh.

(2) The way Christ based His parables on the story of Joseph shows that He read it as a prophecy of Himself.

## Chapter 2: JACOB

### 2.1 Jacob: Really Our Example

The fact that " the God of Jacob" became " the God of Israel" means that for natural Israel, the life of Jacob is their supreme prototype in their relationship with God. When we read of " Jacob / Israel" in the prophets, there is usually a connection with one or more of the following:

- " The Lord of Hosts" / Angels, i.e. Angelic work, which was such a feature of Jacob's life
- The language of " return" , as if Jacob's return to his father (31:3,13; 32:9) was a type of Israel's future return, physically and spiritually, to their fathers and their God- and will involve a like humiliation at the hands of their Arab brethren to achieve this
- The language of 'redemption', which is appropriate to the fact that the first reference to the idea of redemption was in Jacob's words (48:16)
- The idea of God being " with you" , as He promised Jacob (28:15)
- The need not to fear, to renounce the fear which was such a characteristic of the faithless natural Jacob

- There is often an association between Jacob / Israel being rebuked and idolatry, as if this was a besetting sin of the early Jacob.

These connections all emphasize the need to see the turning point in Jacob's life as the wrestling with the Angel, and to realize that this, in essence, must be the experience of all the true Israel of God. Rom. 9:10-13 reasons that the grace of God shown to Jacob is exactly representative of our experience; chosen as opposed to the man next to us (cp. Esau), *not* due to our own righteousness, but as a manifestation of pure grace. The way the prophecies of their latter day struggles are recorded with the specter of the man Jacob hanging over them would suggest that they will be especially aware of this in the last days, until they like him come to make Yahweh their very own God, in the person of His Son. Hos. 12:2-13, the most explicit reference in the prophets to Jacob's struggle with the Angel, appears in a prophecy which has ample reference to Israel's latter day repentance. And Jacob is our example, as Jacob was and is Israel's example. Jacob's flight into Syria is set up as typical of Israel going into dispersion as a punishment for their idolatry. But they will return, as Jacob did. *Then* Israel will not wear a rough garment to deceive any more as Jacob did, *then* they will have renounced the human side of Jacob and captured his final spirituality for their own (Zech. 13:4). *Then*, in that glorious day, unGodliness will be turned away from (the people of) Jacob, as it was from Jacob himself (Rom. 11:26). We must remember that all the criticisms and denunciations of 'Israel' are denunciations of Jacob, who *primarily* was the man Jacob, whose children shared his characteristics. Therefore in some ways we can feed back from the failures of Israel as a people and see the weakness of Jacob as a man. Thus the way Israel were made to "serve with rigour" in Egypt reflected the way Jacob served in the same way with Laban (Ex. 1:13,14), and thereby implies that Jacob was suffering for his sins and was also idolatrous as they were at that time (Ez. 20:8), while he served Laban.

Particularly in that watershed night of wrestling, Jacob was our example. The Lord taught that we must all first be reconciled with our brother before we meet with God (Mt. 5:24)- an obvious allusion to Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in his heart, and then meeting with God. We really must *all* go through that process, whether in one night or a longer period. The commentary on that night in Hos. 12 makes this point: "In his (spiritual) manhood (RVmg.) he had power with God...he wept, and made supplication unto him: he (God) found him (Jacob) in Bethel, *and there He spake with us*, even the (same) Lord God of Hosts...therefore turn *thou* to *thy* God" as Jacob made Yahweh *his* God and *turned* to Him (vv. 3-6). Jacob is our example. Jacob only truly turned to God that night of wrestling, at the age of 97, despite having been brought up in the ways of the true Gospel, and after having lived almost a century of half commitment to God. We can so easily slip into the same life of half-commitment and never, even for a century, turn to our God with all our heart. Ps. 34:3 promises that the Angel of the Lord will encamp /Mahanaim around *all* His servants, just as the Angel did at Mahanaim for Jacob. Jacob's struggle at [or with] Penueel strikes a chord with each of us. Frank Lake has pointed out that each person struggles to find peace in their relationships with others and also with their God- whether or not they are conscious of those struggles<sup>(2)</sup>. Jacob's experience is clearly set up as representative of our own.

## Jacob Our Example

Yet if Jacob really is our example, we are faced with implications we'd perhaps rather not face. He suffered, really suffered, during those 20 years when he kept Laban's sheep; strife between his wives, driven to having relationships with Laban's ex-women, his cast offs, to try to appease his bitching wives; sleep departing from his eyes, consumed by the drought;

wages changed ten times, pining ("sore longing", 31:30) for the family home where he'd lived at peace for 77 years. When we see our brethren, or ourselves, in these situations, we cry out for the pain to end, for the wayward wife to return, for the redundancy to be cancelled, for the cancer to clear. And so it is God's will that we as His children *should* cry to Him in these things. But yet ultimately, so often the answer we seek is not the way to that final, desperate turning to our God which Jacob experienced. What really do we expect? Problems to come and then be taken away immediately? *All* Biblical examples, not least of the Man we fain would follow to the end, are to the contrary. Long term experience of impossible situations, pain at the most vulnerable point...and then the deeper realization of the Kingdom and the grace of the Lord Jesus and the real implications of the covenant of our God with which we are blessed. Yet to achieve this, God will often ask us the very hardest things. The way He asked Jacob to return to "thy kindred", which meant *Esau* (cp. 31:13 with 32:9); the very hardest thing for Jacob at that time. And yet this is the spirit of the cross; we are invited to take the hardest road, not just the difficult one. If we don't see this, we simply haven't opened our eyes to God working in our lives; we haven't woken up to what He is *really* asking us to do (apart from turn up at Christian meetings now and again).

## Jacob And The Last Days

In the same way as natural Israel will be driven towards an increasing identification with Jacob in their final holocaust, so at the same time it seems that spiritual Israel will be also <sup>(1)</sup>. "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (32:7) is the basis of "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), the "time of trouble" from which Israel will be Angelically "delivered" (Dan. 12:1) after the pattern of Jacob. Yet this "time of trouble" is picked up by the Lord in Mt. 24:21 and applied to the time of great tribulation "such as was not" which will encompass all God's people, natural *and* spiritual. What this means is that the Jacob experience must be gone through by all of us, natural and spiritual Israel; and this will entail a desperate praying to God <sup>(3)</sup> and an earnest repentance, recognizing that we have lived out our parental expectations for too long; and above all, a realization that "this God is *our* God", a personalizing of God, a grasping of the wondrous reality of those things which we have previously seen as only so much correct theology and logical theory. But let's not in any way minimize the spiritual struggle and suffering of Jacob. After the pattern of Moses, it seems that the Angel who came to wrestle with Jacob was out to kill him, and it was only his desperate, desperate repentance and pleading to receive the true blessing, the forgiveness of sins, which brought him through to salvation. Let's not see the similarities between ourselves and Jacob and therefore conclude that it will all turn out all right in the end, as it did for him. It's rather like saying 'David sinned with Bathsheba and repented, so I too can repent and all will be OK'; but the depth and intensity of his pleading and self-abasement are hard to plumb. Likewise "We must pray like Moses did" rolls off the tongue far, far too easily, almost doing despite to the spirit of Christ which he reached in those supreme pleadings for God's people. And above all, let's shy away from saying, or at least say far more soberly, things like: "We must carry the cross (brethren!), *like* Christ did! Think of him in Gethsemane, *that's* our example!'. All of which is true; but do we realize the depth and height of what we are connecting ourselves with?

Rom. 9:10-13 speaks of Jacob's experience of grace as if it is ours. But the grace Jacob will receive in the last days is really wondrous- and he is our pattern in this. Hosea 12 speaks of Jacob's running to Laban as a type of Israel's dispersion. Then when Jacob returns he won't deceive as his father did (Zech. 13:4); ungodliness will be turned away from Jacob (Rom. 11:26). The 'return' of Jacob in the prophets usually applies to the time of Israel's



repentance. As Jacob reached spiritual “manhood” at age 97, so will Israel finally, in their very old age as a nation (Hos. 12:3-6 RVmg.). So now Jacob is still in Syria, eyes consumed by drought, the family riven by internal strife- but they are being prepared, as are we all, for the final revelation of grace.

## David And Jacob

Jacob clearly was seen by David as his pattern; Psalm 23 can be read as an extended reflection upon Jacob's account of the promises made to him in Gen. 28:20,21:

### Gen. 28:20,21 re. Jacob

He is with me

He will keep me

He will give me bread to eat

I come again to my father's house in peace

### Psalm 23 re. David

For You art with *me* (i.e. just as You were with Jacob)

He makes me lie down, he leads me, he restores my life

He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies

I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever

David was a man who saw the height of Jacob, perceiving Jacob as our example, and the deep significance of his spiritual growth as our pattern. His almost fanatic devotion to " the Law" would have included the record of Jacob- around a fifth of " the Law" which he studied all the day (and deep into the night watches). Consider how he made Jacob's example his own, and how he was able to see himself living out, in principle, Jacob's spiritual growth pattern; and consider how Jacob is set up in Scripture as our example; the God of Jacob / Israel is our God too:

- " In mine adversity (Heb. *tsela*, limping) they rejoiced" (Ps. 35:15), " I am ready to halt (*tsela*) and my sorrow (repentance) is continually before me" (Ps. 38:17) uses a word which occurs elsewhere mainly in the context of Jacob limping after the night of wrestling (32:31).

- " I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant" (32:10) was spoken by Jacob on that night of destiny, in recognition of how he was morally unworthy to receive the promises which God had given him (see context). David picked this up in 2 Sam. 7:18, where he comments on his unworthiness to receive the promises to him, which were an extension of those Jacob received.

- " I cried to thee, O Lord, and unto the Lord I made *supplication*" (Ps. 30:8) uses the same word as Hos. 12:4 concerning Jacob's supplication to God in earnest repentance and physical request that night.

- Psalm 32 describes David's feelings during the nine months during which he refused to come to real self-knowledge and serious repentance. Appropriately enough, it is shot through with reference to Jacob, especially on the wrestling night. Ps. 38:17 was also penned (or first spoken) against the background of the Bathsheba affair: " I am ready to *halt* and my sorrow (for sin) is continually before me" . And the word for " halt" is usually used in the context of Jacob halting (limping) after his wrestling.

- "Let people serve thee" was the blessing promised to Jacob in his moment of weakness, as he crouched before his father in fawning deception (27:29). And yet David applies this promised blessing to himself (2 Sam. 22:44).

- Jacob's comment at the end of the wrestling experience was that "my life is preserved" (32:30); and that Hebrew phrase is so often used by David (Ps. 7:2; 22:20; 25:20; 33:19; 56:13; 86:13; 97:10; 120:2). Likewise Jacob commented that the experience had shown him that God had been gracious unto him (33:11); and *that* Hebrew phrase too is a catch phrase of David's (Ps. 4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 26:11; 27:11; 30:8; 31:9 and many others).

- Compare Gen. 48:16 with 2 Sam. 4:9. What Jacob only learnt at the *end* of his life, David learnt and applied during his life. And we should likewise not be experiential learners, but learn instead from Jacob.

All these are allusions to that night which was the watershed in Jacob's life, the night when he quit the life of half-commitment, and gave himself completely to God and His Truth, with all this entailed for him. Evidently that night of wrestling had a big impact on David; he saw that it epitomized the spiritual struggle which all God's true children must, *must* pass through on the way to making Yahweh their God. David exactly associates himself with Jacob in this sense of making God his very own God: "Thou art *my* king, O God; command deliverances for Jacob", i.e. David (Ps. 44:4). He too vowed to walk before God in the land (Ps. 116:9), just as Jacob and his fathers had done (Gen. 48:15). It has to be said, really it has to be, that the sense of spiritual struggle and effort in these men doesn't seem very apparent in our community- at least, on the surface.

## Notes

(1) My 90% certainty that spiritual Israel will pass through a time of latter day persecution at the same time as natural Israel is detailed at length in *The Last Days* (London: Pioneer, 1992).

(2) Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966).

(3) The connection between fervent prayer and the faithful in the last days is developed many times in *The Last Days* (ibid.).

## 2.2 The Human Side Of Jacob

### Jacob And The God Of His Father

"Now therefore, my son (age 77!), obey my voice according to that which I command thee" (Gen. 27:8)

"And his mother said unto him, upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them. And he went, and fetched..." (27:13,14)

"Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou...Jacob obeyed his father and his mother" (27:43; 28:7)

"Rebekah's son" (29:12) - not Jacob ben-Isaac

Laban, "his mother's brother" 3 x (29:10)

Allon-Bachuth, "the oath of his (Jacob's) weeping" (35:8) for Deborah, his mother's nurse

"The way that I go...bring me again to my father's house" (28:20,21) cp.24:27,40,42,48,56

"I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (28:22) cp. 14:20; Heb. 11:9

Returning to "Isaac his father" (31:18); "thou sore longest after thy father's house" (31:30); compares *his* father against that of his wives (31:5-7)

Promises = "mercy and truth" (32:10), as Isaac saw them (24:27)

### The negative influence of his family

Rebekah rejected promise of 25:23 in ch.27; as Jacob in 33:3-5

Gathering wealth: Abraham (12:5); Jacob (s.w. 31:18); also 24:35 cp. 30:43

Faithless fear (Mt. 25:25; Rev. 21:8) in Abraham (15:1; 20:11), Isaac (26:7,24; 31:42,53) and Jacob (28:17; 31:31; 32:7,11; 41:3)

## **2-2-1 Jacob And Idolatry**

The following is evidence that before that watershed night of Gen. 32, Jacob was influenced by the surrounding religious ideas, and was possibly involved with idol worship. The fact he openly says that Yahweh will only become his God *if* He brings him back home in peace (28:21) is proof enough that up until age 77 at the earliest, Jacob was not an unreserved worshipper of Yahweh. Yet knowing the nature of the man, it seems impossible to believe that he was totally irreligious until the time of his repentance in Gen. 32. The connections between Jacob and idolatry are so very numerous throughout the prophets that it seems impossible to totally disconnect him from idolatry. Just a few examples:

- Speaking in the context of Israel's punishment for idolatry (remember, in God's eyes Israel = Jacob), we are told, apparently out of context, that Jacob served for a wife (singular), and for a wife he kept sheep (Hos. 12:12). Yet this is in the context of v.2, which says that God would punish Israel for their idolatry, according to their ways. And the terrible 14 years of keeping the sheep which their forefather Jacob went through was a type of their punishment for idolatry. As Jacob *served* for Rachel, so Israel served idols and would have to *serve* those idolatrous nations as an appropriate punishment. Keeping sheep in Gentile lands is the basis of the prodigal parable; the young man who left home, tricked his father, sidled past his hostile elder brother with what he was sure was his inheritance by rights, squandered it, kept sheep, and came back a new man. Clearly the Lord had his mind on Jacob, although that parable is full of reference to prophetic descriptions of the nation of Israel, too. Hos. 12:4-6,12,13 seem to say that Jacob's humiliation at the hands of Laban is a type of the future suffering of Jacob, before their final homecoming [\(1\)](#).

- In the same context of Israel's punishment for idolatry, "brother will supplant (s.w. Jacob) his brother" (Jer. 9:9).

- The flocks conceiving in front of the rods / poles (Gen. 30:39) surely has reference to the concept of the pagan *asherah* poles, before which worshippers had sex. Jacob was clearly

influenced by this wrong idea- and yet God patiently worked with him through it. Jacob appears to have had the idea that what a female thinks about or has before her eyes at the time of labour or conception, will affect the child. And so he peeled stripes off the rods so they appeared 'ringstraked', or striped- in the belief that if the female cattle gave birth or conceived looking at them, then the offspring would be striped too, like the striped rods. However, the connection with the asherah poles suggests that Jacob's beliefs were associated with pagan fertility myths, rather than faith in Yahweh the God of his fathers.

- Mic. 1:5 explicitly links Jacob's sin with idolatry.

- Israel are often called 'Jacob' in passages concerning idolatry. Jacob and idolatry go together. Thus " By this therefore shall the sin of Jacob be purged; when he (not 'they') maketh all the stones of the (pagan) altar as chalkstone...the groves and images shall not stand up" (Is. 27:9).

- The idea of a stairway leading into Heaven of course has obvious connections with the ziggurats of those times. But note that those stairways had a temple on the ground immediately where the stairway started, and led up to a temple at the summit. On a human level, Jacob's subconscious was thinking of pagan temple systems. But God turned all this around. For the man Jacob lying there that night, in all his weakness, was a temple, connected by the Angels to Yahweh's Heavenly temple. And we too in all our weaknesses are the temples of God on this earth.

We have to make ourselves remember that every time we read of " Jacob" we are reading of the man Jacob who was at the root of the nation of Israel. We seem to read " Jacob" and " Israel" as referring to the physical land and nation of Israel, without remembering that essentially they are the personal names of the forefather of the *people* of Israel <sup>(2)</sup>.

The evidence seems to be that until he left home, Jacob was influenced by the idolatrous thinking of the surrounding world. For the next 20 years, he more tacitly went along with these things being practiced in his family. The mandrakes used by Leah were not just aphrodisiacs, but were believed to have the magical ability to induce fertility (30:14). This pagan nonsense was believed by Leah and Reuben, and tacitly gone along with by Jacob- although God worked through these wrong ideas, apparently uncorrected, in order to bring about His purpose. And yet from these mixed up women God built the house of Israel. Another example of this is found in the way Jacob says " With this staff...I became (many)" (32:10). Strong comments that the word for " staff" here suggests a magical, pagan stick associated with fertility, coming from a root meaning 'to germinate'. The same word occurs when we read that Jacob put the animals before the " rods" ; it seems this is an intensive plural for 'the great rod', i.e. his staff. Yet, fascinatingly enough, at the very point when Jacob leaves home to start his wilderness journey with only (in his eyes) his pagan staff to bring him good luck, God as it were takes a snapshot of him, and asks Israel to leave Egypt with a staff in their hands- a strange request, surely, unless it was intended to drive their minds back to Jacob, asking them to emulate his example. Jacob and idolatry go together.

In similar vein to all this, Jacob's superstitious ideas about the cattle mating were used by God to teach Jacob that He would bless him physically, as a prelude to the more important spiritual blessings which Jacob was later to value. There is no biological truth at all in what he did. Jacob wasn't specifically corrected for his paganism; later he must have realized the depth of God's grace in still working through him at this time, still giving him blessing.

Likewise, when Laban sets out to attack Jacob, it was clearly in his power to kill him. But the incident of him accusing Jacob of stealing his idols, him publicly searching the whole camp, feeling (Heb.) absolutely everything, and not finding them, probably led to a loss of face which meant he couldn't do what he planned to Jacob. Jacob then bursts out in proud, arrogant denunciation of Laban- not realizing that his beloved, idolatrous Rachel couldn't bear to be without those idols, and had stolen them. Despite Rachel's deceit and idolatry, and Jacob's arrogance, God worked through all this to save them. The way God works with us in our weakness, leading us on, hoping we will later reflect back and marvel at His grace and patience... all this God works oftentimes with man. Not only should we be deeply humbled as a result of our self-examination. We ought to reflect this kind of patience and going along with weakness in the hope of later change in our attitude to our brethren.

But the moment of truth came during his wrestling with the Angel. He realized then that in our relationship with God, it's all or nothing. And after that, he firmly rejected the ways of the world in his own life and that of his family; he made them bury all their idols (35:2). This connection between the night of wrestling and Jacob's rejection of idols is hinted at in 1 Kings 18:31; here, Israel openly renounce their idolatry and claim to turn to Yahweh with their whole heart. To celebrate this, "Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of *Jacob* unto whom the word of Yahweh came saying, Israel shall be thy name". The change of name that night is associated with Israel's rejection of idolatry. And then finally, at the very end, Jacob realizes his earlier idolatry and confesses it, and emphasizes his utter conviction that there is only one God, the God of his fathers, Yahweh, the God of Messiah, his very own God.

And yet even after this, there are a few hints that the way of thinking associated with a life of idolatry was still in Jacob. Thus he set a pillar over Rachel's grave (35:14,20); something which was later forbidden under the Law because of its evident association with idolatry (same word in Lev. 26:1; Dt. 12:3; 16:22; 2 Kings 3:2; 10:27). He had done this previously, in a way his forefathers are not recorded as doing (28:18,22; 31:45,51,2).

Yet at the end of his life, Jacob had come to terms with his earlier idolatry. 'Gad' was the name of a Babylonish deity which presided over chance; Israel were condemned for believing in him in Is. 65:11 AVmg. Leah using this name reflected the sentiment of 'Good fortune at the hand of the god Gad'. The way she effectively accuses Jacob's God of treating her like a prostitute who gave her "hire" because she let her maid sleep with her husband... doesn't indicate that she was a great believer in Yahweh. Yet when Jacob blessed Gad in 49:19, he seems to change this: "Gad, a troop (Heb. *gedud*, not *gad*) shall overcome (*guwd*, related to *gad*) him: but he shall overcome". These word plays would suggest that the god Gad would be overcome, would be 'Gad-ed', by the troop of warriors that would come from the tribe of Gad.

## Notes

(1) Spare a thought for Jacob at this time. During those years he would have gone through all the shame of an intelligent man who is desperately poor, and knows himself to be hopelessly in love (at 77). And when he finally gets the object of his lust, still having to work for her, it really doesn't turn out as he thinks. Bitterness between his wives escalates to the point where he has to have sexual relations with their handmaids; who were, remember, Laban's ex women. He had to go in to the women of a man he must have hated, picking up his throw offs. And then his wages were changed ten times, the conditions of service were ridiculous. To escape from his domestic pain he must have gone out and talked to those sheep. But "in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from my eyes" (31:40). This was all a far, far cry from the cozy life with mum and dad and granddad, thinking that he'd go off and pick up a lovely wife just as Isaac obtained Rebekah.

(2) Thus the statement that 'Israel was the Kingdom of God and will be re-established as such' is of course quite true, but 'Israel' as God's Kingdom meant that the *people* more than the physical land was God's Kingdom, the dominion over which He ruled; and it is the Kingdom in the sense of this

*relationship* which will be restored on earth (Ex. 19:6 cp. 1 Pet. 2:9 teaches that this has already begun)- although this is not to say that the land is not in *any* sense the Kingdom. It is, of course, relevant to the concept of the future Kingdom.

## 2-2-2 Jacob, Rachel And Leah

Jacob was under the one man: one woman ideal of Genesis; and yet he evidently didn't take this too seriously. His mad infatuation with Rachel meant that he thought nothing of polygamy. The idea of accepting one's married circumstances for the sake of principle (a common 21st century believers' cross) was obviously foreign to our Jacob. Many aspects of the Mosaic Law were already in place before it was pronounced to Moses; the prohibition on marrying a second wife who was the sister of the first wife could well have been known among God's people in Jacob's time, seeing that it was a precept based on the principles of Eden (Lev. 18:17,18). "It is wickedness" was God's comment to Moses, and there is no reason to think that His essential moral judgment on this kind of thing has ever changed much. Yet Jacob thought nothing of breaching this command, and committing this "wickedness". Leah's reaction to Jacob's evident favouritism for Rachel was to become obsessed with having children. When she failed to conceive, she panicked that she was barren, and therefore asked Jacob to have intercourse with her servant Zilpah in order to produce children. During the first seven years of her marriage, she produced 6 sons and 1 daughter. This indicated not only an incredible fertility, but also a high womanly status in those times, seeing that she produced so many more sons than daughters. The fact none of her children died in babyhood was also remarkable for the times. Her fertility became proverbial in later Israel (Ruth 4:11). And yet despite this evident fecundity, whenever she thought she had failed to conceive, she asked Jacob to have intercourse with Zilpah. Despite knowing her fertility, Jacob did so. It seems he sacrificed basic principles in order to placate a neurotic wife who, it would seem, he didn't care too much for anyway, seeing he made it plain he had never wanted to marry her in the first place (29:25,31). The whole sense that we get is that his relationship with Zilpah was unnecessary, and he was far too casual in his attitude to it. "Now will my husband dwell with me" (Gen. 30:20) surely implies that Jacob and Leah had effectively split up. The evidence that Leah bore seven children in seven years is evident from the chronology of Jacob's life, reflecting as it does the traumatic Jacob, Rachel, Leah relationship:

### The Life Of Jacob

Age	Comment	Reference
147	Jacob died	47:28
130	Went down into Egypt	47:9
130	Joseph 39	41:46; 45:6
97	Finished serving Laban 6 years for cattle; with Laban 20 years	30:25; 31:41

91	Joseph born, after Leah had already borne her children	30:22,25
84	Married Leah; took Rachel	31:41
77	Fled from Esau and arrived at Laban's	31:41
20s?	Took birthright from Esau	

The way Leah comments about Jacob to Rachel “Now will my husband love me...now this time will my husband be joined unto me” (Gen. 29:32-34) all imply that Jacob’s marriage was in a mess. Jacob, Rachel and Leah were indeed a tangled web. God joins together a married couple; yet Jacob, apparently, neither loved his wife Leah / Rachel, nor had allowed God to join him unto her in emotional bonding. And there he was, having kids by his domestic servants as well, his boss’s cast-offs. And God *loved* this man, and worked with him *so* patiently, to build the house of Israel His people. There’s comfort enough for every man and woman, reading this record. The way Jacob is simply described as the one whom God loved in Ps. 47:4 is majestic in its brevity. God loved Jacob. He really did. Simple as that. When Jacob is the one presented as having struggled with God more than any other.

In passing, Jacob's love for Rachel is reflected and acknowledged by the inspired record when we read of *Rachel* weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted "because they are not" (Mt. 2:18; Jer. 31:15). But these ideas are more relevant surely to *Jacob* weeping for Rachel and especially for Joseph- for Jacob wept for Joseph and refused to be comforted (Gen. 37:35). This was after the death of Rachel (Gen. 35:19). Surely the record is reflecting the unity which there was between Jacob and Rachel; even after her death, Jacob wept as it were with her kind of weeping. Martin Buber notes that "womenfolk bring the household gods to the homes of their husbands from the homes of their fathers" (1). By doing this, Rachel showed both her loyalty to her husband and yet also her attachment to idolatry; a classic case of mixed motivation arising from not having wholly given herself to the one true God.

### **Jacob And Laban**

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?

## Notes

(1) See Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1947) p. 205.

## 2-2-3 The Weakness Of Jacob

Jacob's basic dishonesty is seen by the way in which Esau begged Jacob for the "red pottage", which he thought was a kind of blood soup [a strange thing for Yahweh's people to be eating at the time!]- and yet Jacob actually only gave him a dish of lentils. This would explain why Esau later claimed he had been twice deceived by Jacob (Gen. 27:36). The mere sale of the birthright was hardly deception; but if the bitterness of it all was that even in that hard bargain, Jacob didn't really give Esau the food he craved... then we can understand Esau feeling Jacob had twice deceived him.

The spiritual weakness of Jacob at the time of the wrestling incident can be inferred from the way Hosea speaks about Jacob in Hosea 12. Hosea paints Jacob as a hypocrite, one who prays to God and yet serves idols. Hosea is recognizing that the sins of the fathers tend to continue in subsequent generations; and yet those generations are still culpable for their sin [alcoholics who blame 'inherited genes' should bear this in mind]. But the point is, Hosea is reasoning upon the basis of the similarities between Jacob and the Israel of his day; and he's urging them not to be like Jacob, not to blame their weakness on the fact Jacob was their genetic ancestor; and perhaps urging them to go and make the conversion to true spirituality which Jacob eventually made.

There is reason to think that even at the end, Jacob was still in some ways weak. Thus despite his name having been changed from Jacob to Israel, the two terms are used by God in the record in juxtaposition (34:7; 35:22; 46:2, 5,8; 48:2) as if to reflect the way the full change of Jacob would only take place in the Kingdom, when each believer will receive his new name (Rev. 3:12). We have seen that Jacob really is our example, or perhaps our pattern of spiritual growth, and that in so many ways, Jacob matured marvellously. And yet there is real evidence that even at the end, there were serious deficiencies in his spirituality. Recognition of this fact must not lead us to any spirit of complacency in our spiritual struggles. But at the end, we will never reach the stature of Christ. By grace, righteousness has to be imputed to us. The spiritual blindnesses and deficiencies of our brethren can be so agonizing to behold; and yet we too have ours, as Jacob had his, and the fact we have them does not mean that we (or they, or Jacob) will not be saved in the end. Perhaps you won't agree with *all* the following; but the general picture is clear: he didn't quite make it to the spiritually perfect / mature status with which he is credited right at the beginning (25:27 Heb.). Job is an identical case; he is labelled "perfect" at the beginning, but at the end of his spiritual growth, he didn't quite get to perfection. The weakness of Jacob meant likewise.

- " (Shechem), which *I* took out of the hand of the Amorite with *my* sword and with *my* bow" (48:22) indicates that Jacob's old self-reliance was still not totally gone; his sense that through his own effort he could bring about the fulfillment of God's promises for him. In this area, the weakness of Jacob remained. These very words are alluded to in Josh. 24:12 and Ps.



44:1-6, where the Spirit says that the land was given to Israel *not* on account of their bow and sword.

- We have shown that finally, Jacob accepted Joseph as a type of Christ. And yet it would seem that he favoured Judah with an unseemly favouritism. His comment that "thy father's children shall bow down before thee" (49:8) seems a conscious allusion to Joseph's dream that Jacob's children would bow to *him*; as Jacob refused to accept it then, so he had problems with it even at the end (37:10). "I had not thought to see thy face" (48:11) suggests that he had discounted the possibility of Joseph's dream ever coming true.

- Although Jacob maybe favoured Judah on a human level, he certainly favoured Joseph spiritually. It seems that he made up his mind that Messiah would come from Joseph (when in fact Christ came through Judah). He said that Ephraim's seed would become a multitude of nations (48:19)- he was applying the Messianic promise to Ephraim. Likewise he stated that from Joseph (Ephraim's father) would come the Shepherd / Stone / Messiah (49:24); presumably, Jacob thought, through Ephraim. Yet Jacob was wrong in this. Thus whilst Jacob showed his spiritual maturity by an enthusiasm for the Lord Jesus Christ, even right at the very end of his life, he still had an old flaw: a desire to fulfill God's promises in the way *he* wanted them fulfilled, a desire to turn God's word round to fit in with *his* preferred way of thinking (in this case, that Messiah would come through Joseph / Ephraim). The way the prophets continually describe sinful Israel as "Ephraim" is perhaps God's way of showing that Jacob's way was not His way.

- The weakness in Jacob's tendency to have an over-physical view of the promises was still with him at the end. He seems to speak as if he saw the fact that Rachel was buried in Canaan as a proof that therefore in that sense he had possessed the land of Canaan (48:7 and context). Yet the NT says that the fact Jacob *didn't* own the land meant that he hadn't received the fulfillment of the promises, but would do so in the future.

- This all too physical view of the promises is perhaps also suggested in his desire to make Yahweh his God because He had fed him all his life long (48:20). Earlier he had promised to do this, if Yahweh would indeed provide him with daily food (28:20). That bargain he struck with God would surely have been best repented of rather than carried through.

- "His border shall be unto Zidon" (49:13) is an unreconciled expositional problem. The canton of Zebulun in the Millennium will be nowhere near Zidon, and Zebulun didn't have a border unto Zidon in the past. According to Josephus (Ant. 19:10,16), Zebulun was never even bounded by the sea, being cut off by Asher. Could it be that at times Jacob's enthusiasm carried him away, and what he said was more his own wishing than the direct revelation of God? Until a satisfactory explanation can be come up with, it seems this is what we must accept. In this case, we see that even in this flurry of faith in the future Kingdom and Messiah (see *Jacob and the promises*), Jacob's interest in the physical aspect of the promises still remained with him, and carried him away in a way which God refused to work with. David's spiritual enthusiasm for Solomon needs to be read in a similar light; he makes statements concerning him which reflect a Messianic zeal, but also a desire to see his physical son more blessed than he was worthy of.

## **2-3-1 Jacob's Name Change**

We all grow up with some concept of God. This is as true for those with atheist or apostate backgrounds as it is for those steeped in Sunday School from the cradle. That concept of God which we have in our youth tends to stay with us, and in some ways dogs us for much of our lives. Growth towards a real, personal knowledge of the true God, *our* Father, is a lifelong process. Jacob grew up in the most spiritual home on earth at the time (although some of the goings on would have made the neighbours doubt this). He was brought up 'in the Truth', we could say. And yet his conception of God was woefully immature for many years. His struggle towards the true knowledge of God is not only fascinating; because Jacob's spiritual growth really is intended as *our* model. Nathaniel thought he really believed in the Lord Jesus. The Lord commented: "You shall see (usually used in John concerning faith and spiritual perception) greater things than these...you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man" (Jn. 1:51 RSV). It was Jacob who saw Heaven opened and the Angels ascending and descending. And Christ's comment that Nathaniel was "an Israelite (Jacob-ite) indeed, in whom is no guile" (i.e. Jacob without his guileful side) is a reference to Jacob's name change. It confirms that Nathaniel was to follow Jacob's path of spiritual growth; he thought he believed, he thought he saw Christ clearly; but like Jacob, he was to comprehend far greater things.

The covenant God made with Abraham was similar in style to covenants made between men at that time; and yet there was a glaring difference. Abraham was not required to do anything or take upon himself any obligations. Circumcision [cp. baptism] was to remember that this covenant of grace had been made. It isn't part of the covenant [thus we are under this same new, Abrahamic covenant, but don't require circumcision]. Perhaps this was why Yahweh but not Abraham passed between the pieces, whereas usually both parties would do so. The promises to Abraham are pure, pure grace. Sadly Jacob didn't perceive the wonder of this kind of covenant- his own covenant with God was typical of a human covenant, when he says that *if* God will give him some benefits, then he will give God some (Gen. 28:20). Although he knew the covenant with Abraham, the one way, gracious nature of it still wasn't perceived by him.

### *Jacob's Name Change*

Several times at the very end (Gen. 49:2,7,24) Jacob mentions his old and new names ('Jacob' and 'Israel') together, as if to show that now he finally accepted and believed the wondrous change that God had wrought in him. First of all, he doesn't seem to have accepted his name change, and needed God to remind him of it again (32:28; 35:10). To accept, really accept, the Name we called upon ourselves at baptism (Acts 2:21; 9:14; 22:16; Rom. 10:12-14) is difficult. To believe that God really does see us as His people, bearing His Name, with all the moral glory this implies... it took Jacob no less than 50 years to realize the implications of Jacob's name change (Jacob's name was changed when he was 97, and he only uses it freely of himself just before his death at 147) <sup>(2)</sup>. It's unusual for a man to repeatedly mention his own name when talking to others; and yet this is exactly what Jacob did in 48:20; 49:2,7,24; it was as if he was playing with a new toy, reflecting his grasp of that basic, wondrous truth he had been taught 50 years ago; that in *God's* eyes, his name had changed. In God's eyes, he was not the Jacob, the liar, the supplanter, the deceiver; but Israel, the prince with God. But it took 50 years for the wonder of it all to come home to him.

The name change reflected God's perception that Jacob had changed. And yet at that point in time, it seems Jacob didn't realize his change; for he had to be reminded of the change of name later, he had to be encouraged to accept that it was really true. 2 Kings 17:34 criticizes

men for worshipping Yahweh but also their own gods; they are rebuked with the comment that God had made a covenant with " the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel" . The suggestion is surely that when Jacob became Israel, he quit the life of half-hearted service to God. This was the decision he came to that night when he wrestled with the Angel, and his name was changed. Then he realized that there were only two ways, the way of the flesh and the way of God (cp. Mt. 6:24; 7:13,14; James 3:11,12). It is for this reason that soon after the wrestling incident and change of name, Jacob purges his family of their idols (35:2). Once he has done this, God reminds him the second time that his name has been changed (35:10). Like Jacob, we find it very hard to ascertain our spiritual growth; the very construction of our natures makes 100 % accurate self-examination impossible (Ps. 19:12; Prov. 14:12; 1 Cor. 4:4 RSV). It's not only that we fail to perceive all our errors; we also fail to realize when we have made a significant turn for the better in our lives. Yet God perceives this, as He did with Jacob that night when He renamed him. This perhaps the hardest struggle we have; to really grasp the height of God's positive perception of us. It took Jacob, spiritual hero that he was, 50 years. And a like joy, that almost child-like playing around with that 'new' name he'd received 50 years back, should characterize our spiritual maturity.

### *Mutuality*

There was a unity, a mutuality, between Jacob and God at the end. No longer did he see God as someone else's God, not even just his father's God. The lessons of Jacob's name change were finally learnt. Thus he asks Joseph to bring his sons to him, so that he may bless them; but when he gives the blessing, he states that this is God blessing them (Gen. 48:8,9,15,16); he saw God working through him. At the very end, Jacob gathered himself up into his bed to die, and then God gathered him up (this comes out very clearly in the Hebrew text; Gen. 49:33). That desire of God for mutuality with His servant Jacob had always been there. 50 years previously, Jacob had made " supplication" to God (Heb. 12:4) as he wrestled the Angel; and at that very same time, God dealt " graciously" (the same word translated " supplication" ) with Jacob (Gen. 33:11). At that time, God " recompensed" to Jacob according to his sins, and Jacob responded by " turning" (same word translated " recompensed" ) to his God (Hos. 12:2,8). It's too bad our translations disguise these things. By the end of his life, this spirit of mutuality between him and God had become perfected. And so with us; we too can live our lives thinking that if we do this, that and the other, God will do this and that for us. The idea of a two-way relationship with Him, of His Spirit, with all that implies, dwelling in us, until our will is His will; all this takes time to develop. The Lord set before us an ideal, whereby we would so mature in Him that whatever we ask will be granted; we will ask what *we* will, and receive it, because whatever is asked according to *God's* will is received. In other words, our will, our innermost desire and ambition, in things great and small, abstract and physical, will be His (Jn. 15:7; 1 Jn. 5:14). And then, in the eternity of the Kingdom, we will be God's inheritance (Dt. 4:20; 9:29), and He will be ours (Ps. 16:5). This mutuality of inheritance between us and God is commented upon in Jer. 10:16, in the very context of Jacob: " The portion of Jacob (i.e. God, the inheritance of Jacob) is not like them... Israel is the rod of his inheritance; Yahweh of Hosts is His Name" . This is yet another reflection of God's recognition that finally, Jacob fulfilled his promise to make Yahweh his God (Gen. 28:20). The lessons of Jacob's name change were finally learnt.

### **2-3-2 The Humility Of Jacob**

This sense of mutuality between God and Jacob was associated with Jacob's achievement of a true humility. The way he blessed his sons in Gen. 49 indicates this; note how he saw

Isaachar's greatness in the fact he was a humble servant (Gen. 49:14). He learnt the lesson of that night of wrestling; his natural strength was not to be gloried in, neither was this to be his true greatness. The way he rebukes and effectively rejects Reuben, Simeon and Levi, the sons who had flaunted their natural strength and prowess, reflects the perspectives which Jacob attained at the end. " Reuben...my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power...thou shalt not excel" (Gen. 49:3,4) sounds as if Jacob associated his natural strength with Reuben, and yet now he rejected it. Doubtless these men gathered round their father expecting to hear some sweet fatherly blessing mixed with a few gentle reproofs for past behaviour. The whole process of Israel's sons being " gathered" to him and receiving their blessing and judgment is typical of the final judgment, showing how Jacob was a type of Christ at this time. The surprise of the sons we are left to imagine, but it would point forward quite accurately to the surprise which will be a feature of the rejected (Mt. 25:44).

The same growth in humility is to be seen in the account of Job's spiritual growth. There are, it seems, intended similarities between these two men; both lived in tents and are described as " perfect" , both lived among Edomites, both were initially self-righteous, both came to an abrupt watershed in their spiritual experience, due to the work of their Angels; both had false friends, adversaries and problems with their wives, and both ended up rich at the end, with more importantly a fine appreciation of Messiah and the sweet day of His Kingdom.

Jacob's attaining a true humility, his making Yahweh his very own God, his realization of the personal relevance of the promises of the Gospel, resulted in a wonderful opening up of Jacob at the end. Throughout his life, he comes over as a man of few words. It made an interesting exercise to copy out all the words Jacob is recorded as saying. Until Gen. 48 and 49, we are left with the a kind of staccato effect; he speaks with jerks and jolts, often with an underlying bitterness and deep suspicion; and there are some profound silences recorded, where he simply doesn't respond, but bottles everything up inside him (Gen. 28:5; 35:9-13, 19, 29). There is no record of any weeping after the death of his dear Rachel, or leaving his beloved mum, or at the death of his father who had such a huge spiritual influence on him; and there were precious few words from him when he learnt of the supposed death of Joseph (Gen. 37:35). But now at the end, there is a tremendous openness, words flow from him; he knows whom he has believed, and can speak confidently to his family about Him, from his own experience. One senses a great sense of positiveness about him. At age 130, he mumbled to Pharaoh: "Few and *evil* have the days of the years of my life been" , as if every day had dragged (Gen. 47:9). But at the very end, 17 years later, he more positively speaks of the Angel that had redeemed him from all *evil* (Gen. 48:15).

### 2-3-3 Jacob's Perception Of God

Consider the evolution of Jacob's perception of God:

Yahweh thy (Isaac's) God  
(Gen. 27:20)

This is almost cynical; the sort of thing an unbaptized child of a believer might say to their parents

Yahweh is in this place...how

Jacob feared God with the fear of one who has

dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God (Gen. 28:16,17)

no real relationship with Him

If God will be with me...then shall Yahweh be my God: and this stone...shall be God's house (Gen. 28:20-22)

The implication was that Jacob didn't consider Yahweh to be his God at that time. Jacob's words sound as if he believed in 'God' as a kind of force or spirit, but did not have Yahweh as his personal God. And yet God had promised Abraham that He would be the God of his seed (Gen. 17:7,8); Jacob was aware of these promises, and yet he is showing that he did not accept their personal relevance to him at this time. The fact at the end he does call God his God reveals that he then accepted the Abrahamic promises as relevant to him personally. His offer to give a tithe to God if God delivered him would have been understood in those days as saying that Yahweh would then be his *king* (cp. 1 Sam. 8:15,17); and yet he evidently felt that Yahweh wasn't then his King. There is no record that Jacob ever did build a temple or tithe; but at the end of his life he realizes that God had kept *His* side of the deal, in that He had been with him and fed him all his life long. The fact he hadn't kept his side of the deal made Jacob realize the huge grace of God...

Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? (Gen. 30:2)

Jacob starts to further realize the power of God

Yahweh hath blessed thee since my coming (Gen. 30:30)

Jacob saw God as the one who gave physical blessing; he saw the promises of Divine blessing as primarily re. material blessing. He missed their basic import, which was of forgiveness and the Kingdom (Acts 3:26,27)

The God of my father (Gen. 31:5)

Not *my* God

God... God... the Angel of God  
(Gen. 31:7,9,11)

He perceived God as an Angel, like Isaiah he knew therefore he deserved to die

Laban said: " The God of your father appeared unto me..."  
(Gen. 31:29)

That Jacob worshipped the God of his father rather than his own God was well known. " *Your* (plural) father" (cp. " thee" in the previous and following verses) may suggest that Jacob was confident enough of his father's God to have introduced it to his family, although he himself still had not reached the point where he had made this God completely his own.

Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away empty. God hath seen my affliction (Gen. 31:42)

Again, not *my* God. And he saw God as the supplier of physical blessing; he understood the promise to Abraham that " I will be with thee" as referring to blessing of cattle more than anything more spiritual.

" The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us (Laban said). And Jacob swore by the fear (i.e. the God) of *his* father Isaac" (Gen. 31:53)

This seems to be emphasizing that Laban swore by his fathers' gods, because he knew no better, and Jacob did likewise. A Baptist is a Baptist because his father is, and at the beginning of spiritual life, a Christian can be one for no better reason than his parents are. Jacob was still at this stage in middle age. And so so many of us must pass through that inevitable growth curve of Jacob.

O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, Yahweh... (Gen. 32:9)

He came to see that 'God' was Yahweh (cp. notes on Gen. 28:20 above); he saw that there was only one 'God', and that the vague sense of 'God' which he had was in fact 'Yahweh'. But still he speaks of this Yahweh-God as someone else's God.

Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name (Gen. 32:29)

Jacob knew the Yahweh Name, he knew the name El Shaddai (Ex. 6:3); surely he was asking for a deeper exposition of the Name. He realized his need to draw closer to God. But the Angel grants him the blessing of forgiveness, and says

that Jacob doesn't need such an exposition, because he now knows the character of God: he has received such grace and forgiveness and future assurance. This is the Name / character of God revealed. Thus Jacob realized that he knew the theory of God, but not the practice. Latter day Jacob, natural and spiritual, are little better. In so many ways, so often, we know but don't believe; and it has been commonly observed that the problem with us is that we are right in doctrine but very weak in practice. This shouldn't surprise us. It was exactly the characteristic of our father Jacob. But the God of Bethel is our God too, and will bring us through to a deeper maturity. That night, Jacob reached "manhood", spiritual maturity (Hos. 12:3 RV).

I have seen God face to face  
(Gen. 32:30)

He perceived God as that Angel

The children which God hath  
graciously given thy  
servant...God hath dealt  
graciously with me (Gen.  
33:5,11)

He saw God as the one who graciously gave physical blessings, and also as the God who gives spiritual grace / mercy to undeserving sinners like himself. Thus a growing appreciation of grace was a facet of Jacob's perception of God and spiritual growth.

He erected there an altar, and  
called it El-elohe-Israel (Gen.  
33:20)

This seems to have been a flash of spiritual insight, a peak of faith which was not afterwards sustained; not only did Jacob accept the new name God had given him (although he needed reminding of this again in Gen. 35:9), he saw that 'God' was his God, the God behind the powerful ones (Angels) who looked after Jacob / Israel. Still he saw God as pre-eminently *physically* powerful, and manifested in many Angels. And still he had not fulfilled his promise to make *Yahweh* his God.

God (Heb. *e*l), who answered  
me in the day of my distress,  
and was with me in the way

God is still a God who gives physical blessings. Jacob has previously only spoken of *Yahweh* or *elohim*. He thought it was the *elohim* who had

(Gen. 35:3)

appeared to him at Bethel; now he sees more clearly the concept of *one* God.

God Almighty give you mercy before the man (Gen. 43:14)

Jacob's perception of God was as very powerful, One who can give undeserved grace to men like Jacob's sinful sons. He uses a term he has not previously used: *El-Shaddai*, the Almighty El. Using new terms for God reveals a deepening of understanding of Him. We likewise will grow in our knowledge of Him through the trials of life. Consider how poor Hannah was driven through the sorrow of her life to coin the phrase "the Lord of hosts" for the first time in Scripture (1 Sam. 1:11), so strong became her sense of the strength and manifestation of Yahweh in His Angels.

"I am God (*el*), the God (*elohim*) of thy father...I will make of *thee* a great nation" (Gen. 46:3), as God had promised Abraham and Isaac

This is God's encouragement to Jacob to fully accept Him as his own God, not just see Him as his father's God. Even at 130, Jacob had to be helped to break free of his parental background, and make God his own God. It was also an attempt to make Jacob see that the true God was not just an Angel, but the power behind the Angels. This would imply that Jacob was so blinded by God manifestation that he failed to see the God that was being manifested. We have the same problem, and a sign of spiritual maturity is the awesome realization of the reality of God on a personal level.

God Almighty appeared unto me (Gen. 48:3)

Jacob's perception of the power of God, this one Almighty *El*, is growing. Ex. 6:3 says that Yahweh appeared to Jacob "by the name of God Almighty", so presumably this Name was declared to Jacob at the vision in Bethel; for this, Jacob says, was when God primarily "appeared" to him. And yet he is only recorded as using this name 50 years later. It took 50 years for the fact that God really is ALL mighty to sink in, and for him to come out with this publicly.



I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed (Gen. 48:11)

He realizes that God does exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think (Eph. 3:20)

God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which shepherded me all my life long, the Angel... (Gen. 48:15)

Now Jacob is getting closer to a personal perception of God; he realizes that the same God who was with Abraham and Isaac has been with him. He sees *elohim* as essentially only one God.

God make thee as Ephraim ... God shall be with you and bring you again into the land of your fathers (Gen. 48:20,21)

Now Jacob's perception of God is as a God who does something in the future, in fulfilment of His promises of the Kingdom

I have waited for thy salvation, O Yahweh (Gen. 49:18)

Yahweh is a saviour God, not just a provider of children, cattle and land for the present; and now, at long last, Jacob associates Yahweh with himself; Yahweh has become his God, as he promised 70 years before. Ex. 6:3 says that Jacob knew the Yahweh Name from the time God appeared to him; but it took him a lifetime to make Yahweh his very own God.

The mighty God (*abiyir*) of Jacob (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel [Jacob; i.e. Messiah]), even the God (*E*) of thy father (Jacob)... the Almighty (Gen. 49:24,25)

I could almost weep for joy here. *Finally*, at long last, Jacob got there. He says three times the same thing; God is my God, Yahweh- Messiah will be the my rock, my stone, yes, He is the God of your father Jacob, He is ALL-MIGHTY to save. That promise made 70 years previously in semi-belief, he had now fulfilled. He had made Yahweh his God. He was not only the God of his father and grandfather. The God who can do all things, not only physically but more importantly (as Jacob now realized) *spiritually*, was with his very own God. No wonder he dies repeating this three times over. And remember, he's our pattern. Jacob coins a new name for God: the *abiyir*, translated here "the mighty [God]" . This word occurs only in five other

places, and each time it is in the phrase " the mighty one (*abiyr*) of Jacob" (Ps. 132:2,5; Is. 1:24; 49:26; 60:16). Likewise, the Lord used new titles of God in his time of ultimate spiritual maturity as he faced death (Jn. 17:11,25). Many of the Messianic Psalms refer to God as " my God" , and it was one of the phrases in the Lord's mind in His final, glorious maturity (Mt. 27:46). Moses in his final speech of Deuteronomy often encouraged Israel that God was *thy* (singular, personal) God. Jacob knew God's mightiness for himself in a very special way; he knew His gentle forgiveness of all his pride and self-will, that mighty forgiveness, that mighty patience with him, that Almighty salvation of him which had been made possible. In the same way we will each be given the name of God, and yet this Name will be known only to us (Rev. 2:17; 3:12; 14:1); it will be God's Name, but in a form entirely personal to us. In dim foreshadowing of that glorious relationship with God, Jacob reached something of this even in his mortal life. And so the God of Duncan is not quite your God, and the God of (e.g.) Robert Roberts is not quite my God. The whole concept is wondrous, really. We are straining at the limit of our possible perceptions.

## 2-3-4 The Love Of God For Jacob

" One shall say, I am Yahweh's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto Yahweh, and surname himself by the name of Israel" (Is. 44:5). The Name of Jacob / Israel is paralleled with Yahweh. Remember how Jacob in his doubt promised God: " If God will be with me...then shall Yahweh be my God" (Gen. 28:20,21); and we have shown how that at the end, Yahweh was Jacob's God. God seems to recognize this by describing Himself as the God of Jacob / Israel so very often. His joy, His sheer delight at Jacob's spiritual achievement is recorded throughout the Bible. The way God describes Himself as " the God of Israel" (201 times) or " the God of Jacob" (Gen. 25 times) infinitely more times than anyone else's God is proof enough that God saw His relationship with Jacob as very special. " God of Abraham" occurs 17 times; " God of Isaac" 8 times; " God of David" 4 times. Remember that whenever we read " Israel" , we are reading of the man Jacob and his children. That God was the God of mixed-up, struggling Jacob is a sure comfort to every one of us. God is not ashamed to be surnamed the God of Jacob (Heb. 11:16 Gk.). The clear parallel between the historical man Jacob and the people of Israel is brought out in Mal. 1:2: "I loved you... I loved Jacob". Had Israel appreciated God's love for

the man Jacob, and perceived that he was typical of them, then they would never have doubted God's love for them. And the same is true of us, whom Jacob likewise represents.

Every reference to "the God of Jacob / Israel" is effectively saying: 'I'm the God that stuck with mixed up, struggling Jacob. And I'll stick with you too, through spiritual thick and thin, and bring you through in the end'. This is the love of God for Jacob. So close is the association between God and Jacob that there are times when the name 'Jacob' becomes a synonym for 'the God of Jacob'. Ps. 24:6 is an example: "The generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob" (cp. other examples in Is. 44:5; Jer. 10:16; 51:19). The name of Israel therefore was paralleled with the name of God- Joshua feared that the name of Israel would be cut off, "and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Josh. 2:9). Thus God identified Himself with Jacob- such was the love of God for Jacob. It's rather like when He says that in Egypt, He heard "a language that I understood not". He understood Egyptian, but He so identified Himself with His people that He can speak like this. This leads on to a point which can be no more than reflected upon: It seems that the sons of Rachael, Jacob's favourite wife, were favoured by Jacob. Ephraim and Manasseh [the sons of Joseph, counted as Jacob's personal sons] and Benjamin marched in front of the ark (hence Ps. 80:2), and these three tribes were represented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> row of the breastplate by the three most precious stones. Could it be that God so identified with Jacob even in his weakness, that He too reflected this perspective of Jacob's, in treating these three sons as somehow especially favoured? Such was and is the extent of God's identity with His wayward children.

There are at least two caveats to be extracted from all this:

- Jacob hid behind the idea of God manifestation too long. This is not to say that there is no such thing; but we can take it to such a point where we lose sight of the glorious reality of the one true, real God, who is our God, and who is ultimately *there*, at the back of all the things and ways in which He may be manifested. Jacob saw God manifest in Angels to the point where he failed to see the God who was behind them. Building the altar 'El-elohe-Israel' was his first step towards rectifying this. As time went on, he saw God as one, not as multitudes of Angels, even though he knew from the vision of Bethel that they were all active for him; he saw the El behind the Elohe, and realized that this was Yahweh, his very own God.

- Notice that as in the pattern of Job's spiritual growth, there was no marked growth in Jacob's physical use of the name 'Yahweh'; rather was there a growth in appreciation of who God actually *is*- the real meaning of 'Yahweh'. I mention this not to discourage the use of 'Yahweh' in our talking about God, but rather as a caveat against the implication by some that those who pronounce the word 'Yahweh' are somehow more mature than other believers. It is true that as time went on, Jacob articulated his spiritual growth in terms of using different names of God, each expressing different and deeper inflections of his understanding of God's character. This should be reflected in our increasing appreciation of God's personality, not in a playing around with the Hebrew names in themselves, the semantics of which we as non-Hebraists have no real grasp of anyway.

## **2-3-5 Jacob And The God Of His Father: Christians And Parental Expectation**

Jacob was 77 when he fled from Esau. As far as we know, he had lived all that time "dwelling in tents" (Gen. 25:27); and Heb. 11:9 adds the information that at this time, faithful Abraham lived together with Isaac and Jacob in the same tents. Jacob grew up with Abraham

and Isaac. He would have known the promises backwards. He lived, as far as we know, a single life, staying at home with his mother, who evidently doted on him, openly preferring him to Esau. Yet at this time, Jacob did not accept the Abrahamic promises as really relevant to him, nor did he worship Yahweh as his God (Gen. 28:20). Familiarity bred contempt: "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel...thy first father (i.e. natural Jacob" hath sinned" (in this way) (Is. 43:22,27). Like so many of latter day Jacob, brought up with the knowledge of God's covenant, he was bored with God's Mercy and Truth.

There is sustained emphasis on Jacob's obedience to his parents, especially to his mother (Gen. 27:8,13,43; 28:7). The whole story is a foretaste of the issues involved with Christians and parental expectation in our day. It might not be going too far to say that he grew up far too much under her thumb; he meekly obeyed her faithless suggestion that he deceive his father into granting him the blessing, content with her assurance that it would be mum's sin, not his (and I imagine her pecking him on the cheek as she gave him the tray with Isaac's food on). No wonder he fell madly in love at first sight, when he first saw the girl he knew his mother wanted him to marry. Jacob introduces himself as "Rebekah's son" (Gen. 29:12), although it would have been more normal to describe himself as Jacob ben-Isaac. Gen. 29:10 labours the point three times that Laban was "his *mother's* brother". The fact Deborah, his mother's nurse, was taken under the wing by Jacob, further suggests his very close bond with his mother; he buried Deborah under Allon-Bachuth- 'the oak of his (Jacob's) weeping' (Gen. 35:8). Jacob struggled to accept his father's God as his God. And yet he in so many ways is portrayed as deeply influenced by Rebekah his mother. When he asks Laban to allow him to leave, he uses very similar words to those used by Eliezer when he asked Laban's family to let Rebekah leave to go marry Isaac:

#### **Eliezer in Gen. 24**

"Send me back" (*shallehuni*) 24:54

"Let me go (*shallehuni*) that I may go (*w'eleka*) to my master" 24:56

Laban's blessing of Rebekah 24:60

The servant "went his way (*wayyelak*)" 24:61

#### **Jacob in Gen. 30**

"Send me away" (*shalleheni*) 30:25

"that I may go (*w'eleka*)... let me go (*w'eleka*)" 30:26

Laban's blessing of his grandchildren and daughters 31:55

"Jacob went on his way" (32:1)

Intentional or not, the inspired record strives to bring out the similarities. The lesson is that culturally, Jacob was very much his mother's son- just as those raised Christian today may be culturally Christian, and yet not truly accept their parents' God as theirs until they pass through the valley of the shadows, the school of hard knocks.

As he set out to relatives in a distant land, hoping to find a wife, he was fully aware that he was in principle replicating his father's experience. When he spoke of God keeping him "in this way that I go" and bringing him again "to my father's house" (Gen. 28:20,21), his mind was on the story he had so often heard of how God lead Abraham's servant in "the right way" and leading back home with a wonderful wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:27,40,42,48,56). When at this stage in life (he was 77, remember) things suddenly took a different turn, his great hope was that God would bring him back safely "again to my father's house in peace" (Gen. 28:21); he wanted to go back to the stay-at-home life. What God put him through in the rest of his life was the exact opposite of this. He says that if God does this, he will "surely give

the tenth unto thee" (Gen. 28:22 cp. 14:20)- exactly as granddad Abraham had done (Gen. 14:20), who had doubtless told Jacob this many a time as they 'dwelled together in tents' (Heb. 11:9). When he finally heads home 20 years later, the Spirit describes him as going " to Isaac his father" (Gen. 31:18). There is something almost childishly proud about the way he sets off *his* father against the deceitful father of his wives (Gen. 31:5-7). Laban mocks this almost immature homesickness: " thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longest after thy father's house" (Gen. 31:30). Despite this jibe, Jacob unashamedly swore " by the fear of his father Isaac" (Gen. 31:54); the picture of his father trembling in fear of God when he realized his superficiality stayed with Jacob (Gen. 27:33). It seems he spoke publicly of God as the God of his father, for this is the term Laban used to him (Gen. 31:29). The influence of his father and grandfather lasted a lifetime; even in old age, he feared to go down to Egypt because of the precedents set by the bad experience of Isaac and Abraham there; it seems that he delayed to obey Joseph's invitation to visit Egypt because of this, and was possibly rebuked by Yahweh for this: " Jacob, Jacob (such repetition is often a rebuke), Fear not to go down into Egypt" (Gen. 46:3). Likewise Christians live out parental expectation very often, without much personal faith.

The result of all this was perhaps similar to the sheltered Christian background of many in the brotherhood today; Jacob believed, but he only half believed; God was not *his* God in those years, his spirituality was largely a living out of parental expectation. This living out of parental expectation when it comes to our relationship with God is a major problem for Anglo Saxon believers. Christians and parental expectation so often go together in the Western world. And it was in the ecclesia of Israel before us. So often kings who were not very faithful or spiritual are described with a rubric like: " He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord: he did according to all that his father...had done" (e.g. 2 Kings 15:34). This may not mean that he did what was right in God's sight *full stop*. He did what was right *only insofar as his father had done*. And this is why over time, the spirituality of the kings of Judah decreased.

It would seem from 2 Chron. 36:21 that the law concerning the land resting every Sabbath year was hardly ever kept, even by the righteous kings. We can imagine how the thinking developed: father didn't do it. grandfather didn't, none of the faithful old kings seemed that interested in it...therefore every time that passage was considered in their study of the Law, it was mentally bypassed. *We are all absolutely expert at this kind of bypass.*

We sometimes tend to excuse ourselves on the basis of only being products of our background. But eight year old Jehoiachin reigned a mere three months and ten days: and God's comment was that " he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chron. 36:9). we could, of course, make the excuse that his surroundings, his immediate family, his peers...were all idolatrous. But Yahweh evidently didn't see this as any real excuse: he, at sweet eight years old, " did that which was evil" and was punished accordingly. Not only does this give an unusual insight into God's view of responsibility; but it shows that God expects even a child to break away from background influences when they are evil.

The table above demonstrates clearly enough how Jacob saw God as the God of his fathers, rather than *his* God, for far too long. And even worse, it would seem that at this time there was more than a hint that Jacob was involved with idol worship, as well as Yahweh worship. And yet Jacob didn't want to give this impression to his parents; thus he really fears that his father will think he is a deceiver, and therefore he will not attain the coveted blessing (Gen. 27:12). He wanted to be seen by his parents as the one they wanted him to be spiritually.

Again, this seems more than typical of the position of Anglo-Saxon believers. Overcoming this mindset of relating to God only through the constructs of his parental and community expectations was one of the biggest struggles of Jacob. And as our community becomes increasingly inbred, the challenge to have a real, personal faith looms the larger for our us, for whom Christians and parental expectation is a major problem. But this same process, of unlearning and rediscovery, must be gone through by any convert; the atheist must break free of his background expectations, the Baptist must break free of his, realizing like Jacob that some of it was right and some wrong.

Of course, much of what Jacob was taught was quite right. But there were things which weren't right. God had promised his mother Rebekah that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob); and yet her concern to trick her husband into blessing Jacob rather than Esau was studied rejection of that promise (Gen. 25:23). And Jacob followed her in her faithlessness- in this area. He perceived the promises of God through her eyes, rather than his own. Likewise Isaac saw the promises as "mercy and truth" (24:27); and so did Jacob (Gen. 32:10). Another example of following the negative spiritual traits of his forbears is seen in Jacob's penchant for materialism. This was a weakness of the whole Abraham family; a specific word is used about how they "gathered" material wealth. Abraham did it (Gen. 12:5), and so did Jacob (Gen. 31:18). The list of what they "gathered" is almost identical (Gen. 24:35 cp. 30:43). Faithless fear (cp. Dt. 20:8; Mt. 25:25; Rev. 21:8) was another characteristic; in Abraham (Gen. 15:1; 20:11); Isaac (Gen. 26:7,24; 31:42,53); and followed by Jacob (Gen. 28:17; 31:31; 32:7,11; 41:3).

At the end, Jacob spoke of God as his redeemer (Gen. 48:16), which is the first Biblical reference to the concept of redemption. This was not the only area in which Jacob was a paradigm breaker (consider how he coined the word *abiyr* to describe God's mightiness). The Hebrew for "redeem" is taken from the idea of the nearest kinsman. Jacob at the end of his days is surely saying that now he saw God as closer than his family. We really have a lot to learn here. God comes before family- although increasingly this isn't appreciated by Anglo-Saxon believers. The new convert who sacrifices family ties for allegiance to Christ realizes this full well. But in my observation, second and third generation believers aren't so committed. The majority of the divisions and bitternesses which plague the brotherhood are largely a result of believers wanting to stay with their family, rather than follow Divine principles. Time and again brethren and sisters change fellowships, with all the disruption this causes, simply because of family, not for any genuine Biblical conviction. Effectively they will throw others out of fellowship, throw new converts into turmoil and disillusion, just to stick with a dogmatic family member, even though they may not share his or her convictions. And so God's Truth becomes a social and family affair rather than a candlestick burning with the fire of the Spirit. Christians tend to follow parental expectation and the norms of their social network rather than God's word.

Please note that I'm not teaching rebellion against and rejection of everything faithful parents have taught us. At the close of his life, Jacob was still emotionally attached, consciously and unconsciously, to his father and grandfather (consider the way he unconsciously imitates his father by feeling he is about to die years before he does, Gen. 47:9 cp. 28 cp. 27:2 cp. 35:28). But he had made their faith his own. There was nothing essentially wrong with the understanding of God which Abraham and Isaac taught Jacob; it was "the Truth" as we would call it. But Jacob had to rediscover it for himself; however, this process did not involve rejecting them or their God. Jacob's nervousness of going down into Egypt was doubtless due to his recollection of Abraham and Isaac's tales of spiritual woe concerning it. God appeared

to Jacob concerning this, with the words: " Jacob, Jacob...fear not to go down into Egypt" (Gen. 46:2,3). The double repetition of a name is usually a rebuke; but for what? Possibly for still being influenced in his spirituality by the spectre of his forefathers, rather than personally reflecting on the implications of God's word to Abraham, that his seed would have to live in a Gentile land for a period before they could be led into the promised land (Gen. 15:13).

Almost on his deathbed, Jacob speaks of how the God of Abraham and Isaac is his God (Gen. 48:15,16); he speaks of being gathered to his people, to them, just as they too had been gathered to their people (Gen. 49:29 cp. 25:8; 35:29). He really stresses his desire to be buried in Canaan along with Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 47:29,30; 49:29; 50:5,6), alongside his dad and grandfather, remembering how they had lived together in the same tents in his childhood (Heb. 11), speaking together of the promises. The fact he had prepared his grave there years before shows that this was not only the sentimental feeling of a dying man. This repeated emphasis on his connection with Abraham and Isaac shows that at the end, Jacob saw the supreme importance of being a member of God's people. He didn't just fix on his own personal hope, but on the fact he was connected with all the heirs of the promise. Paul also focused on this aspect when he came to his time of departing. And so with us, we will come to see (if we haven't already) that our association with Christianity is not just a part of our social structure. We aren't just Christians because of parental expectation. Our association with God's people is eternal, the consequences of being baptized into the body of Christ (the believers) are related to our salvation. Thus the believers are joint-heirs together of the same Abrahamic promises (Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 3:7), just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived together as joint heirs of the same promises (Heb. 11:9). Christ is the true heir of what was promised to Abraham (Mt. 21:38; Rom. 4:13), but through baptism we become joint heirs with him (Gal. 3:27-29; Rom. 8:17). Thus when we read of us as " heirs" , the very same Greek word is used for " heir" in the singular, concerning Christ; and this concept of heirship of the promised Kingdom is common: Gal. 4:7; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 1:2; 6:17; James 2:5. Thus our baptism not only makes us sons of God, " in Christ" in a personal sense, but also puts us " in" the rest of the body of Christ. To be wilfully separate from that body is therefore to deny the meaning of our baptism and our place " in Christ" . Yet it took Jacob a lifetime to realize this as he should, despite having been brought up on the promises and being almost obsessed in his early life that he was the seed of Abraham, and therefore the promised blessings applied to him on a personal level. How very similar his path was to that of so many of us. That rejoicing in the personal relevance of the Gospel promises to us doesn't go down, but we come to see in a far more inclusive sense the implications of our being the seed of Abraham; we see our connection, our eternal and gracious connection, with all who are true heirs of the same promise.

Jacob speaks of his life as a " pilgrimage" (Gen. 47:9), using the same word used about Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 17:8; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1). Thus he showed his connection with them; they became *in spiritual not just emotional terms* the centre of his thinking. It seems that Jacob came to see his beloved parents in spiritual, not emotional terms, at the end. Consider the pronouns he uses in almost his last words: " There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they (i.e. he and his brother, Gen. 35:29) buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah" (Gen. 49:31). He doesn't talk about in the first person about " my father" or " I" buried. He sees himself as their friend in faith, more than their son. These words were said in Jacob's last breath. It shows to me how at last he had won this battle, he had shed the crutch of his father's faith, he stood alone before *his* God, at the very end he wasn't leaning on his parents spiritually any more, all the scaffolding had been removed, and he stood alone, on his own deep foundation. His final words are full of conscious and unconscious reference to

the fathers and the promises. Thus his reference to how Abraham and Isaac 'walked before' his God (Gen. 48:15) is a reference back to Gen. 17:1; 24:40. Jacob had meditated upon these records, in whatever form they were preserved, and now bubbled out with reference to them. Those same promises concerning the Lord Jesus and his Kingdom should become the centre of our thought as we reach spiritual maturity. "Let my name be named upon them (Joseph's children), and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac" (Gen. 48:16) indicates that he saw an equivalence between them and him; he saw they were "heirs of the same promise" (Heb. 11:9). Jacob came to realize that those promises made to them were the very basis of *his* faith too, as well as theirs, and he knew therefore that he would be resurrected with them into the glory of God's Kingdom. And so he wanted to be buried with them; he didn't reject them, but he came to understand that the promises were gloriously true for him on a personal level. His final words reflect his resentment against the children of Heth (Gen. 49:32); he saw that they were the world, the children of this world which now possess the land of promise, covenanted to be God's Kingdom, not theirs. He realized that the time was not yet ripe, and his very last words were a reminder of this: "The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth" (Gen. 49:32). His mind was centred on the promises and the future ownership of the land, and on his connection with Abraham and Isaac; the fact that the land was not inherited during the patriarch's lifetimes (the land had to be bought from the children of Heth) is seen by the Spirit as an indication that the Kingdom had not yet come, but surely would do (Acts 7:5). And Jacob died with exactly the same perception. In doing so, he was reflecting the view of his dear mother, who detested the ways of the Godless children of Heth (Gen. 27:46). So in his time of dying, Jacob was not divided from the spiritual views of his parents. Their Hope was his Hope, but he had made it his own. He was not just living out their expectations of him. The way he got there in the end is just marvellous to behold. The way Joseph falls on Jacob's face and weeps and weeps on him and kisses him is in some way how we all feel (Gen. 50:1).

## 2-4-1 Jacob And The Promises

The promises to the Jewish fathers ought to be at the very basis of our faith and behaviour. Sadly, the emphasis once given in this area has faded, as our community has turned away from the essentials of the true Gospel and become obsessed with more peripheral issues. Our understanding of those promises which form the basis of our covenant relationship with God ought to increase as we spiritually mature. We will not only grow in appreciation of their importance, but also understand them more. In Jacob's case, his attitude to the promises, to the one Gospel, was related to his attitude to God. Jacob came to see the promises which he had known from childhood as relevant to him in an intensely personal sense. Thus at age 77 he vowed: "If God will be with me...then shall Yahweh be my God: and this stone...shall be God's house" (Gen. 28:20-22- words quoted by faithless Absalom in 2 Sam. 15:8). The implication was that Jacob didn't consider Yahweh to be his God at that time. And yet God had promised Abraham that he would be the God of his seed (Gen. 17:7,8); Jacob was aware of these promises, and yet he is showing that he did not accept their personal relevance to him at this time. The fact at the end he does call God his God reveals that he then accepted the Abrahamic promises as relevant to him personally (Gen. 49:24,25). This is an essay in the titanic difference between knowledge and belief. At baptism we tend to have knowledge, which masquerades as belief. And all our lives long we must struggle, as Jacob did, to turn knowledge into faith. His *personal* grasp of the wonder of the promises at the end is revealed in Gen. 48:4, where Jacob recounts how "God Almighty...said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession". God never actually said all this



to Jacob; Jacob is quoting the promise to Abraham of Gen. 17:8 *and applying it to himself*. And with us too, a personal grasp of the wonder of it all, that it really applies to *me*, is a mark of that final maturity we fain would achieve.

And yet... even in this incident, God so eagerly wished to work with Jacob. Jacob's sleeping with a stone as his pillow is hardly a natural thing to do- but it was done in order to induce dreams and revelations from the gods (1). And the one true God responded to Jacob, by showing him Angels ascending from him to God, and Angels descending from God to Jacob in response. It wasn't the other way around- because surely the idea was to show Jacob that his prayers really were being heard, Angels were in touch with God about them, and God was zealously responding even then through Angelic providence. Yet all this was done by God when Jacob was so far from Him. Just as a patient and loving father bears with his child, so God bore with Jacob; and He does with us too, and we are to reflect this in our dealings with our brethren.

We will see that Jacob progressively grew in his realization that the promises of God refer more to spiritual blessings than physical things; he saw more and more their practical import, in terms of separation from this present world, and devotion to the things of the promised Kingdom; he saw that if those promises are really relevant to us, then we have a strong connection with all others who are in the same covenant Hope; and he saw especially the greatness and utter centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised seed through whom all was made possible.

Jacob knew the promises, well; having lived together with Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 25:27 cp. Heb. 11:9) for all his early life, it was inevitable that this was so. There would have been no boredom in talking and meditating more deeply about these things on a Sunday evening. And yet for much of his life, Jacob undoubtedly perceived the promises as some kind of means of providing him with personal physical blessing from God, in selfish, material terms. It was only his realization of personal sinfulness to which he was driven which really opened his eyes to this. And it seems we each must follow a like pattern.

### **Jacob Initially Only Saw The Physical Aspect Of The Promises**

Jacob was a materialist; he "gathered" / acquired material possessions as Abraham did (Gen. 31:18 cp. 12:5; 24:35), and he therefore was inclined to see God's promises as re-enforcing his own preferred lifestyle, rather than accepting that the real blessings he needed were spiritual. In the same way as our preconceptions will influence how we read Scripture, so with Jacob's approach to the promises. Having heard the promises concerning his future seed and the present protection God would grant him, Jacob immediately seized on the latter: "If God will be with me...then shall Yahweh be my God" (Gen. 28:20,21). He brushed past the implications of Messiah, although later he came to see that these were the most fundamental things God had promised. The way he raised up (cp. resurrection) the pillar and anointed it at this time may have shown a faint conception of Messiah, but this took years to seriously develop. Jacob thought that God had blessed Laban in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises, simply because Laban's flocks had greatly increased; he saw the "blessing" as physical prosperity (Gen. 30:30). He was sharing the over-physical view of the promises which his father Isaac held, who mentioned the promised blessing as essentially concerning material blessings in this life (Gen. 28:3,4). As with David and Solomon, the weakness of the parents was repeated in the child. This perception of the promises as only for his personal, physical benefit was clearly evidenced in the way in which he was so bent on obtaining the birthright

from Esau. This was no sign of spirituality, but rather of his obsession with material acquisition. We can be sure he arranged to be boiling that broth just at the right moment. It was hardly an off-the-cuff decision to ask Esau for the birthright. He not only disbelieved the promise that the elder would serve the younger, but he misunderstood it, thinking that God's promises were dependent upon human works and wit to be fulfilled. He spoke of how he would bring upon himself the blessing God had promised him (Gen. 27:12). Later, he reveals the same attitude when he describes his children as the fulfillment of the promises of present fruitfulness (Gen. 32:10), but also the children he had obtained by his own service (Gen. 30:26); he thought that his own effort and labour had fulfilled God's promises. He reasoned that Laban had been rebuked by God because God had seen how hard he had worked (Gen. 31:42). He explicitly says that if God further increases his flocks, it would be a sign that he was righteous (Gen. 30:33). Like Job, he had to learn that God's blessings are not primarily *physical*, and that we do not receive them in proportion to our present righteousness. And yet during this learning process, God patiently went along with him to some extent. "Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams..." (Gen. 31:12) is a promise couched in the language with which God invited Abraham to lift up his eyes and behold the land which He would give him (Gen. 13:14,15). Even whilst Jacob was trying to fulfill God's promises for Him, still half worshipping idols, God gently went along with him to teach him firstly that He *would* keep promises, and then to show Jacob the more spiritual essence of it all.

Jacob saw material prosperity as an indicator of the fulfillment of the promises to him. Because he *was* physically blessed in his life, he came to feel that the promises had been fulfilled, and therefore he almost lost sight of the future aspect of our relationship with God. There are powerful lessons for us here. He saw the promises ("mercies...truth") as having been fulfilled to him already (Gen. 32:10), and therefore he needed the night of wrestling to bring him to the realization that the blessing of *forgiveness* (Mic. 7:20), with its eternal, future implications, was what the promises are really all about. The promise to make Abraham's seed as the sand of the sea, he saw as implying that his children would not be physically harmed (Gen. 32:12); yet the New Testament teaches that this promise fundamentally refers to Messiah, and those of all nations who would become "in him". At the end of his life, it seems that Jacob learnt this. He had been promised that he was to "let people serve you" (Gen. 27:29) and yet he effectively said he didn't want that promise, by serving Laban for a wife (Gen. 29:18,25,27); at the end he was brought through life's experiences to see that the promises are the basis of life, and that we must let God fulfil them to us.

### **Fulfilling God's Promises For Him**

Because Jacob saw, for much of his life, that the fulfillment of God's promises depended on his effort, he so often doubted them; because, of course, men can never make enough effort. Thus he asks God to deliver him from Esau, because if Esau killed him, the covenant would not be fulfilled. "I fear him, lest he come and smite *me* (first!) and the mother with the children" (Gen. 32:11). Whether he died or not that night would not have nullified God's promise that his seed would become a multitude (Gen. 32:12). But first and foremost, Jacob saw the promises as offering him personal, temporal blessing, rather than having a firm faith in their future implications. His wrestling with the Angel was a cameo of this whole attitude; he thought that the promised blessing of God could be achieved through *his* wrestling and struggling. This is why, in the course of that night, he stopped wrestling with the Angel and clung on to him with tears, begging that through pure grace he might receive the blessing (Hos. 12:2-4). Before the wrestling began, Jacob evidently felt that basically, the promises to

him had been fulfilled in the material prosperity which he had: " I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and all the truth (" mercy and truth" is a common idiom for the promises) which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands" (Gen. 32:10).

But Jacob learnt in that night of wrestling what he should have realized years before; that essentially the promised blessing concerns future salvation and present forgiveness as a foretaste of that. This fact is stated directly in Mic. 7:18-20: " Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant...he will subdue our iniquities...(because) thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham which thou hast sworn unto our fathers" . The real import of the promised " mercy and truth" was forgiveness, and as Jacob's race will come to learn this at their latter end, so did Jacob that night. It is tragic, truly tragic, that not only does Christian literature and thinking give little enough emphasis to the promises, but the fact they concern the blessing of forgiveness has been overlooked; we have concentrated, rather like Jacob did, on the more physical blessing of the land and eternal life which they hold out <sup>(2)</sup>.

There is reason to think that all too many of us have gone too far down the road of 'God helps those who help themselves', rooted as that philosophy is (along with so many Christian attitudes) in Victorian Protestantism rather than Biblical wisdom. Works and human wit are the very antithesis of faith in God's promises; salvation, at the end, is *not* by works of righteousness. The works come as the response to the certainty we have, through faith alone, that God's promises will be fulfilled <sup>(3)</sup>. Jacob is the classic example of taking 'we've got to do our bit' too far, to the point where it was faithlessness. He pleaded for deliverance on the basis of the promises, and then divided his family up on the assumption that if some of them are killed, the others will escape; by claiming to 'do the human bit', Jacob effectively denied his belief in the promises. Behold the paradox: 'Deliver me and my children, because You promised to do this...but in case You won't do what You promised, I'll split them up so that some of them have a chance of getting away if the others are killed'.

Ps. 78:67 comments that God did not chose Ephraim- whereas Jacob did (Gen. 48:14). The implication could well be that even at the end of his life, Jacob's choice of Ephraim over Manasseh reflected some sort of weakness, a being out of step with God. This attitude that *he* could bring about the fulfillment of God's promises through his own efforts was the outcome of Jacob's self-righteousness. This is clearly shown when he says that his righteousness had caused his cattle to increase (Gen. 30:33), although he believed that this increase of cattle was due to his receipt of the promised Divine blessing (Gen. 32:10). His proud claim to his father that " I have done according as thou badest me" (Gen. 27:19) when he had effectively done nothing of the sort was the basis for the character of the elder brother in the Lord's parable (Lk. 15:29). Time and again, Jacob emphasizes his works: " I have *done* according as thou badest me (Gen. 27:19)...my days (of service) are fulfilled (therefore) give me my wife...did not I serve with thee for Rachel? (notice Jacob's legalism; Gen. 29:21,25)...give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee... thou knowest my service... how I have served thee (Gen. 30:25-33)...with all my power I have served your father (Gen. 31:6). This trust in his own works was what prevented Jacob from a full faith in the promises. It was only the night of wrestling and his subsequent handicap that drove it from him. He evidently forgot the promise that the elder would serve the younger when he sent messengers to Esau, describing himself as Esau's servant, and Esau as his Lord (Gen. 32:4); yet just a few hours later he was pleading in almost unparalleled intensity to receive the promised blessings of

forgiveness. Such oscillating faith and perception of the promises is tragically a characteristic of Israel after the Spirit too.

In passing, let's note how Jacob was afflicted with legalism, and struggled all his life to understand and accept grace. The legalistic attitude of Jacob and his family is brought out by the behaviour of his wives as well as himself when they are caught up with by Laban as recorded in Gen. 31. The society in which they lived had codified legal practices, as has been established by archaeological research into contemporary towns in the area. For example, part of the bride price had to be kept by the wife personally; and thus Rachel and Leah accuse their father of taking away from them that which was rightfully theirs. Likewise, according to the Nuzi documents, daughters and sons-in-law had legal title to part of the father's estate, and this was proven by their possession of the household idols. Hence Jacob and his wives stole those idols. E.A. Speiser quotes par. 266 of the Code of Hammurabi, which states: "If there occurs in the fold an act of god, or a lion takes a life, the shepherd [cp. Jacob] shall clear himself before the deity; the owner of the fold [cp. Laban] must then accept the loss incurred" (4). It was surely with allusion to this that Jacob complained that he as the shepherd had had to bear the loss of Laban's lost cattle (Gen. 31:39).

### Rejecting The Physical Blessing

Jacob's new appreciation of the blessing of forgiveness is reflected by the way in which he effectively tells Esau that he is handing back to him the birthright, the physical blessings. The way he bows down seven times to Esau (Gen. 33:3) is rejecting the blessing he had obtained by deceit from Isaac: "Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you" (Gen. 27:29). His experience of the blessing of God's grace was sufficient for him, and he rejected all else. It's a shame that the English translation conceals Jacob's rejection of the physical blessing in Gen. 33:11: "Take (51 times translated "take away"), I pray thee, my blessing... because God hath dealt graciously with me, and I have enough (lit. 'all things')". The only ultimately important thing is grace and right standing with God. The Hebrew words translated "take (away)" and "blessing" are exactly the same as in Gen. 27:35,36: "(Jacob) came with subtlety, and hath *taken away* thy *blessing*... Is not he rightly named Jacob? he *took away* my birthright, and now he hath *taken away* my *blessing*". Yet now Jacob is saying: "I have experienced the true grace of God, I stand forgiven before Him, I see His face in His representative Angel (cp. Christ), I therefore have all things, so I don't want that physical, material, temporal blessing I swindled you out of". This is why Jacob pointedly calls Esau his "Lord" in the record. He was accepting Esau as the firstborn. And Paul, in his spiritual maturity, came to the same conclusion; he counted all the materialism of this world as dung, that he might win Christ and be found in him, clothed with his gracious righteousness. Because God had dealt graciously with him, he felt that he had "all" (Gen. 33:11 RVmg.). All he needed was God's grace, and he had that. Rev. 21:7 appears to allude to Jacob by saying that he who overcomes [by wrestling?] shall inherit "all things". We are all to pass through Jacob's lesson; that material advantage is nothing, and God's grace is everything. Truly could Jacob later say, after another gracious salvation, that there God had appeared to Him, had been revealed to him [RV] in the experience of grace (Gen. 35:7).

And yet how seriously will we take all this? Jacob soon slipped from this spiritual height to be deceptive again (Gen. 33:13-15), just as we do. Will the wonder of the grace in which we stand motivate us to reject demanding careers, reject rigorous education programs, give up second jobs, from the wonder of our spiritual experience and our desire to concentrate on these things? There can be no doubt that the wrestling experience of our lives will result in

our rejection of materialism, and wholehearted devotion to the more spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Jacob began that night by pleading: " *Deliver* me from Esau" (Gen. 32:11), and he concludes by marveling that his life is " preserved (s.w. " deliver" ) from *God's* wrath (Gen. 32:30); his concern with physical problems and human relationships became dwarfed by his awareness of his need for reconciliation with *God*. In essence, this is Paul's teaching concerning peace in the NT; if we have peace with *God*, the wonder of this will result in us having peace in any situation. This is easy to write, so easy. And yet it is still true. If we see the seriousness of sin, and the wonder of being in free fellowship with the Father and Son, we will have peace. The wholehearted repentance and clinging on to God of Jacob that night is used in Hosea 12 as an appeal to all Israel to repent as our father Jacob did, and rise to his level of maturity.

### Slips Backwards

Yet, so true to our experience, even after the night of wrestling he slipped back at times into the old way of thinking. His pathetic bleating of Gen. 34:30 is a case of this: " *I* being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against *me* and slay *me*; and *I* shall be destroyed, *I* and *my* house" . Just note all those personal pronouns. God had promised to go with him, and the whole tenor of all the promises was that there would come a singular seed from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who would become a great house, or nation. But in the heat of the moment, all this went out of the window. And not even in the heat of the moment, Gen. 37:10 reveals even more seriously how Jacob's view of the promises, even at the age of 108, was very much on a surface level: " Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves unto thee?" . Rachel was dead (Gen. 35:19), and Jacob mocked the suggestion that she would ever " come" to bow to her son. In Gen. 35:11 God encourages Jacob, fearful he would lose all his family to attacks from neighbouring tribes, to "be fruitful and multiply; a nation...*shall* be of thee, and kings *shall* come out of thy loins". If he played his part, the promises would be fulfilled. But at the time it seems Jacob wanted to cut and run, forgetting about having any more children. " If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved" (Gen. 43:14) sounds more like depressive fatalism than firm faith in the promises that his seed would eternally fill the earth. At 130, Jacob seems to have felt that the fact he had not lived as long as his father and grandfather had, indicated that he had not received so much blessing as they had; he saw length of years *in this life* as being significant (Gen. 47:9), rather than allowing the prospect of future eternity make present longevity fade into insignificance. And yet in his final 17 years, he grew quickly; he was not spiritually idle in those last 17 years of retirement. For at the very end he could say that his blessings had exceeded " the blessings of my progenitors" (Gen. 49:26).

### Final Maturity

At the end, Jacob as it were had come to repentance. Joseph falls on his neck and weeps for him (Gen. 46:29), just as the Father does to the repentant prodigal. In this last period of his life, Jacob's faith in and understanding of the promises flourished. His words are just full of allusion to them. David's last words likewise were shot through with reference to the covenants of promise. No amazing new revelation was given to Jacob, no direct Divine exposition concerning the promises. He simply came to appreciate more deeply their real, personal implications of resurrection, Messiah, and His Kingdom. He therefore came to shun his materialism, to reject the things of this world even more deeply, and to realize more seriously the depth of separation between God's covenant people and the world. All these things hinged around his appreciation of the implications of the promises. Embracing the



promises involves a confession that we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth (Heb. 11:13). We, as Abraham's seed, will go through an identical growth pattern. And yet, tragically, we live in a brotherhood which *generally* places decreasing emphasis on these things. Lectures, Bible exhibitions, preaching literature, all pay scant, if any, attention to the promises. They should be the very basis of our presentation of the Gospel, and what is, more vitally, the basis for our spiritual growth towards the Israel of God. Jacob's final appreciation of the promises is reflected in the way that he asks his sons to bury him in Canaan. To carry his body 300 miles to Hebron was quite something to ask. He knew that his personal resurrection didn't depend on the place of his burial; presumably, therefore, he asked for this in order to teach his children that the land of promise was their real home; that the promises associated with Hebron were the basis of their eternal redemption. Thus in his maturity, Jacob saw the need to teach his children the central, crucial importance of the promises. Perhaps he also wanted to demonstrate faith in resurrection and his subsequent separation from the Egyptian belief in the immortal soul. In principle, these strands of spiritual maturity were also seen in Paul, at his latter end. 2 Tim. 4 reflects his concern for the strengthening of others and the need to expose and separate from that which is false.

## The World

Jacob spoke at age 130 of how his life had been a "pilgrimage" (Gen. 47:9); he realized that this life was only a series of temporary abodes. The same word is translated "stranger" with reference to the patriarchs' separation from the tribes around them (Gen. 17:8; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1). Jacob's attitude that the things of this life were only temporary, that we are only passing through, is identified in Heb. 11:10-16 as an indicator that Jacob shared the faith of Abraham and Isaac. His very last words concerned the fact that he had purchased his burial field "from the children of Heth" (Gen. 49:32), as if the separation between him and the surrounding world was so clear in his mind. Likewise in Gen. 48:22 he refers back to the time when he took Shechem from the Amorites. Thus his saturation with the promises meant that he saw the degree of his separation from the world. He twice describes his Messianic descendant as devouring the prey in the morning of the second coming (Gen. 49:9, 27); he foresaw an aggressive tension between Messiah and other beasts, i.e. the nations of the surrounding world, which would end in the glorious victory of Christ's coming in glory. This image of devouring the prey after the battle against the world in this life is the basis of other latter day prophecies (Ez. 39:18-20; Rev. 19:17-20). The faithful will eat the carcass of the beast at Christ's coming (Mt. 24:28 cp. Rev. 19:17-20), sharing in the victory of the lion of Judah who has slain his prey and now devours it. This was all foreseen by Jacob, although he would have seen the beasts which the Messiah / lion devoured as the nations surrounding his people (Jer. 15:3; 28:14; Ez. 5:17 and many others).

In his penultimate sentence, Jacob makes the perhaps strange comment that "they buried Isaac" (his father). The "they" meant him and Esau (Gen. 35:29), but perhaps Jacob wanted to show his separation from Esau by describing the funeral in this way. Separation from the world is thus an aspect of spiritual maturity, and also a result of sustained appreciation of the covenant promises.

The Lord likewise, in that ultimate spiritual maturity at the end of his mortal life, realized the titanic difference between his people and the world. He mentions "the world" 18 times in his prayer of John 17, and in this same context speaks of the unity of God's people, and their certainty of salvation. These were also themes in Jacob's mind at the end (and Paul's too, it can be shown).

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## Notes

(1) J.G. Janzen, *Abraham And All The Families Of The Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) p. 108.

(2) A note needs to be made here concerning baptism. It is incorrect to say that because faith without works is dead, therefore if we believe we must prove this by the work of baptism. Baptism isn't a 'work' in this sense; it doesn't prove that we have faith. If this were so, salvation would be by faith alone, baptism of itself wouldn't be needed for salvation. But baptism is a vital part of salvation. Entry to the covenants of salvation is by baptism, not by faith alone, with works following as a response to the fact we are in covenant with God. Faith does not bring a man into Christ; baptism does. It is a 'sacrament' we *must* observe in order to enter covenant relationship, not a work we do to prove that our faith and entry into covenant is valid.

(3) The classic preaching works emphasize the physical aspect of the promises, i.e. the possession of the *land* of Israel, to the exclusion of the more important spiritual aspect of imputed righteousness and forgiveness. However, there is evidence that both as a community and as individuals, we are starting to put the emphasis where it should be (e.g. it seems that we are beginning to realize that the promise to Abraham discussed in Gal. 3 refers more to the promise of *the Spirit* rather than to physical possession of land: Gal. 3:2,6,14). There is reason to think that over time, the perception of the promises by the body of believers has moved from the physical to the spiritual. Thus the early Israelites thought of the promised inheritance as being effectively fulfilled in the fact that they had entered Canaan and were living there (Lev. 25:46; Num. 26:55; Dt. 1:28; 12:10; Josh. 14:1). David went on to realize that the promised inheritance was not in this life, but looked forward to the day when God's people would eternally inherit Canaan through the gift of immortality (Ps. 25:13; 37:9,11; 69:36). Solomon went further, in that he spoke of the promised inheritance as the glory (Prov. 3:35), depth of knowledge (Prov. 14:18) and spiritual riches (Prov. 8:21; 28:10) which God's people will inherit in the future Kingdom. The Lord Jesus rarely spoke of the inheritance as inheriting *land*, but rather of inheriting "everlasting life" (Mt. 19:29), the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), "all things" (Rev. 21:7). Likewise the NT writers saw the "inheritance" as forgiveness (Acts 3:25,26; 1 Pet. 3:9) and salvation (Heb. 1:14). These more abstract things will all be experienced in the land promised to Abraham; this is the unchangeable, literal basis of all the other blessings.

(4) E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* [The Anchor Bible] (New York: Doubleday, 1964) p. 247.

## 2-4-2 Jacob And Jesus

### Messiah

It has been pointed out that the order in which Jacob chose to bless his sons becomes a Messianic commentary, once we appreciate the Hebrew meaning of their names: "See a Son! (Reuben). Hear, join, praise and dwell with him (Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun). He will bestow a reward (Issachar) at the judgment (Dan) upon a company (Gad) of blessed or happy ones (Asher), who, after wrestling (Naphtali) will add further (Joseph) to the Son of the right

hand (Benjamin)" . At the end of his life, Jacob appreciated the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This same final emphasis on the supremacy and centrality of the Lord is to be seen in the growth graph of Paul and Job also. Jacob's reflection on the Lord Jesus must have been deep indeed, for he reaches some quite advanced and deep conclusions concerning him. Thus he describes God as the God from whom is " the shepherd, the stone of Israel / Jacob" (Gen. 49:24), both evidently Messianic titles. Yet " the rock of Israel" is later understood to be a reference to the God of Jacob (2 Sam. 23:3). Therefore we may conclude that Jacob saw his God as manifest in the future Messiah, who would come out of the Father, i.e. be the Son of God. To understand God manifestation in Christ and the necessity for his Divine Sonship could have come from direct Divine revelation, but my sense is that it came instead from his deep appreciation of the promised blessing of forgiveness through Abraham's Messianic seed. Jacob's ever deepening appreciation of this and his progressive appreciation of God's grace led him to deeply meditate on the Lord's role. Jacob himself was a shepherd (Gen. 46:34; Hos. 12:12), and yet he gave Christ the title of " *the* shepherd" (Gen. 49:24), as if he recognized that although Christ would come out of God, he would also be exactly like Jacob, of his nature. He saw on a completely personal level the way in which Christ truly was his very very own representative. He therefore saw in himself a type of Christ, indicated by the way in which he asks his sons to gather themselves unto him, and then goes on to say that ultimately, his people will gather themselves together unto Messiah (Gen. 49:1,2 cp. 10).

Later Messianic titles memorialized the relationship between Jacob and Christ. " The King of Israel" suggests that Christ was seen by Jacob / Israel as his king (Mic. 5:1,2; Mt. 2:6; Mk. 15:32; Jn. 1:49; 12:13). 'The comfort of Israel / Jacob' (Lk. 2:25) also reflects how Jacob was comforted by his appreciation of his future Lord. Jacob's hope of Messiah was the hope of his life; " I have waited for thy salvation" , 'Your Jesus', he commented (Gen. 49:18). Jacob describes Christ as " the stone of Jacob / Israel" (Gen. 49:24); Jacob's physical stone had been overturned, rested upon, set up and anointed (Gen. 28:13-15); perhaps now at the end, Jacob thought back to that incident and saw in that stone a prophecy of the death and resurrection of the Lord. Perhaps he even saw that the anointing, the 'Christ-ing' of the Stone would be after its raising up; he foresaw that the Lord Jesus would be made the Christ, the anointed, in the fullest sense by the resurrection (Acts 2:36). " The hope of Israel" , or (see modern versions), " he for whom Israel / Jacob hopes" is another title of Christ (Acts 28:20 cp. Jer. 14:8; 17:13; Joel 3:16); he was the one for whom Jacob / Israel hoped. And his hope is the hallmark of all the Israel of God. It may be that Paul used the phrase with reference to Jacob's Messianic expectations, seeing that in the essentially parallel Acts 26:6 Paul speaks of the hope of the promise made to the fathers. Thus Paul saw " the hope of the promise" as being " the one for whom Israel / Jacob hopes" , i.e. Messiah (Jer. 17:13; Joel 3:16). Like Jacob, Paul saw the promises as essentially concerning the spiritual blessings achieved in Christ, rather than merely 'eternal life in the land of Israel'. His exposition of the promises in Gal. 3 follows the same pattern.

### Jacob and Jesus

Many of Jacob's blessings of his sons contain some reference to Christ's future work, e.g. " he shall divide the spoil" (Gen. 49:27); " he whom thy brethren shall praise" (Gen. 49:8 = Rev. 5:5). Jacob describes Judah's Messianic descendant as " my son" ; he eagerly looked ahead to the Lord Jesus as fulfilment of the promised Messianic seed. He perhaps saw that the multitudinous seed he had been promised was in fact an intensive plural, referring to the one great Messianic seed. Jacob saw Christ as a powerful lioness protective of her cubs (cp. us), as " Shiloh" , the bringer of peace; thus his own troubled life lead him to a fine appreciation



of the Lord's peace, i.e. the true forgiveness of sins and restoration of fellowship with God. He saw Messiah as being associated with the ass (Gen. 49:11), the Hebrew for which essentially means 'patience'; he foresaw the Lord's patient endurance in the struggle, and even foresaw his garments as dipped in blood (49:11 cp. Rev. 14:18), eyes bloodshot with the struggle, and yet with teeth white as milk from a true assimilation of God's teaching (Gen. 49:12 cp. Is. 55:1); through his personal experience and extensive reflection on the basic need of man and the promised blessing of forgiveness, Jacob really went deeply and accurately into a personal knowledge of Christ. Blind as he was (Gen. 48:10), Jacob meditated upon the Lord Jesus. His mind was filled with him. He perhaps contrasted his own dim eyes with the burning, bloodshot eyes of his zealous Lord, visualizing the suffering which he knew He would endure for his sake. The blessings of Gen. 49 are in well planned poetic form; it may be that Jacob composed these poems about the Lord Jesus as the crystallization of his extended reflection on the Lord. Would that we would rise up to the Messianic perception of the blind poet Jacob. Likewise David foresaw the Lord Jesus always before his face, and therefore his heart was never ruffled. Jacob evidently saw in Joseph's experience a type of Christ's future sufferings and resurrection (Gen. 49:11,23). It may be that he considered Joseph to be the special Messianic seed (which he was, in type), and this would explain his profound joy on seeing Joseph alive *and his children*, for this would have meant that the promises concerning the seed, as he understood them, had been proved true (Gen. 46:30; 48:11). It would also explain why Heb. 11:21 adds the detail that at the end of his life, as he was dying on his bed, Jacob showed his faith (i.e. his faith in Christ, which is the theme of Heb. 11) by worshipping Joseph, propping himself up on the bed head with his last energy to do it (Gk.). He clearly saw in him a type of his future redeemer. He finally accepted the truth of Joseph's dream: that Jacob must bow down to his greater son- although he reached this humility, this bowing before the spirit of Christ, in his very last breath. It seems probable that meditation on Joseph's experience was what brought Jacob to Christ; he had managed to scheme and plot his way out of every other crisis, but the loss of Joseph brought him to his knees helpless. The way he recognizes the greatness of Christ at the end reflects a maturing of attitude since the day when he refused to accept that he would ever bow down to Joseph (Gen. 37:10). The way he speaks to Joseph at the end shows his deeper respect of him: "If I have found grace in thy sight" (Gen. 47:29) was the same way in which he had addressed Esau, when crawling before him in Gen. 33:8,10,15. His appreciation of the greatness of Joseph reflected his appreciation of the greatness of Christ. Earlier, his anger with Joseph's claim that all his brothers would bow down to him is explicable when we remember that Isaac had promised Jacob that this would be *his* blessing (Gen. 27:29 cp. 37:10). Yet at the end, he realized that the promised blessings didn't *only* apply to him on a personal level, and he even conferred such a blessing on Judah (Gen. 49:8).

Jacob's reflection on Joseph's sufferings gave him a clearer picture of those of the future Messiah. Jacob foresaw how Simeon and Levi would be especially responsible for 'houghing the ox' (Gen. 49:6 RV), or bullock (Concordant Version), i.e. Christ (Dt. 33:17 RV), the bullock of the sin offering (Heb. 13:11-13). Gen. 49:6 can also be rendered, with evident Messianic reference, 'murdering the prince' (49:6 Adam Clarke's Translation). The Roman historian Hippolytus says that "From Simeon came the Scribes, and from Levi the priests" ; it was these groups who murdered the Lord, and Jacob seems to have foreseen this, through his reflection on their hatred of Joseph. He comments that they took counsel against Joseph, as the scribes and priests would do against Christ (Ps. 2:2).

Progressive appreciation of the Lord Jesus can be seen in the lives of Paul, Peter and many others. But it was been pointed out by David Levin that Abraham's appreciation of the

promises relating to the Christ-seed also grew over time. When the promise was first given, he seems to have assumed it referred to his adopted son, Lot. Thus Abraham offered Lot the land which had been promised to Abraham's seed (Gen. 12:7 cp. chapter 13). But after Lot returned to Sodom, Abraham looked to his servant Eliezer as his heir / seed (Gen. 15:2,3). Thus God corrected him, in pointing out that the seed would be from Abraham's own body (Gen. 15:4). And so Abraham thought of Ishmael, who was a son from his own body (although Yahweh didn't specify who the mother would be). When Abraham's body became dead, i.e. impotent, he must have surely concluded that Ishmael was the son promised. But again, Abraham was told that no, Ishmael was not to be the seed; and finally God told Abraham that Sarah would have a child. Their faith was encouraged by the incidents in Egypt which occurred straight after this, whereby Abraham prayed for Abimelech's wives and slaves so that they might have children- and he was heard. Finally, Isaac was born. It was clear that this was to be the seed. But that wasn't all. Abraham in his final and finest spiritual maturity came to the understanding that the seed was ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in wondrous appreciation of the Saviour seed and the way of forgiveness enabled through Him.

### **2-4-3 Jacob's Blessings Of His Sons**

Jacob no longer saw the promised blessings as referring to him personally having a prosperous time in the promised land; he joyfully looked forward to the future Kingdom. He says that he now realizes that his blessings (of forgiveness and the subsequent hope of the Kingdom) are greater than the blessings of the everlasting mountains (Gen. 49:26 RV mg.); he saw the spiritual side of his blessings as more significant than the material aspect. Despite the fact that the promises were primarily fulfilled in the peace and prosperity he and his seed enjoyed at the end (Gen. 48:4 "multitude" s.w. 47:27; 35:11; 28:3), Jacob doesn't emphasize this fact as he could have done; instead, he looks to the future, ultimate fulfilments. He looked back on his life as a "pilgrimage", a series of temporary abodes on the way to something permanent, i.e. the future Kingdom (Gen. 47:9). Although his seed had become a "multitude" as promised, he says that he refuses to unite himself with the "assembly" (s.w. multitude) of Simeon and Levi (Gen. 49:6), as if he saw this physical fulfilment of the promises in his lifetime as worthy little. His appreciation of the promises absolutely fills his thinking at the end. The promised Kingdom was "the pride of Jacob" (Ps. 47:4 NIV; Am. 6:8; Nah. 2:2), his chiefest joy. There are aspects of Jacob's blessings of his sons which evidently have not been fulfilled. Presumably they will be fulfilled in the Kingdom, which shows how Jacob's mind was not dwelling on his children receiving physical blessings from God in the short term (cp. how Isaac blessed his sons), but rather the promised eternal blessings of the Kingdom. It is quite likely that the sons, in their humanity, expected blessings of a more immediate sort, such as a dying father of those times would have shared out between his sons. But instead, Jacob's talk is not of the things of this brief life, but of the Kingdom.

He seems to have perceived the spiritual danger his children were in, living in the luxury of Egypt. The promises of being fruitful and being given a land were being fulfilled, in a primary sense, in Israel's experience in Egypt (Gen. 48:4 cp. 47:27). Joseph was *given* the *land* of Egypt (Gen. 41:41), using the same words as in Gen. 45:18; 48:4 concerning how the true *land* -of Canaan- had been *given* to Abraham's children. Jacob's children were given a *possession* in Egypt (Gen. 47:11), and therefore Jacob emphasized that their *real* possession was the eternal inheritance of Canaan, not Egypt (Gen. 48:4; 49:30; 50:13). Thus Jacob at the end realized the importance of warning God's people against the world, against the

temptation of feeling that God's present material blessing of us with a foretaste of His Kingdom means that in fact we lose our enthusiasm for the *true* Kingdom, in its real, material sense. Like Paul in his final flourish of 2 Tim., Jacob saw the need to warn God's people, to point them away from the world, and towards the future Kingdom. Jacob saw that his people, like him in his earlier life, would be tempted to see God's promises on an altogether too human and material level.

### **Jacob's blessing of Zebulun**

His comment that Zebulun would dwell at the haven of the sea (Gen. 49:13) was not fulfilled in this dispensation, seeing that according to Josephus (and a careful reconstruction of Joshua's words), Zebulun never dwelt by the Sea, being cut off from the coast by the tribe of Asher. And yet according to the distribution of the tribal cantons recorded in Ezekiel, Zebulun will border the Red Sea in the Millennium (Ez. 48:26). And Jacob foresaw this, and gave Zebulun that blessing, with not a mention of any more immediate blessing. He had come to learn that in essence, the promised blessings of God were of the future, not the here and now.

### **Jacob's blessing of Issachar**

" Issachar has desired that which is good; (i.e.) resting between the inheritance. And having seen the resting place that it was good...he subjected his shoulder to labour" (Gen. 49:14 LXX). The Apostle alludes to this Greek text in Heb. 4:1: " Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest" . Jacob imputed righteousness to his son Issachar at the end. Imputing righteousness to others, seeing the good and the potential in them, was something Jacob only reached at the end; he saw Issachar as seeing the future Kingdom, and devoting himself to labour now to attain that future rest. And the writer to the Hebrews bids us follow that man's example. Jacob's judgment of his Issachar was with regard to how keenly he perceived the future rest of the Kingdom, and laboured now to attain it. For this reason, Jacob commended him; he judged Issachar according to how keenly he desired the Kingdom.

### **Jacob's blessing of Dan**

Dan was to bite the horse heels, so that the riders fell backwards (Gen. 49:17). This is to be connected with Zech. 10:5, which speaks of how in the last days, the Arab invaders of Israel will be toppled from their horses by the men of Israel / Jacob. Again, Jacob's mind was on the far distant glory of his sons in the day of the Kingdom. There is also reference here to Gen. 3:15, but with an unexpected twist; Dan as the snake (not the woman) would bite his enemies, and thereby subdue them. Is there a hint here that Jacob had so meditated on the Lord Jesus, the future Messiah, that he realized that he must have our sinful, snake-like, Jacob-like nature, and yet through that very fact the final victory against sin would be won? 'Jacob' meaning 'heel-catcher' associates him with the seed of the snake, who would bruise the seed of the woman in the heel. He saw how he would somehow be rescued from his own 'Jacob-ness', saved from himself, by the Saviour to come. It turned out that Jacob, who in some ways was the seed of the snake, became the seed of the woman. And yet his Messianic blessing of Dan indicates that he saw these two aspects in his Saviour Lord; he was the one who had the appearance of the seed of the snake (cp. how the bronze snake symbolized him), and yet was in fact the seed of the woman. I really believe that Jacob had so deeply reflected on his own life and sinfulness, on the promise in Eden, and on the promises of Abraham's saviour-seed, that he came to as fine an appreciation of the representative nature of Christ's

sacrifice as any believer has today. Thus a lifetime of reflection on the promises (rather than thinking 'Yes, we know all about them') and sustained self-examination will lead to a deep grasp of the fact that Christ really represented *you*, he had exactly your nature, and thereby he is your very own saviour. And yet the fact Christ was our representative seems to be written off by many of us as a dead piece of doctrine we must learn before baptism.

" I have waited for thy salvation (Jesus)" (49:18) is commented upon by the Jerusalem Targum with the suggestion that Jacob was expressing a very definite Messianic expectation: " My soul waiteth not for the deliverance of Gideon, the son of Joash, for it was only temporal; nor for that of Samson, for it was but transient; but for the redemption by the Messiah, the Son of David, which in thy word thou hast promised to send to thy people, the children of Israel; for this, thy salvation, my soul waiteth" .

### Jacob's blessing of Gad

Gad " shall overcome *at the last*" (49:19) reflects how Jacob's mind was focused on the final victory of his people, " at the last" .

### Jacob's blessing of Asher

**Asher** " shall yield royal dainties" , or 'dainties fit for a king' suggests Jacob imagining how in the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus would eat food grown in Asher? The tribes of Israel will each bring their royal dainties to the Lord Jesus in the Millennium (Ez. 45:16).

### Jacob's blessing of Naphtali

**Naphtali** " is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly (lit. 'gracious') words" (Gen. 49:21) is another Messianic hint; Ps. 22 (title) likens the Lord to a hind at the time of his death; and again, Jacob's appreciation of the quality of grace as it would be manifested in Christ comes out. The LXX says that Naphtali is "a tree trunk let loose" . With all the other Messianic insights in Jacob's words, this cannot be accidental. Jacob even saw something of the physical manner of the Lord's death. The idea of being let loose has day of atonement connections (Lev. 16:21). Did Jacob see that far ahead? One Chaldee text reads for this verse: "Naphtali is a swift messenger like a hind that runneth on the tops of the mountains bringing glad tidings".

### Jacob's blessing of Benjamin

" In the morning he shall devour the prey" (Gen. 49:27) connects with the promises that Messiah's second coming would be the true morning (Is. 60:1; Mal. 4:1,2); this was the day when Benjamin would have his true blessing.

Jacob's progression from perceiving the promises as concerning physical blessing to seeing their essential relevance to forgiveness and future salvation is made explicit by Gen. 49:26: "The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of the ancient mountains, the delight, glory or loveliness of the hills of eternity" (this rendition is supported by the LXX, Gesenius, RVmg.). Remember that in the wrestling incident, Jacob realized that the blessing of God essentially refers to His forgiveness; and this connection between blessing and forgiveness / salvation is widespread throughout Scripture: Dt. 33:23; Ps. 5:12 (blessing = grace) Dt. 30:19; Ps. 3:8; 24:5; 28:9; 133:3 (= salvation); Ex. 12:32; 32:29; Num. 24:1; 2

Sam. 21:3; Ps. 67:1 (cp. context); Lk. 6:28 (cp. ) Acts 3:26; Rom. 4:7,8; 1 Cor. 10:16; Gal. 3:14 (= forgiveness). Jacob's final appreciation of God's grace, the way he does far above what our works should deserve, is indicated by his comment that " I had not thought to see thy (Joseph's) face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed" (Gen. 48:11). " Thought" is 74 times translated " pray" , and only once " thought" ; the idea is surely: 'I never prayed to see you again, I didn't therefore have the faith in the resurrection which I should have done, just as I didn't believe your mother could be resurrected when you spoke of her coming to bow before you (Gen. 37:10); but God in His grace has done exceeding abundantly above all I asked or didn't ask for, and shewed me not only your face in this life, but also your children'.

Surrounded by his sons clamouring, one can imagine, for physical, immediate blessings, just as he did in the first half of his life, Jacob says that the spiritual blessings he had received, the grace, the forgiveness, the salvation, were infinitely higher than the blessings of rock-solid hills and mountains, things which seemed so permanent and tangible. His intangible blessings were, he finally realized, much higher than his tangible ones. And so with us individually and as a community; we come to realize, over time, that the Kingdom of God is not so much about meat and drink, the physical, tangible things, but more about peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17); we value the spiritual side of the Kingdom far more; the reality of seeing God's face, of sin forgiven, of the collapse of the wretched barrier which there is between us, the glory of God perfectly revealed; these things come to mean far more than the fact that in the 1000 years of the brief Millennium, corn will wave on the tops of the mountains, and children will play in the now-troubled streets of Jerusalem (even assuming these passages are to be read dead literally). The spiritual graces of the Kingdom, the conquest of sin, the end of sinful nature, the true joy, the eternal felicity and true fellowship... these things, the *quality* of the Kingdom existence, come to mean far more than the fact it will be *eternal*, fascinating as this may be for us to presently contemplate. Jacob is our pattern, and will be our pattern by the end. Turn *thou* to *thy* God as Jacob did, Hosea pleads (Hos. 12:4).

## 2.5 Jacob's Wrestling With God

This study will bring together themes from the others. We have seen that until this time, Jacob was involved in idolatry, he had the idea that the promises concerned the obtaining of physical blessing in this life, and that he could bring about their fulfillment by his own efforts. He was not totally committed to Yahweh as his God (28:20). The fact he promises to give a tenth to God *in the future* suggests that he did not then consider God to be his King, for the idea of tithing seems to have been established before the Law of Moses was given (as were many other elements of that Law; 14:20). This life of half-commitment and deceit in order to further his own selfish ends was abruptly changed by the night of wrestling. And we have seen that we must all go through this same experience, especially in the last days, whether it takes hours or years. There can be no doubt that Jacob expressed a deep repentance that night; Ps. 85:1,2 associates the return of Jacob with his repentance and forgiveness. We have shown that the blessing promised to Abraham essentially concerned forgiveness more than physical blessings (Acts 3:25,26), and Jacob came to realize this that night. Mic. 7:20 is explicit that the promise to Jacob concerned forgiveness. That we are on the right lines of interpretation here is indicted by Is. 29:12-14, which speaks of how Israel's latter day repentance will be after the pattern of Jacob's in his time of trouble: " Jacob shall not now be ashamed (of his sins), neither shall his face now wax pale (at the thought of their consequences)...they also that erred in spirit (attitude, as Jacob did) shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine" , as Jacob learnt the real import

of the promises. He realized that all his life, he had been wrestling with God, his Angel, and he now came to beg his God for the blessing of forgiveness, implying he had repented. The Hebrew for "wrestle" can mean both to wrestle and also simply to cling on to. It seems he started wrestling, and ended up clinging on to the Angel, desperately begging for salvation and forgiveness. His great physical strength (remember how he moved the huge stone from the well, 29:2) was redirected into a spiritual clinging on to the promises of forgiveness and salvation. And this will be our pattern of growth too.

It seems Jacob was familiar with the idea of wrestling with God as being related to prayer. Rachel speaks of how "with wrestlings of God have I wrestled...and I have prevailed" in obtaining a child (30:8; AV "great" = Heb. 'elohim'). We know from Hos. 12 that Jacob became aware that he was wrestling with an Angel, not just a man. His wrestling is therefore to be understood as prayer and pleading, although doubtless it started as a physical struggle with an unknown stranger, who he later recognized as an Angel, and then perceived as God Himself.

It is clear enough that Jacob came to realize that he had not yet received the true blessing of God, i.e. forgiveness, whereas earlier he had felt that his blessings of cattle etc. was the fulfillment of the promised blessing. It is therefore evident that Jacob repented during that night of wrestling. This is confirmed by the Spirit's commentary elsewhere:

- "Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin" (Ps. 85:1,2) is one of many examples of where Jacob's return home is associated with his repentance and forgiveness, which thereby makes it a type of Israel's final homecoming in the last days.

- As Jacob's wrestling with God led him to repentance, so Israel are bidden repent. Amos makes an appeal to this end which is shot through with reference to Jacob's meeting of God that night: "Ye have not *returned*...prepare to *meet thy God, O Israel*...he that maketh the *morning* darkness, and treadeth upon the high places (idol groves)...the Lord, the God of *Hosts* is His *Name*" (Am. 4:12,13).

- The approach of Esau in angry judgment reflected God's attitude to Jacob (33:10). Jacob realized that he must "appease" (Heb. *kaphar*, normally translated 'to make atonement') Esau with gifts of animals. This is surely a confession of sin on his part (32:20). But when he offers them to Esau, Esau kindly responds that he "has all". But all the same Jacob wants to make the sacrifice, to give up the material things...and in all this, too, we see an accurate reflection of God's position with Jacob (and indeed all of us).

Yet what did Jacob repent of? Doubtless he realized that the life of half-commitment, passively assenting to the doctrine of his parents and grandparents, whilst doing his own thing, was effectively a rejection of God. This was the main thrust of his repentance. And yet the Angel commented that Jacob had struggled with both God and men, and had prevailed. Which men? Jacob recognized that the Angel represented Esau (33:10), his brother with whom he had emotionally struggled all his life. The struggle in the womb had been lived out all their lives to this point. Perhaps the Angel's face appeared like that of Esau? Jacob saw the face of the Angel as it were the face of Esau- implying that the Angel he wrestled with was Esau's guardian Angel. He was being more obliquely shown the truth which New Testament passages like 1 Jn. 4:12,20,21 state plainly: that our relationship with our brother is our relationship with God. And Jacob was thus repenting of how badly he'd treated his brother.

But there is reason to think that the Angel also reminded Jacob of his father Isaac. The way Jacob begs the Angel to bless him recalls how he so earnestly wanted to obtain his father's blessing. Jacob's pleading for blessing with the Angel would have reminded him of Esau's desperate pleading for the blessing from Isaac. All these things were restimulated in Jacob's mind by the wrestling. The Angel asks him what his name is (32:27), in exactly the same way as Isaac had asked him 20 years before. At that time he had lied. But now he truthfully answers the Angel: " Jacob" , the deceiver. And then he begs for the blessing of forgiveness. He had struggled with men, with Isaac and Isaac's influence of Jacob's spirituality, with his brother Esau, with Laban, and with himself. And the Angel said that in all these struggles with men, Jacob had ultimately won in that he had confessed he was a deceiver, he had accepted the perversity of his nature.

## Rejecting The Physical Blessing

Jacob's new appreciation of the blessing of forgiveness is reflected by the way in which he effectively tells Esau that he is handing back to him the birthright, the physical blessings. The way he bows down seven times to Esau (33:3) is rejecting the blessing he had obtained by deceit from Isaac: " Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you" (27:29). His experience of the blessing of God's grace was sufficient for him, and he rejected all else. It's a shame that the English translation conceals Jacob's rejection of the physical blessing in 33:11: " Take (51 times translated " take away" ), I pray thee, my blessing...because God hath dealt graciously with me, and I have enough (lit. 'all things')". The Hebrew words translated " take (away)" and " blessing" are exactly the same as in 27:35,36: " (Jacob) came with subtlety, and hath *taken away* thy *blessing*...Is not he rightly named Jacob? he *took away* my birthright, and now he hath *taken away* my *blessing*". Yet now Jacob is saying: 'I have experienced the true grace of God, I stand forgiven before Him, I see His face in His representative Angel (cp. Christ), I therefore have all things, so I don't want that physical, material, temporal blessing I swindled you out of'. And Paul, in his spiritual maturity, came to the same conclusion; he counted all the materialism of this world as dung, that he might win Christ and be found in him, clothed with his gracious righteousness. Later, Jacob again resigned the things of this world for the sake of what was implicit in the promises, when he told his family: "Put away the strange gods that are among you" (Gen. 35:2). These household teraphim would have been the property deeds to Laban's property, but because of what God had promised him at Bethel all those years ago, Jacob was willing to resign all that hope of worldly advantage (35:3).

And yet how seriously will we take all this? Will the wonder of the grace in which we stand motivate us to reject demanding careers, reject rigorous education programs, give up second jobs, from the wonder of our spiritual experience and our desire to concentrate on these things? There can be no doubt that the wrestling experience of our lives will result in our rejection of materialism, and wholehearted devotion to the more spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Jacob began that night by pleading: " *Deliver* me from Esau" (32:11), and he concludes by marvelling that his life is " preserved (s.w. " deliver" ) from *God's* wrath (32:30); his concern with physical problems and human relationships became dwarfed by his awareness of his need for reconcillation with *God*. In essence, this is Paul's teaching concerning peace in the NT; if we have peace with *God*, the wonder of this will result in us having peace in any situation. This is easy to write, so easy. And yet it is still true. If we see the seriousness of sin, and the wonder of being in free fellowship with the Father and Son, we will have peace. The wholehearted repentance and clinging on to God of Jacob

that night is used in Hosea 12 as an appeal to all Israel to repent as our father Jacob did, and rise to his level of maturity

## **Jacob's Wrestling With God**

" In his manhood he had power with God" (Hos. 12:2 RVmg.) suggests that he reached spiritual maturity that night. To be that familiar with God that we can reason with Him, struggle with Him in prayer, seek to change His will over an illness or situation... this is spiritual maturity. This whole characteristic of striving with God was memorialized in his new name: Israel, implying 'striver and prevailer with God and men'. And this must be the characteristic of Israel after the Spirit too. There is a confusion in the Hebrew between 'striver' and 'prince'- for the struggle comes before the crown. Our relationship with Him, our attaining of salvation, is a struggle, a wrestling, a desperate, desperate clinging on, a pleading with tears. Yet this is almost the opposite of the spirit of our community; a comfortable drifting through life, attending the same round of meetings, largely hearing pleasant platitudes, no tears, no little real self-sacrifice, little realistic self-denial, little self-examination and daily struggle to be the more spiritual in the 'small' things of life, hiding behind the institutionalization of spirituality which our history has inevitably resulted in, staying up late, rising up early, labouring with God to build the House, foregoing the petty luxuries and niceties, give give giving... Yet Jacob that night really is a type of us all:

- 'Israel' is the most common title God uses for His people; and it means 'one who struggles with God and prevails'. This, therefore, will be the characteristic of all His people. Note the humility of God, the Almighty, in desiring to articulate our relationship with Him in terms of us struggling with Him and winning. Hos. 12:4 seems to emphasize this, by saying that Jacob in his prayer and pleading had power *over* the Angel. His strength was in his humility; by his strength he had power over God, but it was by his weeping and pleading that he did (Hos. 12:4). This, then, was the true strength 'over' God.

- The Haggadah [recited at the Passover] invites every Jew of all ages to see himself as Jacob's son: "A Syrian [Laban] almost caused my father to perish" is to be recited by all males at the feast. This likewise is how close we should see our connection with him.

- Describing our final gathering to judgment it is prophesied: "I will assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out" (Mic. 4:6). This is all very much the language of limping Jacob being gathered home. But in him we must see all of us.

- Strong defines 'Israel' as meaning 'he who will rule as God'. This would therefore be the basis of Rev. 3:21, which promises that he who overcomes (also translated "prevail") will be a ruler with God, on His throne. It seems that the Lord has his mind back in Gen. 32, and he saw all who would attain His Kingdom as going through that same process of prevailing with God, overcoming, and being made rulers with Him.

- The Angel came to Jacob with the desire to kill him, as Esau (whom the Angel represented) approached him in the same spirit. It was by Jacob's desperate clinging on to God, his pleading, his intense prayer (Hos. 12:4) that he changed God's intention, after the pattern of Moses in later years. The sentence of death we received in Adam perhaps doesn't mean as much to us as it should. Our reversal of it will involve quite some struggle.



- Mt. 18:8 says that it's better to limp into the Kingdom than be rejected for self-righteousness. Surely there is an invitation here to see the limping Jacob, walking away from the encounter with the Angel, as our role model.

- Hezekiah saw Jacob's watershed experience that night of wrestling as analogous to his own experience during his sickness: "I reckoned till morning, that as a lion he would break all my bones (cp. Esau's approach)...I shall go softly (cp. "I will lead on softly", 33:14)...for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Is. 38). Tragically, Hezekiah didn't keep Jacob as his hero. He succumbed to the very materialism which Jacob permanently rejected that night.

Through the whole incident with the wrestling Angel, Jacob was led to understand something of the meaning of the Gen. 28 vision of a ladder with Angels (*mal'akim*) ascending *from* him to Heaven and returning to him. He sends messengers (*mal'akim*) to Esau (Gen. 32:3)- and they return to him as it were as a mighty host of an angry army. Hence he named the place Mahanaim, two camps / hosts- for he perceived that Esau's host was indeed the host of God in His Angels. And thus he comments that he saw the face of the Angel / God as if it were the face of Esau (Gen. 33:10). And so God can masterfully arrange incidents in our lives too, which are somehow the summation of all our previous encounters and interactions with people... to teach us His way. This is why there is sometimes a sense of *deja vu* in our lives.

### **Fighting To The Kingdom**

Jacob wrestled / struggled in prayer with the Angel. Consider the Biblical emphasis on the idea of struggle, quite apart from the fact that Jacob's night of wrestling is a cameo of the experience of all who would be counted among the Israel of God:

- Job felt that his prayers were a striving with God (33:13). Christ's prayers in Gethsemane are described as a "striving" (Heb. 12:4); Paul asks the Romans to *strive* in prayer, so that he may be *delivered from unbelievers* (cp. Esau), and *return* to them with a *blessing* (Rom. 15:30). This is all allusion to Jacob. Likewise Epaphras 'strove' for the Colossians in his prayers (Col. 4:12 AVmg.).

- Prayer is portrayed as a struggle. The Romans were to strive together with Paul in prayer (Rom. 15:30); the Lord's prayers in Gethsemane were a resisting / struggling unto the point of sweating blood (Heb. 12:2). "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you...that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding" is parallel to "We do not cease to pray for you... that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 2:1 cp. 1:9,10). Paul's conflict / struggle for them was his prayer for them. Our groanings, our struggling in prayer, is transferred to God by the Lord Jesus groaning also, but with groanings far deeper and more fervently powerful than ours (Rom. 8:22,23 cp. 26). Our prayers are to give the Father no "rest" (Is. 62:7), no cessation from violent warfare (Strong). The widow by her continual coming in prayer 'wearied' the judge into responding; Strong defines this Greek word as meaning 'to beat and black and blue' (RVmg. gives "bruise"). It's a strange way of putting it, but this is another reminder of the intense struggle of prayer. Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. The 'struggles' of Moses in prayer are an example of this; through the desperation and spiritual culture of his pleading, he brought about a change even in God's stated purpose.

- "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mt. 11:12) is constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord in Lk. 16:16: "the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man *presseth into it*"; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7).

- The fact God uses such language is proof enough that He has no room for those who want a passive ride to His Kingdom. Passivity is nowhere to be seen in the above passages. It's an all or nothing struggle, after the pattern of Jacob's. It has been widely observed that God has expressed His purpose in a way which seems in some way flexible; e.g. through intense prayer, Moses changed God's stated intention to destroy Israel. It would seem that God reveals Himself as a God who can be wrestled with in prayer in order to militate against passivity in our relationship with Him; if we know His purpose can be changed through intense prayer, we will be powerfully motivated as Moses and Jacob were.

## **Jacob And Us**

Here in this incident of Jacob's wrestling with God we see most poignantly the similarities between Jacob and ourselves. Time and again, our lives present us with our own selves, just in different guises. And so with Jacob. He was probably surprised that Rachel would deceive her father by stealing his idols and then lying to him; he had thought she was so wonderful, so pretty, so spiritual. But then he would have come to see that he too, for all his outward spirituality, had also deceived his father. Likewise he would have reflected how Leah must have been party to the cruel deception she played on him at the time of his marriage. Her father Laban would have advised her to do it, or she'd be left a spinster. And Jacob too had listened to his mother's false reasoning in similar vein. Leah had pretended to be her sister-just as Jacob had pretended to be his brother, on another's advice, in order to deceive his own father. Jacob in a national sense must meet their watershed. They are smart, they are fast, just as Jacob was. And just as so many in the new Israel are too. As God worked with Jacob and gave him material blessing even in his self-righteous years before his final meeting with Esau and the Angel, so has Yahweh blessed His people; material prosperity, a strangely fertile land, a charmed life in international foreign policy, miraculous military victories in 1948, in 1967, in 1973, a booming economy...and yet they must yet meet Esau, and then the light of the Lord's countenance. And we are all following the same pattern. It may well be that the watershed for natural Israel will be at the same time and in the same essential form as for contemporary spiritual Israel. For each member of 'Jacob' must go through this in their lives. The material blessing of the brotherhood at this present time may be the counterpart of 1948, 1967, 1973... And the outcome of it all is that Jacob ends his days worshipping, as he leans upon his staff; i.e. he worshipped as he limped, having lost his natural strength, and leaning upon the Lord's support. The muscle in the thigh which was touched is the strongest muscle in the human body. Jacob's strongest point was turned into His weakest, and this is our pattern. Here is our happy end too, in the very and final end: to worship, limping, leaning on our staff.

## **2.6 Jacob And Imputed Righteousness**

It can be demonstrated that the weakness of Jacob, morally and even doctrinally, runs far deeper than may be apparent on the surface. Even at the end, despite the level of spiritual

maturity which Jacob doubtless achieved, he still had serious aspects of incompleteness in his character <sup>(1)</sup>. And yet he is held up as a spiritual hero, a victor in the struggle against the flesh <sup>(2)</sup>. This was (and is) all possible on account of the phenomenal imputation of righteousness which God gave to His Jacob. He was saved by grace, not works; and Malachi appeals to God's people to see in Jacob's salvation an eternal reminder of God's grace (Mal. 1:2; 3:6). Very often, the name Jacob is associated with the way that God sees His people of Jacob / Israel as righteous when in fact they are not (Num. 23:7,10,21; 24:5; Ps. 47:4; 105:6; 135:4; Is. 41:8). The names "Jacob" and "Israel" are often used together (e.g. Hos. 12:12) to show how God saw the Jacob as Israel, without forgetting he was still Jacob. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious" (Ex. 33:19) is an essential part of God's Name and character. Paul explains in Rom. 9 that this is exemplified by the way in which even before birth, God chose Jacob rather than Esau, not according to the fact that Jacob was more righteous, but simply because He chose to show grace to Jacob rather than Esau. And this, Paul implies, is the same wondrous, senseless grace which has been poured out upon the new Israel / Jacob. And seeing that Jacob really is our role model, this speaks volumes concerning God's relationship to us. After the night of wrestling, Jacob seems to have grasped this fact; he speaks twice of how God had been gracious to Him (33:5,11). The pure grace of God's dealings with Jacob is brought out in how Jer. 30:7,8 prophecies that in the time of Jacob's trouble, "I will break his [the invader's] yoke from off thy neck". This was the promise given to Esau- and one could say that Jacob having got all he did, at least Esau should be allowed to have the little promise given to him. But now even this is given to Jacob- at the time of his 'trouble', his final downtreading for centuries of disobedience.

The way God showed such grace and imputed righteousness to Jacob even before his birth is also brought out in Is. 44:2, which states that from the womb, Jacob was chosen to be God's servant; and yet Jacob coolly said that only if God did what He promised, would he agree to serve Yahweh, and have Him as his master. Earlier in the same servant prophecies, the servant Jacob is described as a useless servant: "Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect (Jacob was a perfect / plain man, Gen. 25:27), and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:19). Although the servant is worse than useless (a deaf messenger), he is seen as perfect by his Divine Master. And the servant prophecies are primarily based on Jacob (note, in passing, how often they associate the servant Jacob with idol worship, which seems to have been an earlier characteristic of Jacob). Consider too the allusions to Jacob in Is. 53; a man of sorrow and grief, despised of men, who would see his seed. As Christ felt a worm on the cross (Ps. 22:6), so Jacob is described (Is. 41:14). That even in his weakness, Jacob prefigured the Lord in his time of ultimate spiritual victory, shows in itself the way God imputed righteousness to him at the time.

The whole basis of how God dealt with Jacob is intended to be an essay in the way in which He counts all the true Israel as righteous, even though they are not. Imputed righteousness is the key to our salvation by grace. When Balaam tried to curse Israel, it was impossible because God saw them as righteous, even though they were not: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness (Jacob-ness) in Israel" (Num. 23:21). He overlooked Jacob's natural characteristics. It is no accident that God repeatedly described His people at this time with the title of 'Jacob' (Num. 23:7,10,21,23; 24:5,17,19). The lengths to which God went to count Israel and Jacob as righteous are wondrous. We have shown elsewhere the idolatrous tendencies of Jacob. But it is emphasized in Jer. 10:15, 16 that the God of Jacob is not an idol, nor is He created by an 'errorist'- using the same rare Hebrew word concerning Jacob being a 'deceiver' in Gen. 27:12. Jacob was a 'deceiver', and for much of his life did not accept Yahweh as his God, preferring the idols of the land (28:20,21). Yet

Jer. 10:15,16 says that idols are made by 'deceivers', and the God Jacob believed in was not an idol like this. God is almost turning everything upside down to frame a weak, faltering Jacob as the very opposite. And He will do likewise with every one of the true Israel.

## A Framed Record

The whole record is framed in such a way as to present Jacob in a positive light compared to Esau <sup>(3)</sup>, even though (as Rom. 9 demonstrates) there was little fundamental difference between them at first; indeed, the deception and passive hatred of Jacob was probably worse than the simplistic carnality of Esau. Esau tried to please his parents (remember his taking of wives to please them), he forgave Jacob; whereas Jacob deceived his father wickedly, and never reconciled himself to Esau. Esau's desperate pleading for Jacob's pottage at the cost of his birthright seems to be the background for 1 Cor. 15:32, where those without the hope of covenant resurrection are described as saying "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die", just as the faithless in Israel did in Hezekiah's time. Instead of weeping in repentance, their attitude was "let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die" (Is. 22:13). This category is associated with Esau, craving for the things of today at the cost of an eternal tomorrow. But Jacob himself was no better; it would take many years before he came to weep in repentance before the Angel, as he should have done before. And yet Esau is set up as the sinner and Jacob as the saint. All the time, righteousness is imputed to Jacob later in the record- thus "Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep" (Hos. 12:12)- when actually he did it for *wives* plural- and a few concubines. Again we see Jacob is imputed righteousness.

Esau before Isaac, pleading with him to change his irrevocable rejection, is picked up in Heb. 12:14-16 as a type of the rejected at the day of judgment. The implication is that Jacob at this time symbolized the saints; yet he was no saint at that time. The way he is described at the time as "smooth" (27:11), without a covering of hair, may be a hint that he needed a covering of atonement. He didn't even accept Yahweh as his God; and anyone who would justify lying to his father as Jacob then did has rejected the whole concept of living by any kind of principles. Yet Jacob at this time is set up as a saint. At this time, the record of Isaac's blessing of Jacob (27:29) is framed to portray Jacob as a type of Christ: "Let people serve thee" = Zech. 8:23; Is. 60:12 "nations bow down to thee" = Ps. 72:11; "Be Lord over thy brethren" = Phil. 2:11; "Let thy mother's sons bow down to thee" = 1 Cor. 15:7. The fact Esau mocked Jacob as he skulked off to Padan Aram is picked up in Obadiah 12 as a ground for Esau's condemnation; and yet, humanly, Jacob was at that time by far the bigger and more responsible sinner. A bit of mocking from Esau was, from a human standpoint, a mild response. Other allusions to Jacob in later Scripture comment on his negative side. "Deceiving and being deceived" is surely a pointer to Jacob (2 Tim. 3:13). "The slothful man catcheth / roasteth not that which *he* took in hunting" (Prov. 12:27 RVmg.) may be one of the Proverbs' historical commentaries- in this case, on Jacob. The implication would be that Jacob was lazy in staying in the tent and not hunting. But many Biblical allusions to Jacob seize on one aspect of his behaviour and apparently glorify it. Even after his repentance at the night of wrestling, he still deceived Esau (33:13-15). And yet the record is written in such a way as to make Jacob out to be the righteous one; he is described as "perfect" at a time when he had not even accepted Yahweh as his God. Thus what he eventually was is said of him at the beginning, but with no hint that this is the case; the impression is given that he was always "perfect" from the start (25:27). Jacob is there described as living in tents with his righteous father and grandfather; whereas there is ample evidence that he was quite used to the tough outdoor life, and was an accomplished shepherd. Heb. 11:9 implies that he had faith in the promises and was indeed an heir of them at this time; even though he did not see them

as personally applying to him then (28:20), and was more involved in idolatry than he should have been. Another example of the way the Spirit frames the record in Jacob's favour is in 37:3: " Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age" . We have shown that most of Jacob's children were born within a few years of each other, and in any case, Benjamin was the youngest. It seems that the Spirit is almost making a weak excuse for Jacob's favouritism, or perhaps picking up Jacob's self-justification for his favouritism and treating it as if it is valid.

There are many examples of where God worked through Jacob's weakness, and blessed him in spite of it, imputing righteousness to Jacob. Thus Jacob's use of red stew to wrest the birthright from his red brother was used by God to give him the birthright (the words for " stew" and " Esau" are related), even though Paul evidently disapproved of Jacob's attitude (Rom. 12:20 surely alludes here); his evil deception of his father was used by God to grant him the physical blessing (27:28 is confirmed by God in Dt. 33:28), even though at the time he was dressed like a goat (17:16), connecting himself with fallen Adam and the rejected at the day of judgment; "Deceiving and being deceived" certainly rings bells with Jacob (2 Tim. 3:13); his idolatrous dream of a Ziggurat was turned into an assurance of Divine care for him, the shrine which topped Mesopotamian ziggurats being turned by God in the vision into the throne of Yahweh. Indeed, 'Babylon' meant 'gate of God', and in thinking that he was at heaven's gates, Jacob was confusing Babylon and the true city of God. But still God worked through all this. Jacob's superstitious use of mandrakes and poplar rods was used by God to fulfill the physical aspect of the promised blessing; he used " white" rods to take power from Laban, the " white" one, and to give him white animals- and God worked through it. Jacob shifted the blessing of firstborn from Manasseh to Ephraim, humanly because he wanted to see his own experience replicated in that of his favourite grandchildren. And yet God confirmed this, by later saying that He accepted Ephraim as His firstborn (Gen. 48:20 cp. Jer. 31:9). God gave Jacob 10 sons but he wanted 12, and therefore adopted another two; and God accepted this. The names given to some of those sons weren't very spiritual or even true, and yet God accepted them (e.g. Naphtali, 30:8; Dan, 30:6, Issachar, 30:18). Likewise, God didn't want a temple, and He didn't want Israel to have a human King. And yet He conceded to their weakness, and worked through this; as He may occasionally work through the sin of marriage *out of* the Faith to bring someone *to* the Faith. This is, of course, a dangerous road to go down, in so far as we can easily be lulled into feeling that God will work with us anyway; the knowledge of His grace can make us lose the sense of urgency in our spiritual struggle. And yet, at the end, God works through our weakness. This not only gives us comfort in our own stumbling path to the Kingdom, but should enable us to be patient with those of our brethren who seem to be so unashamedly weak.

## **Weak And Strong At The Same Time**

This leads on to what is a major theme in God's dealing with Jacob; at the very moments when Jacob is weak or downright evil, God sees something righteous in him and responds accordingly. The closer we look, the more examples we can find of this in other Bible characters <sup>(4)</sup>. And the more honest our self-examination, the more we will see that even in the apparent heights of devotion and righteousness, there can be the darkest strain of sin. And likewise, in the depths of human failure, it is not uncommon to sense an element of spirituality going on at the same time. Men, generally, don't take this spiritual schizophrenia into account in their judgment of people and situations. But quite evidently, God does. He sees that our behaviour can be read on more than one level; the same action has elements of righteousness and sin within it. Thus Jehu's massacre at Jezreel was commanded by God, and

Jehu was praised for his obedience in doing it (2 Kings 10:30,31), but he was also condemned for it (Hos. 1:4). Yet we simply cannot make such analysis, although we must recognize that this is in fact how God analyzes. And for this reason alone, we are quite unable to anticipate the outcome of the judgment with regard to other believers.

The following are examples of this theme in God's relationship with Jacob:

- "Children, obey your parents in the Lord...honour thy father and mother, for this is the first commandment with promise; that it may *be well* with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3) is a strange allusion to Jacob; "Jacob obeyed his father and his mother" (28:7) by going to Padan Aram (actually he fled there, but the record frames it as if he did so purely out of obedience to his parents and from a desire to find a wife in the Faith). Because Jacob did this, God promised him at Bethel that it would *be well* with him (32:9), and he too was given the Abrahamic promises of living long on the earth / land. Thus Jacob's fleeing to Padan Aram is seen by the Spirit in Paul as a righteous act of obedience to faithful parents, which resulted in him receiving the promises. And yet his flight was rooted in fear, and at the time he did not accept the promises as relevant to him, neither did he believe Yahweh was his God (28:20). And yet the positive side of Jacob (i.e. his obedience to his parents) is seized on and held up as our example.

- At the time of Jacob's deception, Esau lifted up his voice and wept (27:38); and this is picked up in Heb. 12:17 as a warning to all those who would fritter away their spirituality for sensuality. The faithlessness of Jacob is disregarded, and the emphasis is placed upon Esau.

- "If God will be with me...and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on...*then* shall Yahweh be my God" (28:20) is simply incredible; *if* God will really look after me, which includes giving me food and clothes, *if* He's as good as His word, then I'll accept Him as my God'. And yet Paul speaks of how we should serve our Master well, especially if he is our brother (alluding to Jacob and Laban), and "having food and raiment be content" (1 Tim. 6:2,8), as if the fact Jacob only expected food and clothing from God was a sign of his unmaterialism. And yet at the very time Jacob said those words, he only half believed, and the next 20 years of his life were devoted to accumulating far more than just food and clothing. And yet his words regarding food and raiment, sandwiched as they are between much that is wrong, are treated as a reflection of his spirituality.

- Ps. 34 has several allusions to Jacob (vv. 6,7,13). "The angel of the Lord encampeth around them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (v.7) is alluding to the Angel with fearful Jacob on the night of westling, and delivering him from Esau. And yet the Angel set out to fight and slay Jacob, after the pattern of Esau (33:10). Jacob feared because of his sins and because of the relentless approach of his brother. Yet this is turned round to mean that Jacob's fear was actually fear of God, and on account of this feat, the Angel delivered Jacob. Jacob was partly afraid of God and his own sins, but (it seems) more significantly, he simply feared Esau physically. And yet in Ps. 34:7, God chose that more positive aspect of Jacob and memorialized it there as an example to others.

- "Now when shall I provide for mine own house also?" (30:30) Jacob slyly asked Laban, and on this pretext spent then next six years using some pagan myth about cattle breeding to take Laban's cattle from him and amass them for himself. What he came to think of as "his flock" (31:4) was a reflection of his mad materialism; he used all his (considerable) human strength to achieve it, and then turned round and said he had only been serving Laban with it



(31:6). Yet these very words are alluded to in 1 Tim. 5:8 as an example for faithful men to copy; indeed, Paul says, if you don't do as Jacob did, you're worse than a pagan! And yet the Spirit through Paul also recognized the weak side of Jacob; "evil men...deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13) is a sure reference to Jacob.

- "When a man's ways please Yahweh, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7) is a reference to Esau's surprising peace with Jacob (Proverbs is packed with such historical commentary). Yet as they made peace, Jacob was saying that Esau was his Lord, and he was Esau's servant (32:18; 33:14), in designed denial of the Divine prophecy that Esau was to serve Jacob (25:23). Yet at this very time, Jacob's ways pleased Yahweh.

- At the very end, Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons as the firstborn is seen as an act of faith (48:5; Heb. 11:21). Yet on another level, Jacob was taking the blessings away from the firstborn who was the son of the wife he disliked, and giving those blessings to the son of his favourite wife, who was not the firstborn. This was quite contrary to the will of God as expressed in Dt. 21:17. At best we can say that God allowed one principle to be broken to keep another (although what other?). At worst, Jacob was simply showing rank favouritism, and yet at the same time he foresaw in faith the Messianic suggestions in Joseph's experience, and therefore made Joseph's sons the firstborn. God saw the good in Jacob at this time, and counted this to him, and recognized and worked with Joseph's decision to make "the son of the hated" the firstborn (1 Chron. 5:1), even though this may have been contrary to God's highest intentions. Likewise God worked through Jacob's pagan use of poplar rods and mandrakes. The way Jacob insisted on blessing Ephraim as the firstborn again seems to show some kind of favouritism and a desire to see his grandson living out his own experience, i.e. the younger son who fought his way up and received the blessings as opposed to the rightful heir. Ephraim becomes a code-name for apostate Israel throughout the prophets. And yet God accepted Jacob's preferential blessing of Ephraim and repeated this in Dt. 33:17.

If God thinks so positively about His weak servants, ought this not to inculcate in us a culture of kindness and positive thinking about each other? Ought this not to be the hallmark of our community? Jacob's imputed righteousness is a pattern of how God treats us, and how we should treat each other.

The same theme is demonstrated by the way in which in his weak moments, the Spirit as it were takes a snapshot of Jacob, and uses this image as a type of the peerless Son of God:

- As Jacob bowed before Isaac as the fawning deceiver, Jacob was blessed with promises which were relevant to the Lord Jesus; "let people serve thee" (27:29) is evidently Messianic (Dan. 7:14). My point is that even in his weakness, God saw the connection between Jacob and Jesus. "Let...nations bow down to thee" is Messianic (cp. Ps. 72:11); "be Lord over thy brethren" is perhaps picked up in Phil. 2:11; "let thy mother's sons bow down to thee" is 1 Cor. 15:7; James 1:1.

- Jacob self-admittedly didn't believe as he slept that night at Bethel. But just days before that, as Jacob sheepishly stood before his sorrowful, betrayed father; right there, right then, God promised Jacob that he would become "a multitude (LXX *ekklesia*) of people" (28:3), words which could only become true through their application to Christ.

- Jacob's infatuation with Rachel was so great that he thought nothing of breaking basic principles, e.g. one man: one woman, in order to get her. He was also willing to pay 14 years

wages for her (you can calculate this for yourself). His deep love of her is a type of Christ's love for his church.

- Jacob called Esau his master (33:5), in evident rejection of the Divine promise they both knew: that Esau would serve Jacob (25:23). And yet at this very point, Jacob speaks of " the children which God hath graciously given thy (Esau's) servant" ; and this scene is cited in Is. 8:18 as a type of Christ and his spiritual children of promise. In similar vein, Is. 49:21 uses this scene as a picture of the faithful remnant among Jacob in the last days.

- Jacob as he approached Esau was weak; he prayed for deliverance, but divided up his family as if he doubted whether God would hear him. The Angel met him, representing Esau (33:10), and would have killed him (cp. Moses) had not Jacob wrestled with him in prayer and begged for the blessing of forgiveness (Hos. 12:4-6). And yet the record of Jacob meeting Esau is shot through with reference to Christ in Gethsemane; the Son of God at one of his finest moments:

### *Jacob*

### *Jesus*

31:14

Night time  
breaking of bread  
and killing of  
animals

32:8

Zech. 13:7

32:1 LXX Jacob  
went on his way  
and saw the camp  
of God; an Ezekiel  
1 type vision of  
Angels

As Christ in  
Gethsemane

32:13

Cp. Kedron

32:6; 33:4

Cp. Judas, Mk.  
14:45; Jn. 18:3

32:17

Jn. 16:5

32:3

Lk. 10:1; 22:8

Made a prince  
afterwards

Acts 3:15; 5:31;  
Rev. 1:5

Jacob referred to  
the promises  
(32:9,10)

As Christ's mind  
was full of the  
promises at the  
end (Ps. 69:13;  
89:49; 77:8;  
44:4,24; Is.



## Jacob, Esau And The Prodigal

The parable of the prodigal contains multiple allusions to the record of Jacob and Esau, their estrangement, and the anger of the older brother [Esau] against the younger brother (5). There is a younger and an elder son, who both break their relationships with their father, and have an argument over the inheritance issue. Jacob like the prodigal son insults his father in order to get his inheritance. As Jacob joined himself to Laban in the far country, leaving his older brother Esau living at home, so the prodigal glued himself to a Gentile and worked for him by minding his flocks, whilst his older brother remained at home with the father. The fear of the prodigal as he returned home matches that of Jacob as he finally prepares to meet the angry Esau. Jacob's unexpected meeting with the Angel and clinging to him physically is matched by the prodigal being embraced and hugged by his father. Notice how Gen. 33:10 records how Jacob felt he saw the face of Esau as the face of an Angel. By being given the ring, the prodigal "has in effect now supplanted his older brother" (6); just as Jacob did. As Esau was "in the field" (Gen. 27:5), so was the older brother.

What was the Lord Jesus getting at by framing His story in terms of Jacob and Esau? The Jews saw Jacob as an unblemished hero, and Esau / Edom as the epitome of wickedness and all that was anti-Jewish and anti-God. The Book of Jubilees has much to say about all this, as does the Genesis Rabbah (7). The Lord is radically and bravely re-interpreting all this. Jacob is the younger son, who went seriously wrong during his time with Laban. We have shown elsewhere how weak Jacob was at that time. Jacob was saved by grace, the grace shown in the end by the Angel with whom he wrestled, and yet who finally blessed him. As Hos. 12:4 had made clear, Jacob weeping in the Angel's arms and receiving the blessing of gracious forgiveness is all God speaking to us. The older brother who refused to eat with his sinful brother clearly represented, in the context of the parable, the Jewish religious leaders. They were equated with Esau- the very epitome of all that was anti-Jewish. And in any case, according to the parable, the hero of the story is the younger son, Jacob, who is extremely abusive and unspiritual towards his loving father, and is saved by sheer grace alone. This too was a radical challenge to the Jewish perception of their ancestral father Jacob.

The parable demonstrates that both the sons despised their father and their inheritance in the same way. They both wish him dead, treat him as if he isn't their father, abuse his gracious love, shame him to the world. Both finally come to their father from working in the fields. Jacob, the younger son, told Laban that "All these years I have served you... and you have not treated me justly" (Gen. 31:36-42). But these are exactly the words of the older son in the parable! The confusion is surely to demonstrate that both younger and elder son essentially held the same wrong attitudes. And the Father, clearly representing God, and God as He was manifested in Christ, sought so earnestly to reconcile both the younger and elder sons. The Lord Jesus so wished the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees to fellowship with the repenting sinners that He wept over Jerusalem; He didn't shrug them off as self-righteous bigots, as we tend to do with such people. He wept for them, as the Father so passionately pours out His love to them. And perhaps on another level we see in all this the desperate desire of the Father and Son for Jewish-Arab unity in Christ. For the promises to Ishmael show that

although Messiah's line was to come through Isaac, God still has an especial interest in and love for all the children of Abraham- and that includes the Arabs. Only a joint recognition of the Father's grace will bring about Jewish-Arab unity. But in the end, it will happen- for there will be a highway from Assyria to Judah to Egypt in the Millennium. The anger of the elder brother was because the younger son had been reconciled to the Father without compensating for what he had done wrong. It's the same anger at God's grace which is shown by the workers who objected to those who had worked less receiving the same pay. And it's the same anger which is shown every time a believer storms out of an ecclesia because some sinner has been accepted back...

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### Notes

- (1) See *The Human Side Of Jacob*.
- (2) See *Jacob: Really Our Example*.
- (3) See "*I won't be in the Kingdom*" for more examples of this.
- (4) See "*I'm a hypocrite*" for more discussion of this major Bible theme.
- (5) K.E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) lists 51 points of contact between the Jacob / Esau record and the prodigal parable.
- (6) A.J. Hultgren, *The Parables Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) p. 79.
- (7) See e.g. Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary To The Book Of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) Vol. 3 p. 176.

## 3.1 Job: A Pattern Of Growth

### 3-1-1 Themes In Job

Repeated reading of Job's speeches, especially if this is done in only one or two sittings, highlights certain recurrent themes. During a series of repeated readings of Job, the following list was made. Job's speeches were then printed out together as one piece of prose, and each verse renumbered; i.e. column 3 of the following table refers to the verse number if Job's speeches are printed out together.

- 1. No faith in the resurrection: 7:9,10; 10:21; 14:10,14; 16:22; 17:15; 19:10; 21:33
- 2. Looks forward to the resurrection: 14:13-15; 19:25-27
- 3. Looks forward to the judgment seat: 6:2; 19:23,29; 21:19,20,30; 23:3-7,10; 27:8,9,22; 31:11,14,28,35-37
- 4. Knows the wicked will be punished one day: 27:9,13-23; 31:3,11

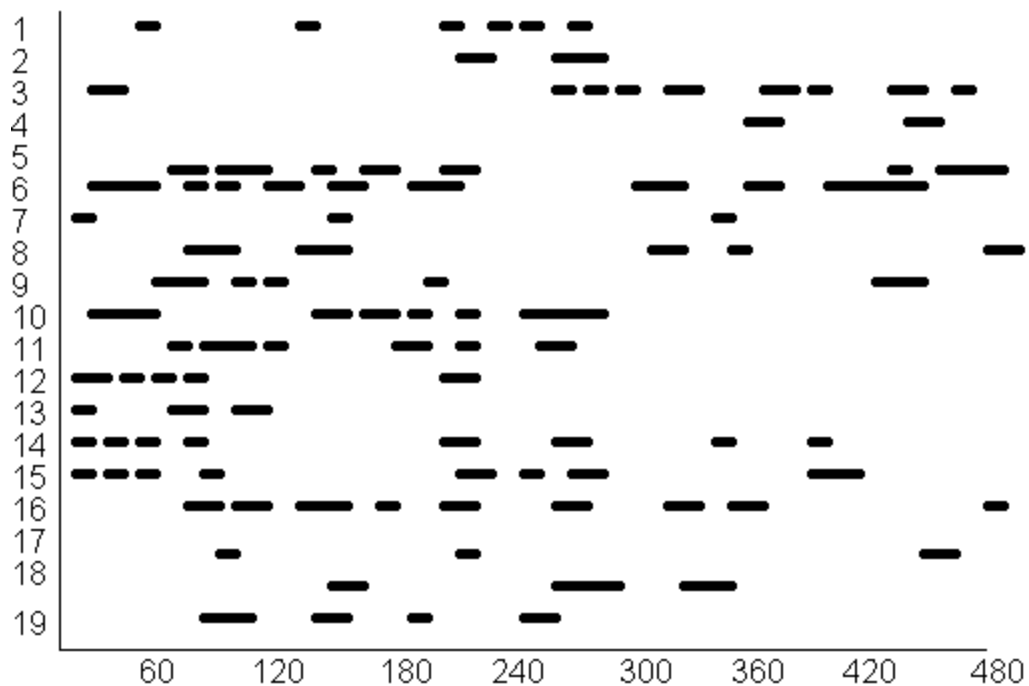
5. Realizes his sinfulness: 7:20,21; 9:2,15,20,21,28; 10:6; 13:26; 14:16,17; 31:33; 40:4,15; 42:3,6
6. Justifies himself: 6:10,24,28-30; 9:29; 10:2,7; 12:4; 13:15,16,18; 16:17; 23:11,12; 27:5,6; 31:1,5,7,9,13,16,19,21,26,30,39
7. Thinks he understands God: 6:13; 13:1; 24:25
8. Admits he doesn't understand God: 9:2,11,12,24; 10:15,16; 23:14; 26:3; 42:3
9. Bitter with God: 7:11-21; 9:23,31; 10:3; 13:27; 30:21
10. Bitter with his friends / brethren: 6:15-18,24-29; 12:2-4; 13:4-13; 16:2-5; 17:2,10; 19:2,3,14,19,22
11. Realizes the weakness of his own nature: 7:17; 9:21,30-32; 10:4,9-11; 14:1-4,22; 19:26,28
12. Suicidal: 3:3-33; 6:8,9,11; 7:2-4,15,16,21; 10:1,18-21; 17:1,14
13. Thinks life is unfair: 3:26; 9:17; 10:5,8
14. Realizes God brings suffering: 1:21; 2:10; 6:4; 9:17; 16:11-14; 19:6,9-13,21; 27:2; 30:11
15. Complains about his physical suffering: 3:24; 6:7; 7:13,14; 9:25; 16:8,10,12; 17:6,7; 19:11-20; 30:1,9,10,19,30,31
16. Realizes the greatness of God: 9:4-10,19; 10:7; 12:10,16-24; 13:11; 14:18-20; 21:22; 23:13; 26:6-14; 42:2
17. Desire for Christ: 9:33-35; 16:21; 31:35
18. Realizes that God blesses the wicked: 12:6; 21:6-18; 24:2-25
19. Doesn't know if he has sinned: 9:20,21; 10:14,15; 13:23; 19:4

### **3-1-2 The Names Of God In Job**

Job's speeches	No. of verses	Verse numbers	" God"	Yahweh	The Almighty
1:21	1	1	3		
2:10	1	2	1		
3:3-26	24	3-26	2		
6:2-30	29	27-55	3	2	
7:1-21	21	56-76			

9:2-35	34	77-110	2	
10:1-22	22	111-132	1	
12:2-25	24	133-156	3	1
13:1-28	28	157-184	3	1
14:1-22	22	185-206		
16:2-22	21	207-227	3	
17:1-16	16	228-243		
19:2-29	28	244-271	4	
21:2-34	33	272-304	5	2
23:2-17	16	305-320	1	1
24:1-25	25	321-345	1	1
26:2-14	13	346-358		
27:2-23	22	359-380	9	4
29:2-25	24	381-404	2	1
30:1-31	31	405-435		
31:1-40	40	436-475	5	2
40:4,5	2	476-477		
42:2,3,5,6	4	478-481		

*Note:* 28:1-28 is counted as Zophar's third speech (see R.V. and Heb.).



An analysis of the above data reveals one of three trend patterns:

1. The theme is constant (e.g. Job's self-justification and his awareness of the greatness of God), or
2. The theme is relatively absent at the beginning, but over time Job understands and emphasizes it more and more (e.g. his desire for the day of resurrection and judgment), or
3. Job emphasizes some things in his early thinking which over time cease to be big themes with him (e.g. his talk of suicide fades away, his quandary over whether he has sinned or not subsides. This latter aspect ought to be a feature of us all over time).

### 3-1-3 Job's Spiritual Growth

It is unlikely that Job's period of affliction lasted more than a year or so (Job 7:3), and yet this is the part of his life and spiritual growth that is presented to us in such detail. It was his spiritual growth during this period which led him to exclaim: " I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5). Job was like so many of us; he knew the doctrines, he believed, he loved his Bible, he did good, he tried to do the very best for his kids spiritually, he had worked his way up in the world (from being an orphan, 6:27?) without consciously seeking prosperity (1:10 AVmg.; 8:7; 31:25), and had shared his blessings with others; he realized at least in theory the weakness of his nature; and yet when he examined himself, he really didn't think he was too monstrous a sinner. And his 'ecclesia', such as it was, thought the same. Even the 'world' around him thought so. But in the final triumph and pinnacle of spiritual growth which he achieves by the end of the book, Job looked back on all this and saw it all as so much theory. In those long years (his children were old enough to have parties and get drunk), he finally recognized that he had only heard of God " by the hearing of the ear" . There had been no real spiritual vision of God, no real *personal understanding*- just hearing in the ear (note how the Queen of Sheba alludes to Job's words- she had heard in the ear, but her spirit failed when she saw with her eyes). In the theological context in which Job was, the idea of seeing God for oneself was a huge paradigm jump. Centuries later, righteous Isaiah was sure he would die because he thought he had seen Yahweh (Is. 6:5). Job reached the same spiritual peak of ambition and closeness to the Almighty which Moses did when he asked to be shown God's glory, with the apparent implication that he wanted to see Yahweh's face (Ex. 33:18,20). This peak of ambition which characterized Job's maturity was partly due to the way in which God recounted His greatness before Job (e.g. ch. 38). And yet (as the above chart makes clear) an appreciation of the physical greatness of God was something which had consistently featured in Job's words. Yet he had to be taught that what he thought he knew and appreciated so well, in fact he didn't.

Dare, dare I say it: but isn't this just where so many of us have been for years, hearing in the ear, in the calm quietness of our church halls; but not *seeing* God for ourselves, not grasping the personal intensity of knowing, understanding (" seeing" ) the Almighty for ourselves, on a very personal level? " I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee" (42:5) must be connected with 19:27, where Job reveals that his perception of the Kingdom is that *then* he would see God with his own eye. But by 42:5, he has come to the realization that what the depth of Divine understanding which he thought would only be possible in the Kingdom, was in fact possible *here and now*. This same progressive, awesome realization that *so much* is possible here and now is something which both individually and collectively we must go through.

### 3-1-3 Allusions To Job In The New Testament

There are many allusions to Job in the New Testament; far more than may be apparent on the surface. Mt. 10:27 is one of them: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops". The idea of God telling us things in the ear which we must then openly declare is surely looking back to Job's words. "

Darkness" is also a Job idea; the word occurs at least 30 times in the book. The final appearance of Yahweh in the darkness of the thundercloud was His reproof of Job's repeated suggestion that the darkness of sin somehow separated God from involvement with man. What Job was told out of darkness, he had to speak forth in the light. It seems that Job's spiritual growth is being picked up by the Lord and presented as our pattern. He does the same in Lk. 18:30, another of the allusions to Job in the New Testament, when He speaks of how each of us must give up house, wife, brethren and children for the Kingdom's sake, and then afterwards receive "manifold more in this time, and in the world to come...". This is exactly the position of Job (Job 42:10), and yet the Lord applies it to each of us. Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, also sounds like Job (Mt. 5:44 = Job 31:30). Further, Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration and the Kingdom are shot full of allusions back to Job. The cry that Zion's warfare or "appointed time" is now ended (Is. 40:2) is taken straight out of Job 7:1; indeed, Job 7:3-7 describes Job's haggard life in the same terms as Israel in dispersion are described in Isaiah 40. The point being, that Job's eventual re-conversion and salvation is a pattern for that of all God's people. For more allusions to Job in the New Testament see [http://www.carelinks.net/books/dh/james/james\\_d12.html](http://www.carelinks.net/books/dh/james/james_d12.html).

The pattern of Job's re-conversion is telling indeed. Initially, Job thought little of the judgment. Indeed, his faith in the resurrection collapsed at times (as it did with David in Ps. 88:10?). He struggled through the day to day trauma of his life, and that was enough. The implications of the promises to Abraham and in Eden were lost on him; he went away from the hope of Messiah and resurrection which sustained the likes of Moses and David, solely, it seems, as a result of their meditation on the implications of those early promises. The way Eliphaz speaks of how Job's seed or offspring could be many or "great...as the grass of the earth" (Job 5:25) suggests the people of Job's time were familiar with the promises made to Abraham, and the concept of their being applicable to them too. Job realized his sinfulness, and yet at the same time he was in a quandary over whether he really had sinned. In Job 27:6 he even feels that his heart does not reproach him over any of the days he has ever lived (RV). This is such an accurate caricature of so many Christian consciences, of so much of our self-examination, both individually and collectively. We of course have to admit that we are sinners, riddled with weakness in so many ways; and of course we *do* admit this. And yet there is a quandary over whether we really are big time sinners. We feel ourselves to be little sinners, whatever we may theoretically admit. And as such, we fail to appreciate the grace of God's salvation, and therefore we fail to dynamically respond to this as we should do, and thereby our community and our own lives are characterized by the all too evident apathy with which they are; there is so little of the real flame, the fire of true spirituality, which there might be <sup>(1)</sup>. And dear dear Job, like us, for all his good works, for all his being such a truly and really nice guy and brother, through and through... he had to be brought down to his knees: "I am vile... I know (*now*, by implication) that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee... therefore have I uttered that I understood thee; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not". As is evident from the above chart, *all through* Job realized his own sinfulness, the weakness of his nature, and the surpassing greatness of the power and knowledge of the Lord God. These are aspects of Job's spirituality which never

changed too much; he was constantly aware of these things. And yet only right at the end did he realize that he knew nothing as he ought to know. " If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2) sounds like another of the allusions to Job in the New Testament- particularly once it is realized that 1 Corinthians has several other Job allusions <sup>(2)</sup>. For all his correct understanding of basic doctrine (remember that Job was in covenant with the true God), he came to the conclusion that he had been speaking about things and issues which were totally beyond his comprehension; and not only this, but he seems to have realized that they were " too wonderful for me" in the sense that the things of God are almost inappropriate on the lips and in the mind of a sinful mortal.

### *The Wonder Of It All*

This is not to say that we cannot be sure that what we believe is in essence " the Truth" . I am not suggesting that at all. But what I am saying is that as we grow spiritually, there will be a more timorous grasp of the wonderful doctrines of the true Gospel, a greater sense of their wonder, a deeper appreciation of our moral and intellectual frailty, and therefore a deeper knowledge that the glorious truth we hold is in a sense " things too wonderful for me" .

Some personal reminiscences may -or will perhaps in the future- touch a chord with you: Soon after my baptism, I recall hearing a brother 'going on', as it seemed to me then, about the fact that we should call Christ our " Lord" , not our elder brother, because although *He* calls *us* His brethren, it is not for us to call him our brother, but rather our Lord. I remember thinking how utterly pedantic this was. But now I see that the brother had a point- a crucial one. And I recall discussing the atonement with phrases like " so God really had no option but to...." , and referring to " Christ" as if He was some chap I'd knocked around with at school. I've not changed my doctrinal convictions one bit- I trust they are deeper now than ever before. But the things of the Truth are wonderful, too wonderful for us in many ways, although this doesn't in any way mean that the Truth itself is unattainable by us. We must handle the Truth with an ever-growing sense of awe, wonder and deep deep gratitude.

### Notes

(1) See *The Gospel Of Grace* and *The Humility Of The Gospel*.

(2) Commented upon in my *James And Other Studies* (London: Pioneer, 1992).

## 3-1-4 Job And David

David in his drive to spiritual maturity had a similar sense: " Such knowledge (the basic knowledge of God which, in the context, he has just outlined) is too *wonderful* for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Ps. 139:6). David doesn't mean that the things of God are too wonderful for him to understand, and he just quits in trying to handle them. Throughout the Psalms, David repeatedly speaks of the *wonder* of God, how he wishes to extol the *wonder* of God, and how he mourns the tragedy of the fact that Israel generally had not grasped the *wonder* of their God. He asks for his eyes to be opened so that the *wonder* of God's ways might be made known to him (Ps. 119:18). The Hebrew word translated " wonder" or " wondrous" was evidently one of David's favourites. Yet he says that although he sees the wonder of the knowledge of God, he feels it is " too wonderful *for me*" - perhaps " for me" is where the emphasis should be. It may be that David spoke of the knowledge of God as being " too wonderful for me" with his eye on Job's experience. If Ps. 139 was written in the

aftermath of his physical and spiritual crisis at the time of Bathsheba, David would have seen himself as coming out of it with the same sense of spiritual growth as Job after his months of crisis: "Now mine eye seeth thee...I am vile...things too wonderful for me" all have a certain ring with the sentiments David expresses after Bathsheba. It can be demonstrated that the repentance and restoration of David after the Bathsheba incident is used, through New Testament allusion, as a prototype for the spiritual growth of each of us. This means that the terrible, crushing humbling of Job, of David, of Moses, must in some way at some time be replicated in the experience of every true saint, who struggles up the same graph of spiritual growth. From each of us there must be wrung the deep, essential realization: "I am vile... I know (*now*) that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee... therefore have I uttered that I understood thee; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not" .

And yet in our humanity, as soon as we are faced with such situations we cry out to God to take them from us; and not only so, when we see our brethren in such positions, or approaching them, we plead *desperately* that they will be spared. And yet ultimately, we must each pass through the valley of the shadows, and learn our lessons. There is nothing wrong with crying out for deliverance- indeed, we are bidden do so. But here is one of the essential paradoxes at the very root of our relationship with God: we know such crises are what we need, and yet we cry out for them never to happen to us, or be taken away. This, it seems to me, is yet one more irreconcilable paradox in spiritual life.

David several times speaks of the need to fear God and 'depart from evil', and the blessedness of the man who does so (Ps. 34:14; 37:27); and Solomon repeats his father repeatedly on this point (Prov. 3:7; 4:27; 13:19; 14:16; 16:6,17). Yet they are surely alluding to Job, who feared God and "eschewed" [s.w. 'depart from'] evil (Job 1:1). Without doubt, these allusions indicate that they saw Job as symbolic of all the righteous. And this is no mere piece of painless Bible exposition; Job in all his turmoil really is the pattern for each one of us, the path through which we each must pass.

### **3-1-5 Job And Christ**

Job's changed attitude to the day of judgment is particularly marked in the above analysis. As his desire for the Lord's revelation in judgment increased, so his talk of suicide declined; Job became less wrapped up in himself, his mind opened out beyond the pettiness of here and now to the ultimate spiritual truth of Christ's coming. The more Job thought on this, the less bitter he became with his 'friends'; the more he realized that ultimately, every disobedience *would* receive its just recompense of reward; and because he knew that he too was a sinner by nature, Job became less concerned with the spiritual failures of others. His initial doubts as to whether there really would be a resurrection subsided as he is driven to not only firmly believe that there will be a resurrection and judgment, but also to desperately *want* that day, to long for it. Paul likewise came to see the day of judgment as an "assurance", a comfort, rather than an inevitable and dreaded event on the horizon of our existence (2 Thess. 1:6-10; Acts 17:31).

As Job's emphasis on the coming of Christ and judgment increased, so his concentration on his present sufferings decreased. His heart was consumed within him with desire for that day (19:27 AVmg.). 2 Tim. 4 can be regarded as Paul's most mature spiritual statement, written as it was just prior to his death. In 2 Tim. 4:1,8, Paul's mind was clearly on the second coming and the certainty of judgment. He realized, in that time of undoubted maturity, that the



common characteristic of all the faithful would be that they all *loved* the appearing of Christ. This isn't, of course, to say that anyone who loves the idea of Christ's coming will thereby be saved. A true love of His appearing is only possible with a correct doctrinal understanding, and also a certain level of moral readiness for His appearing <sup>(1)</sup>. But do we *love* the appearing of Christ as Job did? Is it *really* all we have in life? Is our conscience, our faith in the grace of God, our real belief in the blood of the cross, so deep that we *love* the idea of the coming of judgment, that we would fain *hasten* the day of His coming? The graph constructed above shows how Job's *love* of the Lord's coming grew very rapidly. Before, he was too caught up with bitterness about his unspiritual fellow 'believers', effectively justifying himself in the eyes of his ecclesia and his world, full of passive complaints about his own sufferings... and so he didn't *love* that day as he later came to.

### *The Jagged Graph*

There are some very evident ways in which Job spiritually grew. For example, he originally said that his life previous to his afflictions had not been a life of ease (Job 3:26); but as a result of his suffering, he realized that actually it had been "at ease" (Job 16:12). But analysis of our graph above, if nothing else, reveals that spiritual growth is not a smooth upward curve; neither is there growth in every aspect of our spirituality; and there can even be retrogression in some areas, whilst there is growth in others. Job really is the classic model of all this. Job's realization of his sinfulness doesn't seem to have grown as it might have; his constant appreciation of the greatness of God seems to have centred around His *physical* greatness rather than the power of His grace. He increasingly uses the title "Almighty" for God, perhaps reflecting this <sup>(2)</sup>. His sense of human frailty doesn't seem to have grown as it might have; it seems Job didn't *quite* reach the level of contrition which God intended. I say this for two reasons. Firstly, if Elihu is taken as genuinely speaking on God's behalf- and much of what he says is repeated by God- Job had not reached the appropriate level of humility which he should have done. And secondly, the appearance of Yahweh in the awesome thunderstorm and His subsequent demands of Job seem to have called forth a genuine confession of frailty in Job. Above all, his sufferings led Job to Christ. This is certainly how the record reads. It seems that prior to this, Job had looked away from the weakness of his own nature, and concentrated instead on the coming of judgment day to bring about his own justification and the condemnation of those he perceived to be against him. And yet at the end of it all, at the end of the jagged graph of his spiritual growth, there was a wondrous, wondrous sense of softness in Job, in his final triumph at the end; no bitterness with his God, no bitterness with his brethren, just a deep seated recognition of his weakness and the saving greatness of the Almighty. And in the end, at the very end of it all, this is where we'll be brought to, both in the effect the experience of life has on us (if we respond properly), and also through the effect of the judgment seat. God's hand was in Job's life; He brought him to that final, glorious end. God twice told Job that He was going to demand of him, and receive an answer (38:3; 40:7). I would suggest that God puts the words of repentance to Job, and Job then meekly repeats them: "I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me [the following words]: I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:4-6). This is the *ultimate* spiritual end for us all. Self-abhorrence, repentance, not just a passing niggles of conscience, but *real* repentance, in dust and ashes.

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## Notes

(1) See *Loving His Appearing*.

(2) Note that Job's use of the title "Yahweh" doesn't increase over time. This either means that his appreciation of God's Name didn't grow as it should have done; or it suggests that physical use of the name "Yahweh" isn't of itself an indicator of spiritual growth.

## 3-2-1 The Conversion Of Job

### Introduction

It is probable that many Bible readers have come to perceive the book of Job as largely revolving around the identity of the satan, and the problem of suffering. Subconsciously, it is easy to feel that the book has an opening two chapters concerning the satan, and then a mass of complicated dialogue between Job and the friends, ending with God's speeches concerning the wonder of the natural world, and then Job's justification. Such a view misses the whole point of the book: "How can a man be just with God?" (Job 4:17 R.V.mg.; 9:2; 25:4). Job's growth in understanding this is the main theme; and the many applications for ourselves are independent of who the satan is, or *exactly why* God permits suffering.

Job was a "perfect" man, whose moral integrity was recognized by God (1:1). Yet he suffered greatly. The theological perspective of both Job and the friends seemed to lead them to feel that suffering was a direct response to sin, and blessing was therefore proportionate to righteousness. This created the spiritual and intellectual dilemma for both Job and the friends, which their long speeches so painfully reveal. Indeed, it seems that Job's lack of *understanding* was as much a cause of the agitated depression he developed, as the very *physical* extent of the trials he experienced. That Job was indeed depressed can be seen by the vast number of times Job speaks of "I" or "myself". There are some 40 occurrences of these words in Chapter 29 alone. Those seeking to understand the relationship between faith and depression would do well to examine the record of Job, before turning to the psychology of a God-forsaking world.

### Longing For Christ

Understanding the real import of the speeches rests largely on a correct understanding of Elihu. Job longed for one like Elihu, who could reconcile God with Job's righteous life, his sufferings, and all his intellectual doubts. Elihu points out that he is the fulfilment of Job's need (33:6 cp. 9:33). With this, Job has no disagreement. Elihu is to be seen as a type of Christ (see later). The speeches of Job therefore make us see the desperation of man's need for Elihu/Jesus; especially the need of those who lived under the Old Covenant. Job's weakness, morally, physically and intellectually, becomes representative of the weakness of each of us. We breathe a sigh of relief (as Job did too) when Elihu appears on the scene. This matches the moral and intellectual "rest to your souls" which the true believer in Christ experiences; rest from the weight of the mental burdens which the spiritual life imposes. Job's greatest pain was not physical; it was the pain of being misunderstood by those close to him (e.g. his wife, relatives and the friends), the ingratitude of those around him, the agony of knowing that no one had been down the mental path he was being forced along. He longed for his grief to be written in a book, for true recognition to be given to his *desire* for righteousness. He could not turn to his friends, who must have been close to him spiritually at one point. Eliphaz cruelly mocked his spiritual isolation: "Call now, if there be any that will

answer thee; and to which of the saints (in the ecclesia) wilt thou turn?" (5:1). Job's desire for real spiritual friendship grew so intense that he comes to visualize an ideal friend, who would not only appreciate his every grief, but who would offer more than commiseration. He came to long for one who would reconcile him with the righteousness of God. Naturally, he would have had in mind Abraham's promised seed. His mind was therefore being prepared to desire the coming of Messiah; in prospect, he was developing a personal understanding and appreciation of the Lord Jesus. In all this, Job is our glorious example. There can be very few who have not experienced the terror of complete spiritual isolation, longing for understanding and true appreciation, but finding none within the ecclesia whom they can turn to. As we look back from our traumas to the glorious reality of Christ's existence, so Job looked forward to it.

### *Yahweh The Saviour*

It has been observed that the Covenant name of Yahweh is not used in the speeches of Job and the friends. Instead they speak of God as *El* (power) or *Shaddai* (the fruitful one). This shows how they perceived God as the awesome power of the universe, the one who granted their physical blessings in response to their obedience to Him. 'God' was like a profitable insurance policy. But *Yahweh* is fundamentally a saviour-God, one who manifests Himself in men for their salvation, and is supremely manifested in the Son. Significantly, we are told in chapter 42 that Job finally spoke to *Yahweh*; it was to Him that he said: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee" (42:5). He came to understand God's Name, His personality, in far greater fullness. He came to appreciate far more the extent of God's manifestation in the true friend which he looked forward to. Our sufferings and traumas have a like effect, if we respond as Job did. Note that both Jacob and Samson, in their time of spiritual maturity, also reached a higher appreciation of the names of God. Reflect likewise how Abraham told Isaac that "elohim yir'eh", the elohim would provide the sacrifice; but after the wonder of the ram being provided, he named the place "Yhwh yir'eh" (Gen. 22:14). The experience of this foreshadowing of the cross led him to know the Yahweh Name more fully; and for this reason it can be shown that the cross was the supreme means of that Name being declared to men.

### *Job: Preface To The Law?*

The exasperating speeches of the friends also highlight the need for Elihu, and also the inability of human reasoning to bring about justification with God. Much of their reasoning was repeated by exponents of the Mosaic Law as a basis for salvation. The connections between the book of Job and the Mosaic Law have been shown elsewhere [\(1\)](#). It seems significant that the book was probably written by Moses in Midian just prior to the giving of the Mosaic law (there are very strong Jewish traditions to this effect). Job was therefore placed into circulation amongst God's people to prepare them for the giving of the Mosaic law. Those who perceived the mind of the Spirit would realize that they were being taught that cold obedience to a set of commands was not the basis of justification with God. In the book of Job, human moral 'perfection' was shown to be both unattainable, and irrelevant to bridging the gap between sinful man and a righteous God.

There is Biblical evidence that the drama of Job occurred at some time after Abraham, and before the exodus, thus confirming the traditional Jewish dating:

- The Sabeans of 1:15 were probably the descendants of Sheba, Abraham's grandson (Gen. 25:1-3). For his children to grow into a separate tribe, the events of Job must have happened some generations before the Law was given.
- Eliphaz was of the tribe of Teman, Esau's grandson (Gen. 36:10,11). For Teman's children to be called 'Temanites' rather than 'the sons of Teman' would have required a few generations.
- The Septuagint states that Job was the "Jobab" of 1 Chron.1:44,45, who lived five generations after Abraham.
- Job had 10 children by one wife and then another ten by her- sounds like pre-flood times
- Job uses very early titles for God.

### *Clear Conscience?*

Job was a “perfect” man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a ‘perfect’ man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4). Consider too how the palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to teach others that Jesus had the power to forgive sins (Mt. 9:2-6). The 'perfection' of Job before the trials is something to marvel at: "That man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (1:1). He was even considerate for the very feelings of the soil as he ploughed his land (31:38-40); such was his sensitivity. And frequently, Job protests the clarity of his conscience. The more we can appreciate the high level of Job's righteousness, the more we will understand how good conscience and obedience *alone* are not the basis of salvation. God emphasizes that He was not looking for any specific sin of Job's to be revealed, as a result of the trials (35:15). The New Testament's revelation of Christ's righteousness likewise leads us to the conclusion that we lack both the self knowledge, and the appreciation of God's righteousness, to be able to say that we have a totally clear conscience. Paul also emphasized his clear conscience (Acts 23:1), yet he concluded: "I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. 4:4 R.S.V.). No amount of mental searching can "find out God...unto perfection" (Job 11:7). Holding 'the truth' alone is not the basis of salvation. Understanding those doctrinal truths is quite rightly the basis of our *fellowship* with each other; but not of our salvation. God's fellowship with a man is not fundamentally because that man holds true doctrine. It is because that man appreciates God's righteousness, his own sinfulness, and the mediatorial work of Christ between us and God. The final speeches of God and Elihu brought home the point that the righteousness achieved by man was not comparable with God's righteousness (e.g. 40:7-10). We are left to draw the conclusion: that the only way for man to be just with God is through the imputation of God's righteousness to man.

Discerning and feeling ones own sinfulness is an undoubted part of conversion. Elihu on God's behalf rebukes Job for thinking that "I am clean without transgression" (33:9,12); and Elihu's exhortation to Job to say "I have sinned" (33:27) is obeyed by Job, as if he accepted the truth of what Elihu was saying. When Job finally lays his hand upon his mouth (40:4), he is only doing what he had earlier told the friends to do in recognition of their folly (21:5).

## *The Atonement*

This leads the student of Job to a finer appreciation of Christ's work. If he had been born of human parents, he could theoretically have attained as much righteousness as was possible for a man to achieve. Perhaps Job was also one of the few (the only one?) in this position. But that righteousness would not have matched that of God. Christ had to be the begotten Son of God, so that "God was in Christ...that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:19,21). In a sense, God's righteousness was given to Christ (Ps. 72:1), which is why He can judge men (Ps. 72:2). An ordinary man, even if he were perfect, would not be able to truly judge other men on God's behalf. Job was brought to realize all these things, through his sufferings. It is quite possible that it was also through the extent of his 'undeserved' sufferings that Christ, whom in some ways Job typified, also came to appreciate the necessity and intricacy of the atonement which God achieved through him.

However, chiefly Job is typical of us rather than Christ. A brief summary of his characteristics brings home the similarities between Job and many a steady believer:

- A good conscience
- Knowing true doctrine
- Vexing his righteous soul at the worldliness of his family and the sin of the surrounding world
- Putting his hand deeply in his pocket to support any good cause (29:12)
- Rigidly shunning idolatry and sexual sin (ch. 31)
- Enjoying abundant material blessings, which he recognized were from God.

His trials brought him to realize that whilst these things were not irrelevant to God, none of them alone were the basis of salvation, or proof that he was acceptable with God. He was brought to question whether he really *believed* the basics of the One Faith; or whether he just knew those things as abstract pieces of doctrine. That God is good, that he *is* love, that man is sinful and abhorrent to God, that there will be a resurrection and just judgment; all these things Job was driven to either reject or believe more desperately, more urgently, more intensely. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee" (42:5). In our re-conversions, we go through the same process. With Job, it *was* a process. During it, there were wild fluctuations in Job's faith; from denying that there would ever be a resurrection, to the matchless confession of faith in this found in 19:25-27. Job's tender love and appreciation of God ("He sheweth Himself marvellous upon me", ) is countered by his rage against God for *hating* him (16:9). Such wild fluctuations indicate more than the unstable brain chemistry of clinical depression. They are part of the spiritual adolescence which we each go through, in some form, as we go through our re-conversions, growing up into the maturity of the spirit of Christ. The briefest examination of our own ways, coupled with a true appreciation of human sinfulness, will show that our spiritual level wildly fluctuates. How many times have we walked away from close fellowship with Yahweh and His Son at the memorial table, to then do the grossest despite to the spirit of grace- even if it be 'just' in a hard word or thought.

## **The Psychology Of The Friends**

The psychology of the friends is profitable to analyze. Job was the “greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:3), the Hebrew implying the eldest, the most senior. The friends were older than Job, and take pleasure in reminding him of the wisdom of the ‘elders’. He had risen above his place, got too great too quick, and therefore they were intent on proving to him that actually he was not so great, he had sinned, and they by their supposed wisdom and understanding were really greater than him. And they bent their theology, their guesswork as to his possible sins, to that subconscious end- of justifying themselves and pulling Job down beneath them by their interpretations of his misfortunes. What this indicates is that during their period of ‘friendship’ previously, they had nursed unconscious feelings of jealousy against him. The lesson for us is to re-examine our friendships, our loyalties, to see if they carry the same feature; a desire to ‘be in with’ the popular and the successful, to catch some reflected glory. The conversion of Job led him to understand the fickleness of his friends, and to pray for them in it.

The friends ended up playing God. They presumed to judge Job according to their own limited and inaccurate theology, by assuming that he must have sinned in order to receive such terrible trials from God. Zophar claims to have revealed Job’s guilt, and then says that “the heavens”- an elipsis for “God”- have revealed Job’s guilt (Job 20:27). Job figured out what was happening when he complained to them: “Why do you hound me as though you were divine?” (Job 19:22 NAB). But something good came out of all this for Job. The way the friends played God set up a kind of dialectic, from which Job came to perceive more powerfully who God really was- and, moreover, how in fact this God would ultimately save him rather than destroy and condemn him, as the friends falsely thought. By ‘dialectic’ I mean that the way the friends presented a false picture and manifestation of God’s judgment led Job to react against it, and thereby come to a true understanding of God’s judgment. Having stated his perception that the friends are indeed playing God (Job 19:22), Job goes straight on to make a solemn and important statement. The solemnity of it is witnessed by his request that what he was now going to say would be inscribed in rock with the point of a diamond as a permanent record (Job 19:24). And that solemn statement was that he knew that God would be his vindicator at the last day, that he would “see God”, that he would have a bodily resurrection, and that at that time it would be the friends who would be condemned (Job 19:25-29). This supreme statement of faith, hope and understanding was elicited from Job because of the rejection he suffered from his friends, and the way they so inaccurately and wrongly played God in wrongly condemning him on God’s behalf. Job thus came to long for the judgment seat. There are few believers who have reached that level of intimacy with God- but Job did, thanks to the way his friends so cruelly turned against him. And this is a major lesson we can take from being the victim of slander, misunderstanding and misjudgment by our own brethren. Job 23:3 perhaps epitomizes this desire of Job for judgment day: “Oh, that today I might find him, that I might come to his judgment seat!” (NAB). He wanted the judgment seat to come that very day! The invisible hand of God is working in every life that suffers from ones’ brethren ‘playing God’ in false judgment of us... to lead us to this wonderful and blessed attitude.

## **Imputed Righteousness**

In the end, Job was saved by grace, and by righteousness imputed. God’s graciousness towards Job’s hard words of anger is perhaps an insight into how He judges the words and actions of people in grief or depression. God justifies Job to the friends as having spoken that



which was "right", even though Job spoke much that wasn't right, and shook his fist at God. It may be relevant in this context to note that God condemned Edom / Esau because "his anger did tear perpetually" (Am. 1:11)- as if He was willing to understand the gut reaction of anger [in Esau / Edom's case, over Jacob's deception]; but He does expect us to work through the stages of it, not to be caught up on the 'anger' stage of our reactions to loss and grief.

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## Notes

(1) See *Job in James And Other Studies*. This article also shows how Rom. 3:23-26 is alluding to Job 33:23-28, as if Elihu is to be read as typical of Christ. Note in addition how Dt. 4:32 = Job 8:8.

## 3-2-3 The Role Of Elihu In Job

We have spoken much about the vital place of Elihu in understanding the message of Job. As typical of Christ, *he* was the resolution to all Job's problems. His speeches produced a true self-realization within Job, rather than compounding his agony, as the words of the friends did. Comparison of the following passages will show how Elihu is indeed God's representative; note that his words are not rebuked by God at the end, whilst those of the friends are:

Elihu	God
34:35	38:2; 42:3
33:13	40:2
33:2	40:8
33:9	35:2

## Words, Words

There is much connection between Elihu and the word of God, as there is between Christ and the word. It may be that Elihu actually wrote the book of Job (32:15,16 imply this). *He* was therefore the fulfilment of Job's desire that someone would sympathetically write his grief and record his mental agonies (19:23). Of few other Bible characters, apart from the Lord Jesus, is it so emphasized that they spoke God's words. It might be possible to speculate as to the tone of voice in which Elihu spoke. By contrast to the friends' "hard speeches", Elihu assures Job at the start of their dialogue: "My fear shall not terrify thee, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee" (33:7 LXX) <sup>(1)</sup>. A similar contrast is pointed by Elihu's claim to be speaking as a result of God's spirit within him (32:8), whereas Zophar and the friends spoke from their *own* spirit (20:3). Apart from God's specific confirmation of Elihu's words, Job evidently perceived Elihu to be the answer to his pleas to find God. Job's desire for "a daysman" was answered by Elihu: "I am according to thy wish". Job did not dispute this. If one of the friends had claimed to be such a "daysman", we can imagine Job's indignant denial of it!

Job's words in 23:3-6 repay examination in this regard: "Oh that I knew where I might find (God)! that I might come even to His seat!. I would *order* my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments...Will He plead against me with his great power? No." God, and Elihu,

*did* plead against Job by recounting God's power. When Elihu was established in Job's mind as God's true representative, he found that he had nothing to say, as he thought he would have. Elihu seems to refer back to these words when he challenges the dumfounded Job: "If thou hast anything to say, answer me...if thou canst answer me, set thy words in *order* before me" (33:32,5). Job several times spoke of how he would fully explain himself to God, if he found Him. Yet in the presence of God and Elihu, he finds that all the words dry up. Words became irrelevant. All he can do is behold the majesty of God's righteousness, and declare his own unrighteousness. That spiritual pinnacle of Job still lies ahead for the majority of us. The desire to speak is a desire to express our *own* thoughts. Words are a construct which can trap us. Only *God's* words can liberate. There is a *wordless* element in being truly humbled before the Almighty. Job's sacrifice of a truly broken spirit was worth more than thousands of apposite words. Job had dimly imagined that this would be so: "Teach me, and I will hold my tongue; and cause me to understand wherein I have erred" (6:24). When Elihu *did* teach him and show him that he was erring by *nature* rather than specific sin, Job truly held his tongue: "I will lay mine hand upon my mouth...I will not answer...I will proceed no further" (40:4,5; notice the threefold repetition). This is one of several examples of Job knowing the truth in abstract theory, but not appreciating it until the mixture of reflection on his trials and Elihu / Jesus, brought it home. Thus Elihu's words silenced and humbled Job, preparing him for the direct speech of God to Job. Likewise, the words of Christ lead men to a personal hearing of the Father's words.

### *Representation*

The degree to which Elihu was Job's exact representative helps us appreciate the precision of our Lord's representation of us. Indeed this appears to be the role of Elihu in Job. The LXX brings this out well. 33:5,6 give the picture of Elihu asking Job to physically stand up against him, back to back, to bring home how identical they were: "Stand against me, and I will stand against thee. Thou art formed out of the clay as also I: we have been formed out of the same substance". It seems that Elihu had been through Job's very experiences, of 'death' and rising again: "He has delivered *my* soul from death, that my life may praise him in the light. Hearken, Job, and hear *me*" (33:30,31 LXX). And this is exactly what Job did.

### *True Empathy*

The more we appreciate the representative nature of our Lord Jesus, the more we will really believe that we *have* a true friend, one who can truly *empathize* rather than just sympathize with our sufferings. It has been rightly said that appreciating the atonement is the very crux of our day to day living in Christ. Because we are individual personalities, it is impossible for any other believer to *totally* empathize with us. You might break a leg, and so might I, but I cannot fully enter into how you feel about it. 'I know *just* how you feel' so often just provokes even deeper pain. Yet if we believe properly in Christ, then we will truly believe that He *does* empathize, as Job felt towards Elihu as opposed to the friends, and the "saints" of his ecclesia (5:1). Study of the atonement ceases to become abstract once we realize that Christ really *does* empathize *completely* with us, in a way in which no other person can.

We are one Spirit with Christ (1 Cor. 6:17). He is in us, and we in him. "The spirit itself maketh intercession for us..." (Rom. 8:26) occurs in the context of "the Spirit" referring to the spiritual mind within us. Yet evidently Christ is our only intercessor. "The spirit itself maketh intercession for us" in that our spiritual man is totally one with the spirit of Christ. Such is the unity between us that Paul can speak of our own spirit making intercession for us!



The *wonder* of it! Yet all this stems from a correct appreciation of the doctrine of representation as opposed to substitution. How *can* some say that this doctrinal aspect is unimportant? It is at the heart of our moment by moment relationship with the Lord Jesus, as the representative nature of the Mediator was at the core of Job's new spiritual life. Because we are "one Spirit" with Christ, we can better appreciate how Christ can truly empathize with our every situation in life, even though He personally may not have experienced it in his own flesh. The degree to which Christ is "The Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 R.V.) is perhaps not recognized by us as it should be. How many conceive of 'Christ' as a piece of doctrine, a human being who somehow ascended to Heaven, where He rigidly sits until His return?

### *No Platitudes*

Elihu was no friend of platitudes. In order to truly help Job by justifying him, Elihu had to persuade Job of his total sinfulness, and the inability of his own righteousness to save him. One could almost say that Elihu chose to dwell on the bad things about Job, rather than the many good aspects of his character. Yet the 'bad' things were all facets of Job's human nature, rather than any specific sins. Elihu's emphasis shows how serious sin is, in God's sight. In doing so, Elihu appears to misquote some of Job's words. Had the friends done this, we can imagine Job flaring up about it. But never does he challenge Elihu. The reason is that the Spirit within Elihu was recalling not only Job's words, but the thoughts and motives behind them (e.g. 9:22,23 cp. 34:5-9, and 10:2; 13:23 cp. 34:31,32) <sup>(2)</sup>. All of Job was made naked and opened unto the eyes of both God and himself. Elihu was not afraid to convict Job of the implications of the off-hand words which he had spoken. Thus he makes the point that by justifying himself rather than recognizing God's righteousness, Job was effectively saying that God was *unrighteous* (33:2). We need the re-conversion experience of Job to realize the sinfulness of our every off-hand sin. Appreciating the seriousness of sin is one of our weakest points. It is quite possible that *all* trial has this ultimate purpose. Only from knowing our sinful selves can we appreciate God's righteousness, and the wonder of the atonement. It is possible that some brands of Christianity have driven underground any form of self-knowledge. To appreciate oneself is not necessarily pride. Humility, as the opposite of pride, does not mean driving 'self' underground to the point that we pretend it isn't there. Job seems to have gone wrong here. He drove the very thought of sinfulness out of himself to such a degree that he failed to appreciate his own *natural* alienation from the Almighty. He came to reverence God's physical power and majesty rather than His moral majesty. David got the balance right when he reflected: "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains" (Ps. 36:6). He saw God's moral strength reflected in the massive physicality of God's creation. And this was the purpose of Job being taken on a tour of some of God's creations in the end. He had previously prided himself on his appreciation, as he thought, of God's hand in creation, and how creation revealed the greatness of God (e.g. chapter 28). But now he was taught that what he thought he so appreciated, he really didn't; and he was taught the true knowledge of God. Unclean animals are brought to his attention in ch. 39; he then repents in 40:2-4, as if he finally saw in them symbols of himself. And then chapters 40 and 41 go on to speak of the joy of clean animals in their relationship with God, and the inability of man to come between them and their maker.

### *Climax*

And so the words of God and Elihu brought Job to a shuddering spiritual climax. From his heart he cried: "I am vile...I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes...I am melted" (LXX). It was concerning this matchless confession that God could say that Job had "spoken

of me the thing which is right(eousness) " (42:8). God swept over the times when Job shook his fist at God, imputing righteousness to him on behalf of this confession. Thus the Spirit later speaks of the long-enduring patience of Job (James 5:11); God was able to look on his good side rather than the bad side, due to Job's confession of that bad side. To confess our sinfulness properly is to declare, by implication, righteous things about God.

**" I am vile...I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes...I am melted " (LXX).**

The more we enter into that man's thoughts and experience- and enter in we *are* bidden- the more those words come as a breakthrough, a victory. One can weep and almost cheer as we read them, " I am vile...I *abhor myself*" . One senses the Sons of God in Heaven shouting for joy, the Father's Spirit exalting, Elihu inwardly grinning to himself as he mopped his brow, the *triumph of the spirit of Christ and of His cross*, the wordless, wordless joy of salvation and self-realization starting to dawn within Job, as amidst the desperation of his self-hate and shame, he was born again <sup>(3)</sup>. Earlier, his reins had been consumed within him with longing for the day when he would see God (19:26,27); and finally even in this life, he came to see God for himself (42:5). He had thought this would only be at the resurrection (19:26), seeing a full relationship with God was, he felt, impossible in this life (28:12,20); but he came to see that even in this life, with the joy of a good conscience, the principle is even now realisable. He exalted that now, his eye saw God. It wasn't all abstractly reserved for the Kingdom. In our trials and losses, or in our bitter realization of our own sins and fundamental sinfulness <sup>(4)</sup>, we really *can* go through the re-conversion which Job experienced. Some of the last words in the record are that Job gave his daughters an equal inheritance with his sons (Job 42:15)- something which would have been unusual in those times. Through all his sufferings, Job came to see the value and meaning of persons before God, be they male or female; he overcame the background culture, the thinking of his surrounding society, and openly showed to all the immense value he had come to place upon each and every human being, regardless of their gender.

" Lo, *all* these things worketh God oftentimes with man" (33:29). For all on that road, having *all* these things worked out within them- God be with us.

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## Notes

(1) Compare this with how the Angel spoke the " fiery law" of Moses in a relaxed, friendly way, " as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33:11).

(2) This is an important principle to appreciate. It explains why many New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are no *precise* quotations of the Hebrew text; and why some of them impose interpretations which appear to be out of context. The *Spirit* is mixing interpretation with quotation, as Elihu did when quoting Job's words.

(3) The record of Job's later life in Job 42, especially in the LXX, imply a complete new beginning, with a new wife, new children, animals and lands- with a life-span to match a new life starting after his trials ended.

(4) We do not necessarily have to experience physical loss to have the Job conversion. David's confession of sin in Ps. 51:3,4 is packed with Job allusions; as if Job's physical trials brought about the same effect as David's full recognition of his sin. Such recognition ought to be easily possible for each of us, regardless of our 'physical' experiences in life.

### 3.3 Job In Other Scripture

#### 3-3-1 Job In Other Scripture

Job must be one of the most enigmatic books for Bible students; what we seem to lack is a framework around which to develop our interpretation of it. Such a framework should be provided by following up the connections between Job and other Scripture. It is the purpose of this study to trace some of these connections: by doing so we will come to see that Job and his friends represent the Jewish system and the mentality behind it, although in the same way as the Lord Jesus was associated with Israel (for example in the suffering servant prophecies of Isaiah, which apply to both Christ and Israel), so Job is also a type of Christ. We are going to suggest that Job represents both apostate Jewry and our Lord Jesus, which is typical of the way all God's people exhibit the reasoning and weakness of the flesh whilst simultaneously striving for the imitation of Christ (cp. Rom.7:13-24). Compare too how Saul, Jonah and Adam represent Christ although they also sinned.

Although Job did not speak wrongly about God (42:7;2:10) and kept patiently speaking the word of God despite the mockery it brought from the friends (James 5:10,11), this does not mean that Job or all that he said was blameless. The friends are not reprimanded for speaking wrongly about Job, but about God. Thus there was probably a fair degree of truth in their accusations concerning Job. Elihu also severely rebukes him, and unlike the three friends he is not rebuked for anything in the final analysis by God in Job 42 [\(1\)](#), not to mention the accusation of 'darkening counsel without knowledge' (38:2) by the Lord Himself, backed up by four chapters of heavy reprimand of Job's reliance on human strength and wisdom. This led to Job retracting much of what he had said: "I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth...I will not answer...I will proceed no further...I uttered that I understood not...wherefore I abhor myself and repent" (40:4,5; 42:3-6). This clearly establishes that much of Job's reasoning was faulty, although what he spoke before God was correct [\(2\)](#). Job was a prophet (Job 29:4 cp. 15:8;23:12; Prov.3:32; Amos 3:7; the secret of God being with him made Job a prophet) and it is in his role as such that he is commended in James 5:10,11- i.e. for the words concerning God which he spoke. The words for which God and Elihu rebuked him were therefore about other things. Elihu accused him of speaking "without knowledge" (34:35), which Job admitted he had (42:3).

#### Job And The Restoration

We'll demonstrate below how Job is set up in later Scripture as a symbol of the priesthood, Judah and the Jews. We'll suggest that the book of Job was compiled or re-written at the time of Hezekiah; and yet I suggest that the number of connections between Job and the restoration prophets suggest it may have been further re-written under Divine inspiration [along with much of the extant Old Testament] whilst Judah were in captivity in Babylon. Job thus becomes a symbol of Judah in captivity; as they sat by the rivers of Babylon, mocked by their neighbours, so Job sat in captivity and was mocked. He was released from his captivity (Job 42:10) as a symbol of how Judah could be released from hers (Ps. 126:1). As the fire of God fell upon him and consumed his sons and daughters (Job 1:16), so the same Hebrew words are used to describe how God's fire of fury fell upon Zion and consumed it, along with

her sons and daughters (Neh. 2:3,13; Ps. 78:63; Jer. 17:27; Lam. 2:3; 4:11; Ez. 23:25). Indeed the idea of Divine fire consuming sinners appears three times in Job (Job 15:34; 20:26; 22:20). As Job was 'broken down' by God (Job 16:14), so the same Hebrew word is used to describe how God brought about the 'breaking down' of Jerusalem's walls (Neh. 1:3; 2:13). As Job was "touched" by God's hand (Job 1:11,19; 2:5; 4:5; 19:21), so Judah in captivity were "touched" by the Gentile world (Zech. 2:8 s.w.).

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## Notes

(1) Notice how God confirms what Elihu says: 34:35 cp. 38:2;42:3; 33:13 cp.40:2; 33:2 cp. 40:8; 33:9 cp. 35:2. Elihu's description of God's inspiration of him, resulting in it being painful not to speak forth the words given, recalls Jeremiah's experience as the result of his inspiration: "I am full of the fury of the Lord; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out..His word was...shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing" (Jer. 6:11; 20:9). Elihu's words are so similar that there must be a connection: "I am full of words (Hebrew), the Spirit (of inspiration) within me constraineth me. Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles" (Job 32:18,19). This similarity between these two young prophets (n.b. Job 32:6) may be because Jeremiah was reprimanding Israel, whilst Elihu was doing so to Job and the friends who represented Israel.

(2) The problem of reconciling the rebuke of Job's words with the statement that he has spoken what is right about God as opposed to the friends (42:7) is the same as the frequent pronouncement that some kings of Judah walked blamelessly before God exactly as David did, when there is clear evidence in the record that this was not so. This may be because God imputes righteousness to a believer's whole life if his final acts are acceptable (cp. Ez.18:27,28). "Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath" may refer to the response of the friends and Job to the rebukes of Elihu and the manifestation of God's power in the thunderstorm which must have been witnessed by the friends as well as by Job. Maybe they made some unrecorded response about God which was not right, whereas Job's supreme recognition of God's righteousness and humbling of himself was speaking that which was right about God. It has to be admitted that it is hard to understand all that Job says in the book about God as being "right", and he is specifically rebuked by God for his words.

## 3-3-2 Job As Priest

It can be shown that James read Job in a bad light insofar as he saw him as a type of the rich, Judaist-influenced Jews in the first century ecclesia who proudly despised their brethren. Eliphaz says that Job's sudden problems amid his prosperity were what would happen to all the wicked (15:21). This seems to be alluded to in 1 Thess.5:3 concerning the sudden destruction of rich, spiritually self confident believers. Job's words of 30:1 certainly smack of arrogance: " Whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock" . This would mean that his merciful acts to the poor were done in a 'charitable' spirit, thinking that such public acts declared him outwardly righteous: " I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy (by his charity). I (thereby) put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgement was as a robe and a diadem" (29:13,14).

This has clear reference to the clothing of the Mosaic High Priest with his outward show of righteousness. Job was probably the family priest, seeing that the head of the household appears to have been the priest in patriarchal times; thus Job could offer a sacrifice for the sins of his children (1:5). Job's likening of himself to a moth-eaten garment due to God's changing of his circumstances (13:26-28) must connect with the disciples of the Law as an old, decaying garment in Heb.8:13. The priestly clothing " for glory and for beauty" (Ex.28:2) is certainly alluded to by God when He challenges Job " Deck thyself *now* (i.e. like you used to) with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty...then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee" (40:10,14)- as if God is saying that Job's previous life represented the Mosaic priestly system with its external pomp and implication that ones own righteousness can bring salvation (" that thine own right hand can save thee" ). Job's humiliation meant that, by implication, he no longer felt able to clothe himself with the priestly garments of glory and beauty; he had learnt the spirit of the Christian dispensation, to trust on the grace of God rather than a system of salvation

depending on personal righteousness. The descriptions of Job rending his " mantle" (priestly robes) recalls that of Caiaphas; his falling on his face perhaps indicates his recognition that reliance on the outward show of the Law needed to be replaced by humble faith. Job thus described his experiences as God leading " priests away stripped" of their robes (Job 12:19 N.I.V.).

### *Job the priest*

The priest's duty was to expound the word of God (Mal.2:7; Hos.4:6): Job being a prophet also meant that he had a prominent role to play in the instruction of the people. It appears that as a prophet he was faithful- he spoke what God said. The friends were also prophets, seeing that in 15:8,9 they say that they have been given the same " secret" (i.e. inspiration) and knowledge of God as Job had. However, they did not accurately speak forth what they were inspired with as Job did (42:7). But as the priests of Israel misled the people by faulty reasoning ostensibly based on the word, so Job too was in error as a priest. Eliphaz told Job " Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I: yea, thine own lips testify against thee" (15:6). This is picked up by Christ in his words to the one-talent man in the parable: " Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee" . The man was condemned for keeping his talent (his spiritual knowledge of the word) to himself rather than sharing it with others. Eliphaz proceeds to make the same rebuke of Job- although he had " heard the secret of God" , which we have seen implies the gift of prophesying the word, he " restrained wisdom unto thyself" (v.8). This confirms that Christ's one-talent man of the parable is based on Job, thus making him represent the rejected at judgement. No doubt the primary application of the one-talent man was to the Jewish believers of Christ's day who did not capitalize on the talent they already had. The taking away of the talent and its being given to others recalls the Kingdom (i.e. the Gospel of the Kingdom) being taken from the Jews and being given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it (cp. trading the talent).

In Job 9:21 and by implication in other places, Job effectively says that there is no point in serving God or striving for obedience to God. This is what the priests of Israel later said: " It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?" (Mal.3:14). Elihu claimed that Job " hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself in God" (34:9)- i.e. keep the commands of God, seeing that the Hebrew for " delight" often occurs in the context of obedience to the word. The Malachi passage is more specifically alluding to Job 21:7,15: " What is the Almighty that we should serve Him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?" . These are the words of Job, complaining about the prosperity of the wicked who had such an attitude, and the carefree happiness of their lives: " Their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ" (21:11,12). It is in this that the Malachi context is so significant, for Mal.3:15 continues : " We (the Israelites) call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up" . This was also Job's view. Notice that Job is probably implying that his prosperous three friends were among the wicked whom he is describing, thus associating them with the corrupt Jewish priesthood.

### **3-3-3 Job and Israel**

There are a number of passages which associate Job with Israel in general terms. We will first consider these and then proceed to analyse how the reasoning of Job showed the same characteristics as the Jewish system in the first century. It has been suggested by J.W.Thirtle in " *Old Testament Problems*" (worth a read by every serious student) that the book of Job

was re-written and compiled by Hezekiah's men who at the same time produced the Psalter (all under inspiration, of course). The copious connections between the suffering servant prophecies of Isaiah and the book of Job (take a glance down the A.V. margins of Job) are therefore more easily understandable- the account of Job's sufferings and vindication amidst opposition was framed in language that pointed forward to the similar suffering (through the same disease?) and vindication of Hezekiah. The suffering servant of Isaiah refers to both Israel and the Lord Jesus, exactly as the parable of Job also does. The connections between Isaiah 40 and the book of Job are especially marked. The more obvious are tabulated here:

<i>Isaiah 40</i>	<i>Job</i>
:14	21:22
:17	6:18
:22	9:8
:23	12:21
:24	14:8
:26	25:3
:27	3:23
:31	29:20

The link between Is.40:27 and Job 3:23 is most significant: " Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God?" . These are the words of Job in 3:23: " Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" . Thus Job represents Israel; and because " Israel" in Isaiah also refers to our Lord, we can make the equation Job=Israel=Jesus. The distancing between himself and God which Christ felt on the cross (Mt.27:46) is thus foreshadowed by Job feeling the same- and like Christ, it was a trial from God, not a specific punishment for sin.

Another telling point of contact with Isaiah is found in 4:3-5. Job had " strengthened the weak hands..and..the feeble knees. But now it (the weakness and feeble knees) is come upon thee, and thou faintest" . This is picked up in Is.35:3,4: " Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful (Heb.'hasty'- both are relevant to Job) heart, Be strong...behold, your God will come" . Thus Job is a type of the weak-hearted Jews, and his final deliverance thus points forward to the coming of the Lord. The return of the prodigal son foreshadowed the final repentance of the Jews (note how that parable is based on Gen.43:16;45:14,15). But Job's decision to say " I have sinned...and it profited me not" (33:27) also connects with the prodigal son (Lk.15:21), thus again associating him with the Jews in their suffering and repentance. Isaiah's earlier description of Israel as " from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness...but wounds, and bruises and



putrifying sores" (1:6) is couched in the picture of Job " with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown" (Job 2:7). Note too that the description of Miriam in Num.12:12 LXX is quoting from Job 3:16 LXX; as if both Job and Miriam represented apostate Israel.

There are also links between Job and Deuteronomy 28, again connecting Job with a faithless Israel:

#### *Deut. 28*

:29 " Thou shalt grope at noonday,  
as the blind gropeth in darkness

:29 " The blind"

:35 " The Lord shall smite thee  
in the knees and in the legs with a  
sore botch from the sole of thy foot  
unto the top of thy head"

:37 " An astonishment...

and a byword, among all nations"

:67 " In the morning thou shalt say,  
Would God it were even! and at  
even thou shalt say, Would God it  
were morning"

All the Jews' blessings from God  
were to be taken away and their  
children cursed:" Thou shalt beget  
sons and daughters but thou shalt  
not enjoy them" (v.41). " Cattle..  
flocks of thy sheep" (v.51).

#### *Job*

" They (the wicked; although the  
friends are getting at Job when  
they speak of them) meet with  
darkness in the daytime and grope  
in the noonday as in the night"  
(5:14).

Job had fits of blindness (22:10,11)

" Boils from the sole of his foot  
unto his crown" (2:7) were inflicted  
by satan. " The Lord" in Dt.28 was  
the wilderness Angel; which is one  
of several indications that Job's  
satan was an Angel...

" Mark me (Job) and be astonished"  
(21:5;17:8).

" A byword of the people"  
(17:6;30:9). " Now am I their song"  
(30:9).

" When I lie down, I say, When  
shall I arise, and the night be  
gone? and I am full of tossings to  
and fro until the dawning" (7:4).

Ditto for Job

" The Lord shall bring a nation  
against thee (v.49);

The Sabeans/ Chaldeans-  
forerunners of the Babylonians and  
Assyrians who punished Israel.

Again, these are only the more evident connections. In similar vein God (in the Angel of the presence) " was turned to be (Israel's) enemy" because of their sin. Job complains that his satan-Angel has " turned to be cruel to me" (30:21 AVmg.). Job comments that if the children of the wicked " be multiplied, it is for the sword" (27:14). Seeing his own children had been destroyed, Job presumably was accepting that he was among the " wicked" , as he does elsewhere (e.g. 9:2). Hos.9:13,16 repeats such language regarding the punishment of sinful Israel: " Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer" . Dt.28:41 has the same idea. Eliphaz reminds Job that the wicked of Noah's time were destroyed by a flood, implying that the sudden calamities of Job's life were like the flood, thus equating him with the world at Noah's time. Jude, Daniel, Peter and the Lord Jesus all interpret that world as representing apostate Jewry in the first century, destroyed by the " flood" of AD70. It is also interesting that 1 Pet.5:8,9, concerning the Jewish devil walking around seeking to draw away Christians, is quoting the Septuagint of Job 1:7, suggesting Job's satan is also to be linked with the Jewish satan.

There are several allusions to Job in Romans, all of which confirm what we have so far suggested. A simple example is Elihu's description of Job as a hypocrite heaping up wrath, which connects with Paul's description of the Jews as treasuring up unto themselves " wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom.2:5).

There are several illuminating links between Romans 9 (about Israel) and Job:

#### *Romans 9*

:19 " Thou (the Jews) wilt  
say then unto me, Why doth  
He yet find fault (with  
Pharaoh and the Jews)? For  
who hath resisted His will?  
The Jews were saying that it  
was God's pre-ordained  
purpose that they should be  
His people, therefore their  
behaviour was excusable.

:20 " O man, who art thou  
that disputest (AVmg.) with  
God?"

#### *Job*

" He is..mighty in strength: who hath  
hardened himself (NIV " resisted" )  
against Him, and hath prospered?" . Job's  
reasoning is similar to that of the Jews-  
effectively he too is asking why God is  
finding fault with him (9:4).

This is what Job desired to do: " I would  
order my cause before Him, and fill my  
mouth with arguments...there the  
righteous might dispute with Him" (23:4-7  
cp. 9:3).



:14 "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid" . The context is that the Jews were saying that their Calvinistic view of predestination allowed them to sin yet still remain God's people.

By Job saying " It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself in God" because he is either predestined to salvation or not, Job provoked the comment from Elihu " Far be it from God, that He should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity" (34:10). The link between this and Rom.9:14 shows that Job had the same mentality as the Judaizers, and was thus also shown the blasphemous conclusion to which his reasoning led.

Paul extends his association of Job and Israel in Romans 11:

#### *Romans 11*

:35 " Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again?" . This is countering the Jewish reasoning that they were self-righteous and were giving their righteousness as a gift to God, for which they were blessed.

:16,17 use the figure of roots and branches to describe the Broken branches refer to the apostate Jews.

#### *Job*

Elihu similarly rebukes the self-righteous Job: " If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth He of thine hand?" (35:7). Without this key from Job it would be hard to understand what 'gift' Rom.11:35 was speaking about.

Bildad speaks of the wicked (i.e. Job- 18:4,7 cp.14:18 clearly Jews. refer to him) " his roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off" (18:16)

Most fascinating are the clear connections between Rev.9 and Job:

#### *Rev.9*

:5" To them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented"

#### *Job*

Satan could not kill Job, but was given power to torment him.

:6 " Men (shall) seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them" .	Job said he was one of them " which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures" (3:21,22)
The marauding Saracen bands	The Sabeian bands
:11 " A king over them, which is the Angel.."	The satan/Angel of Job?
:11 " A king...Abaddon..Apollyon" ('Destroyer').	" The king of terrors" attacking Job's tents (18:14)
:11 " The bottomless pit"	" Hell is naked before Him, and destruction (cp.'Abaddon') hath no covering" (26:6).

Thus Job is being shown to represent " those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (Rev.9:4). The idea of sealing is associated with being justified by faith rather than by the Law in Rom.4:11. If " the earth" in Rev.9 is read as " the land" and the chapter given a Jewish interpretation, the allusions to Job as representative of unsealed Jewry still depending on the Law become even more relevant. There are many allusions to Job in the early chapters of Genesis- understandably, bearing in mind the early date of the book of Job. Cain is used by Jesus as a prototype of the apostate Jewish system- he was the first murderer and the first human liar, and thus symbolized the Jewish devil in Christ's time (Jn.8:44). Adam being a sinner is also a type of the Jews, inadequately covered by the fig leaves which represented the Jewish way of covering sin. Their glossy appearance which soon faded well represented the inadequacy of this method. Hos.6:7 confirms the equation of Adam with Israel: " They (Israel) like Adam have transgressed the covenant" (AVmg.). Note how like Job, Adam represents both the Jewish system and Christ (1 Cor.15:45). Bearing these things in mind, it is significant that Adam and Cain are both connected with Job.

### 3-3-4 Job as Adam

Job 13:20-22 subtly alludes to Adam's fall:

" Then will I [Job] not hide myself from Thee"	Adam hiding in Eden from God.
" Withdraw Thine hand far from me: and let not Thy dread make me afraid"	Adam's fear and dread as he heard the Lord's voice walking in the garden.
" Then call Thou, and I will answer"	God calling Adam and his answering God with his

## confession of sin.

It would appear that Job was recognizing that he had sinned, that he knew that the sense of spiritual limbo he was in paralleled Adam's hiding from God in Eden, but that he would only respond to God's call and come out of hiding to confess his sin as he knew God wanted him to, if God withdrew His hand- i.e. relieved him of the immediate trials he was then experiencing. Thus Job was trying to barter with God- wanting Him to withdraw the trials in return for Job making the confession which he knew God wanted.

Another connection making Job as Adam is in Job's words of 10:9: " Remember, I beseech Thee, that Thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt Thou bring me into dust again?" . This is Gen.3:19- the curse upon sinful Adam that he would return to the dust. Job seems to be admitting that he is like Adam in that it appeared God was going to end his life as a result of his sin- return him to the dust. But he reasons that this is unfair, seeing he has not sinned (10:7,14,15). Thus he oscillates between saying he has sinned and is like Adam, and then claiming that although he is being treated like Adam this is unfair. Similarly Job complains " He breaketh me...without cause" (9:17); " breaketh" is the same word translated " bruise" in Gen.3:15, thus implying that he is receiving the result of the covenant in Eden for no reason. Jesus must have been sorely tempted to adopt the same false reasoning of his great type. The references earlier in Job 9 to God spreading out the Heavens and creating the stars show Job's mind at this time was set early in Genesis (v.8-10). Job 27:2-4 again associates Job's likening of himself to Adam with his false blaming of God for wrongly dealing with him: " God...who hath taken away my judgement; and the Almighty, who hath made my soul bitter (AVmg.); all the while my breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils" . This is obviously referring to the record of God's creation of Adam in Gen.2:7. In 31:33 Job denies that he is like Adam in that unlike him, he has no sin to hide: " If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity..." . And yet like Adam he was humiliated by God's questioning at the end of the book.

However, in his humbler moments Job recognized that he was a sinner and deserved Adam's punishment: " Thou changest his (man's) countenance, and sendeth him away" (14:20)- referring to Adam being sent out of Eden, or also to Cain's countenance falling and then being sent away from God. Job recognized that there would come a time when " My change come (when) Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee: (I know) Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands" (when I respond to Your call to confess my sin)- 14:14,15. It would appear from this that Job feels that there will be a call to resurrection corresponding to God's call of Adam out of hiding (v.13 " Oh that Thou wouldst hide me in the grave" ), after which he would confess his sins- i.e. at the judgement. God's calling to Job out of the whirlwind and Job's subsequent confession at the end of the book again encourages us to see " the end of the Lord" with Job as pointing forward to our justification at the day of judgement and the Kingdom. James 5:8 cp. v.11 seems to connect " the coming of the Lord" and " the end of the Lord" with Job in Job 42. The fact that the Lord was " very pitiful, and of tender mercy" with Job thus reminds us of how He will be in our day of judgement. The friends ridiculed Job's evident comparison of himself with Adam: " *Art thou* (the emphasis is on that phrase) the first man (Adam; 1 Cor.15:45 alludes here) that was born?" (15:7).

### 3-3-5 Job as Cain

As with the similarities with Adam, Job complains that although he is associated with Cain, this is not really fair. "Thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet" because of observing his ways with unnecessary detail, Job complained. The mark on him that was a witness wherever he went echoes that which God put on Cain. God's preservation of Cain from death also finds a parallel in Job's feeling that God is preserving him unnaturally (3:21-23; 10:9-15). Zophar possibly recognized that Job was like Cain in that his countenance had fallen and he was so angry, although also fearful of God (Gen.4:5); he said that if Job repented he would "lift up thy face (countenance) without spot; yea, thou shalt...not fear" (11:15). Job 31:39 is another example of Job saying that he was being unfairly treated like Cain: "If I have eaten the strength (of my land) without money...let thistles grow instead of wheat" (31:39,40 AVmg.). This is referring back to the curse on Cain, that "when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength" (Gen.4:12). Job is saying that his land has yielded its strength to him, and that only if he sinned should the Adamic curse of thistles come upon him. We too can resent the limitations of our own nature, not least in the proneness to sin which it gives us, and become bitter against God because of it as Job did.

Thus in 16:17,18 Job instead associates himself with unfairly persecuted Abel: "Not for any injustice in my hands...O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry (of my blood) have no place" (16:17,18 cp. the crying of Abel's blood from the ground in Gen.4:10). Job complains in 31:3 that "the punishment of his (the wicked man's) iniquity" is deferred to his children; he uses the same Hebrew phrase used regarding the punishment of Cain's iniquity in Gen.4:13, thus saying that it was the wicked of the world, not him, who were the real counterparts of Cain.

### **3-3-6 Job And The Jews**

We now consider how the characteristics of the Jewish system of reliance on human wisdom, self righteousness and works are all seen in Job. 1 Cor.1 and 2 are in the context of Paul warning the believers against the temptation to let the human philosophy of the Roman and Greek worlds infiltrate the ecclesia, especially through the inroads of the Judaizers. In his argument, Paul makes one of the direct quotes from Job in the New Testament: "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor.1:19). This is quoting Job 5:12,13, where Eliphaz is explaining why he thinks Job and his view of life have been brought to nothing. Thus Paul read Job as a type of those who were influenced by the pseudo-wisdom of the Judaizers. Paul continues: "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" (1 Cor.1:20). Job's constant desire to dispute with God and the friends, and the claims both he and they made to possessing wisdom, show Job was clearly in Paul's mind. "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" he concludes, maybe thinking of the humbled Job.

Job was the greatest of the men of the east (1:3), people who were renowned in the ancient world for their wisdom (cp. Matt.2:1; 1 Kings 4:30). Thus Job as the Jews would have been full of worldly wisdom, and this is maybe behind Paul's words of 1 Cor.3:18,19: "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written (quoting Job 5:13, which is Eliphaz speaking about Job), He taketh the wise in their own craftiness". Thus again Job is equated with the false wisdom of the Judaizers, who were using "excellency of speech...wisdom...enticing words of man's wisdom" (1 Cor.2:1,4), to corrupt the believers from the "simplicity that is in Christ", "as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty" (2 Cor.11:3).

Paul's rebuke of the Jews in Rom.2 for their reliance on a mixture of worldly wisdom and that of the Mosaic law has many similarities with Job:

**Rom.2:17-23**

" Thou art called a Jew...and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and triest the things that differ (AVmg.), being instructed out of the law;

and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an

instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?

Thou that preachest a man should not steal...commit adultery... (worship) idols...dost thou?

Thou that makest thy boast of the Law, through breaking the Law dishonourest thou God?"

**Job**

A fair description of Job before his trials.Cp. Job's constant reasoning with God about things which differed from his previous concept of God; " Doth not the ear try words?" (12:11)

" I was eyes to the blind" (29:15)

" Thou hast instructed many ... thy words have upholden him that was falling...but now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest" (4:3-5).

These were the 3 main things of which the friends accused Job.

Elihu, on God's behalf, says that Job's boasting of his righteousness implied God was doing wickedly in punishing Job (34:10)

Their belief that they possessed such great wisdom led the Jews to be self-righteous, in that they reasoned that if they were wicked, then their wisdom would reveal this to them. Job and the Jews were exactly the same- " Is there iniquity in my tongue? Cannot my taste ('palate'- i.e. spiritual sensitivity, Song 5:6; Ps.119:103) discern perverse (evil) things?" (6:30).

Galatians 6 warns those who think themselves to be something spiritually that they are nothing, deceiving themselves (v.13), and that by having such an attitude they are sowing to the flesh, and will reap corruption (v.8). Eliphaz interprets Job's downfall as an example of " they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (4:8). The conscious connection

between these passages again shows that Job was seen as a type of the Jewish, self-righteous, often Judaist-influenced, members of the ecclesia (Gal.6:13).

Elihu rebukes Job for his self-righteousness: " Let us choose to us judgement: let us know among ourselves what is good. For Job hath said, I am righteous" (34:4,5). This seems to be behind Paul's words in 1 Thess. 5:21 " Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" , which is in the context of using " prophesyings" (v.20)- i.e. the true word of God- to analyse and reject false Judaist teaching that was claimed to be inspired. Thus again Elihu is interpreted as the true prophet of God and Job as a false reasoner, doing so under the guise of speaking the Truth, seeing he was a prophet. Job's reliance on works to bring justification with God is clearly seen in 9:29: " If I be wicked, why then labour I in vain?" - i.e. 'If I've been condemned, all these good works I've done are vain- they won't give me the salvation I thought'.

### *The friends*

The three friends also have similarities with the Jewish system. When Job speaks of " the wicked" he is digging at the friends, as they do at him when they speak of the wicked. Thus he implies in 21:22 that they were trying to " teach God knowledge" - alluded to in Rom.11:34 and 1 Cor.2:16, where the Jews are mocked for thinking they can instruct God and be " His counsellor" , thus linking the friends with the Jews. We have seen that Gal.6:7,8 concerning sowing to the flesh is alluding to Eliphaz's description of Job in 4:8. However, the same passage also has connections with Job 13:9, where Job accuses the friends of mocking God. Gal.6 is saying that those who show themselves to be outwardly wise (v.3), " making a fair show in the flesh (constraining) you to be circumcised" (v.12), are mocking God. Thus the sweet-talking Judaizers infiltrating the believers in Galatia correspond to both Job and the friends. Paul refers at least twice in Galatians to the effect this " thorn in the flesh" had had on his eyesight (4:14,15; 6:11). It may be that Paul's association of the friends with the Judaizers subtly drew the parallel between their smearing of Paul's name because of his physical disabilities which they implied were sent by God to punish him, and the Judaizers despising Paul spiritually because of his disability, which was perhaps a result of the Jewish Satan in his life. The descriptions of the elders of Zion sitting on the ground in mourning for Jerusalem in Lam.2:10 recalls the friends mourning for Job- thus associating both them and Job with a condemned Israel (Job 2:12).

### **3-3-7 Job and Jesus**

We have suggested that the sufferings of Job are framed in language which connects with the sufferings of Hezekiah and also Israel, whom he epitomized, at the time of the Assyrian invasion. Hezekiah and Israel are both types of Christ (note how so many of the curses on Israel for their disobedience came upon Christ on the cross). The suffering servant of Isaiah often concerns all three of them. Thus Job's sufferings point forward, via Hezekiah and Israel, to Christ. His final vindication when he prays for his friends, lives many years, and sees his sons (42:8,16) thus connects with the prophecy of Christ making " intercession for the transgressors" who persecuted him- i.e. the Jews- and seeing his seed, prolonging his days, after his crucifixion and resurrection (Is.53:10,12- note how Is.53 is a chronological account of the events of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension). The description of Job as the son of man and a worm uses identical language as that used about Christ on the cross in Ps.22:6. Thus the friends for whom Job prayed are equated with the Jews who persecuted Christ, for whom Christ made intercession both on the cross and after his ascension. Job being fatherless

(6:27) and being able to echo our Lord's " Which of you convinceth me of sin?" with " Is there iniquity in my tongue?" (6:30) are just some of many shadows of Christ to be found throughout the record of Job. Most comfortingly, these shadows suggest that our Lord suffered the almost manic levels of depression experienced by Job, especially in His final passion.

The whole of James 5:10-16 appears to be based on the example of Job: v.12= Job 3:1; v.13,14 cp. Job's afflictions; v.11= Job 42:10; God's mercy to Job is used by James as an encouragement to the sinners in the ecclesia to repent; v.16= Job 42:8. Job is held up in v.11-13 as an example of a prophet being afflicted, but then James goes on to speak of praying for the sick who had sinned- i.e. those who had been struck with physical illness as a result of their wickedness. The sick were to " pray for one another, that ye may be healed" , knowing that " the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" . This may be alluding to Job's prayer for the friends in 42:8 while still sick himself . The word for " fervent" is the same translated " earnest" in the record of Christ's fervent prayer in the garden in Lk.22:44-46. Job's prayer for the spiritual welfare of the friends points forward to Christ's prayer in the garden. His prayer was for his salvation from death- which was tantamount to praying for our salvation, and that was certainly the motive behind it rather than of selfish self-preservation. Only through His resurrection could we be saved. Thus the motivation for Christ's earnest prayers for salvation was His desire to gain us salvation. This is all confirmed by Job's prayer of 42:8 being connected with Christ's prayers in Is.53. Another connection with Is.53 is in 2:12,13. The friends " knew him not" as the Jews also did not recognize Christ because of the great physical torment (Is.52:14; 53:3). Like those who crucified Christ " they sat down" watching him; cp. " and sitting down they watched him there" . The astonishment of the Jews at the ghastly physical appearance of Christ on the cross (Is.52:14) is matched by Job 17:7,8: " All my members are as a shadow..men shall be astonished at this" (i.e. the state of his body). Job 5:11 is quoted in Prov.3:11, which is a prophecy of Christ . Prov.3:13-15 describes our Lord's successful finding of wisdom in the language of Job's unsuccessful search for it in Job 28:16-19, implying He found what Job did not (cp. Rom.9:31,32).

### *Job, Jesus, Israel*

We have noticed that Job represents both Christ and Israel. This is nicely shown in 19:12-14: " His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp around about my tabernacle" . This is reminiscent of the descriptions of the Roman armies (Christ's armies- Matt.22:7) surrounding Jerusalem in AD70. There then follows a description of Job's sufferings which has clear links with that of Christ's crucifixion in Ps.69. " He hath put my brethren far from me (cp. Ps.69:8), and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me" . Note how the last phrase links with Christ's description of Judas as " my own familiar friend" , implying there may be a connection between the one-time friends of Job, and Judas. Both epitomized the Jewish system, and both were at one stage trusted by Job/Jesus. Other descriptions of Job's sufferings in the language of Ps.69 include Job 30:9 " Now am I their song, yea, I am their byword" (cp. Ps.69:12); 22:11 " abundance of waters cover thee" (cp. Ps.69:1,2); 2:11 the friends came " to mourn with him and to comfort him" , although Job said he turned to them for comfort in vain (16:2). The Hebrew in 2:11 is identical to that in Ps.69:20, describing Christ looking in vain for comforters.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. In Matt.19:23-

26 the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that " with God all things are possible" - without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: " I know that Thou canst do everything" . It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job.

Matt.5:27-30 is another example. The Lord says that looking on a woman lustfully was the same as actually performing the sin, albeit within the man's heart. This is the language of Job 31:1: " I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" . Job recognized that if he did so, this would be the same as actually committing the deed. He says he will not look lustfully on a maid because " Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the *workers* of iniquity?" (31:3). Thus Job's understanding that a lustful look in the heart was working iniquity was at the basis of Christ's teaching.

### 3-3-8 Paul and Job

Paul in Philippians appears to have read Job in a very positive light (under inspiration), holding up his constant recognition that God would be glorified through his sufferings as an example to himself during a similar time of great physical trial. Whilst he wrote the letter he was so ill that he had a choice of being able to " depart, and to be with Christ" (Phil.1:23) or remain. One way of understanding this is to read it as meaning that Paul was so ill that he could give up his will to live if he chose, but struggled for their sake to keep alive. No wonder his mind went to the afflicted Job, under inspiration. The following are the connections Paul makes with Job which are apparent to me- doubtless there are many more:

1) Phil.1:19 is made a mess of in the A.V. Moffat does better with " The outcome of all this, I know, will be my release" . The Greek here is almost identical to Job 13:16 LXX: " Though he slay me...even that is to me an omen of salvation" . The context is of Job speaking of the good conscience he had maintained with God; similarly Paul's good conscience made him fearless of approaching death, as he also made clear when on trial for his life (Acts 23:1; 24:16).

2) " Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death" (Phil.1:20) seems to echo Job 13:13-15 (especially in RVmg.), where Job says he is willing to face every trial, but knows that death will be his lot; yet he is certain that God will still be glorified through this. All of this is very apposite to Paul's situation.

3) " To die is gain" (Phil.1:21) was Job's attitude too, particularly in Job 10:20-22, where whilst recognizing the unpleasantness of death he is speaking, in the context, as if he were willing to suffer it to maintain his integrity with God. Paul is reasoning along similar lines.

4) The previous three allusions to Job in Phil.1 make a fourth one not unlikely. " In nothing *terrified* by your adversaries" (Phil.1:28) employs a word classically used (although unique in the N.T.) to describe the startled shying of horses, perhaps suggesting Job 39:22, where the horse is said to mock at fear, " and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword" . This would be as if Paul is saying 'Don't be terrified horses but like that one spoken of in Job, which represented what, in the Lord's opinion, Job was potentially capable of'.

By now it should be possible to read Job in a similar light to Adam- striving for acceptance with God, and yet clearly a sinner. Like so many of us, Job found it hard to accept the



enormity of the guilt we each personally have in the sight of God due to our sinfulness. It needed severe mental and physical trials to make Job come to terms with his true relationship to God, and yet those trials in themselves made him a clear type of Christ. The Lord Jesus learnt the lesson from Job, to accept the consequences of being a member of a fallen race regardless of one's personal spiritual status. By contrast Israel, whom Job also represented, trusted in their own righteousness and through their mental stubbornness to have their concept of God changed, suffered and still suffer the prolonged mental and physical torture of God's displeasure with them, as Job did in his suffering. May we in these last days avoid the fatal mixture of legalism, human philosophy and spiritual pride which Job and his friends gave way to, so that we may develop our comprehension of God's ways to the point where we too can say "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear (cp. our theoretical grasp of 'first principles'): but now mine eye seeth Thee" (42:5).