

## GENESIS

1:2 Moses wrote Genesis, presumably during the 40 years wandering. He therefore wrote it in a context- of explaining things to Israel as they stumbled through that wilderness, wondering who they were, where they came from, where they were headed. This explains why there are so many links within the Pentateuch- e.g. the Spirit “flutters” over the waters in Gen. 1:2, just as God like an eagle [a symbol of the Spirit] “flutters” over Israel in bringing about their creation as a nation (Dt. 32:1). The point is, what God did at creation, He can do at any time in re-forming our lives into a new creation. Those baptized into Christ are “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). This process of making us new means that the creation of life, the huge expenditure of energy out of God which happened at the natural creation, is ongoing in our lives today.

The earth being “without form and void” (Gen. 1:2) uses a phrase elsewhere used to describe the judgment that has come on an order of things (Jer. 4:23; Is. 24:10; 34:11). It may be, therefore, that there was a previous creation on earth which was destroyed in judgment. Hence the command to “replenish the earth” (1:28).

1:12 God created matter. All that exists was made by Him; and by faith we believe that things which now exist were not made from what already existed apart from God. The Genesis record of creation, however, emphasises how God brought order out of chaos. He brought this present world of beauty and order out of a darkness that brooded upon a sea, and from an earth that was “without form and void”, the Hebrew images behind the words implying ‘a chaos’. The frequent references to the earth and sea ‘bringing forth’ (e.g. Gen. 1:12,24) use a Hebrew word which means ‘to let something which is within to come out’. The present world was created by a re-organization of things which existed in some form before. This means that when our own lives, or the collective life of God’s people, appears to be in chaos- then we can in faith reflect that God has brought beautiful order out of chaos, and He can likewise powerfully bring order to what seems hopeless.

1:26 *Let us* - The Hebrew construction here is a “communicative plural”, implying God conferring with His council. To assume that God is speaking to Jesus here is a desperate assumption. The Bible doesn't teach that Jesus literally existed before His birth. The Hebrew word *elohim* translated “God” here literally means 'mighty ones', and here refers to the Angels. The Angels were the agents of creation (Job 38:7). The word *elohim* is translated “Angels” by many translations in Ps. 8:5. The Hebrew construction used here has been described as “a plural of deliberation”, whereby an individual may use a plural to describe his or her decision. Take David’s words in 2 Sam. 24:14: “Let *us* fall into the hand of the Lord...but let not *me* fall into the hand of man”. Ezra 4:18 has a King saying: “The letter ye sent unto *us* hath been plainly read before *me*”. In Is. 6:8 we read the same of God Himself: “Whom shall I [singular] send, and who will go for *us*?”. And this would enable us to better understand God’s decision making in Gen. 11:7: “Go to, let *us* go down, and there confound their speech. So “Let *us* make man...” may refer to God’s personal self-deliberation in making human beings; to a Semitic reader of the original, it would emphasize the vast passion which God Almighty put into this decision. And it therefore follows, that He passionately wishes to have a very definite purpose with us, that He so loves us, and wishes only our eternal good.

*In our image, after our likeness*- We aren't in God's mental likeness, because His thoughts are so far above our thoughts (Is. 55:9). But the “our” refers to the Angels, and whenever they appear on earth, they have appeared in human form. God is a real, actual person, existing in Heaven but everywhere

present by His Spirit. Thus man is made in the image and likeness of God, as manifested through the angels. James 3:9 speaks of "...men, which are made in the similitude of God". Our creation in the image of God means that we can infer something about the real object of which we are but an image. Thus God, whom we reflect, is not something nebulous of which we cannot conceive. Ezekiel saw God enthroned above the cherubim, with the silhouette of "the likeness of a man" (Ez. 1:26; 10:20); it is God Himself who is located above the cherubim (2 Kings 19:15). All this has a practical import; because we are in the image of God, because it is imprinted on every part of our bodies, we must give that body to God, just as men were to give the penny which had Caesar's image on it to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). The Hebrew word *tselem*, 'image' is in modern Hebrew 'photograph'. God is personal and He has a concrete, actual form and being.

2:7 The 'soul' refers to the person, body or self. The famous 'Save Our Souls' (S.O.S.) clearly means 'Save us from death!' The 'soul' is therefore 'you', or the summation of all the things that make up a person. It is understandable, therefore, that many modern versions of the Bible (e.g. the N.I.V.) rarely use the word 'soul', translating it instead as 'you' or 'the person'. The animals which God created are called "living creatures...every living thing that moves" (Gen. 1:20,21). The Hebrew word translated "creatures" and "living thing" here is *nephesh*, which is also translated 'being'; for example in Gen. 2:7: "...and man became a living being". Thus man is a 'soul' or 'living being', just as the animals are 'souls' or 'living beings'. The only difference between mankind and animals is that man is mentally superior to them; he is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), and some men are called to know the Gospel through which the hope of immortality is opened up to them (2 Tim. 1:10). As regards our fundamental nature and the nature of our death, there is no difference between man and animals.

2:17 The serpent was a beast of the field which God had made (Gen 3:1). Yet out of the ground [Heb. *adamah*- earth, soil] God formed all the beasts of the field, including the serpent (Gen. 2:17). So the serpent was likewise created by God out of the ground- it wasn't a pre-existing agent of evil. Note the snake, as one of the beasts of the field, was "very good" (Gen. 1:31)- hardly how one would describe the serpent according to the orthodox reasoning.

2:21 Woman was created from the side of Adam, not from his head nor from his feet.

2:24 *Cleave*- Mt. 19:5,6 interpret this as meaning that God "joins together" man and woman in marriage; not simply at the wedding, but throughout their life experience together. It's therefore going against God's work to break apart what He has tried to join together.

3:1 The serpent was an animal, created by God. The words 'satan', 'lucifer' and 'devil' don't occur in the entire book of Genesis. Adam, and not the serpent, was the means by which sin entered the world (Rom. 5:12). The Bible doesn't teach that the satan exists as a personal being who sinned in Heaven and came to earth.

3:3 Eve had been told by Adam that they must not even touch it, although this is not what God had told Adam (Gen. 2:16,17 cp. 3:2,3). Adam turned to Eve and as it were wagged his finger at her and said 'Now you see that tree over there in the middle, *don't you even touch it* or else there'll be trouble, O.K.'. She didn't *understand*, he didn't *explain* that it was forbidden because it was the tree of knowledge, and so she was deceived into eating it- unlike Adam, who understood what he was doing (1 Tim. 2:14). *Why* didn't Adam tell her more clearly what God had said? Maybe he was

disillusioned with the wife God gave him; he didn't have intercourse with her as he had been asked, he separated from her so that she was alone with the snake. Gen. 3:12 seems to reflect more than a hint of resentment against Eve and God's provision of her.

3:15 The descendant of the woman was to be a specific individual- Jesus. He was literally “made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). He was the son of Mary, although God was His Father. Thus He was the descendant of the woman but not the descendant of a man, as He had no human father. This descendant of the woman was to be temporarily wounded by sin, the serpent - “you shall bruise his heel”. A snakebite on the heel is normally a temporary wound, compared to the permanence of hitting the snake / sin on the head, which Jesus did in His death.

3:21 Sin results in death (Rom. 6:23), i.e. a pouring out of the blood, which carries the life. For this reason the Israelites were expected to pour out blood each time they sinned, to remind them that sin resulted in death. “... according to the law (of Moses) almost all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22). Because of this, Adam and Eve's covering of themselves with fig leaves was unacceptable; instead, God killed a lamb (Rev.13:8) to provide skins to cover their sin (Gen. 3:7,21). Similarly, Abel's sacrifice of animals was accepted rather than Cain's offering of vegetables, because he appreciated this principle that without shedding blood there could be no forgiveness and acceptable approach to God (Gen. 4:3-5).

3:24 The cherubim have Angelic associations. They were to keep “the way” to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24), whereas the keeping of the way is later said to be in the control of Angels- e. g. in Gen. 18:19 the Angels decide Abraham will keep “the way of the Lord”, implying they were the ones guarding it.

4:10 In another figure, the blood of the dead believers cries out from under the altar, demanding vengeance on this world: on the Catholic, Protestant, Babylonian, Roman, Nazi, Soviet systems that slew them for their faith (Rev. 6:9). To God, their blood is a voice, just as real as the voice of Abel, which cried out (in a figure) for judgment against Cain (Gen. 4:10). There is no immortal soul, we personally feel nothing in death. But there is an immortal spirit, in that who we essentially are, our personality, lives on in the memory of a loving Father.

4:16 “Went out” is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain “went out” (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). The ungrateful servant “went out” and condemned his brother- thus condemning himself (Mt. 18:28).

4:26 The early chapters of Genesis highlight the fact that there were these two sorts of people; the descendants of Seth called themselves “by Yahweh’s name” (Gen. 4:26) and comprised the righteous “sons of God”, the seed of the woman. By contrast, the descendants of Cain, are described as being associated with murder and instituting polygamy (Gen. 4:23 & 19), the art of weapon production (Gen. 4:22) and entertainment (Gen. 4:21). The names of these people imply that at this time they started an alternative , apostate, system of worship to replace the true worship of God, which angered God; e.g. Cain named a city after Enoch, whose name means “dedicated”; Irad means “eternal city”; Mehujael means “God combats”; Lamech means “Overthrower” (of the truth ?). The

sons of God marrying the daughters of men in Gen. 6:2-4 would therefore describe the inter-marriage of these two lines, so that only Noah and his family were the “seed of the woman” at the time of the flood.

5:29 *Shall comfort us*- did Noah's parents expect Noah to be the child who would do all the hard menial work for them, so that they would suffer less from the curse placed upon the ground in Eden? This might explain why Noah had children when he was 500, far older than others of his time (Gen. 5:32- Noah's father had had his first children at 182, Gen. 5:28; Seth had his first child at 105, Gen. 5:6; Enos at 95, Gen. 5:9; Cainan at 70, Gen. 5:12; Mahaleel at 65, Gen. 5:15; Jared at 162, Gen. 5:18; Enoch at 65, Gen. 5:21; Methuselah at 187, Gen. 5:25); Gen. 6:18 implies that Noah only had three sons, whereas for people with such long life spans we'd have expected him to have had far more than that. He only had three children- for he prepared the ark to save “his house” (Heb. 11:7) and Gen. 7:1 is quite clear: “Go into the ark, you and all your household” - his whole household was his wife, three sons and their wives. Period . Perhaps we get the picture of a man who was the underdog, the farm worker, the sidekick of the family, whose own family life was delayed and limited by this background. Perhaps he turned to alcohol for comfort (hence Gen. 9:21). But it was he whom God chose to save, he alone who was righteous in that generation which perished. It was the quiet, broken man who was saved. The Hebrew word for “Comfort” occurs later, when we read how God “repented” that He had made man (Gen. 6:6,7). Lamech's desire for 'comfort' was fulfilled but not as he imagined; not through his son being his personal slave, but rather in God changing His mind about humanity and making a new start. We get what we desire, in essence; and so we need to desire the right things.

5:32 500 years old- the flood came when Noah was 600 (Gen. 7:11), yet he spent 120 years preparing it (Gen. 6:3). So it's possible that he wasn't married when the call came to build the ark; he'd have explained his life mission to his wife, and she'd have been his first convert. Alternatively, if he were already married at 480, they had many years of barrenness in their marriage. Given the long lifespans in those days, this would've been very hard to take. Yet he didn't take another wife. He was “moved with fear”, 'reverently apprehensive' at what God told him, and prepared the ark in order to save his family (Heb. 11:7). Yet he began doing this before he had any children, and perhaps before he was married. He had faith that he would one day have a family, in accordance with God's invitation to make an ark in which to save his family.

6:2 “Sons of God” is used concerning men, especially those who know the true God (Deut. 14:1; Hos. 1:10; Lk. 3:38; Jn 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:1). Lk. 20:35-36 says that the angels do not marry. See on 4:26.

6:3 *120 years*- Knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would BE saved (1 Pet. 3:20). Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:19 that Christ through His Spirit preached to the people of Noah's day. In 2 Pet. 2:5 he says that Noah was a preacher of, or [Gk.] ‘by’ righteousness to the people around him. Yet in 1 Pet. 3:19 Peter says that Christ preached to those same people through His Spirit. The resolution surely is that although Noah had never met the Lord Jesus, he lived according to the same Godly spirit as did Jesus; and this was his witness to his world. In this sense the spirit or disposition of Christ was found in all the Old Testament prophets (1 Pet. 1:11).

6:4 The Hebrew word for “aggressive men” or “giants” in Gen. 6:4 is also used to describe the sons of a man called Anak in Numbers 13:33. Freak human beings of unusual size or strength are sometimes born today, but it does not mean that their parents were angels. We are not specifically told that these men were the children of the “sons of God”. “There were aggressive men...and also *after that*...the sons of God came in to the daughters of men”.

6:5 The days of Noah are a type of the last days of AD70, and of the last days before Christ’s return: “As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the son of man be” (Mt. 24:37).

7:1 *All your household*- his entire family consisted of his three sons. He therefore had no daughters and it would seem that his sons had no children. This tiny family size must be significant- for in those long lived ages, most women would have likely had over 50 children. Again, it was the small, broken and despised who were chosen of God. It seems that Noah's daughters in law only started bearing after the flood.

7:7 *In the face of*- seems to imply that he waited until the very last minute. It seems this was not due to any lack of faith, but rather because of the urgency and desperation he felt in appealing to others to come into the ark with him. He truly was a remarkable “preacher of righteousness “ (2 Pet. 2:5). Our knowledge of this world’s future means that as we walk the streets and mix with men and women, our heart should cry out for them, no matter how they behave towards us, and there should be a deep seated desire for at least some of them to come to repentance and thereby avoid the judgments to come.

7:23 Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him- Noah is the focus of salvation, but in him and with him his family were saved. Likewise our salvation is by being “in Christ”.

8:3 *In going and returning*- this is the language of the surges of huge tidal waves, caused by the underwater eruptions of the “fountains of the deep” being broken up (Gen. 7:11; 8:2). Being in the ark must've been a very rocky ride; the boat would've been tossed and thrown most of the time. And so it is with our ride in Christ.

8:4 *Seventeenth day of the seventh month*- Israel left Egypt on the 14th day of Abib, the seventh month which became the first month in their new calendar; they likely crossed the Red Sea on the 17th day of that month. So perhaps it was on the very same day that the ark rested. Israel's passage through the Red Sea typified baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), just as Noah's passing through the flood waters did (1 Pet. 3:19-21). Note that this was the same day that the Lord Jesus was resurrected- He died at Passover, 14th Abib, and resurrected three days later, 17th Abib.

8:20 *Built an altar*- This was on Noah’s initiative. There had been no altars stipulated previously. God had asked Noah to build an ark, and now Noah of his own volition builds an altar. As we mature in Christ, we no longer simply follow commands but take our own initiative in God’s service. Noah’s first reaction may have been to build a house for himself and his family; but he put God first and built an altar.

8:21 *Said in His heart*- We may never know in this life God’s feelings in response to our sacrifices. We can touch the heart of God, we tiny mortals on earth...

9:6 As James 3:9; the fact humans are made in God's image means we should perceive the value and meaning of persons, from not killing to holding the door open for people... Defacing God's image earns death. In what ways can we destroy the image of God in others apart from by killing them? Any form of dehumanizing surely does the same. Because we are made in God's image, we should therefore not *kill* other humans (Gen. 9:6). James says the same, in essence, in teaching that because we are in God's image, we shouldn't *curse* others. To curse a man is to kill him. That's the point of James' allusion to Genesis and to God as creator. Quite simply, respect for the person of others is inculcated by sustained reflection on the way that they too are created in God's image.

9:25 *Canaan*- Noah thrice rails against Canaan (:26,27). Why, seeing that the shame had been done to him by Ham, Canaan's father? This seems a classic example of transference- people often focus their anger not against the one who has hurt them, but against that person's relative, family or cause. We should deal with persons directly, perceiving the value and meaning of the human person; and not deflect the relationship onto others as Noah appears to have done. The curses placed by Noah have no fulfilment [contrary to many racist and misguided attempts to force such a fulfilment]. The story ends with a huge spiritual anticlimax, although later reference to Noah shows that he was judged faithful overall.

9:29 *And he died*- In the myth of Utnapishtim, the one who survives the flood is turned into a hero and becomes a god. But of course Moses' inspired record is different. The flood story ends with Noah dying- not becoming a god. And Noah not only remains human, but he remains *very* human- because he goes out and gets blind drunk after he comes out of the ark. Moses' point is surely to show that real human lives really do intersect with Almighty God's work, words and actions.

10:2 This chapter lists 70 Gentile nations as being the descendants of Noah. The Hebrew word *eret* translated "land" is the same word translated "earth". The flood was likely a flood of the land promised to Abraham rather than of the whole planet. These 70 descendants of Noah all lived within the Middle East rather than throughout the entire world. The original purpose of Genesis was to explain to the Israelites in the wilderness where they had come from and the context of the nations amongst whom they found themselves.

10:9 The Hebrew could mean "the mighty hunter against the Lord". The Hebrew for 'Nimrod' is related to 'Gibbor', the title of Christ used in Is. 9:6. Nimrod appears to be a prototype anti-God and anti-Christ, and for this he was well known even then. Gen. 10:10,11 shows his characteristic of building cities in the Babylon/Assyria area. Seeing that "the beginning of his kingdom was Babel" (Gen. 10:10), it is not unreasonable to assume that when "a man said to his neighbour, Come, let's make bricks" to build the tower of Babel, this man was Nimrod (Gen. 11:3).

10:25 *Earth divided*- probably a reference to the division of the peoples recorded in Gen. 10:32 and then in chapter 11, rather than a reference to plate tectonics.

11:15 The genealogies of Genesis 11 reveal how some human lives repeat according to the same outline schema. Thus both Arpachshad and Shelah each lived 403 years after the births of the eldest sons; Shelah, Peleg and Serug were each 30 when their first sons were born. Abraham and Shem both had sons at 100 years old (Gen. 11:10). And it is the very nature of Christian fellowship that God has arranged that our human lives likewise have elements of amazing similarity of pattern.

11:31 Terah and his family departed “to go into the land of Canaan”. These are the same Hebrew words as in the command to Abram: “Get you out of your 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 “relatives 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.

12:3 Grammatically, this can be read as passive (“be blessed”) or reflexive “bless themselves” (as RSV), 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. 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.

12:5 Abram 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.

12:6 God's promise to Abraham was made more specifically at “the oak of Moreh”- a Canaanite shrine; and it's emphasized that “the Canaanite was then in the land”. It's as if God's invitation to Abraham [as to us] 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.

13:9 Here 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. 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 which you *see*, I will give to you, and to your offspring forever" ( 13:15), He was alluding to what He had initially told Abram back in Ur: "Get you out of... to the land that I will show (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.

14:13 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 its length and in its breadth; 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 "*lived* by of the oaks 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.

14:22 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.

15:5 According to Jewish midrash, Abram and his father Terah were leading diviners of the stars in Ur. 'Terah' can mean 'brother of the moon', and Ur and Haran were noted centres of moon worship. In this case, the invitation to Abram to count the stars (15:5) 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.



15:10 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

16:2 "Abram listened to the voice of Sarai" is framed in the language of Adam hearkening to Eve's voice. We can only take this incident- and the less than honourable treatment of Hagar afterwards- to be another trough in Abraham's faith graph. 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. 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.

16:13 The common Hebrew word for 'to see', especially when used about God's 'seeing', means also 'to provide'. When Hagar said "You God see me, she was expressing her gratitude for His *provision* for her. The fact God sees and knows all things means that He can and will therefore and thereby provide for us in the circumstances of life; for He sees and knows all things.

17:5 Abram means 'high / exalted father', and can mean "he is of exalted ancestry". 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. By baptism into the Name the same process happens to us.

17:5-11. 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. 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 (Gal. 3:27-29). What was weird and *so* counter-instinctive 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. Our response to what God has promised us requires us to likewise respond in a counter-cultural and counter-instinctive way.

17:7 The Abrahamic covenant is made personally with every member of the seed in “their generations”. 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 to... your seed...I will be their God”. The seed is Christ, and the “God” is Yahweh. In Rev. 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 idea of personally being with God is a fundamental part of the Gospel preached to Abraham.

17:8 The idea of eternal life is in the Old Testament as well as the new. The promise of eternal life on earth was given to Abraham and his seed, the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:8), but applies to all of us who are baptized into Him (Gal. 3:27-29).

17:17 Abraham's exaltation here is referred to in Jn. 8:56 as Abraham rejoicing to see the day of Christ.

18:2 *Three men*- three Angels, who bore the Name of Yahweh (as in Ex. 23:21).

18:12 Sarah murmured that it was impossible for her to have “pleasure” in childbearing. 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. God uses circumstances and experiences to teach us what is possible for us in His strength.

Sarah is commended for calling Abraham her “Lord” (1 Pet. 3:6). But she said it “within herself” whilst laughing at the improbability of God fulfilling His promise; 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. 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. We should have a similar positive attitude to others, discerning what's good in them even if it's surrounded by weakness.

18:23 God is open to dialogue; but a 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 50 righteous 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. But Abraham set the limit at ten. But 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. His mercy will be upon us according as we hope in Him (Ps. 33:22).

19:3 The Angels who visited Lot in Sodom wanted initially to lodge in the street, but they were persuaded by Lot to change their plans. And who is to say that to some extent this isn't possible today, too?

19:14 Lot's sons in law "were to marry" his daughters. Christ perceived that they were marrying and giving in marriage the very day the flood came, and He pointed out the similarities with the Sodom situation (Lk. 17:27-29). Perhaps the very day of the double wedding, they had to leave? With all the build up to the wedding, Lot and his wife would so wanted to have stayed just another day to see the wedding of their two daughters. It is to the girls credit that they both left. But Lot's wife had invested so much in it emotionally that she just had to look back.

19:26 This suggests the picture of the wife following behind Lot, filled with remorse at the loss of all she had held dear. Lk. 17:29-33 comments concerning not desiring our "stuff which is in the house" in the day of Christ's coming: "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever (like her) shall seek (Greek: 'plot') to save his life shall lose it". We can infer from this that she plotted and schemed how to save her possessions- i.e. her 'life', seeing that for her, her life did consist of the abundance of the things which she possessed (Lk.12:15). These feelings grew so strong that she paused to take a loving, wistful look at the city. The fire only fell after Lot was in Zoar; therefore the city was looking as it normally did. She was walking "behind him", so Lot would not have actually seen her turn into a pillar of salt. As he ceased to hear her footsteps behind him he must have guessed what had happened- but now the Angel's words seemed more vital to him: "Don't look behind you". Sodom was turned into an area of salt (Dt.29:23; Zeph.2:9); as Sodom was turned into salt by fire, so Lot's wife suffered the same punishment through a bolt of fire striking her and turning her too into salt. The unworthy of the last day will suffer the same punishment as the surrounding world which they failed to truly leave.

19:29 The prayers and loving spiritual concern of the faithful really can have an effect on the salvation of our weaker brethren. Abraham's prayer that Sodom would be saved if ten righteous were found there was unanswered; but God knew the real spirit of his prayer, that Lot should be saved, and that God's justice should be upheld in not destroying the righteous with the wicked. It was this which God recognized and answered, even though Abraham had not specifically verbalized those thoughts in prayer. Our true spiritual love for our brethren will likewise be heard in these last days.

20:3 Throughout the records of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his children there is continual repetition indicating how they tended to commit the same sins- e.g. going into Egypt and lying concerning their wives: 12:13; 20:3,13; 26:7. The sinfulness of sin is that our failures encourage our children to commit the same, and worse.

20:16 Sarah was "reproved" by King Abimelech for going along with Abraham's lie about her not being his wife. 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 reproved him... it would have sounded very hypocritical to Abraham's neighbours. Yet the point was, that God saw him as being righteous.

20:18 This shows that we can suffer the effect of others' sins, whilst being personally innocent of the specific sin they committed- as has happened with the effect of Adam's sin.

21:10 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 your 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 gracious counting of righteousness to Sarah and Abraham is repeated to us daily.

21:34 *Lived as a foreigner*- alluded to in Heb. 11:9, which says that Abraham lived in the promised land as a foreigner. He is our example and spiritual father. His characteristics are to be seen in us who have been baptized into Christ and thus become Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:27-29). Although this earth where we live has been promised to us, it's our eternal inheritance which we will receive at Christ's return, yet we now live in our own land as if we're foreigners.

22:3 *Arose and went*- Abraham was 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 in Ur- to arise and walk / go to a land / place which God would show him (Gen. 12:1). Our obedience in one challenge of God leads us to obedience in others. Circumstances tend to repeat both within and between the lives of God's faithful. One experience is designed to lead us to another. Nothing in our lives is senseless chance. All is part of a higher plan for our spiritual good, in our latter end.

22:18 The blessing is defined as forgiveness of sins and salvation (Acts 3:26,26). We become "in" the seed by baptism into Christ, who is Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:8, 27-29). All that is true of Christ becomes true of us, if we are in Him. We all wish to be a blessing to others- we see people suffering from their sins, physically damaged by earthquakes, war, famine, and we wish to get out there and help them; yet we are limited by our life situation. By being in Christ, we can be a blessing for others by bringing them to the blessing of salvation and a place in God's Kingdom on earth.

23:3 Abraham was promised eternal inheritance of the land (17:8)- but he didn't receive any of it in this life, he even had to buy a plot of land to bury his wife. This point is emphasized in the New Testament because it implies a future resurrection and eternal inheritance for Abraham (Acts 7:5; Heb. 11:13,39,40). Hence we have this laboured account of the purchase of Machpelah. 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: "*Entreat* for me to Ephron... the cave ... which *he has*... for the *full price* ... me for a possession...*amongst you* ..." (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. This earth is ours, eternally. But we like Abraham live in it as foreigners- for the moment.

24:4 It must be significant that Abraham told his servant to take Isaac a wife from "my country... my relatives" and not from the people "among whom I live". 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 today, the avoidance of marrying those in the surrounding world just seemed too much to ask. But Abraham knew that a way would be made. As God had *taken* Abram from Ur and Haran and Lot, so God would *take* a woman from there, suitable for Isaac. Faithful parents should do all they can to ensure their children marry within the family of faith.

24:7,8 Abraham told his servant that God would use His Angel so that his mission to find a suitable wife for Isaac would surely succeed. He speaks as if success is certain, and yet he recognizes the possibility that the woman may not be "willing to follow you". We should have the same positive, hopeful attitude in our enterprises for God, expecting success rather than failure. The Angel prepared in prospect for the success of the mission; but it still depended upon the woman's freewill. The whole incident in Genesis 24 can be read as typical of the search, through the preaching of the Gospel, for the bride of Christ. The preacher of the Gospel, represented by Abraham's servant, must go ahead believing that we will succeed (:40,41), just as the shepherd searches for the sheep until he finds it.

24:14 To water even a few camels was a few hours work. It was impossible that a traveller requesting a cup of water would then be offered to have his camels watered. This would have to be from God.

*Your servant... my master*- The servant was aware that his master was also a servant, of God. We shouldn't think of those 'above us' as being too far above us- for as we are to them, so should they be to God. And it's our standing before Him which is all important.

24:15 He spoke his prayer out loud. In the private, online worlds in which we live, it's no bad practice to say our prayers out loud, however quietly. This verse is surely alluded to by Jesus when He taught that we should pray knowing that God knows our needs before we ask Him (Mt. 6:8)- before we've finished our prayer, the answer has sometimes come along. See on 24:63.

24:21 The servant had asked for this to happen, and it did. And he can't believe the prayer has been answered- rather like the believers praying for Peter's release, who disbelieved it could be him knocking at the door (Acts 12:15). We are so similar. It is in those moments that we realize just what a momentous thing it is, to ask something of God, to be performed on this earth. And to realize it actually happened. He did it, for me, a little ant crawling on the surface of a small planet that is hurtling through space, in a remote part of His universe...

24:56 Abraham's servant said that he walked 'before Yahweh' (Gen. 24:40), reflecting how he felt that he was following an Angel. He therefore urges Bethuel: "Don't hinder me, since Yahweh has

blessed my way" (Gen. 24:56). He felt he was on a roll, being led onwards by the Angel- and he didn't want anything to interrupt that. The sensitive believer will perceive similar situations, time and again, as we seek to follow the leading of the Angel / cherubim before whom we walk. If we walk in step with the Angel, success is assured.

24:58 Rebekah immediately says "I will go" (Heb. *elek*)- just as Abraham had been called to "go" from Ur (*Iek*, Gen. 12:1); "and he went" (*wayyelek*, Gen. 12:4). This would seem to suggest an undesigned similarity of character between the family members. Our response to the call of God should be immediate, like the disciples immediately leaving their nets.

24:63 The same thing happened as in 24:15- a man was walking alone, grieving for his mother and praying- presumably for a wife to fill that gap. And the answer to that prayer had already been prepared for quite some time before he had made that request.

25:8 As the reward will only be given at the judgment on Christ's return, it follows that the righteous and wicked go to the same place when they die, i.e. the grave. There is no differentiation made between them in their deaths. Righteous Abraham was "gathered to his people" (or ancestors) on death; they were unbelieving idolaters (Josh. 24:2).

25:23 God loves to work through the weak, the despised, the last, or in this case, the younger.

25:26 Isaac delayed parenthood until he could have children by a believing woman.

25:27 By grace, righteousness has to be imputed to us. This happened to Jacob; he didn't make it to the spiritually perfect / mature status with which he is credited right at the beginning (25:27). Job is an identical case; he is labelled "perfect" at the beginning, but at the end of his spiritual growth, he confessed his imperfection. Jacob is described as "perfect" at a time when he had not even accepted Yahweh as his God (28:21). Quite simply, God counts His beloved children as being far more righteous than they are. The mechanism by which He now does this is through our baptism into Christ, whereby we are counted as if we are Him. Being counted perfect is therefore not simply the bias and ridiculous favoritism of a doting, unrealistic, Divine parent.

25:30 Jacob's behaviour here was wrong. It's alluded to in a negative way by Paul when he says that we should eagerly feed even our enemy (Rom. 12:20). Jacob should have believed God's promise, that he as the younger would be the more blessed (25:23), rather than trying to obtain the birthright in his own strength.

26:6 Isaac chose to live in Gerar, 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 (26:7). So it seems Isaac had some marriage problems; the record speaks of "Esau his son" and "Jacob (Rebekah's) son" (27:5,6). The way Jacob gave Isaac wine "and he drank" just before giving the blessings is another hint at some unspirituality (27:25). And yet Isaac is counted as one of the faithful fathers; he was made strong out of his weakness, just as we are.

26:11 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 Isaac had been deceitful to him, is an example. Yet it was not the nice people of the world, but this wandering, spiritually struggling family whom God loved and worked with.

26:12,13 God hugely blessed Isaac materially right after Isaac's failure of faith and selfish disloyalty in his marriage. Material blessing isn't therefore immediately given or withheld on the basis of our righteousness.

26:29 *You are now the blessed of Yahweh*- as if the surrounding people knew about the promises of blessing which Yahweh had made to His people, and they recognized that those promises were starting to have some level of fulfilment even then in the lives of Isaac and his family. In our lives too, God's promised future Kingdom blessings have a way of starting to come true even now (1 Tim. 4:8).

26:35 Isaac had waited a long time and his family had gone to great lengths so that he could marry a believer. He and Rebekah were understandably disappointed that their son chose to marry unbelieving women from the surrounding world.

27:11 What should Jacob have replied to his mother? It makes a good exercise, and not just for Sunday School youngsters, to write out what he should've said.

27:12 *Deceiver*- The rare Hebrew word used here is found elsewhere in Jer. 10:15,16, where it refers to a maker of idols. Again the record is forging the link between Jacob and paganism.

27:13 There are clear allusions to Eve in Eden; the curse came about because of a hearkening to a woman's voice. Jacob ought to have perceived the similarities of the situation; but he failed to. All human sin is in some way a living out of the Adam and Eve scenario; hence Paul in Romans presents Adam as everyman, and in so many Biblical records of sin (and in our own sins too) we can see allusions to what happened in Eden. We can therefore safely say that if we had been in Eden, we would've sinned likewise. The fact we suffer the effect of that sin is therefore not unjust.

27:24 As Jacob deceived his blind father, so he was himself deceived by Laban. "Deceiving and being deceived" may allude to Jacob (2 Tim. 3:13). What goes around comes around.

27:29 *Lord over your brothers*- Isaac had apparently forgotten the Divine promise that the firstborn was to serve the younger. However, the blessing which Isaac was giving wasn't the same as the Divine blessing of Abraham's seed. All of the family seem to have forgotten the prime importance of God's blessing, and rated human blessing far higher. This can so easily happen to us. The Gospel is contained in the promises to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), and we need to continually remind ourselves of their paramount significance in our lives. There was no Divine inspiration in Isaac's blessings, he was not speaking from God's mouth to his sons, although the recording of them is inspired.

27:38 The way Esau lifted up his voice and wept is picked up in Heb. 12:17 as a warning to all those who would fritter away their spirituality for sensuality- for they will weep in the same way at the day of judgment, aching from the pain of what might have been. Esau was a type of those who will be rejected at the final judgment- they will beg with tears for a change of mind, but it will be too late. None of us will stand before Christ indifferent- we will all desperately wish for His blessing, and therefore our commitment to Him in this life should likewise be total.

27:46 Rebekah's apparent zeal against marriage out of the faith was really a cover for her desire to save her son from problems which he had only her to blame for. We really have to search our motives- for we do externally the right thing from quite wrong motives.

28:1 Here and in :7 we see the repeated emphasis on the need to marry within the household of faith.

28:4 Isaac perhaps now realized that the fatherly blessing over which there had been so much grief was irrelevant compared to God's blessing.

28:12 Jacob's dreaming of a pagan ziggurat could indicate that subconsciously his mind was in pagan things rather than those of Yahweh. But God worked through that, and transformed the dream into a message from the true God. God with amazing patience works through our weaknesses, lack of faith and misunderstandings to bring us to Him as the one true God.

28:13 God made these unconditional promises to Jacob even though at that time Jacob had not accepted Yahweh as his God (:21), thus showing His grace. God in Christ has forgiven every person their sins and promised them salvation- all they have to do is accept Him in faith. God takes the initiative in grace- He doesn't give us His promises as a 'Well done' for our showing faith in Him. He has taken the initiative and it is for us to respond. Jacob there in his unbelief, or agnosticism, with Angels ascending and descending upon him, was in fact a type of Christ (Jn. 1:51).

28:21,22 Jacob seems sceptical of God's promise- he says that if indeed God does what He promises, *then* Jacob will accept Yahweh as his God and give him a tithe. The offer of a tithe seems very mean- the God who has promised us so very much deserves our all, not just a tenth.

29:2 Meeting a future wife by a well at watering time is what happened to Moses and to Isaac (by proxy). Situations repeat between the lives of God's children and even within our own lives, because the same God is working through His Angels to some kind of pattern and formula in the lives of His children, even if the complete algorithm is currently hid from our understanding.

29:17 As life worked out, it's apparent that Leah was the more faithful to Yahweh and her beauty queen sister wasn't so spiritually minded. But Jacob in his spiritual immaturity was attracted to Rachel after the flesh.

29:25 Why did Jacob only realize whom he had slept with the next morning? One is tempted to assume Jacob was drunk on his wedding night.

*What is this-* very similar words and situation to Esau's cry of pain and disappointment at how Jacob had deceived him. It's not simply that what goes around comes around in a kind of measure for measure dynamic, but rather that God was seeking to educate Jacob as to how Esau must have felt at his behaviour, and to lead Jacob thereby to repentance.

29:33 *Has heard-* Yahweh noticed she was hated (:31) and read the situation as a prayer to Him. Sometimes we don't verbalize things in prayer, but God all the same perceives our situation as a prayer to Him.

29:34 Jacob was married to Leah but not "joined" to her, even though God's intention is to 'join' a married couple together (Mt. 19:6). It would seem Jacob like many people today resisted God's attempts to join a couple together.

30:4 Jacob's sleeping with his wives' maids was contrary to the one man: one woman ideal of Genesis. But God tolerated it and used the children conceived as the founding pillars of His people Israel; He worked through the weakness of people rather than turning away in disgust and



disappointment at their failures. God does the same with us, and we ought to have a similar hopeful patience in dealing with people who fail.

30:6 It seems that this was a case of Rachel trying to force God's hand rather than Him blessing her. Yet she eagerly interpreted events as meaning God was blessing her, just as we can- we too easily attach positive meaning to our poor behaviour.

30:8 Leah didn't fight back nor have any personal part in wrestling with Rachel; the wrestling was all in Rachel's mind. We can assume others are actively against us and even fighting against us when actually they are just innocent people in the situation they are in, and our wrestling is in fact against God and not them as persons. Jacob learnt the same lesson when he wrestled with the Angel in chapter 32.

30:11 Gad was the name of an idol, the god of luck or fortune. In this name choice we see the pagan influences in the family which God was trying to transform into His people.

30:16 Mandrakes were supposed to be aphrodisiacs. The record is framed to show how meaningless were these pagan beliefs- for if they had really worked, she would have had no need to order Jacob to sleep with her. God's patient working through their misunderstandings is seen later in how He worked through Jacob's belief in the myth of cattle bearing spotted offspring if they conceived in front of spotted rods (:37).

30:37-39 This was a pagan belief with no biological truth in it, but God still worked through it in order to bless Jacob; see on :16. The Lord Jesus did the same regarding the common belief that demons caused illness. His language went along with the idea, although the Bible is clear that demons don't exist and sickness is ultimately under God's control, in order to bring healing and blessing to those sick people. By doing so, He demonstrated that God's power is so far greater than that of demons that effectively, demons have no power and don't actually exist. God worked in the same way through the wrong ideas held by Jacob and his family.

30:43 *The man*- stressing how Jacob humanly, in a fleshly sense, was blessed by God. Later on he must have reflected how this blessing was by Divine grace rather than because of any truth in the pagan beliefs of themselves, for afterwards he talks of how it was God who graciously gave him the extra cattle (31:9; 32:10).

31:5 *God of my father*- Jacob only spoke about Yahweh as his personal God towards the end of his life. At this stage he was still relating to Yahweh as the God of his father rather than seeing the personal reality of God as his personal God. Today God works in the same way, to transform for us the God of Sunday School Christianity into our personal Father.

31:9 See on 30:43.

31:19 Teraphim were household gods- Rachel clearly believed in them passionately.

31:36 Jacob must have later reflected how this incident reflected God's pure grace to him, and how falsely self-righteous he had been. All the time in this record we are seeing God continuing to work with people through their weaknesses, to bring them to perceive and believe in Him as the God of all grace.

31:42 *Rebuked you*- There's no evidence God actually did. Again we see a man attaching unwarranted meaning to events, assuming God was more pleased with him than He actually was. His wives made the same mistake in the obtaining and naming of their children.

31:45 Raising up a pillar or standing stone was a pagan ritual which God later forbade for His people (Lev. 26:1 uses the same Hebrew word). Constantly we are being reminded how pagan were Jacob's beliefs at this time.

31:53 The god of Nahor was a pagan deity (Josh. 24:2); Jacob instead swore by the One his father Isaac feared, Yahweh. Even though Jacob hadn't yet accepted Yahweh as his personal God, he recognized theoretically the truth of Yahweh as opposed to any other god; Yahweh was working to transform this theoretical knowledge into a practical, personal reality for Jacob.

31:54 Eating bread together was a sign of agreeing to a covenant. It is behind the idea of the breaking of bread service, whereby God and His children state their mutual belief in each other and acceptance of God's covenant with us- which is quite simply to save us from our sins and give us eternal life in His Kingdom because we are in Christ.

32:2 'Mahanaïm' means 'two camps'. The army of Jacob's enemies was matched by an invisible army of Angels which were on Jacob's side, weak in faith as he was. We must remember that each life crisis, each time we seem hopelessly outnumbered, is in fact a Mahanaïm situation for us.

32:4 *Wrestled*- 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. 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. Jacob wrestled / struggled in prayer with the Angel. Jacob's night of wrestling is a cameo of the experience of all who would be counted among the Israel of God- for "there He spoke with us" (Hos. 12:4). The Bible presents prayer as a struggle, not something we do half asleep in the comfort of our beds (Job 33:13; Heb. 12:4; Rom. 15:30; Col. 4:12). Through this, 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 to cling on to. 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.

32:10 The Hebrew 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. But now Jacob begins to realize that all he had in life was from God, and not from his staff.

32:31 Jacob's limping would've reminded him for the rest of his life of his brokenness and dependence upon God's grace to walk life's journey.

33:3 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 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. See on 33:11.

33:5 *Graciously given*- Jacob is beginning to understand that his blessings of family and wealth were a gift of God's grace and not achieved, as he had thought, as a result of his own hard work and pagan practices. The grace of the one true God is being subtly contrasted with the works-based mentality of paganism.

33:11 The Hebrew words translated "take (away)" and "blessing" are exactly the same as in 27:35,36, where Isaac laments that Jacob had *taken away* Esau's *blessing*, and Esau repeats those same words. Now Jacob is saying: 'I have experienced the true grace of God, I stand forgiven before Him, I saw His face in His representative Angel, 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. Because God had dealt graciously with him, he felt that he had "all things". 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 (35:7). See on 33:3.

34:2 The story clearly shows the danger of young people from believing families mixing with unbelievers in an uncontrolled environment- what begins as curiosity can very quickly descend into serious failure with lifelong consequences.

34:16 Marriage out of the Faith reflects a lack of appreciation of covenant relationship. If Dinah had married Hamor, this would have been a covenant relationship which would have resulted in the people of God and the surrounding world becoming "one people" (Gen. 34:16,22). Through baptism, we are the seed of Abraham, we are *the* people of God, we have been selected to undergo a few years preparation now, so that when the Lord comes we may enter His Kingdom.

34:30 So true to our experience, even after the night of wrestling Jacob slipped back at times into the old way of thinking. His pathetic bleating of 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. Our faith in the implications of God's promises to us- we who through baptism have the same Abrahamic promises made to us- can likewise easily become obscured by the immediate pressures of this world.

35:2 These household teraphim would have been the property deeds to Laban's property, but because of what God had promised him, Jacob was willing to resign all that hope of worldly

advantage (35:3). "Foreign gods" would've sounded strange to Jacob's family- the gods they worshipped would've been local Canaanite gods, yet Jacob speaks as if the local world around them was actually a foreign country. He thus shows how we who are in the family of faith should live even in our own land as if we are visitors from abroad in a foreign land (Heb. 11:13).

35:4 Jacob was outnumbered and surrounded by angry enemies, whom his sons had foolishly provoked. He turns to God and throws away all his human wealth, which he might have used to placate his angry enemies. And somehow, it all worked out for him- because there's no record that his enemies did in fact take revenge against the small and vulnerable Jacob family.

35:7 See on 33:11.

35:10 The record continues to sometimes refer to Jacob as "Jacob" rather than as "Israel". This reflects how Jacob didn't fully believe in nor accept that new name which God had given him. We are baptized into God's Name, and yet we too can doubt or forget the wonder of this, and likewise fail to identify ourselves as God identifies us.

35:11 Seeking to imitate God isn't always a recipe for an easy life now for us as humans. The Hebrew word translated "Almighty", *Shaddai*, is rooted in the word *shad*, meaning breast, and has the sense of fruitfulness. Thus "God said unto [Jacob], I am God Almighty [*shaddai*]: be fruitful [like me] and multiply". It seems Jacob sought to obey this by invitation to be like God by having a child in his old age by Rachel- and yet, perhaps due to her age, she died in that childbirth, in that seeking to imitate the Father.

36:2 It is again emphasized that Esau married outside of the family of faith. One reason for the extended genealogy of Esau in this chapter is perhaps to prove that, and to demonstrate that his children and descendants were also not in the family of faith (e.g. Edom, Amalek)- for some of the names here we encounter in later Scripture in a negative context.

36:6 The situation is similar to the division between Abraham and Lot for the same reasons (13:6). Esau should've learnt from that example, just as we should learn from Biblical precedent; for situations in our lives are so often a repetition of a situation which in essence has been recorded in the Bible.

36:31 The fact there were kings in neighbouring Edom before there were kings in Israel shows the accuracy of the later record that the Israelites wanted to have a human king so as to be like the nations around them (1 Sam. 8:5,20). Genesis 36 often mentions the various kings of the tribes surrounding the Israelites; it must've been unusual for a nation like Israel to have no king. The reason was that God was their true King. We too have no visible human leadership, the Lord Jesus is the head of the church and our God, the King of His people, is in Heaven and not on earth. But like the world around us, we can like Israel wish for a human, visible leadership. Yet this is a rejection of God as our true King.

36:33 Jobab is identified with the Job of the book of Job according to Jewish tradition. Several of the names we find here in Genesis 36 also occur in the book of Job. The books of the Bible aren't always in chronological order; it would seem that the book of Job is set in the times of the patriarchs. If the identification of Jobab with Job is correct, we can learn that even someone from an unspiritual background, a descendant of Esau, can still rise above it and become a believer, pleasing to God.

37:3 There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10).

37:9 It must have taken Joseph quite some courage to explain the dreams to his brothers; hence we read: "He dreamed... *and* told it". The Lord Jesus at age 30 must've had the same courage when He began His ministry. This is our struggle, to tell forth the things revealed to us.

37:18 "When the husbandmen saw the son [=Jesus], they said among themselves (i.e. conspired), This is the heir; come, let us kill him" (Mt. 21:38). Mt. 21:38 is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. Joseph is a type of Jesus in so many ways.

37:22 At least two of his ten persecutors were unhappy about what they were doing, and said so (37:22,26; 42:22). Perhaps the whole group egged each other on to adopt an attitude none were totally happy with in their conscience; this is how group dynamics work once sinful, jealous behaviour becomes acceptable to the group in principle.

37:28 So similar to Christ's betrayal for pieces of silver.

37:30 What do you think Reuben said to Jacob at the time of v. 35, to comfort him over his 'dead' son whom Reuben knew not to be dead? Do we always have to tell the truth to people in grief, or are we justified in simply seeing things from their perspective in order to comfort them?

37:32 As Jacob in his youth had deceived his father, so now his sons do to him.

37:34 Jacob tore his clothes to connect with how Joseph, as he thought, had been torn (:33). This is a fine prefigurement of the (easily overlooked) pain of God the Father at the cross.

37:35 The Hebrew word *sheol* is translated in some Bibles as "hell", in others as "the grave". *Sheol* isn't a place where only bad people go after death- for Jacob and Joseph were believers, and are spoken of as being in *sheol*, simply meaning 'in the grave'.

38:1 Judah fell into sin whilst separate from his brothers. Keeping together with others in the family of faith is part of our armoury against sin.

38:10 Sins of omission are all the same as bad as sins of commission.

38:15 Tamar is listed in the New Testament genealogy of Jesus as one of His descendants. Yet like many in His genealogy, she was somewhat non-standard- she had acted as a prostitute. The Lord Jesus had so many strange people in His gene bank, yet He never sinned. We can't therefore blame our sins on our ancestry or background situation.

38:19 Was Tamar right to have done this...?

38:24 Condemning others for sin when ourselves guilty is exactly what happened with David (2 Sam. 12:6). This phenomenon is because we realize on some level that we have sinned, and that sin must be punished. But if we don't admit our sin, we earnestly wish to punish that sin whenever it occurs in others. This explains the huge hypocrisy often observed in religious

people. We can only guard against it by seriously confessing our sins, regularly, daily; and living a continually self-examined life.

38:25 Judah and his brothers sent Joseph's blood stained coat to Jacob. It's recorded that they invited their father to "Examine it, please, whether it is your son's coat or not". He recognized it..." (37:32,33). The very same Hebrew words are used in 38:25,26 in describing how Tamar *sent* to Judah saying "*Examine, please*, whose these are... And Judah *recognized* them and *said*...". The whole point of the similarities is to show how God sought to teach Judah how his father Jacob had felt. Note the parallels between the he-goat in Gen. 37:31 and the "kid of the goats" of Gen. 38:17-20; "and he refused to be comforted" of Gen. 37:35 is a designed contrast with how "Judah was comforted" (Gen. 38:12).

38:30 This is part of a theme in Genesis of the firstborn not enjoying the full status of being firstborn- all part of God's preference to work with the underling and the weak.

39:6 There is an undoubted link between sexuality and spirituality (witness the typical meaning of the Song of Solomon). The Hebrew text here could suggest that it was Joseph's spiritually attractive personality that mesmerized Potiphar's wife; and what good living, socially aloof Christian office worker has not experienced the attention this attracts from colleagues of the opposite sex?

40:7 The sensitive reader will perceive that Joseph had a strong fatherly image, even from a young age (40:7; 41:43; 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.

41:9 *Sins* - The chief butler felt that he had committed a very serious sin in allowing the busyness of daily life and his demanding job to make him simply forget Joseph's need and tragedy. Perhaps an intensive plural is being used here- as if to mean 'my very great sin'. To forget others' need due to the busyness of our lives is a great sin.

41:45 *Zaphnath-paaneah*- 'Saviour of the world', or 'bread of life'. Christ was given a new name on ascension (Phil. 2:6-9; Rev. 3:12).

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.

41:51 *God* (this is important) made Joseph forget all his "toil", his mental sufferings. 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?

42:17 The brothers suffer in prison for three days to prod their conscience about Joseph- typical of a 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?

42:21 "The anguish of his soul" and pleas for deliverance were ignored by the brothers- typical of Christ's 'travail of soul' (Is. 53:12), ignored by Israel (Is. 53:1-4).

42:24 Joseph wept (this is recorded seven times in the record). 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 His wayward people 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.

43:14 *God Almighty*- 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.

43:14 In 35:11 God encourages Jacob, fearful he would lose all his family to attacks from neighbouring tribes, to be fruitful and multiply; because a nation...*shall* be from you, and kings *shall* come out of you. 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" sounds more like depressive fatalism than firm faith in the promises that his seed would eternally fill the earth. Our faith in the implications of God's promises to us likewise goes up and down, crushed at times by the immediacy of circumstances.

43:16 Joseph celebrates their repentance with a meal together, at which they sit in their proper places – typical of the marriage supper of the lamb, with each in his proper place (Lk. 14:10; 22:30; Rev. 19:9).

"Slay... and make ready" for the meal- This is the basis of the prodigal son parable (45:14,15 = Lk. 15:20); the father = Christ; prodigal = repentant Jews, wanting to be servants and nothing else.

43:34 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 Hebrew). 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.

44:5 As Joseph claimed to use his cup in order to discern people, so the Lord Jesus uses His cup to know His people. Our attitude to Him at the breaking of bread service reflects us to Him. He closely watches our hearts as we take His cup.

44:13 The repetition of circumstance in our lives is not only to teach us, but to make sure that we learnt the lesson- for what teacher doesn't give pupils exercises to practice the theory they've

learnt? It seems that Joseph, acting on God's behalf and as a type of Christ, manipulated circumstances so that his brothers would have *deja vu* experiences. Thus he sets things up to tempt them with freedom if they again betray their younger brother (Benjamin) and are thoughtless to their father's pain. The united, frank and open response of the brothers (44:13,16,17) showed how they had indeed learnt their lesson.

44:18 "You are even as Pharaoh" reflects something of Christ's relationship with God. He isn't God Himself personally, but He performs all the functions of God. See on 50:19.

44:20 *Is dead*- The brothers had repeated that lie so many times that they came to believe it. This is the problem with lying and denial of sin- we end up believing it.

45:1 That Joseph could not refrain himself 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. 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?

45:4 The brothers slunk away from Joseph's physical presence, as the rejected will at the final judgment (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.). This 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. No wonder both Joseph and the Lord Jesus will need to persuade their brethren that actually, it's all OK, God's love is greater than the barriers created by our sins.

45:7 *A great deliverance* - Heb. 2:3 "that great salvation" through Christ. Israel saved, all the surrounding world also blessed with deliverance from the famine- the scenario will be repeated in the last days. The judgments are to make Israel repent, but in that time of trouble the whole world suffers.

45:20 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; God's people in AD70 and the last days are likewise bidden leave their stuff and go to be with Christ (45:20 cp. Lk. 17:31), remembering the lesson of Lot's wife who was more concerned with her "stuff" than leaving it all once the day of the Lord finally came.

45:24 The wonder that was ahead of them should have made petty differences disappear. The same should be true within the family of God now.

46:3 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" (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 specter 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 (15:13).



46:29 At the end, Jacob as it were had come to repentance. Joseph falls on his neck and weeps for him, just as the Father does to the repentant prodigal.

47:9 Jacob speaks of his life as a “pilgrimage”, using the same word used about Abraham and Isaac (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. Jacob speaking of how his life had been a “pilgrimage” shows that 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 (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

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 (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 his ancestor (49:26).

48:3 *God Almighty*- 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.

48:4 Jacob's *personal* grasp of the wonder of the promises at the end is revealed here. 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.

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 (48:4 cp. 47:27). Joseph was *given* the *land* of Egypt (41:41), using the same words as in 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 (47:11), and therefore Jacob emphasized that their *real* possession was the eternal inheritance of Canaan, not Egypt (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 Timothy, 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.

48:5 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 favoritism, 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 favoritism 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. We learn from this at the very least that human motivations are sometimes hopelessly mixed.

48:8 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 (48:8,9,15,16); he saw God working through him.

48:11 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 never thought I would see your (Joseph's) face: and behold, God has let me see your seed also” (48:11). The Hebrew word translated “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 (37:10); but God in His grace has done exceeding abundantly above all I asked or didn't ask for, and showed me not only your face in this life, but also your children'. God likewise does for us abundantly more than we pray for or imagine (Eph. 3:20), and our generosity to others should have this feature to it.

48:15 At age 130, Jacob mumbled to Pharaoh: “Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life”, as if every day had dragged (47:9). But at the very end, 17 years later, he more positively speaks of the Angel that had redeemed him from all *evil* (48:15).

Jacob's reference to how Abraham and Isaac 'walked before' his God (48:15) is a reference back to 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” (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.

48:16 It is so easy to under-estimate the amount of work the Angels are doing in our lives; Jacob recognized that his Angel physically fed him all his days, and that it was not just at the crises in his life that the Angel had been present; he describes the Angel as “ever redeeming me” (Gen. 48:16), as if the whole process of life is one continual redeeming process by the Angel, as He designs trials for us which will perfect us in order to gain redemption, as well as physically redeeming us more times than we realize.

*Redeemed me-* At the end, Jacob spoke of God as his redeemer (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. The new convert who sacrifices family ties for allegiance to Christ realizes this full well. God's Truth must never become a social and family affair, but rather a candlestick burning with the fire of the Spirit. Christians mustn't merely follow parental expectation and the norms of their social network.

48:22 "*My sword and with my bow*" 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. Although Jacob can look forward to being in God's eternal Kingdom, he died with some weaknesses, just as we do; and we have to accept this fact in our coping with irritating or immature fellow believers. In some spiritual areas both they and we will never quite 'get there' in this life.

49:2 In 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.

49:14 Jacob's achievement of a true humility is evident in his last words. The way he blessed his sons in Gen. 49 indicates this; he saw Isaachar's greatness in the fact he was a humble servant. 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.

49:18 Jacob's hope of the future Messiah was the hope of his life; 'Jehoshua', the Hebrew form of 'Jesus', means 'Yahweh's salvation'.

49:25 *God of your father-* Finally, Jacob got there. He says three times the same thing; God is my God, Yahweh will be *my* rock, *my* stone, yes, He is the personal God of your father Jacob, He is almighty 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 now Jacob's very own God.

50:10 *Seven days-* as in v. 3, it seems emphasized that the Egyptians mourned for Jacob longer than did Jacob's own sons [40 rather than 70 days]. Perhaps this shows that mourning, as all emotions, is counted by its intensity rather than its external appearance.

50:11 *The Egyptians-* the sons of Jacob weren't Egyptians, but sometimes the family of faith appears as the world, as Egyptians. Our separation from the world doesn't mean that we externally look different to them; faith in one sense is an internal matter visible only to God, who alone sees the heart.

50:14 This was a huge expense of effort, to bury Jacob in Canaan rather than Egypt. It shows that even if we have all the best of this world, as Israel had Goshen, our heart should be in the promised land which is yet to come and shall be eternally ours.

50:16 There's no record that Jacob ever said this. But instead of taking up the issue of dishonesty, Joseph instead concentrates on assuring his brothers of God's grace. We don't need to 'take up' every issue and establish an agreed version of events in order to forgive our brothers.

50:19 The Hebrew can also be rendered: "Fear not: for I am in the place of God". Joseph's relationship with God and with Pharaoh demonstrates how Jesus operates as God functionally, without being God Himself in person. See on 44:18.

50:20 Forgiving others doesn't mean that we justify or mitigate the real evil that has been done to us. This needs to be recognized, but we are to perceive that God works through the evil intentions of others, to do us good in our latter end.

50:25 Like his father, Joseph's heart was in the land of promise, even though he had spent the majority of his life in the wealth of Egypt.

## EXODUS

1:5 *Souls*- The Hebrew word *nephesh* translated “soul” means a person, a body. It carries no idea of immortality.

1:7 The promises to Abraham of having numerous descendants have their main fulfilment in Christ and those baptized into Him (Gal. 3:16,27-29), but as in our lives too, God’s Kingdom promises have an initial fulfilment even in this life.

1:19 This would be an example of lies being told as an act of faith, similar to Rahab’s lie. We must be careful on one hand not to justify our behaviour all the time by thinking that we had no option but to do things which in most contexts would be sinful; yet on the other hand, we need to understand that God calls us to live by principles rather than a literalistic obedience to a legal code.

1:16 The plan to kill all the baby boys around the time of Moses’ birth is exactly what happened at the time of Christ (Mt. 2:16). This invites us to see Moses as a type of Christ.

1:21 It is God who gives and creates families; it is He who joins together husband and wife throughout the years of their relationship. These infertile women working as midwives must have longed for their own children more than many.

2:10 'Moses' meaning 'drawn out' suggests he is the prototype for every 'saint'- a called out one. As Moses was drawn out of the Nile and saved, so he later drew Israel out of Egypt. He could exactly enter into their feelings when they emerged from the Red Sea because he too had been drawn out of water to safety. Moses was a type of Christ, our representative who knows our feelings.

2:15 Visualize the scene when Moses was “full forty years old” (Acts 7:23). The Greek phrase could refer to Moses’ birthday- perhaps it had been arranged that when Moses was 40, he would become Pharaoh. Heb. 11:24 says that he refused and chose to suffer affliction with God’s people. Imagine Moses at the ceremony when he should have been declared as Pharaoh, the most powerful man in his world... standing up and saying, to a suddenly hushed audience, voice cracking with shame and stress and yet some sort of proud relief that he was doing the right thing: “I, whom you know in Egyptian as Meses, am Moshe, yes, Moshe the Israelite; and I decline to be Pharaoh”. Imagine his foster mother’s pain and anger. And then in the end, the wonderful honour would have been given to another man, who became Pharaoh. Perhaps he or his son was the one to whom Moses was to come, 40 years later. After a nervous breakdown, stuttering, speaking with a thick accent, clearly having forgotten Egyptian... walking through the mansions of glory, along the corridors of power, to meet that man, to whom he had given the throne 40 years earlier. He had a choice between the riches of Egypt, the pleasures of sin for a season, and choosing rather to suffer affliction with God's people and thereby fellowship the reproach of Christ (Heb. 11:24-26). He probably had the chance to become the next Pharaoh, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; but he consciously refused this, as a pure act of the will, as an expression of faith in the future recompense of the Kingdom.

3:7 God looked on the sorrows of His people through the sensitivity of Moses, He saw and knew their struggles, their sense of being trapped, their desire to revive spiritually but their being tied down by the painful business of life and living; and He sent Moses to deliver them from this. But these very words are quoted about our deliverance through the 'coming down' of the Lord Jesus (Ex. 3:7; 4:31 = Lk. 1:68).

3:11 Through Moses allowing himself to become part of God manifestation, he found a confidence to achieve that which felt impossible to him. He asks God: "Who am I...?" to do the great things God required... and the answer was "*I am*" (Ex. 3:11-13). Moses' sense of inadequacy was met by the principle of God's manifestation in him; and so will ours be, if we participate in it. We 'are not' as we would like to be, but God is.

3:18 The concepts of being God manifest and also being representative of a sinful Israel come together in Moses in a wonderful way. The elders of Israel were to tell Pharaoh that "Yahweh has met with us". Yet Yahweh had only met with Moses. But because he was representative of Israel and also because he himself manifested Yahweh, the elders had met Yahweh when they met Moses. In this we see a superb prefigurement of the Lord Jesus. He was the supreme, faultless manifestation of God, and yet also the total, empathetic representative of sinful man.

3:20 Moses "supposed his brothers would have understood how that God *by his hand* would deliver them" (Acts 7:25); but God told Moses: "I will reach out *my hand*". Moses had yet to learn the meaning of God manifestation through men. We too must learn that our hand is to be replaced by God's hand.

4:7 Both the snake and leprosy are symbols of sin. Moses felt he was unable to do God's work because of his own moral failures- but God was showing him that He has the power to deal with that, and that Moses could in fact grapple with sin if he let God use him. Moses had given the excuse that the people wouldn't believe God's word if he preached it to them (:1), but it seems this was really an excuse for his inner sense of unworthiness.

4:11 This verse is classic proof that disease is ultimately from God and not from any superhuman Devil or demons.

4:12 This is alluded to in Mt. 10:19,20 and Mk. 13:11 concerning how we too will be taught what to say when we come before the rulers of our world. In such moments of crisis, Moses, even in weakness as he was at this time, really is our living example.

4:16 Moses was "as God" to Aaron and Pharaoh (7:1), but he wasn't God Himself. Such language can be used about men, Angels and Christ- but it doesn't make them personally equal to God.

4:24 God's intentions can be changed by the actions of a third party, in this case Moses' wife. Later, God intended to destroy all Israel, but Moses interceded for them, and God relented. Moses was inspired to do this by his experience at this time; and his Saviour was a Gentile woman [an unbeliever, or weak in the true faith] whom perhaps he should never have married. Moses was being taught that he too for all *his* weakness could be used by God to save others.

4:26 Zipporah was not one of the covenant people; she was the daughter of a pagan priest (Ex. 18:11 implies Jethro thought Yahweh was only one of many gods); she did not circumcise their children. Should Moses have married her? The fact Moses did not bother circumcising his son shows he was not really serious about his relationship with God; God tried to kill him because of this. God tried to kill Moses because of this; this shows how serious this was in God's eyes. Zipporah was a Midianite, a descendant of Abraham through Keturah (Gen. 25:1-6). Circumcision was a sign of the covenant through Isaac, hence the resentment and bitterness of Zipporah over the circumcision issue; and it

seems Moses capitulated to her on this. Their marriage is sure proof that fundamental spiritual differences at the start can only lead to anger and break up later on.

5:3 *Lest He fall on us*- This isn't what God had threatened (3:18); Moses almost makes God out to be an unreasonable and draconian deity. It seems Moses added to God's word to make it sound more credible, rather like Adam added "... neither shall you touch it" when relating God's word to Eve. If we accept the Bible as God's inspired word, we must be careful never to add to it, even implicitly, in order to make the message sound better in human terms.

5:16 Three times in 5:15,16 the Israelites assure Pharaoh that they are *his* servants, whereas Yahweh had requested that His people be allowed to leave so that they might serve *Him* (4:23). We cannot serve two masters- and they chose to serve Pharaoh and not Yahweh, in the hope that their hard lives might be made a fraction lighter by doing so. There was no fire of devotion in them for Yahweh, no desire to make a radical revolt against their surrounding world; they were interested in the offer of a better life which Moses offered them (4:31), they believed it for a brief moment, but any short term suffering was enough to bring them back to serving Egypt.

5:22 *Brought evil*- God is the ultimate source of "evil" in the sense of disaster (Is. 45:5-7), not any superhuman Satan being.

Moses is presented as initially a very unwilling co-operator with God, all too willing to give up and go home when there wasn't the expected response. Yet he developed very quickly.

6:3 God had revealed Himself as Yahweh to the patriarchs, e. g. at Yahweh-Yireh (Gen. 22:14). But Israel had forgotten the implications of believing that the one true God is He who will be whom He will be, is who He is, and has been who He has been. God states seven times [the number of completion] in verses 6-8 that He "will" be and do things for His people. He really will be who He has said He will be.

6:5 God heard Israel's groaning, even though at that time they didn't believe in Him and were lost in depression. God 'hears' situations as if they are prayers, even the people concerned are too weak physically, mentally or spiritually to formally verbalize their situation in the form of a prayer to God. He does the same today.

6:12 Yet God had promised Moses earlier that Israel *would* hear him (3:18). God solemnly told him to go and speak to Pharaoh, because God had told him to do so. But Moses has the cheek to say exactly the same words to God a second time. In a chapter which speaks much of Moses' reluctance, the record encourages us: "These are that Aaron and Moses... these are those who spake to Pharaoh... these are that Moses and Aaron" (6:26,27)- as if the weakness of one as great as Moses should be encouragement for we who are so doubting and faltering in our service of God.

6:30 *Uncircumcised lips*- This may refer to some speech impediment Moses came to suffer. Or it may be that Moses felt he had been so long away from the Israelites that he didn't feel himself as 'circumcised', or perhaps he had never been circumcised. But God used a man who keenly felt his physical and spiritual inadequacies for the great work he was asked to do. A feeling of insufficiency is vital if we are to be used by God, for He delights in using the weak and broken things of this world.

7:2 Although Aaron was intended to be Moses' spokesman, it seems Moses soon took over speaking directly to Pharaoh. This may mean that Aaron lost his nerve; or that Moses gained confidence and no longer considered his spiritual and physical impediments of "uncircumcised lips" (6:30 note) to be a barrier to God using him.

7:4 It seems that all the people of Israel had a guardian Angel- this seems to be implied by "bring out My armies and My people", implying that there were two armies leaving Egypt- one of Angels, another of their charges. Hence 12:41 "it happened, that *all* the armies of Yahweh (a phrase often used about the Angels- but here concerning the Israelites too) went out from the land of Egypt". We too each have a guardian Angel.

7:5 The rejected will not only see how they could have been in the Kingdom; judgment results in men knowing God's Name / character. When God's judgments had been poured out on Egypt, then they knew God's Name; but for those racing against the inevitable tide of death in the returning Red Sea, it was all too late. This will be the tragedy of those rejected at the day of final judgment; nobody will be indifferent in that day, all will earnestly perceive who God really is. The day to know Him is now.

7:7 The life of Moses was in three clear sections. Forty years in Egypt in the opulence of Pharaoh's court, forty years leading sheep in the wilderness, forty years leading Israel in the wilderness. Our lives too are arranged by God, although we only perceive it after many years.

7:17 The pronouns personally confuse God with Moses- our hand becomes God's hand when we put it to His work.

8:9 Was such sarcasm appropriate? We have 'the Truth' in comparison to the unbelieving world, but this is by grace alone, and no sense of superiority, arrogance or sarcasm should ever feature in our witness to them.

8:13 *According to the word of Moses*- The requests of prayer become almost a command to God if we really believe they are according to His will; by His grace, we will ask what we will and He will do it for us (Jn. 16:23). The Greek there implies a superior asking an inferior to do something. This is an essay in the humility of God. We shall decree a thing (in prayer) and it shall be established unto us (Job 22:28).

8:16 The plagues were judgments against the gods of Egypt, whom Israel had likely come to believe in (12:12; 15:11). This plague targeted Seb, god of the dust of the earth; as the flies had mocked Hekot, the goddess of magic who had a frog's head, and the Nile turning to blood showed the effective death of Hapi, the god of the spirit of the Nile.

8:21 Ra and the forerunner of Beelzebub were likened to beetles; much pagan Egyptian jewellery featured beetles.

8:22 Initially, God's people suffered the effects of the earlier plagues. But they didn't experience the later plagues. The plagues on Egypt are alluded to in the descriptions of the latter day judgments to come upon the earth just before Christ returns. It could be that the same will happen- those who are alive at that time may suffer the effects of the initial judgments, and then be somehow preserved as Israel were (Is. 26:20).



*To the end-* God's desire was to save even Pharaoh. We should never give up on seeking to convert anyone.

8:25 *Within the land-* Comparing :27, it required three days journey for God's people to leave Egypt. It's likely that we are to see here a reference to the three days Christ remained dead, before resurrecting to enable God's people to leave Egypt [the world] and embark for His Kingdom.

8:28 *Pray for me* sounds as if there might have been some recognition of Yahweh forming within Pharaoh. Hence God and Moses were seeking his repentance and even salvation, and the drawn out process of the plagues was part of that seeking, even though the more he hardened his heart against his spiritual possibilities, the more God had to confirm him in this.

9:3 *Is on-* Present tense. Yet the idea is clearly 'it *will be* on'. God's word is so certain that He can speak of things He has not yet done as if He has done them, or is now doing them (Rom. 4:17). We need to try to look at things like this; and see that the essence of future judgment and salvation are in fact working themselves out right now.

9:5 The plague upon cattle was clearly prophesied as going to happen at a specified time; but it was conditional upon Pharaoh refusing to let Israel go (9:1,2). He *could* have complied, and therefore the plague wouldn't have happened. And yet the prophecy is so specific that it would seem that this conditionality just didn't exist. But it did. Bible prophecies often have a conditional element to them, because God's purpose is often open-ended, reflecting the colossal value He places upon our freewill decisions.

9:14 The plagues were on Pharaoh's heart in that God was progressively confirming Pharaoh in the position he had himself adopted.

9:22 The great hail plague lead up to Israel's Passover deliverance, and yet this is the language of the last days (Rev. 16:21)- as if there will again be a Passover deliverance for God's people, heralded by the pouring out of plagues upon those who persecute them.

9:29 Spreading out hands is a form of prayer, perhaps symbolizing our openness before God, or perhaps an expression meaning that we have nothing, but beg God for His grace.

9:31,32 Are we to conclude that the Egyptians grew barley but the Hebrews preferred wheat?

9:35 The record speaks often of how Pharaoh hardened his heart ["his heart was stubborn" carries this idea], and yet also of how God hardened Pharaoh's heart (10:1). God confirms people in the mental attitude they adopt. He's not indifferent. Hence the colossal importance of human thought and action- God is waiting to confirm us in the way we choose to go.

10:6 Turning around and storming out shows his anger and emotion; being easily provoked was one of Moses' characteristics (Num. 20:12; Ps. 106:32,33). And yet he was very humble (Num. 12:3). There's nothing wrong with emotion and passion in itself, and it's not irreconcilable with humility.

10:19 The wind casting the locusts into the Red Sea was similar to how God sent a wind to open and close the Red Sea, and the Egyptians were as it were cast into the Red Sea to their destruction. God

was seeking to show Pharaoh what He was capable of, and how Pharaoh was just another locust. The Pharaohs had a locust crest on their crowns. God tries to give people warning of the judgment that will come upon them, in the hope they will repent.

10:22 The plague of darkness was clearly intended to imply the death of Ra, the Egyptian sun god. One by one, the major gods of Egypt were declared dead or powerless by the plagues. The Israelites should've learnt from this not to worship the Egyptian gods ever again; but they forgot the lesson.

10:23 Similar to how the Angel stood behind the Israelites as they crossed the Red Sea, giving them light and yet giving darkness to the pursuing Egyptians (14:20). Perhaps the Israelites had light but the Egyptians darkness because the Angel stood with them literally? God often gives notice of what He is planning to do, bringing about similar situations, in the hope that His people will repent.

10:25 God's demands upon Pharaoh grew- now he had to give them animals too. The further a person goes away from God, the harder God makes it for them- because He confirms people in the hardness or softness to Him which they choose.

11:3 *The man Moses was very great*- Yet it is also written that "the man Moses was very meek" (Num. 12:3). Putting the two passages together we have the clear lesson that he who humbles himself is made great; and in this, Moses was not only a type of Christ but also a pattern for all who would go through the pattern which the Lord Jesus set before us: of humbling ourselves now that we might be made great in due time.

11:8 *I will go out*- Moses saw himself as representative of all God's people, just as Christ is our representative.

12:5 *Without blemish*- quoted about Christ, whom the Passover lamb represented (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19). The animal was to be 'taken out' from the flock- it wasn't specially bred for the occasion. This prefigures how the Lord Jesus was to be of true human nature, one of us, identical to the rest of the flock whom He died to save.

12:11 *Belt on your waist*- With their robes girded up. In a chapter full of Passover allusions, Peter quotes this phrase as painting a word picture of the intensity in which believers today should be living as they await the call to leave this present society [cp. Egypt] and go to be with the Lord (1 Pet. 1:13).

12:19 Searching their homes for yeast represents our searching of our lives for sin (1 Cor. 5:6-8). Sin is like yeast in that just a little bit of it leads to a huge influence in our lives and those of others- it spreads, unless it is thrown away.

12:22 *Hyssop*- We think of the use of hyssop in Christ's crucifixion (Jn. 19:29).

12:23 'Pass over' translates a Hebrew word meaning to hover over. One Angel would hover over the homes of the faithful Israelites to stop the 'Destroyer' Angel (1 Cor. 10:10) killing their firstborn.

12:29 *Midnight*- The second coming of Christ is figuratively said to be with a great cry at "midnight" (Mt. 25:6). Note how a great cry went up at midnight on Passover night (:30). We who are awaiting the return of Christ are therefore in a similar position to Israel on Passover night, watching and waiting, under persecution of various types.

12:34 The Israelites also took with them the idols of Egypt (Ez. 20:7,8), even though the plagues had demonstrated those idols to be dead and powerless, and God had declared those idols condemned by the plagues (:12). The crossing of the Red Sea represents our baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), and we too mustn't take any of this world's idols with us when we spiritually leave this world.

12:37 If there were 600,000 men, excluding children, we can guess that there were around three million Israelites who left Egypt, in addition to the mixed multitude of :38. Jacob's family numbered 70 people when they entered Egypt 430 years previously (12:41; Gen. 46:27). This is a huge growth rate; the promises to Abraham that his descendants would become many clearly received a clear initial fulfilment. Through baptism, those same promises are made to us (Gal. 3:27-29), and in some way we may also experience an initial fulfilment of the promised blessing even in this life.

12:38 *Mixed multitude*- Egyptians who had come to side with Yahweh? Or does this refer to the offspring of relations between the Israelites and Egyptians (e.g. Lev. 24:10)?

12:42 The Passover was a memorial feast, to commemorate how God had saved His people. The equivalent for believers today is the breaking of bread meeting, rightly called by some 'the memorial meeting'. It's a celebration of what has been done for us through the slain lamb, the Lord Jesus.

13:8 *For me*- Subsequent generations were to see themselves as having been personally saved from Egypt, and many of the Psalms take comfort in what God did there as being a guarantee that He likewise will save *us* from our Egypt-like situations.

13:9 *A memorial*- All that Israel did with their hands or thought in their minds was to be influenced by the memory of the fact that they had been redeemed from Egypt. Our experience of redemption through the blood of our Passover lamb should have the same effect upon us. Some Jewish traditions literally fulfil this command by carrying jewellery on their wrist and forehead. For us it should be a mental awareness, which is physically articulated through the memorial meeting, breaking bread and drinking wine in memory of Christ's death which redeemed us from this world and its gods.

13:17 God is sensitive to our weaknesses in the path He chooses to lead us towards His promised land. The fact the people did later wish to return to Egypt (Num. 14:4) was therefore inexcusable; God did not test His people more than they could reasonably endure, just as He will not with us (1 Cor. 10:13).

13:21 The pillar of cloud is paralleled with an Angel in 14:19. Israel were led out of Egypt, through the desert to the promised land by an Angel who guided them- just as we are led by a guardian Angel. The cloud shielded them from the strong sun in the day, and the fire gave them warmth and light by night. In this we see God's sensitivity to us and provision of all our basic needs on our journey towards His Kingdom. An Angel in a cloud appears in Rev. 10:1 to announce that the journey of God's people is over, and they have entered His Kingdom.

13:22 The Angel was continually with the people, every day of their journey- including the days when they murmured against God, wanted to return to Egypt, made a golden calf. We too can become over familiar with God and with the fact that we are being led by an Angel towards God's Kingdom.

14:2 Geographically and tactically, this was a mistake in human terms- God led them into a dead end, surrounded by mountains and with their backs to the sea, with the Egyptians charging after them. We too are led by God at times into situations which seem dead ends, with no human way out. But this is in order to show us the power of His salvation.

14:12 God wanted His people to leave Egypt in order to be *His* servants (7:16); but their response had been that they preferred to be Pharaoh's servants. Moses brought them out of Egypt by his faith, not theirs (Acts 7:36,38; Heb. 11:28,29). In some ways, God drags us kicking and screaming out of the world and to be His people; this is what grace is all about.

14:13 *Whom you have seen*- The pursuing Egyptians were very close to the Israelites. God sometimes tests our faith to the very limit.

14:15 This was a rebuke of Moses by God. He had his crisis of faith, understandably- even though Moses calmly exhorted the people to have faith (14:13). Yet by faith he brought them through the Red Sea (Heb. 11:28,29). Therefore as with his first exit from Egypt (he feared the wrath of the King, and then he didn't, Heb. 11:27 cp. Ex. 2:14), his faith wavered, but came down on the right side.

14:21 *Made... dry land... the waters were divided*- Language definitely reminiscent of the Genesis creation (Gen. 1:7). It's as if God was making a new creation for Israel. After our baptisms into Christ, we too become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

14:22 1 Cor. 10:1,2 interprets crossing the Red Sea as prefiguring Christian baptism. Israel were baptized into Moses as we are into Christ, "in the cloud and in the sea". A cloud is water droplets. They had water on both sides of them and water above them- in this sense they were surrounded by water, just as baptism is a complete immersion in water.

15:1 The faithful believers will sing the Song of Moses when they enter God's Kingdom and all our troubled waters are permanently calm (Rev. 15:3). The Israelites are set up as our examples, and we should learn the lessons from their subsequent failures.

15:2 *My father's God*- Moses was only with his parents in babyhood and maybe very early childhood. They inculcated in him the faith of Yahweh at that early age. They likely died whilst he was still in the court of Pharaoh and looked like an ungrateful child who had gone the way of the world and forgotten his God and his people and their efforts to raise him in the faith. Moses here pays tribute to them. What a surprise awaits them in the Kingdom!

15:4 Pharaoh's men ran into the Sea themselves in hot pursuit of Israel; but God confirmed them in that desire, so in a sense He cast them into the Sea. There is strong emphasis on the image of God throwing or casting the Egyptians into the Red Sea (15:1,21); God confirms people in the way they wish to go, in the heart they wish to have.

15:11 *Among the gods*- The Egyptian gods had been declared dead or powerless by the plagues. Israel enthusiastically sung of Yahweh's excellence above these gods; and yet they still carried the idols who represented those gods with them, and worshipped them (Ez. 20:7,8; Acts 7:42,43). It's one thing to enthusiastically sing of God's truths in the words of hymns and songs, but to live out those words in daily life is quite another.

15:15 *Are melted away*- So the people enthusiastically sung, and so it was in reality, as reported by Rahab (Josh. 2:9-11). But when Israel came to enter Canaan, they preferred to believe that the people there hadn't melted away at all, but were far too strong for them (Num. 13:30-33). Israel's hearts "melted" for fear of those melting Canaanites (Josh. 14:8). Again, we can loudly sing of God's power over all that might be obstacles in our path to entering the Kingdom, but to live and feel this in continual daily life is something else.

15:22 Soon after their baptism at the Red Sea, God gave His people tests. This is often seen in the lives of those baptized into Christ.

15:24 *Murmured*- We are specifically told not to murmur as they did (1 Cor. 10:10). They soon lost the intensity of joyful faith they had when they sung the Song of Moses earlier in this chapter. We too struggle to keep the intensity of faith which we have at some specific moments.

15:27 The Israelites in their twelve tribes must have marvelled at God's gracious providence when they came across twelve wells in the desert, one for each tribe. In our wilderness journeys we too at times are amazed by God's kind providence. The twelve wells enabled 70 palm trees to grow. Gen. 10 listed 70 Gentile nations as the descendants of Noah's sons after the flood, and the number is associated with the Gentile world. The implication is that Israel's blessings were to be shared with the Gentile world. Abraham's seed was to be a blessing to the world, and we who are in Christ are likewise that seed, and aren't to be selfish with our spiritual blessings but share them with the surrounding world. Israel's spiritual elitism and isolationism was exactly the opposite of what God intended.

16:3 As Israel exaggerated in their minds how good it had been in Egypt, forgetting it was the land of their suffering and desperation, so we can look back to the world we left at baptism [cp. The Red Sea crossing] and imagine it was so far better than it was.

16:6 God had brought Israel out of Egypt, but the reality and wonder of it was subsequently lost on them, just as it can be on us.

16:8 It's twice emphasized in :8,12 that the manna would completely fill them. God's word as it is in Christ can alone fully satisfy us here in life's wilderness.

*Not against us*- What they said against Moses they said against God, in the sense that all God's people represent Him, and our attitude to His people is our attitude to God- and will be the basis of our final judgment (Mt. 25:40).

16:18 Jewish tradition interpreted this as meaning that the stronger, fitter people gathered more and shared it with those who were weaker and couldn't gather so much, resulting in them all having the same amount of manna. Paul quotes this tradition with approval in 2 Cor. 8:15, using it to argue that rich Christians should give to those who are poorer. Those who refused to obey this command of 16:18 found their manna was corrupted by morning- teaching that unless we share our manna or wealth (as 2 Cor.8:15 interprets it) before the morning of the Lord's coming, we will incur His wrath.

16:19 They were given enough food only for each day. Jesus alluded to this when He asked us to pray that God will give us enough bread for today only (Mt. 6:11).

16:27 The manna represented the word of God and the salvation which comes through its revelation in Christ (Jn. 6:48,63). Israel could gather it on six days of the week, but not on the seventh. The seventh day represents the Millennium / Kingdom (cp. how the manna ceased as soon as they entered Canaan, representing the Kingdom). Yet on the seventh day Israel sought to collect manna but found none- as the foolish virgins of the new Israel will seek the oil of the word when it is no longer available. Nobody will be indifferent in the day of judgment. All will want to gather the manna, be filled with the oil. Now is the day to do so.

17:6 The rock that was struck represented Christ (1 Cor. 10:4)- water came out of His side when He was 'struck' in crucifixion. Paul says that the rock followed them- in the sense that the water from the smitten rock followed them as a gushing river. This speaks of the constant refreshment and life available from Christ in our wilderness journeys. Yet despite the wonder of that provision, the people still murmured, made a golden calf, wanted to return to Egypt- they failed to perceive the wonder of God's constant presence, just as we can.

17:11 Uplifted hands represent intense prayer (Lam. 2:19; 2 Chron. 6:12,13; Ezra 9:5; Ps. 28:2; 141:2; 1 Tim. 2:8). The Bible is always teaching us the power of just one person- when Moses didn't pray so fervently, Israelite lives were lost. Others' wellbeing and final victory partially depends upon our prayer for them, hence Paul's example of and exhortation to pray for others continually.

17:12 Moses with his arms held above his head with men both side of him until the sun went down invites comparison with Christ on the cross, where He intensely prayed for the final victory of us God's people.

18:2 Moses "sent away" this woman- the Septuagint uses the same Greek word translated to "divorce" in 1 Cor. 7:11-13. Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts (Mt. 19:8) and yet he himself appears to have divorced her- for the hardness of his heart?

18:3 Moses' children had names which showed his recognition he was a stranger in the land where he was living; he lived as a foreigner in Midian. Few people live in a country for 40 years without feeling they belong to it. We who are the Israel of God are to live as foreigners and pilgrims in this land which in fact is our eternal inheritance (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11).

18:15 Again we see the degree to which Moses was functionally God to the people, although he wasn't God Himself in person. The same can be said of Jesus.

18:18 Moses accepts Jethro's advice on the basis that he would otherwise "wear away"; even though his natural strength never abated (Dt. 34:7). Was that because he followed Jethro's advice- or because God blessed him anyway, making Jethro's advice irrelevant?

18:21 As with the New Testament qualifications for leadership amongst God's people, birth, education, charisma and social standing were irrelevant. Spiritual qualifications were to decide who was chosen for leadership- a concept unheard of in any other religion.

19:4 The eagle tries to teach its young to fly independently by casting them out of the nest and flying beneath them to catch them if they fall, as well as the draft from it's own wings keeping them in motion. God wants His people to fly independently, not just be carried by Him.

19:6 We in Christ are His Kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 2:9). The priests were from the tribe of Levi, and the kings from Judah. But God's intention was that all His people should be priests, rather than giving the responsibility for spiritual care and welfare to a select group of specialists. Nearly all religions delegate spiritual care to some group of specialists, but amongst God's true people we are all intended to be priests. Although Christ was from the kingly tribe of Judah, He is a priest too (Heb. 7:11-13)- and we who are in Him can therefore be a Kingdom of priests even now, and in the future be king-priests who shall reign eternally on earth (Rev. 5:10). Whilst the full physical manifestation of God's Kingdom is yet to come at Christ's return, we who are under the Kingship and dominion of God are in that sense His kingdom in embryo, in the sense that the people ruled over by a king are his 'kingdom'.

19:19 According to Heb. 12:18-29, Moses was very frightened by the earthquake and sound of the voice. That passage draws a comparison with the voice of the blood of Christ, which is yet more powerful- having the power to shake all things to their very core.

19:24 God judges people in a manner appropriate to their sin- if the people broke through to gaze at Yahweh, He would break through in judgment against them.

20:4 Israel weren't to worship any appearance of God or anything which claimed to be a representation of Him- He wanted them to worship Him directly, facing the utter reality of the fact that we can have direct contact with Him.

20:5 *Jealous*- The more love someone shows to someone, the more they are going to be jealous about them, especially when the beloved one has agreed to accept that love. God's love for us is colossal, epitomized in the gift of His Son to die for us in demonstration of His love. He is therefore jealous over us, our thoughts, actions, feelings- for He sees all. It is painful for Him beyond words when we turn away to other gods- and it must be thrilling for Him to see us eagerly wanting to respond to Him, in a world which for the most part has refused His love or treats it as something ordinary.

20:7 *His Name in vain*- We take the Name to ourselves by baptism into that Name; baptism is a calling upon ourselves the Lord's Name (Acts 15:17; 22:16). We aren't to do this "in vain", for nothing, but to appreciate the wonder of it.

20:17 *Not covet*- God's law differs from human laws in that it criminalizes internal attitudes. It was impossible to prove the sin of covetousness, nor enforce the law against it- because it's invisible to others. Yet the God who sees all stands in judgment upon our innermost thoughts and desires.

20:19 People prefer not to have a direct relationship with God, hence the hierarchies and pyramid structure of many churches. But God wants to have a direct personal relationship with us as individuals. They failed to see that Divine words given through another person really are the voice of God to us personally (Ex. 20:19). Perhaps our difficulty with appreciating an inspired Bible is similar; we know the theory, but do we really see the wonder of the fact that what we read is the awesome voice of God Himself to us?

20:24 We are made from the dust of the earth. God doesn't want beautiful externalities, He wants us to worship Him from the heart, accepting us as we are. The Law of Moses recognizes so often that Israel wouldn't be fully obedient, hence the next verse goes on to speak of how *if* they still insisted

on building not an earth altar but a stone one, then even if they make use of God's concession to human weakness, they must still abide by His principles.

*I will come down to you and I will bless you-* "You" is you singular in the Hebrew here. Wherever an ordinary Israelite offered sacrifice, God would come to them personally. Yet this is the very language of God coming unto Moses on the top of Sinai (19:20 "came down")- as if to imply that the very pinnacle of Moses' relationship with God, meeting Him on the top of the mount, is just as attainable for each of God's people who truly sacrifices to Him.

21:6 *Elohim*- The word literally means 'mighty ones', and is usually translated "God"; but it can refer to Angels and also to men, in this case, to the elders or judges of Israel.

This custom is alluded to in Ps. 40:6, and applied to Christ in Heb. 10:5-10. For love of us, the wife whom He was given by God His "master" (:4), Christ chose to stay in the Father's house for ever. The nailing of the ear to a piece of wood is understood in Hebrews 10 as prophetic of Christ's nailing to the cross. The ear represented obedient listening to the Master's word. Christ on the cross was ultimately obedient to God's word- for our sakes. That we are seen as His wife should inspire us to the utmost faithfulness and support of His cause in this world.

21:14 The altar represented Christ (Heb. 13:10). He is the place of refuge whither we may flee, who like the man of v. 13 have committed sins worthy of death and yet against our deepest will. Whilst we cannot justify all our sins by blaming them on circumstances, within some kind of 'situational ethic', it is also true that God recognizes that at times and in some ways we sin without deeply intending to.

21:17 To deal with a person as if they are an object is judged by God as bad as murder. The value and meaning of the human person is paramount with God, and is reflected in His law.

21:20 A slave was to be respected as a person no less than anyone else. A person's social or economic standing can never excuse abusing them.

21:33 *Doesn't cover it*- As the punishment for not keeping in an animal known to be dangerous (:29). These laws were seeking to inculcate sensitivity to others. We too should live our lives thinking about the possible consequence to others of our actions, both in what we commit and what we omit to do.

22:7 *Pay double*- But Zacchaeus paid back four times what he had stolen (Lk. 19:8). The existence of God's law shouldn't inculcate a spirit of minimalism in us, doing the letter of the law and no more. Rather if we perceive the principles behind it, we will do far over and above what the letter of the law requires.

22:10 'God' here refers to the judges or elders; to come before God's representative is to come before God.

22:21 Israel were to be motivated in kindness to others by the recollection that they had been redeemed from Egypt; the memory of our redemption through the waters of baptism [cp. the Red Sea] should have the same effect upon us.



22:25 Israelites weren't to lend to each other for interest. Yet Jesus tells the rejected man that he should've done at least this (Mt. 25:7)- as if to say that the man should've done at least something with what God had given him, even if it wasn't the ideal, and even if it technically infringed God's law. Indifference and selfish laziness with God's gifts is therefore highlighted as being so reprehensible to Jesus.

22:31 This command wasn't only for hygienic reasons. God wished to encourage His people to have a healthy work ethic, not taking short cuts, but eating animals they had raised themselves for that purpose. We live in a society where laziness and trying to live for free has become almost an art form. We cannot ultimately get around the curse, that we shall eat only as a result of the sweat of our own labour. We have to accept our humanity and our fallen condition, looking for the lifting of the curse in God's future Kingdom.

23:2 We go astray "like sheep" (Is. 53:6)- we tend to sin because of others' influence, because we're not as strongly individualistic and independent as we like to think we are.

23:4,5 These are further examples of how God's law differs from human laws in that it criminalizes internal attitudes. It was impossible to prove the sin of omitting to help your enemy's animal, nor enforce the law against it- because it would've been invisible to others. Yet the God who sees all stands in judgment upon our innermost thoughts and desires. Note too that sins of omission are just as bad as sins of commission; the man who refused to help the animal could've returned to his home that day feeling he hadn't actually committed anything wrong. But his sin of omission would've been noticed by God.

23:12 God's sensitivity to animals shines through the Law- the fact even animals are living beings and not mere machines should be felt by us too. God's intention was to inculcate an all round spirit of sensitivity to others in human life, and that included animals.

23:13 They were not to even mention the names of idols- a principle alluded to in Eph. 5:3, where we are told that we shouldn't even name or talk about immorality and evil. For these are the idols of our age. We aren't to sin vicariously, by watching, reading and speaking about sinful things whilst not physically doing them ourselves.

23:21 God's Name being carried by the Angel explains how Moses later is recorded as talking with Yahweh face to face, even though we are also told that He cannot ever be seen by humans. Moses spoke with the Angel who carried the Yahweh Name, and who was therefore functionally as God to men. The same principle explains how men, and especially Christ, can be spoken of as God because they carried His Name, without this making them God Himself in person.

23:23 This happened invisibly, with the Angel working through circumstances to weaken those tribes. But the Israelites failed to believe this verse, feeling that those tribes were far too strong for them (Num. 13:30-33).

23:28 The sending of hornets ahead of Israel parallels the sending of the Angel ahead of them (:23). The reference may be to literal hornets devastating and weakening the Canaanites; or it could refer instead to Egyptian tribes or the Philistines, some of whom had hornets on their armour, attacking and weakening the Canaanite tribes just before the Israelites arrived. This situation was providentially arranged by the Angel who went before Israel. The obstacles to our possessing the

Kingdom seem huge and strong, but in fact they have been significantly weakened by God's providence. Invisible to us, the Angels likewise are potentially preparing our way to enter the Kingdom.

23:29 The God who is so far away from this earth foresees the situations we will face in life, and like a true Father, arranges things so that they will not be too great for us to overcome. His sensitivity to us is amazing.

24:7 Moses could read- for he had been raised with the best of the Egyptian education system (Acts 7:22).

24:8 *Blood of the covenant*- It wasn't that the blood *was* the covenant, but the death of the slain animal represented the confirmation and certainty of the covenant. Christ's death confirmed the new covenant which was made in the promises to Abraham (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:15-19). Believers take the cup of the new covenant in the breaking of bread service (1 Cor. 11:25), as a token of the absolute certainty of God's basic promises to us who have had those same covenant promises made to us through baptism (Gal. 3:27-29). We will eternally inherit the earth- and the blood of Christ confirmed that to us.

24:11 To eat and drink with the Lord is a sign He accepts us and does not wish to destroy us. This is the comfort of doing so at the breaking of bread meeting.

24:12 Yahweh wrote the Law. Yet the Lord Jesus speaks of *Moses* writing the precepts of the Law (Mk. 10:5). "The book of the law of Moses" is parallel with "the book of the law of Yahweh" (Neh. 8:1; 2 Chron. 17:9); it was "the book of the law of Yahweh given by Moses" (2 Chron. 34:14). God was so strongly manifest in Moses, without making Moses to be God Himself in person.

25:2 Willing hearted giving to God is important- the giving must never be from a sense of unavoidable obligation. In appealing for generosity to our poorer brethren, Paul uses this idea- speaking of how a willing heart in a cheerful giver is so loved by God (2 Cor. 8:19; 9:7).

25:21 The blood of atonement was sprinkled each year upon the top of the ark, the place known as "the mercy seat" or 'atonement cover'. This blood represented the blood of Christ. The Angel cherubim shadowed the blood on the cover, representing how the Angels watched over Christ in His sacrifice and especially upon the cross. Hence His temptation to call Angels to deliver Him from it (Mt. 26:53). Peter alludes to this in saying that the Angels intently look down upon the things of the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:12). Pagan religions typically had a throne in their temples, on which their God sat. The throne of the true God was empty- there was a "mercy seat", but no god or idol sat upon it. Faith is about believing in the God who cannot be seen (Heb. 11:1,2), and whose saving mercy to us is confirmed in the blood of His Son.

25:22 God meets with us over the blood of Christ, and from there His voice is heard. Hence Heb. 12:18-29 likens the blood of Christ to a huge voice; we cannot imagine Him there on the cross and be passive, we hear, as it were, God's voice for us. This is why we must regularly remember Christ on the cross, replaying the scene continually before our eyes. For there we hear God's voice and we have our meeting with Him. The breaking of bread service is a practical help to this end.

25:36 The candlestick represents the assembly of believers (Rev. 1:20). It was made of beaten work, representing how all those in the true church will be beaten into a shape through which they can be lights for God.

25:38 Gold wasn't the strongest or most practical material for these instruments. But it represents faith (1 Pet. 1:7). We aren't the best instruments for God to use in His house, but He prefers to use the soft and those who aren't humanly qualified for His work- because He works by faith in us, and by our faith in Him rather than our human strength.

26:6 The tabernacle was "one", joined together in such a way by the interlocking parts that it taught the lesson of unity. The spiritual tabernacle, the believers, was "pitched" by the Lord Jesus- translating a Greek word which suggests 'crucifixion' (Heb. 8:2). Through the cross, the one, united tabernacle was pitched. To tear down that structure by disuniting the body is to undo the work of the cross.

26:10 The tabernacle represents God's dwelling place. He now no longer lives in any physical structure, but in the hearts of His people, who between them comprise His new dwelling place. We can however learn lessons from the principles behind the tabernacle construction. Great emphasis was placed on how the components were all interlocking- the curtains coupled together, the boards were joined by bars etc. It is by our unity and connection with each other that God will dwell amongst us. Christianity can't be lived in isolation- we need each other.

26:14 They were dyed red to represent how the blood of Christ is the covering for God's people.

26:31 The veil represents Christ in His humanity (Heb. 10:20). His character was complexly woven and beautiful, with the white linen or righteousness (Rev. 19:8) running as a thread through His entire character. Weaving complex strands and patterns therefore speaks of how God worked to develop the character of Christ, and He likewise weaves in our lives too, if we are open to His working.

26:33 The veil screened off the Most Holy Place, where the very presence of God was. When Christ died, this veil was torn down (Mt. 26:51), from top to bottom- indicating it was done by God and not men. Through His death, anyone who believes in Him can do continually what the High Priest could do only once per year- come right into the very presence of God Himself.

27:1 *Acacia wood*- This was plentiful in the wilderness, but it is little more than brushwood; a surprising choice of material to be used in God's dwelling place. But His choice of *us* with all our weakness and dysfunction, the common, weak stuff of the wilderness, is no less surprising. The choice of acacia wood for constructing the tabernacle is one of several points in the whole enterprise where it seems a less than ideal material was chosen, from a construction point of view. This aspect emphasizes that God prefers to work with the soft, weak and broken in order to do His work (as also in Ez. 15:2-5).

27:20 The lampstand is used as a symbol of the ecclesia in the visions of Revelation 2 and 3. The purpose of the ecclesia is to enable the oil of the Spirit to be burnt, to turn it into light. We are to keep our own personal light burning continually, day and night. Jesus had this in mind when He likened us to women waiting for the bridegroom to come at night, whose oil lamps should not be allowed to go out (Mt. 25).

28:3 The wise were given wisdom, in keeping with God's principle of confirming people in the way in which they themselves choose to go.

28:6 The ephod was a kind of waistcoat, onto which the breastplate was attached.

28:12 This is symbolic of how Christ, our High Priest, carries the names of all God's people on His shoulders and over His heart (:29) as He stands for us in God's presence. The preciousness of the stones reflects our high value in God's sight.

28:17 The faithful believers are likened to a stone with a unique name written on it (Rev. 2:17). We are each called to uniquely reflect and refract the light of God's glory in a way slightly different to anyone else, just as the stones on the breastplate all glimmered with their own unique beauty. Unity isn't the same as uniformity.

28:35 "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16) may be Paul alluding to how the High Priest had to have bells so that "his sound shall be heard... so that he will not die". This idea of the sound being heard is picked up in Ps. 19:3 concerning the spread of the Gospel.

28:39 That the Priest's crown was to be made of linen rather than solid gold or some other precious metal could appear some kind of anticlimax- most leaders of other religions had something solid on their heads. White linen represents righteousness (Rev. 19:8); it's as if the intention was to highlight the fact that simple righteousness is of such great value and power in God's sight rather than any visible ostentation.

28:41 The Lord died that He might "sanctify" us to God (Jn. 17:17,19). This is the word used here by the Septuagint to describe the consecration of the priests to service of the body of Israel. If we reject the call to priesthood today, wanting to leave it all to others, we reject the point of the Lord's saving suffering for us.

28:43 *Bear iniquity* is therefore an idiom for being personally guilty. Yet the idiom is used about Christ in His bearing of our iniquity on the cross (Is. 53:11). The Lord Jesus was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with, leading to His feeling of having been forsaken by God (Mt. 27:46). This means that although Christ never sinned, He knows the feelings of sinners, because His identity with us was so deep and complete.

29:1 'To make holy' or to 'sanctify' is something Jesus often spoke in discussing the meaning of His death. He makes many allusions to the language of the High Priest in His prayer of John 17, e.g. "for their sakes I sanctify Myself so that they also may be sanctified" (Jn. 17:19). We are all called to be part of a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9); Christ's death sanctified us, prepared us for service in God's house. Spiritually serving others is therefore not something just for a specialist minority, but for *all* who are in Christ, 'the anointed one', anointed just as the priests were anointed to serve (:21). The unblemished animals which were sacrificed in order to sanctify the priests therefore represent the sacrifice of Jesus.

29:7 The Septuagint word used for 'anointing' here occurs in the New Testament only in 1 Jn. 2:20,27, where we read that we have each been anointed. The idea of anointing was to signal the initiation of someone as they began a specific calling or work. When we are baptized into Christ, *the* anointed One, then as 2 Cor. 1:21 says, we too are anointed in a sense. We're given a specific

mission and purpose. "The anointing that you received" in 1 Jn. 2 would therefore refer to our commissioning at baptism. It seems to imply a one time act of being anointed / commissioned / inaugurated for service. Baptism isn't therefore merely an initiation into a community; it's a specific commissioning for active service, in ways which are unique to us. We do well to bring this point out to those we prepare for baptism.

29:33 Eating the things with which the atonement was made points forward to the breaking of bread service. We can see in this echoes of the consecration of the priests; and we should realize each time we do it that we have been sanctified in order to proactively serve in God's house.

29:42 Although we are a great multitude of redeemed, yet the communication of the Father and Son to us are still amazingly unique, even though we all hear and read the same actual words, and reflect upon the same facts. Right back at the beginning of God's relationship with Israel He made the point that "I will meet you [plural] to speak there to you [singular]" [the KJV reflects the Hebrew grammar by making a distinction between you plural and 'thee', you singular].

29:45 *I will dwell... will be their God*- Rev. 21:3 understands this as coming true when Christ returns to earth, seeing that God's intention for this to happen with Israel didn't materialize. And yet, having prophesied that He *will be* their God, He says that He is right now their God (:46). This could mean that even if God's people choose not to have Him as their God, yet He keeps His side of the covenant; He is their God. In this we see God's hopefulness for us, His earnest desire to have a relationship with His people.

29:46 Often we read this two fold intention of God- to bring His people out from the world [Egypt], and then to do something positive with them. Our separation from the world isn't therefore negative; for 'holiness' means both separation *from* and separation *unto*.

30:8 *Perpetual incense*- The continual burning of incense, night and day, was a reminder that prayer (cp. Incense, Rev. 8:3,4) was a way of life, not only specific statements. David's references to making constant prayer (e.g. Ps. 88:1) may allude to the constant rising up of the incense. We cannot be literally praying all the time, but our basic spirit of life can rise up as a prayer to God constantly. Our lives are, in a sense, our prayer.

30:9 The Law seems to have foreseen the difference between real and apparent prayer by warning that the true incense was to be burnt [representing prayer], but not any other kind of incense, or incense comprised of other kinds of ingredients. We must ask ourselves whether our prayers are the real thing, or just one part of our brain talking to another part of our brain which we call 'God'.

30:18 This may represent the need for the washing of baptism in order to come to Christ, the altar (Heb. 13:10). This was required if they didn't want to die (:20).

30:20 Tit. 3:5-7 implies that the priests washing in the brass basin typified baptism. Baptism is related to salvation. All God's people are priests (1 Pet. 2:5,9); the washing of baptism is an absolute necessity before we can be God's priestly people.

30:21 There are many allusions to the language of priesthood in the New Testament, both as major statements and also in passing. The idea of baptism as a washing suggests that we afterwards enter into priestly service; we're not declared by baptism to be merely members of a denomination, hobby

level theologians who now agree to a set of doctrines. We instead, in a very real sense, are cleansed and consecrated into the service of God, ministering to His people, doing His work.

30:35 Incense is a symbol of prayer (Rev. 8:3,4). Whilst there is a place for instantaneous and emotional prayers, this doesn't mean that we should overlook the fact that another kind of prayer should be prayer that is carefully prepared, just as the incense was.

*Seasoned with salt*- Our speech, Paul says, should be "seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). He's alluding here, perhaps with the idea that the way we speak generally should be in the same manner as we pray to God, like the incense.

30:36 *Very small*- If incense is like prayer, this may refer to how we shouldn't be afraid nor ashamed to pray to God about the smallest things. Nothing is outside of His control, indeed, God is so often in the details.

31:6 The wise were made more wise- an idea we often encounter in the opening chapters of Proverbs. God confirms men and women in the way they wish to go; if they wish to do His work and build up His dwelling place, He will confirm them in their natural talents and give them new ones.

31:17 How are we to understand the 'Language of limitation' which Scripture abounds with- e.g. Gen. 2:2; Ex. 31:17; Dt. 32:20,27? God is almighty and doesn't need refreshment. One explanation is that such language refers to God's manifestation through His Angels, who aren't almighty although they are sinless (Mt. 24:36).

Heb. 4:10 understands the Sabbath to teach that as God ceased from His works, so those in Christ should cease from trusting in their own works and live their whole lives in the spirit of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is defined here as a sign between God and the people of Israel, those in Christ don't need to observe it today (Col. 2:14-17).

32:32 Moses loved the people so intensely, despite their rebellion. He was prepared to give his place in the Kingdom so that they might enter; he *prayed* God for 40 days to accept his offer. He knew that atonement could only be by sacrifice of blood (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22; cp. Num. 25:8,13); and yet he climbed the Mount with the intent of making atonement himself for Israel's sin (:30); he intended to give his life for them. And he didn't make such a promise in hot blood, as some men might. He made the statement, and then made the long climb to the top of the mount. And during that climb, it seems he came to an even higher spiritual level; he was prepared not only to offer his physical life, but also his place in the Kingdom; God's "book" is His book of life, of those who will ultimately be saved (Ex. 32:32 cp. Ez. 13:9; Dan. 12:2; Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 20:12). The love of Moses for Israel typifies the love of Christ towards us. At the end of his life he recounts how God had threatened to destroy the people (Dt. 9:15), but he doesn't record his 40 days of pleading with the Father, and how he turned down the offer of having himself made into a great nation. In this we see his humility. Note how Moses argues with God against God's stated intention, and persuades God otherwise. He is open to dialogue with us His people; hence the intensity we can experience in prayer, and the element of wrestling there is in it. To be blotted out of the book may have been understood by Moses as asking for him to be excluded from an inheritance in the promised land; for later, a 'book' was written describing the various portions (Josh. 18:9). The connection is made explicit in Ez. 13:9- to be blotted out of the book meant to not enter

the land. God had just spoken of 'blotting out' Israel from before Him (Dt. 9:14), and making a nation of Moses; but now Moses is asking to share in their condemnation rather than experience salvation without them. This was the extent of his devotion. In Dt. 9:18 he says that his prayer of Ex. 32:32 *was heard*- in that he was not going to enter the land, but they would. Hence his urging of them to go ahead and enter the land- to experience what his self-sacrifice had enabled. In this we see the economy of God, and how He works even through sin. On account of Moses' temporary rashness of speech, he was excluded; Moses didn't enter the land. And yet by this, his prayer was heard. But ultimately he did what he intended- he gave his place in the Kingdom / land so that they might enter [although of course he will be in the future Kingdom]. This is why Moses stresses at the end of his life that he wouldn't enter the land *for Israel's sake* (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21; Ps. 106:32). He saw that his sin had been worked through, and the essential reason for him not entering was because of the offer he had made. In all this, Moses was typifying the death of Jesus. Is. 53:8 describes His cross as being "cut off [Heb. 'excluded'] from the land of the living" (s.w. 'the congregation'- of Israel), for the transgression of His people. The Lord died the death of a sinner, He chose like Moses to suffer affliction with us, that we might be saved.

32:33 God didn't accept Moses' offer to die as a *substitute* for Israel, for each must be judged for their own sins. But He did accept Moses as a *representative* of Israel and accepted his mediation for their salvation on this basis; just as He accepted the work of Christ on the same basis. Paul learnt the lesson when he says that he *could wish* himself condemned and Israel saved (Rom. 9:1-3); but he recognized God didn't accept Moses' offer of dying for them as a substitute.

33:1 The manifestation of God in a person leads to a mutuality between them. Here God says that *Moses* brought up Israel out of Egypt; but in 32:11, Moses says [as frequently] that *God* brought Israel out of Egypt. And we too can experience this mutuality in relationship with the Father.

33:5 God told Moses that because Israel were stiff-necked, therefore He could not go up with them. Moses agrees the people are stiff-necked, but he knows God well enough to ask Him to still go up in the midst of them (34:9). And God did! He acted according to how broad was Moses' conception of God's grace. If Abraham's conception of grace had been even broader, perhaps Sodom would've been saved...

33:13 God assures Moses that he has found grace in His eyes, and yet Moses doubts this... as if the voice of God telling him wasn't enough! And maybe there is even the implication that he mistakenly thought that he needed more *knowledge* of God before he could find that grace... as if it depended upon his own mental faculties. And yet God patiently assures Moses yet again: "*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious*" (:19) was said specifically to Moses, given the context of Moses' doubts about his receipt of God's grace. The coming down of Yahweh to pronounce His Name was, in the context, to show how far God would go to assure Moses that yes, His grace towards Moses was real. We too struggle with really believing God's grace, it seems too good news; and we too are given, also by grace, this undeserved assurance upon assurance.

*I will give you rest*- But they did not enter that rest- Heb. 4:8,10. "Rest" was defined as the land being subdued before God with all the tribes driven out (Josh. 1:13,15; Num. 32:21,22; 1 Chron. 22:18).

This being conditional on Israel's faithfulness, we conclude that when the Angel said "I will give you rest" He was speaking of what was possible in prospect; so much peace, victory and salvation have been prepared for us in prospect.

34:6 God's Name is essentially His characteristics and personality; this declaration of the Name is in response to the request to reveal His glory (33:18). How we pronounce or transliterate God's Name isn't so important; the essence of God's Name is who He is and what He does by grace in the lives of people. Jesus alludes here when He predicted that His death would be a declaration of God's Name; in the cross we see the quintessence of God's mercy, grace, judgment etc. (Jn. 17:26). We are baptized into the Name, whereby all God's perfect character is counted to us.

34:9 Moses makes this request after the clear statement in 33:3 "I will not go up in the midst of you". So let us not be afraid to ask God to change what seems like His purpose in our lives, no matter how hard it seems, if we truly feel that another way would give Him more glory. Moses would not have tried if he did not think success in that prayer was possible. But he not only tried, he succeeded.

34:28 The Old Covenant is defined here and elsewhere as the ten commandments, which include the Sabbath. The New Testament teaches that the Old Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant in Christ- and He never commanded us to keep the Sabbath.

34:29 We are described in 2 Cor. 3:18 as also like Moses beholding the glory of God, in terms of His moral perfection as it is in the face of Jesus (see on :6), and as the physical glory reflected off Moses' face, so the more we are in the presence of Jesus, meditating upon His character, the more that glory in a moral sense will increasingly shine off our faces. Paul uses the metaphor of looking in a mirror, until we find that the image in the mirror is no longer our face but the face of Jesus.

35:5 Paul wanted the Corinthians to think themselves into Israel's shoes. For then they would realize that as Israel had to have a willing heart to give back to God the wealth of Egypt which He had given them, so they were to have a willing heart in being generous to their poorer brethren (Ex. 35:5 = 2 Cor. 8:12). And they would have realized that as "last year" they had made this offer (2 Cor. 8:10 Gk.), so the year before, Israel had received Egypt's wealth with a similar undertaking to use it for the Lord's cause. As Moses had to remind them a second time of their obligations in Ex. 35, so Paul had to bring it again before Corinth. And if they had seen these similarities, they would have got the sense of Paul's lament that there was not one wise hearted man amongst them- for the "wise hearted" were to convert Israel's gold and silver into tools for Yahweh's service (Ex. 35:10 = 1 Cor. 6:5; 2 Cor. 10:12).

35:6-9 These were the things which Israel had taken with them from Egypt (12:36); we likewise should use whatever resources we have taken from this world [cp. Egypt] in order to do God's work and build and enhance His dwelling place amongst His people.

35:31 These men could have refused to do what God asked them. This passage appears to be the basis upon which Paul tells us that each of us have "good works" which God has in mind for us to do, and we must exercise our freewill to perceive them and go do them (Eph. 2:10).

36:6 Israel were extremely generous to God's work, whilst at the same time carrying with them the idols of Egypt and in their hearts wanting to return there (Ez. 20:7,8; Acts 7:42,43). We too can be



externally supportive of God's work whilst in our hearts being far from Him; this is the nature of our human condition which we must battle against. God above all seeks our hearts and not our external works.

36:31 *He made...*- There is an exact symmetry between the commands to make the tabernacle items- e.g. "You shall make bars..." (26:26) and the record of the fulfilment of the work- "He made... bars". This is to demonstrate how strictly obedient Moses was to all the commands, hence the comment that he was faithfully obedient in all the work of God's house (Heb. 3:2,5). In all this, Moses was a type of the perfect obedience of Christ to God. However, we also note that earlier in his life, Moses tended to argue back with God and find every reason *not* to be obedient. As he grew spiritually, he became more naturally and enthusiastically obedient to God's demands rather than trying to find ways around them, and as such he becomes a pattern for our spiritual growth too.

36:35 The veil symbolized the flesh of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 10:20); and yet into it was woven scarlet, a symbol of His blood and sacrifice which permeated His mortal life. The lesson is that the cross is a daily way of life. The Lord taught this when He asked us to take up the cross daily: to live each day in the exercise of the same principles which He lived and died by. Let's not see spiritual life as a survival of a few crises, as and when they present themselves. It's a way of life, and the principles which lead us to the little victories (when we scald ourselves with hot water, when we dirty a newly washed shirt...) will give us the greater ones also, when (e.g.) we stand before a tribunal, or face death in whatever form.

37:19 Israel was one nation under God; they were represented by one seven-branched candlestick. But in the New Testament vision of Rev. 1:20, each church is represented by an individual candlestick, and the body of Christ as a whole is represented by seven candlesticks, seven being the number of completion. This suggests that each local congregation is seen as autonomous by Christ; no other candlestick can dictate to another what they should do. If they fail to give light as they should, then this is dealt with by Christ Himself, the One who walks amongst the seven candlesticks and is in their midst (Rev. 1:13); He alone can remove a candlestick (Rev. 2:5).

37:21 The language of buds, flowers and branches invites us to see the candlestick as a tree of life giving light in the darkness of the tabernacle, which had no natural light. The candlestick represents the local church in our times (Rev. 1:20); we as communities of believers are to be as the tree of life, offering eternity to a dark world; hence Prov. 11:30 likens the fruit of the righteous to the tree of life, which results in winning people for eternity.

37:22 *One beaten work*- The fact the candlestick was made from one piece of gold is emphasized; it speaks of the unity of the local church, achieved through much patient beating out of the material which comprises it.

38:8 Perhaps this suggests that their devotion to God led them to no longer be so concerned with their own image and appearance.

38:18 This describes the curtain over the door of the tabernacle in similar language to how the veil hiding the Most Holy is described. Christ is the door of the tabernacle through which we enter at our conversion and baptism (Jn. 10:9). By doing so we also enter, in prospect, through the veil into the Most Holy of eternity and Divine nature.

The height of the curtains was such that a man would have to bow his head in order to pass underneath it, teaching the humility required to approach God's presence.

38:23 This seems to imply that Aholiab was already a master craftsman; but he could only do the work because God blessed and developed the 'natural' talent which Aholiab was willing to present to God's service. God sometimes gives us the opportunity to develop our 'natural' talents for use in His service- other times, He asks us to do that which is for us a taking up on the cross.

38:29 God remembers to this day how much everyone gave of what material, and has preserved the record in His written word. This is encouragement to us that no sacrifice for God's house is every forgotten, but He eternally remembers it.

39:7 *Stones of memorial*- The idea wasn't that God might forget His people and so He needed to be reminded by the Priest wearing these stones with their names on; rather they were a reminder to Israel that they were each personally remembered by God all the time.

39:9 A span was about 22 cm. or 9 inches. The breastplate was quite small, compared to the grandiose religious clothing of other religions.

39:23 Christ died as the supreme High Priest, and the soldiers decided not to rend His garment but instead to throw dice to see which of them should get it (Jn. 19:24). As He hung on the cross, looking down and noticing what they were doing, He would have remembered this teaching about the High Priest's garment, and taken encouragement that He was indeed doing the High Priestly work to its ultimate term. His blood stained, dirty outer garment- perhaps woven by his social outcast of a mother- was equivalent of the High Priest's robe of "glory and beauty" (28:2).

39:43 When Moses looked with pleasure upon the completed tabernacle and blessed Israel, he was imitating God's inspection and blessing of the completed natural creation (Gen. 1:31); as if now a new creation had been begun in the lives of Israel, just as it is in us through baptism into Christ (cp. The Red Sea crossing)- 2 Cor. 5:17.

40:3 *Ark of the testimony*- The "testimony" refers to the tables of the covenant, the ten commandments, which were within the ark; the connection between the ark and the "testimony" is very strong in the record. The ark was symbolic of Christ, in whom dwelt the word and covenant of God.

40:6 Sacrifice is necessary before we can enter God's presence. Sacrifice doesn't simply mean giving material things to God; it refers to giving up to God that which is personal and valuable to us. We're not involved with God simply in order to get from Him; in this case, spirituality would be purely selfish, as it is in many religions. Authentic relationship with God depends upon our having the spirit of sacrifice; not in the sense that we can only get to God if we give something, for that too would be too primitive and a denial of grace as the basis of our relationship with God. But His grace and the wonder of fellowship with Him cannot be accepted by us passively nor with indifference; our natural response, if we believe it, is to want to give to Him.

40:19 *As Yahweh commanded Moses*- This phrase runs as a refrain throughout the chapter, as an appropriate ending to the book. See on 36:31.

40:30 Before we can come to offer acceptable sacrifice and do God's work, we must firstly wash in baptism.

40:33 *Finished the work*- Jesus had this in mind when just before His death He said that He had finished the work God had given Him to do (Jn. 17:4); and He died saying "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). He felt His work had been to build a dwelling place for God- not in a literal tabernacle, but in the hearts of willing men and women whose weakness and sin He had enabled to be overcome through His sacrifice.

40:37 They didn't know their itinerary ahead of time, each day and night they would've wondered whether they'd be called to move on or not. Their lives in this sense had no stability. If the Red Sea crossing represents our baptisms (1 Cor. 10:1,2) then this speaks of our lives afterwards being under God's leadership and guidance, we in that sense cannot map out how we would wish our journey to be.

## LEVITICUS

1:2 *From the herd*- They were not to keep some animals specially for sacrifice; they were to take the sacrificial animals out of the herd. We are to be living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), not reserving just part of our lives for God. The Lord Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, and He was taken out of the common herd of humanity, not preserved specially for His work.

1:3 *Without blemish*- No animal actually is without blemish. God recognizes that we will not attain perfection in this life, but we are to do our best towards it. Only Christ was the sacrifice totally without moral blemish (1 Pet. 1:19).

1:4 Putting the hand on the animal's head was to show that the animal represented the offerer. He showed thereby that he deserved to die, and wished to give his total life to God just as the animal would be totally offered to God. We see here God's principle of accepting us on the basis of the representative sacrifice of Christ; the equivalent of our putting our hand on the head of the sacrifice is the act of baptism into Christ and abiding "in Christ", He being our representative and we being His.

1:9 Every part of our lives, including our most inward parts, are to be offered to God. The process of splitting the offering into its parts speaks of our self-examination, defining each part of our lives and offering them to God consciously.

2:6 *In pieces*- see on 1:9.

2:9 *A pleasant aroma*- This is a very common phrase. It is applied to us in 2 Cor. 2:15- if we are in Christ, we are counted as a pleasant aroma to God. The offering of ourselves to Him is nothing of itself, but because we are in Christ and counted as Him, we are a delight to God. Hence the colossal importance of being "in Christ".

2:11 Yeast represented sin (1 Cor. 5:8). Honey and yeast would've made the grain pleasing to men; but the lesson was that what pleases people isn't what is necessarily pleasing to God. He wants a person as they are, from the heart.

2:13 The salt represents gracious speech (Col. 4:6) and peace with one another (Mk. 9:50); without these things, no matter how great our sacrifice, it cannot be accepted by God. Hence Jesus taught that we should not offer our sacrifices to God until we have done what we can to get at peace with our brother (Mt. 5:24).

3:6 *Without blemish*- Although peace offerings were completely voluntary, they were not to think that therefore they could not respect God's holiness and give him that which was second best. Many of the sacrifices we make to God are likewise not compulsory, but the spirit of giving God the best which permeates the Law of Moses should remain with us.

3:11 *The food*- The metaphor invites us to see the altar as God's table, at which He as it were ate the sacrifices. At the breaking of bread service, we come to the table of the Lord (1 Cor. 10:21); the offering we bring is ourselves. And yet God has placed on the altar, on the table before us, the sacrifice of His Son, and invites us to eat with Him there. Eating with someone was understood as a

sign of religious fellowship. At the breaking of bread, we are therefore celebrating our living fellowship with God Himself.

3:16 The fat was understood as the best part of the animal, although today for health reasons we tend to consider the meat to be of more interest than the fat. They were to give to God that which they perceived to be the most valuable, within the frames of understanding and perception within which they then lived.

4:3 Sins of ignorance still needed to be atoned for. Sin is a felt offence against God, whether or not we were aware of it at the time. If we accidentally step on someone's foot and they don't tell us about it until tomorrow, it doesn't mean that we didn't hurt them at the time. The sins we committed before baptism, in ignorance, were still felt by God and need atonement- which is available freely through being "in Christ". David asked to be forgiven for the sins he committed which he didn't know about (Ps. 19:12 cp. Ps. 90:8). We should pray the same. But this means we are asking for forgiveness for sin which we haven't specifically repented of. We should likewise forgive others for their sins which although we so clearly feel them, they themselves don't realize they have committed them. We can, if we wish, insist that we shall only forgive those who repent to us of their sins. But the problem with that approach is that *as* we forgive others, the basis we choose upon which to relate to them, so we will be forgiven (Mt. 6:12). If we trust we are forgiven for sins we aren't conscious of, even though they are very clear to God and felt by Him, then we ought to forgive others for their sins even when they don't perceive (at this point in their spiritual journey) that they have sinned.

4:5 *Anointed*- 'Christ' means 'The anointed one', and so Jewish minds would have associated 'Jesus Christ' with the priest who saves ['Jesus' means 'Yahweh's salvation'].

4:7 *At the base of the altar*- We think of the blood of Christ trickling down the stake to the ground.

4:8 *Inward parts*- There is huge emphasis upon this in the regulations about sacrifices. Our inward parts and thoughts of the heart are laid open before God and should be offered to Him, not just the externalities which men see (Heb. 4:12). The sacrifice of Christ was so perfect because His innermost thoughts were offered to God.

4:15 *Before Yahweh*- Before the priests who represented God. God Himself is in Heaven, but His representatives on earth are functionally Him to other people. We must therefore watch our behaviour and who we are, because we who have been baptized into His Name are His representatives on earth.

4:29 The person had to personally kill the animal, not delegate it to a priest or someone else. It would've been an unpleasant experience, but designed to teach the seriousness of sin. 'This animal has done nothing wrong; it's *me* who ought to be dying for my sin' would've been the thought of all sensitive, spiritually minded people who did this. And this is our thought as we survey the cross with the son of God dying upon it for our sins.

5:1 Sins of omission, of turning a blind eye, are just as culpable as sins of commission.

5:2 Haggai comments that it was easier to be made unclean than to be made clean; touching holy things didn't impart holiness to a person, whereas touching unclean things made people unclean

(Hag. 2:11-14). It's easy to be made unspiritual by association with unspiritual things, the things which are dead, which have no spiritual life in them, which are going nowhere- hence Paul alludes to this by saying "Touch not the unclean thing" in the context of appealing for believers to quit worldly associations (2 Cor. 6:17). However, on the other hand, this is no proof for the wrong idea of 'guilt by association'. The Lord Jesus touched lepers in order to heal them.

5:10 The sin offering always preceded the burnt offering, which represented dedication to God. Before we can acceptably dedicate ourselves to God in any enterprise or aspect of our lives, we must first be right with God, cleansed from our sins; for good works alone cannot compensate for the sin we have committed.

5:11 God thirsts for relationship with us, and doesn't want human poverty to mean that we can't get atonement. In Bible times, religion was the hobby of the wealthy; yet God wants relationship with all. Although it was a principle that shedding of blood was required for forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22), God was prepared to allow a non-blood sacrifice if this was all a person had to offer. Aware of this, Heb. 9:22 says that "*almost* all things" under the Law were cleansed by the shedding of blood- but not literally all, because the writer knew that there was this possibility of offering flour offerings instead of the required animal. The fact God is prepared to make concessions to human weakness shouldn't lead us to any spirit of minimalism in how we consider sin or the standards of God's holiness.

6:4 *Robbery*- This effectively was what the exaggeration, mind games, manipulation, white lies and deceitful dealing of v. 2 was reckoned as. These things creep in so easily into any business dealings between people; and God sees them as robbery.

6:5 *In the day*- Broken relationships were to be restored as quickly as possible, so the restoration was to be made immediately. In all human failure, reconciliation involves some level of restoration, be it verbal or material.

6:13 *It shall not go out*- There was fair emphasis on this, that always a bullock should be smouldering as a burnt offering to God. Our devotion to God, as a community of believers and as individuals, must be 24/7; it's not a matter of occasional flashes of devotion, weekly attendance at meetings etc.

6:16 The priests had no inheritance amongst Israel, they survived by eating parts of the offerings. Their eating of them represented God's 'eating' of the sacrifices, the altar being described as His table (Mal. 1:7,12), His acceptance of the offerer and fellowship with them- for eating what had been brought to you was a sign of acceptance and religious fellowship with the donor.

6:20 An ephah is about 22 litres.

6:22 *Wholly burnt*- The priests were not to eat parts of their own offering, as they usually did with the offerings of others. We as the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5) shouldn't take any personal benefit from what we give to God, otherwise the concept of personal sacrifice to God is somewhat lacking in complete meaning. The priests were so used to dealing with the needs of others for atonement and acceptability with God- but they were not to forget that they too needed this, hence they too had to offer sacrifice. Our dealings with the unsaved world shouldn't lead us to forget our own personal need for reconciliation with God.

6:29 When Jesus presented Himself as the sin offering and invited His people to eat the symbol of it in the breaking of bread meeting, He was inviting us to see ourselves as a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9), no longer assuming some group of specialists would look after the spiritual concerns of others, but everyone, male and female, taking responsibility. This was a radical, difficult idea to accept for 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish Christians, and it is hard for us today too, accustomed as we are to assigning responsibility to others rather than taking it ourselves.

7:1 There's a difference between the trespass offering and the sin offering, which is hard to define. It seems that the trespass offering was made when a specific sin had been done more consciously, whereas the sin offering was required when sin had been committed less consciously, or when a more general recognition of the fact we are sinners was required.

7:3,4 There is special emphasis upon the fat, which was perceived as the best part of the animal, and the most covered inward parts. After recognizing our sin, we must be prepared to offer these to God. David understood the spirit of the trespass offering when after his sin with Bathsheba he offered to God his inward parts (Ps. 51:6).

7:20 The peace offering was a voluntary sacrifice. But this didn't mean that the offerer could be careless, or think that having made a special sacrifice to God somehow made his uncleanness of no significance. Taking the initiative in serving God is good, but it shouldn't make us think that we are somehow above God's principles and can be unclean in other aspects of our lives.

7:27 The blood represented the life (17:11). The lesson was that life- both our own and that of others- is God's, and we shouldn't assume that we are our own masters. It is not for us to do what we wish with life- it is God's. Paradoxically, the person who thought they could eat blood, who thought that life was theirs, would lose their life. The only way to live eternally is to give our life back to God who gave it to us. In baptism, we die with Christ, giving our lives to God as He did, but this must be an ongoing principle in our daily living, as we live not to ourselves but to Him (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Pet. 4:2).

7:30 *With his own hands*- We cannot get others to do our worship and devotion to God for us. In this lies the grave error of the orthodox idea of a human priesthood who as it were do everything for us. We are to have a deeply personal relationship with God, with Christ as our only mediator (1 Tim. 2:5).

*Waved*- The Hebrew word means to lift up, to shake, to move to and fro. This style of offering meant that the offerer lifted up the sacrifice to God. The wave offerings were typically eaten by the priests, but first they had to be lifted up to God in recognition that they were being given ultimately to Him and not to the priests personally. The physical lifting up of the sacrifice through the air towards God could represent the ascension of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice to God.

8:4 *Congregation*- The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint [LXX], uses the word *ekklesia*, which is used in the New Testament for the church. The body of believers in Christ today are the equivalent of the Old Testament people of God, Israel.

8:6 This washing with water looks ahead to baptism into Christ, by which we become the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5).

8:8 *Urim and thummim*- These seem to have been two stones, which at times flashed a sequence of yes / no answers to specific questions which arose amongst God's people.

8:9 *As Yahweh commanded Moses*- The careful obedience of Moses is emphasized; by it he became a type of Christ who was totally obedient to God (Heb. 3:2,5). The early chapters of Exodus present Moses as not always obedient, often arguing back with God and trying to find ways around God's commandments to him. In this we see his spiritual growth. This growing acceptance of God's authority and eagerness to obey rather than find ways around His commandments should be a feature of our spiritual growth too.

8:10 'Christ' means 'the anointed one'. All these anointed things were therefore symbolic of Him. He fulfilled their meaning in reality within His person, character and work.

8:14 Whatever special work we embark upon for God, we should always be aware of our own weakness and need for forgiveness. Therefore the consecration of Aaron and his sons for their great work began with sin offerings.

8:15 The physical furniture of the tabernacle wasn't sinful of itself. It was cleansed in order to demonstrate that whatever humanly beautiful and impressive work we make for God, it is still shadowed by our own sinfulness.

8:23 All our service to God is to be done with the awareness of the fact that Christ shed His blood for us- our way of hearing, all we do with our hands and where we go with our feet is to be influenced by our experience of His death for us.

8:34 They were insistently reminded of their own need for atonement as they commenced the work of securing the atonement of others. In all our efforts for others we must bear this in mind.

9:4 The appearing of Yahweh to His people required that they made themselves right with Him through a sequence of offerings which dealt with their sin and made them acceptable to Him. We in our day are to live in daily expectation of God's appearing to us through the return of Christ; and we too must ensure we are right with Him and can go to meet Him acceptably (Mt. 25:6).

9:15 *The goat of the sin offering*- Jesus spoke of the righteous as sheep and the sinners as goats (Mt. 25:33). A goat rather than a sheep was required because the goat was the representative of the sinful people; it was killed as a recognition by them that their sin deserved death. In baptism we make the same recognition- that I should die, and I identify myself with the dead body of Christ, and come alive again in Him.

9:22 *Blessed them*- Blessing is often associated with forgiveness and acceptance with God. The blessings promised to Abraham and his seed likewise (Acts 3:25,26). If we are Abraham's seed by baptism (Gal. 3:27-29) then we are to be a blessing to the world in that we offer them the way to God's forgiveness and fellowship with Him.

When the offerings are spoken of together, they are always in this order- sin offering, then burnt offering and then peace offering. Firstly we must deal with our sin; then dedicate ourselves to God, as spoken of in the burnt offering. Only then can we have peace with God and fellowship freely with Him, as exemplified in the peace offering.



10:1 The implication of v. 9 could be that they were drunk when they did this.

10:2 Fire coming down from God has just occurred as a sign of His acceptance of sacrifice (9:24). We shall either be consumed by God's fire, or we give ourselves to Him as living sacrifices and are accepted and consumed by Him. There's a logic of devotion here- whether we live to the flesh or to the Spirit, we are to be consumed anyway. So we may as well be consumed by God's acceptance of us rather than by His wrath.

10:3 God's destruction of sinners is a constructive declaration of His holiness rather than an angry deity lashing out at people because they offended Him. Any disciplining of others which we may have to do, e.g. of our children or within the family of God, should be done in the same constructive spirit. This incident teaches that we cannot approach God on our own terms, in our own way, but must do so in the way He has defined in His word. The fact He doesn't respond to human failure so visibly as He did in Moses' time doesn't mean that this is any less true for us today.

10:19 Aaron felt unable to eat with God because of his bad conscience about his sons' behaviour, or maybe because he felt angry with God for killing his sons. Moses expected Aaron to just be obedient to the letter of the law for the sake of it, but Aaron is presented as having done the right thing, living with sensitivity to our conscience and feelings rather than in unthinking obedience to the letter of the law.

11:3 *Chews the cud*- The Hebrew means to bring the food up again, to ruminate. Perhaps this was to represent ruminating upon God's word; and being cloven-footed perhaps speaks of being sure footed and walking stably in life. To chew the cud (ruminate on God's word) but not walk the talk (not having a cloven foot) still makes us unclean (:4). However, it may be that there is little significance in the chewing of the cud of itself, because doing so didn't make the animal unclean of itself- it was just an exercise for Israel to teach them the concept of discernment, self control and obedience to God even when this meant practical inconvenience for them (see on :6).

11:6 *Unclean to you*- Paul observes that there is nothing unclean of itself (Rom. 14:14). These animals were to be unclean "to you" because it was part of God's method of teaching His people to make a moral choice in life, to recognize there is sin and righteousness, clean and unclean. There were hygienic reasons behind the prohibition of some animals, but the essential intention was to teach the concept of making a difference, of looking at something we could partake of and saying 'No, that is not for me'. The fact God later withdrew the distinction between clean and unclean animals just confirms that they were not clean nor unclean of themselves; all had been created by God and declared "very good" in Genesis. The distinctions between them were there to simply educate Israel in practicing the concept of separation and discernment between acceptable and unacceptable things in life.

11:8 *You shall not touch*- The basis of the command to us in our age to "touch not the unclean thing" by being separate from sinful things (2 Cor. 6:17).

11:10 The parable of the drag net pictures fishermen sitting down with their catch, throwing away the "bad" fish. These would've been the unclean sea creatures, e.g. crabs, which had got caught up in the net. This represented the 'sitting' of the final judgment at the last day (Mt. 13:48,49). We are to make that same division between good and bad in the choices we make today.

11:13-16 These birds all hunt and eat other unclean animals, and many of them were totems of the idols believed in by the nations. Again the idea was to teach God's people the need to keep away from association with things which resembled sin, which would put ideas in the mind which tended towards sin rather than righteousness. This principle is so relevant today in connection with what we watch or read, for by presenting ourselves continually with sinful associations we are the more likely to ourselves fall into sin.

11:25 The more conscious was the association with uncleanness, the greater was the effort which made to be made to achieve cleansing. Thus if someone knowingly carried a carcass, they had to wash their clothes in addition to being unclean.

11:30 The animals listed were known in the land promised to Abraham. This is another proof that the Law of Moses was not intended for world-wide Gentile use but was the covenant between God and Israel during a specific time and in a specific location on the earth.

11:42 They were not to associate themselves with animals which hugged the earth; just as we should not keep close to earthly things (Phil. 3:19) but seek the things which are above (Col. 3:1).

11:44 The Hebrew words for sanctification and holiness include the ideas of both being negatively separated *from* and positively being separated *unto*. The whole legislation about clean and unclean animals was to try to teach Israel this principle. As such there was limited significance in the actual division of animals into clean and unclean- it was merely a teaching device.

11:45 *Who brings you up out of the land of Egypt*- This didn't just happen at the Red Sea, just as it wasn't completed at our baptisms (1 Cor. 10:1,2). Our being brought out of Egypt and toward God is an ongoing process.

12:8 The poverty of Mary the mother of Jesus is indicated by the fact she offered doves and not a lamb (Lk. 2:24). He knew poverty.

13:2 It's doubtful whether the skin disease referred to in Leviticus is what we now call leprosy, i.e. Hansen's disease.

13:3 Leprosy is symbolic of sin. But a person can appear to have leprosy when in fact it's only a surface level appearance of it; but only the priest, representing Jesus, can declare this. We must of course be careful not to excuse our failings as merely surface level sin; but when it comes to judging others, we must accept that someone can appear sinful to us but it's only a surface appearance; we must not ultimately judge whether a person will be saved or not, quite simply because we cannot do so. Only the priest, the Lord Jesus, can do so.

13:6 Our life spent in Christ is represented by these periods of seven days; at the end, Christ as the true priest and judge will decide whether the sin which there is in our lives has remained at a surface, appearance level- or whether it has spread. Yeast likewise represents sin, in that it spreads its influence. Sin either spreads in our flesh or doesn't...

13:8 The temptation must have been to try to cover up the appearance of sin / leprosy rather than revealing oneself to the priest; just as we are tempted today.

13:9,10 God's people were to avoid trying to judge the appearance of leprosy / sin in others.

13:13 If a person has indulged in sin and recognizes it, although they carry in their lives the evidence of it, yet the sin has as it were died and they are clean. At baptism into Christ we became “dead to sin” (Rom. 6:2).

13:20 There may be here a distinction being drawn between sin on a surface level and that sin which is deeper, which leads to exclusion from God’s family.

13:23 People carry the scars of their sins, but these don’t mean we should treat them as sinful.

13:37 *In his eyes*- The opinion, analysis and judgment of the priest, representing Christ, is all important. Many people in primitive societies consider they have a legitimate medical opinion, based on the kind of traditions and folk wisdom which abound in relation to skin diseases. Israel were to resist these, and leave the diagnosis and judgment solely in the hands of the priest. We have a serious tendency to judge others’ sin, and we really must leave this to Christ.

13:46 Christ died for us “outside the camp” (Heb. 13:11,13); he was unashamed to associate with lepers and as it were died with them and for them.

13:51 *Whatever use*- No matter how valuable the garment, this didn’t somehow mean that the leprosy [cp. Sin] was any less significant.

13:55 The tendency would’ve been to think that if the rot was only on the inside of the garment and not visible to anyone else, then this didn’t require attention or cleansing. Hence the emphasis- “whether the rot is inside or outside”. Sin is still sin, whether or not it is visible to others or not. Some peoples’ sins are more open to our view than others (1 Tim. 5:24).

13:56 *Pluck it out*- To stop the leprosy / sin spreading. Jesus uses the same phrase in teaching that we should ‘pluck out’ of our lives whatever is likely to lead us to stumble into sin (Mt. 5:29; 18:9). Repeatedly, the seriousness of the leprosy / sin is defined by whether it spreads, either in depth or distribution.

14:7 The two birds may foreshadow the death and resurrection of Jesus. The bird which flew away in joyful, thankful freedom symbolized Christ’s resurrection and the freedom from sin which is enabled for us who were spiritual lepers; thanks to the death of Christ, represented by the death of the first bird.

14:8 The cleansed leper was to become as a baby, and be washed in water. This looked ahead to baptism by full immersion into Christ as the new birth (Jn. 3:3-5).

14:14 The leper was to continually live under the impression of the fact he or she had been healed and cleansed, just as we should. The fact the blood of Christ was shed for us personally should affect how we hear (hence the blood was put on the ear), what we do with our hands (the right thumb) and where we go with our feet (the right big toe). The process was repeated with oil (:16), perhaps foreshadowing the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the lives of those in Christ.

14:30 *Such as he can lay his hand on*- Lepers had to live outside the camp of Israel and couldn’t work, so they would’ve typically been very poor. But the concept of sacrifice was important; they weren’t to assume ‘I’m a leper, of course I have nothing, I don’t have to sacrifice anything’. They had to lay their hand on at least some kind of animal- and the Hebrew could possibly carry the sense of

*'whatever* he can lay his hand on'. It was important that they gave at least something in recognition of their need for cleansing, and their receipt of it by God's grace. We shouldn't consider our poverty, in whatever area, to mean that we don't have to sacrifice anything to God.

14:34 *Which I give to you for a possession*- Constantly Israel were reminded that God would indeed give them the promised Kingdom, even though at that time as they wandered in the wilderness it must've seemed merely a nice idea. He encourages us likewise.

14:35 It would've been tempting for the owner to just cover up the signs of disease within his house, rather than ask the priest to inspect it. We are to be open before God, freely confessing our sins and possible sins or liabilities to sin, in open dialogue before Him in prayer. When David invites God to search his heart and see if there be any wicked way in him (Ps. 139:23), he was alluding to the language of the house owner inviting the priest to inspect his house for leprosy.

14:39 This looks forward to Christ as the ultimate priest coming again on the final [seventh] day and inspecting the degree to which sin has spread within us, or remained merely on the level of appearance. 1 Pet. 2:12 alludes here, by calling the day of Christ's return "the day of inspection" (Gk.).

14:41 The removing and scraping of diseased stones is a figure alluded to later in the Bible. The stones of Tyre were to be removed and scraped (Ez. 26:4)- for it was a sinful city. Jesus makes the same allusion when He said that the stones of the temple were to be removed one by one, because the Jews refused to accept the day of Christ's inspection (Lk. 19:44 Gk.). When He entered the temple, looked around it and then walked out, He was acting as a priest inspecting a leprous house (Mk. 11:11). But the Jews refused to accept Him as priest and insisted that their hypocrisy was in fact holiness. The new stones which were to be brought in (:42) refer to the Christian believers, who were to be built up into a new temple (1 Pet. 2:5). It was a radical thing indeed for Jesus to liken the temple, the very symbol of human piety and the very quintessence of the Jewish religion, to a leprous house which needed to be pulled down. Established religion today likely has the same judgment from Him.

14:47 There was greater culpability the more consciously a person did things which he or she knew were unclean. Thus to lie down in the unclean house required a washing of clothes, whereas just going into it merited a lesser requirement for cleansing.

14:51 Wood, hyssop and scarlet clothing all featured in the final suffering and crucifixion of Christ. This is the basis for our cleansing from the leprosy of sin.

15:2 These laws were to teach that in essence, it is what comes from within a person which makes them unclean, more than what enters us from outside (Mk. 7:15-23). The idea that demons, evil spirits or Satan can enter us and make us unclean must be rejected; Jesus emphasizes that sin comes from *within*, therefore it is totally our fault, and we must take responsibility rather than blaming it on cosmic forces outside of us.

15:3 *If his body has stopped excreting his discharge*- Even if we are no longer sinning, we must remember that we still stand guilty for past sins unless we have received cleansing for them. The passage of time and the fading of human memory works only a pseudo-atonement for sin; it is the

blood of Christ and our conscious identity with it which alone can eternally cleanse our conscience from sins both past and present.

15:10 There was greater culpability the more consciously a person did things which he or she knew were unclean. Thus to purposefully carry something unclean required a washing of clothes, whereas just touching them merited a lesser requirement for cleansing.

15:13 *Running water*- In the dry wilderness, this would have been from the river of spring water which followed them from the smitten rock, which represented Christ who was smitten so that we might have the means of being cleansed (1 Cor. 10:4).

15:16 Like many of the commandments, there was a large element of personal choice in whether to obey this or not; intimate matters such as personal discharges were unknown to others. Under the new covenant, this is even more the case; attitudes of mind which make us unclean before God are known only to ourselves. The Law of Moses was the only legal code which had so many clauses which concerned matters which could never be publically demonstrated. God's intention even under the old covenant was to teach and inculcate personal relationship between God and His people. He did this by giving commandments whose keeping only He and the individual knew about.

15:18,19 The whole family would have known that 'mum and dad' or just mum was unclean. Personal matters like sex and menstruation thereby became part of normal family awareness, rather than being hived off in quasi-secrecy and invested with an aura of mystery as they are in many modern cultures.

15:28 This two stage cleansing process is common in the Mosaic rituals. She was clean, but in another sense not fully cleansed until the end of the seven days. We likewise are now cleansed in Christ, but in a full sense we will only be fully cleansed when He returns and our bodies are made like His, and the flesh no longer is a part of our condition of being.

16:2 This is one of a number of examples where the Law God gave Moses was changed by Him in consideration of human weakness. This shows that God's law isn't set in stone; those who argue that we must keep the Sabbath today must face the fact that God *can* change and abrogate His own laws. The wonderful thing in this case is that God meditated upon the sin of Aaron's sons, and didn't wish to put Aaron in the way of temptation which might be too much for him; because God never allows us to be tempted beyond our capabilities (1 Cor. 10:13). The way God here recognizes the extent of His own holiness and as it were seeks to protect humanity from being harmed by it is similar to how He warned Israel not to come too near to the burning mountain (Ex. 19:21), and how He urged Moses not to come too near to the burning bush (Ex. 3:5). This isn't God distancing Himself from us, but His seeking to establish understanding of His holiness whereby we can ultimately draw near to Him in Christ (Heb. 10:22). When we struggle with God's distance from us we must bear this in mind.

16:10 The two goats represent the death and resurrection of Christ. The scapegoat bounding away in relieved, joyful freedom symbolizes the genuine freedom and joy of forgiven sin which we can experience in Christ. It's clear that human beings are eager for a scapegoat, we seem wired with a psychological need for one, someone upon whom we can place our sins and thereby feel free from them personally. The scapegoat has been provided for us in Christ, and therefore we shouldn't seek to scapegoat others.

16:12 Incense represents prayer offered by Christ (Rev. 8:3,4); the way it was taken beyond the veil into the Most Holy Place reflected how prayer, be it the 'mere' words of a woman waiting at a bus stop, enters into Heaven itself.

16:18 The New Testament observes that the blood of this bull and goat could not take away sins- even though the live goat apparently carried the sins away into the wilderness. If sin had really been carried away, there would have been no need for this annual day of atonement ceremony (Heb. 10:3,4). The conclusion is therefore drawn that God only operated this system of atonement on the basis that the blood of the sacrifices pointed forward to the blood of Christ, and on the basis of His faith and knowledge that Christ would make the perfect sacrifice, God accepted the animal blood on the basis that it was symbolic of Christ's blood.

16:29 *Do no kind of work*- Because this was the day of atonement (:30). The point was that *God* was providing atonement by His grace and on account of the blood which represented Christ's blood- and not on the basis of our works.

17:9 Sacrifice couldn't be offered anywhere. It wasn't the case that the fact someone had a desire to do something for God thereby made them acceptable to Him. He had to be approached in the way He stipulated; and Jesus said "I am the door" (Jn. 10:9). It's not therefore true that all spiritual roads lead to the same place. We can only come to God in His way.

17:10 Blood represents life; to take life to ourselves rather than recognize it is God's results in us losing our lives (:14). Just as simply as the blood was to be given to God, so we are to give our lives to God. To take the blood to themselves is in fact spoken of as being as bad as murder (:4). This seems extreme language, but it underlines how important to God is this principle- that life is His and we are to give it to Him rather than live or take it to ourselves.

17:13 *Cover it with dust*- Burying the life, as it were. In baptism, we give our lives to God and figuratively die and are buried with Christ (Rom. 6:1-10).

18:5 *If a man does, he shall live in them*- Quoted in Gal. 3:12 to prove that life with God was possible by complete obedience to the Law of Moses. The Law could not give life in practice only in that people broke it (Gal. 3:21). Paul's point in Galatians is that eternal life therefore cannot be given on the basis of doing the Law- because we all break it. But Jesus completely kept the Law, and therefore deserved to have eternal life; but He died for us. Because of His perfect obedience to it, it wasn't therefore possible for Him to remain dead, He had to be raised from the dead (Acts 2:24). The principle that life was possible for those who lived in perfect obedience to the Law would have driven every humble, sensitive, Godly minded person to wonder how he or she could attain to eternal life; they would've so wished to find a person who was completely obedient to the Law whose righteousness could as it were be counted to them. In this sense, the Law was a household servant which led people to perceive their need for Christ (Gal. 3:24).

18:6 *I am Yahweh*- Who God is becomes the motive for obedience; our core desire to be like Him, rather than a legalistic, literalistic desire to keep commandments, is what will help us in practice to be like Him.

18:9 These laws teach that nakedness should only be uncovered before your wife or husband. Uncovering nakedness is an idiom for the sexual act. The allusion is to Adam and Eve having their nakedness uncovered; we have to accept the situation we are in as a result of the curse, rather than having sexual relations with who we like, as if uncovering nakedness is nothing shameful. Our hope is for the curse put on us in Eden to be lifted at Christ's return; we can't lift it in this life, as our own ever insistent mortality reminds us.

18:18 Jacob broke this principle by taking Rachel and Leah, and his sad family life afterwards was recorded as a testimony to how if we break God's principles, we may remain His people as Jacob did, but we will suffer the consequences. David likewise took the wives of Saul and also Saul's daughter- and likewise his breaking of the Law in this didn't lead to happiness, even though he remained God's man. There seems another allusion to David in :20- for Bathsheba lived in the house next door to David's, and his taking of his neighbour's wife resulted in the destruction of his own family and, ultimately, his kingdom.

18:21 *Profane the name*- We carry God's Name too, in that we are baptized into the Name. Our behaviour must therefore be appropriate to the Name we bear (James 2:7).

18:22 God found homosexuality "detestable"; although the Law of Moses has been abrogated, His basic moral principles remain unchanged. When Christ died on the cross, God didn't suddenly change His mind and decide that homosexuality was now OK.

19:5 Freewill offerings such as the peace offering must really be of our free will. We mustn't feel any sense of obligation to others, doing voluntary things to be seen of them, but any act of freewill devotion must be genuine, motivated by our personal desire to devote our time or resources to God.

19:7 *An abomination*- If we think our freewill devotions to be God can be done as we wish without regard for His principles, then what we do is obnoxious to Him. The Hebrew word translated "abomination" is often used about idol worship; we will not be worshipping Him, but the idols of our own image and standing in the eyes of people.

19:10 *For the poor*- If all Israel were obedient to the Law of Moses, there wouldn't have been any poor in Israelite society (Dt. 15:4). But the same Law of Moses repeatedly instructed Israel to be generous and sensitive to the poor; it tacitly recognized, as did Jesus, that there would always be poor within Israel, for the Law would never be fully kept (Mt. 26:11). We see in the structure of the Law the recognition of human failure in a way which no other law has ever equalled. There's a tendency to assume that the poor are poor because of their own poor decision making and therefore we have no responsibility to help them- although we are all poor decision makers in various ways, especially in spiritual matters. The Law taught a principle we need to learn also- that even if folk have dug a whole and fallen into it, we are still to assist them and be sensitive to their situation.

19:11 The command not to steal is associated with not deceiving others nor lying to them. Dishonesty, even if it's unrelated to material gain at another's expense, is a form of theft; we are taking from another wrongfully.

19:14 *Fear your God*- As if God is especially sensitive to our abusing others' disadvantages in whatever form, and His wrath about this is to be feared.

19:15 We are not to judge in the sense of condemn others, but it's inevitable in daily life that we have to form opinions. But we must always remember that the person we are judging is in fact our neighbour, our brother, our equal; our judgment shouldn't be rooted in any sense of feeling inherently superior over him or her, spiritually or otherwise.

19:17 By not rebuking our brother, by saying nothing and not engaging with the issues when we need to, we are likely to breed anger in our hearts against him or her.

19:18 One reason we fail to love others as ourselves is because we may in fact not love ourselves in the sense of perceiving our own value before God.

19:23 Forbidden fruit naturally recalls the forbidden fruit on the tree in Eden. To grab as much as we can immediately without working for it nor recognizing that the firstfruits of all human endeavour must be given to the Lord- is all very human and common. But to do so is painted as bad as taking the forbidden fruit of Eden, with all the long term suffering which came as a result of short-termism.

19:29 *Lest the land fall to prostitution*- Sexual misbehaviour sets an example which spreads so easily.

20:3 *To profane My holy name* – Our attitude to our children is our attitude to God's Name. We need to ask ourselves how in our context we might be giving our children to Molech? 'Giving' children to Molech may not only have referred to child sacrifices but also dedicating children to the service of Molech. Our children are to be dedicated to God and nobody and nothing else.

20:4 Acting as if we didn't notice something is a sin of omission just as bad as a sin of commission.

20:5 *All who play the prostitute after him*- The seriousness of sin is partly in the influence it has upon others. To give children to Molech encouraged others to sin by the example set. The power of our example upon others is far greater than we realize. Verse 14 likewise teaches that sexual perversion in one case could easily lead to wickedness being practiced amongst the whole congregation.

20:10 *Another man's wife, even... his neighbour's wife*- This definition suggests that every man in the community was to be treated as one's neighbour. Hence in the New Testament, loving our neighbour is interpreted as meaning loving all others within the community of God's people (Gal. 5:13,14). We shouldn't think that because someone is unknown to us or distant from us in whatever sense, that we can act differently to them than we would to the one living next door to us.

20:25 You shall therefore make a distinction – The fact God had separated His people from this world (:24) was the reason for the commandments about them making a distinction between clean and unclean. There is nothing unclean of itself, the commands were given as a mechanism for teaching and reminding Israel in their daily lives of their separation from uncleanness. Those animals designated by God as "unclean" were "unclean *for you*"- not that they were in themselves.



21:6 *Food of their God*- God invited Israel to eat with Him at the altar, which became His table. The equivalent for us is eating with God at the Lord's table, the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 10:21). Eating together was understood in Semitic culture as a sign of religious acceptance and fellowship.

21:7 *A woman who is a prostitute*- Another tacit recognition within the Law that it would not be fully kept; for prostitution was outlawed. Thus in the very structure of the Law we see God's sensitive recognition of the fact it would not be fully kept. His sensitivity to and provision for our failures in advance, both individually and collectively, shouldn't lead us to think that therefore we needn't take His principles seriously; His foreknowledge of our weakness shouldn't be perceived by us as a safety net for our sinfulness.

21:10 *Not let the hair of his head hang loose*- This is not to say that long hair is wrong in itself for a male. The pagan priests of Egypt, from where Israel had just been brought out, were noted for their long hair, which stood out from the rest of the male population in Egypt who generally had shaved heads at that time. The principle is that we shouldn't perceive our religion as merely just one of many other religions; there is something utterly unique about our way to God through Christ, who is our only mediator, the only way, "the truth". Whilst on one hand God doesn't judge the outward appearance but the heart, we should also be careful not to have externalities which make us appear to be 'pagan' and not the unique people of God.

21:22 Whatever blemish the man had, he could still personally fellowship with God, but he was not to publically offer the offerings of others. The priests at that moment were to be consciously representative of the sacrifices, which are the only other things which have the language of 'blemish' and 'unblemished' applied to them (e.g. 22:20).

22:6 As we as the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5) read of these requirements not to eat the holy things whilst unclean, we may wonder how we as sinners can ever eat the bread and drink the wine as required to remember Christ's death. But the fact is, we have been washed and sanctified for service by baptism into the Name of Christ (1 Cor. 6:11 alludes here). This is a status we are continually in- for this is the wonder of the concept of our being "in Christ".

22:10 *A foreigner living with the priests*- The Law has a lot to say about welcoming foreigners and being hospitable to them. We as the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) should likewise be open rather than closed to the people of the world around us, even though we are in another sense separated *from* them and *unto* the things of our God.

22:11 Gentiles who had been bought for a price by a priest to be his servants were treated as Israelites. This looked forward to Christ, the final Priest, buying us with His own blood that we might be His servants, and thereby we are fully part of His family and the people of God (1 Cor. 7:23).

22:13 *No stranger shall eat*- But if the stranger had been bought by the Priest, he or she was no longer a stranger (:11). Paul has this passage in mind when he rejoices that those baptized into Christ are no longer strangers and foreigners but members of God's family and fellow citizens with "the saints", a term which he may well have understood in this context as referring to the community of Israel (Eph. 2:19).

22:24 *Neither shall you do thus in your land*- Animals weren't to be castrated. We see in this not only a reflection of the huge value God places upon life in general, but also His sensitivity to animals. Verses 27 and 28 may reflect the same.

22:32 *I will be made holy... I am Yahweh who makes you holy*- They as us were to live out in practice the status which God had given them. He had made them holy and acceptable in His sight, and they were therefore to live in a holy manner.

23:4 *You shall proclaim*- Paul alludes here when he says that the breaking of bread meeting- the only 'feast' we have under the New Covenant- is a proclaiming of the Lord's death (1 Cor. 11:26).

23:17 *Baked with yeast*- Yeast represents human sin (1 Cor. 5:8), and was often banned from being offered. But here it was required- to remind the people that they were sinners, and yet God still accepts the offerings of sinners.

23:20 The two lambs offered for a burnt offering at the end of harvest contrast with the single lamb offered at the start of it (:12). This was to underline that the receipt of blessing from God must be responded to in dedication to Him- which is what the burnt offering represented.

23:22 The Israelites were reminded of this principle at this point in the legislation lest they become so caught up with realizing their own material blessings that they forgot that others were not so blessed. Whenever we reflect upon our material blessings we are to immediately remind ourselves that others somewhere are not so blessed, and we have a duty towards them.

23:30 *That person I will destroy from among his people* – Whilst work was forbidden during the other feasts, this threat is added only here concerning the Day of Atonement. This was how important it was for them to realize that atonement for our sins is in the end by God's grace through the sacrifice of the animals who represented Christ; and not according to our works.

23:38 The repeated use of the word "besides" emphasized that times of special commitment to God shouldn't lead us to forget the regular sacrifices and devotions which we are to make. An example of this would be that if one spends some days away at a church gathering, we are not to forget our own personal quiet time with God, prayer and Bible reading.

23:43 It's not recorded in the record of the Exodus that God made Israel dwell in booths. Often later Scripture gives us extra information about what happened at a historical event. This is why we need to use the entire Bible in order to get the correct picture about what happened in the historical sections.

24:2 The whole congregation of Israel were to bring a small amount of oil and flour for the bread each week. The constantly burning oil and presence of the small loaves was a symbol of how Israel were continually before Him. Yet the amount of oil and flour required each week was miniscule in comparison to the size of all Israel- there were probably three million of them at the time this law was given (Ex. 12:37). But God is the God of small things. In the very small things we offer Him, we are remembered before Him. Israel were taught that this tiny offering of oil and flour each week was so highly significant; offering even very small things shouldn't be seen by us as unnecessary or insignificant before God. The way Jesus noticed the widow offering two tiny coins and commented upon it is proof of this (Lk. 21:2).

24:6 The bread on the table connects with the breaking of bread at the table of the Lord under the New Covenant. The bread was replaced- as it were eaten by God- each week (:8). Whilst there is no specific command as to how frequently we should break bread, it would seem from Acts 20:7 that some of the early Christians did it weekly, and this is no bad example for us to follow.

24:11 If we marry out of the family of faith, our children may well not have the reverence towards the true God which they should have.

24:22 *For the foreigner as well as the native-born-* If we have unbelievers into our homes or any situation where we are in charge of the social situation, we are to ensure that God's principles are upheld. Again translating this into modern terms- if parents have unbelieving children in their home to play with their own children, God's principles are still to be upheld by the visitors.

25:10 *You shall **proclaim** liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants-* This is alluded to in Lk. 4:19 where we read that the Lord Jesus proclaimed "the **acceptable year** of the Lord". We are to make the same proclamation in preaching the good news to all people- "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached [**proclaimed**, s.w. 4:19] in his name among all nations" (Lk. 24:47). The year of Jubilee began with the day of Atonement, which is understood in the New Testament as foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our sins. We are now to live in a permanent state of Jubilee, announcing it to all people. The Hebrew word translated "jubilee" carries the idea of forgiveness, release, freedom. This is our message to all the people of the world.

25:15 The ultimate time of Jubilee will be at the return of Christ. We are to perceive the value of all things we buy relative to this. Effectively, the Jubilee was a time of release from debt. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt. 6:12) is probably another allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves.

25:20 The Lord Jesus implied that we are in a permanent Jubilee year situation when He said that we should "**take no thought what you shall eat... Sow not nor gather into barns**" and not think "**What shall we eat?**" (Mt. 6:26,31 = Lev. 25:20). **If we put God's principles first, somehow materially everything works out. We shall not starve.**

25:23 The principles of the Jubilee taught that all land and persons belong to God; we are only temporarily using them, and nothing ultimately belongs to us personally; all is God's. This helps us cope better with 'loss' of possessions, and should keep us from the manic materialism which has been bred by capitalism, whereby all seek personal ownership of land and resources.

25:28 Eph. 1:13 speaks of our place in God's Kingdom as our possession which has been purchased by the blood of Christ, and which we will receive as an inheritance at His return. This is all Jubilee language. The eternal time of Jubilee will be when the Kingdom is established upon earth, and we will each receive both literally and more abstractly an eternal inheritance in that Kingdom on earth, each with a varying number of towns to rule over (Lk. 19:17). Whether we are rich or poor in this life, whether or not we purchase our 'own' homes (:29), we are assured that our very own personal possession is assured, and we will return to it eternally in the Kingdom of God at Christ's return. The Israelite who became "poor", either by his own failures, others' manipulations or his own poor decision making, would have continually looked forward to the year of Jubilee- when finally he and

his family would be free, no longer in servitude, and could return to their very own land and inheritance as their eternal possession (:34). We look forward to Christ's return with the same spirit.

25:53 *With harshness*- Any social superiority we may have over others is temporary, and must be seen in the context of the year of Jubilee which has been announced in Christ. The whole concept was designed to teach humility and gentleness in relationships.

25:55 Those who had servants were to remember that they themselves were servants. Maybe Paul had this in mind when he reminded us that all our brothers and sisters are servants of Christ and not of us, and we therefore have no right to judge another man's servant (Rom. 14:4). As Israel were to be a nation of servants, so should the Christian community be today.

26:9 That God can "respect" mere humans indicates not only His humility but also His extreme sensitivity to us and His delight in our feeble attempts to please Him; rather like a parent may be thrilled by the responses of a baby, totally insignificant as they are in themselves.

26:17 *Flee when no one pursues you*- A spirit of fear, nervousness and negativity can be given by God as a result of wilful disobedience to His ways. He can give a spirit (mental attitude) of fear (2 Tim. 1:7).

26:23 *If by these things*- It seems that the curses mentioned in this chapter aren't just a general list, but there is an intended chronological sequence. God had planned from the start that if Israel were disobedient, then He would bring various judgments, in order to help them be obedient; and if they failed, He would bring more, again with the intention that they responded to them. The curses for disobedience weren't therefore merely an offended deity lashing out at a people who had irritated him; God has purpose and positive spiritual intention even in the judgments He brings into peoples' lives. He is constantly seeking our return to Him, just as the shepherd searched for the lost sheep until He found it (Lk. 15:4).

26:24 *Even I*- To have God against you is a terrible thing.

26:26 *Not be satisfied*- So many of the judgments are mental attitudes (especially :16,36). God gives people attitudes of mind, positive and negative.

26:43 If we hate or despise God's word, He will hate us (:30). Our attitude to God's word is related to His attitude to us. The very least we can do is to read His word daily and love it, through all our weakness.

27:1 This chapter is as it were an appendix to the Law because it concerns vows which were freewill decisions to give something to God and weren't part of the legal demands which God made upon His people in the previous chapters. It's good for us to at times make a special commitment to God from a joyful heart. The values attached to people in the next verses seem to speak of the price that should be paid if a person wished to cancel the dedication of themselves or even of others which they had made. It seems Jephthah may have been ignorant of these provisions and therefore suffered immensely from not paying attention to all God's law (Jud. 11:31-40).

27:8 This provision seems to foresee the possibility that a totally poor person would dedicate themselves to God's service (e.g. doing some work related to the maintenance of the sanctuary) and

yet need to change that commitment (perhaps to care for a sick and dying relative), and yet have nothing to pay for his own redemption. This freewill dedication of oneself to God's service is alluded to when Paul praises some of the Macedonian believers for devoting their own selves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5), and the family of Stephanas for having 'ceremonially consecrated' themselves to serving their fellow believers (1 Cor. 16:15 Gk.). What could we devote ourselves to do, remembering that wealth is no barrier to making this kind of devotion?

27:10 Changing what we have given to God according to new circumstances isn't encouraged; we should give and assume that what we gave is now not ours any longer. Giving should be frank and final, with no thought of regret afterwards or considering what might have been if we had not given it- e.g. letting our mind wander around the possibilities of what we could have used money for if we'd not given it to God.

27:23 The value of all things is relative to the Year of Jubilee, which speaks of the return of Christ (see on 25:10,15,20).

27:26 We should avoid the temptation to give what we owe to God anyway as if it is a gift of special freewill devotion.

27:33 *Not analyze whether it is good or bad-* We should not be carefully calculating in our giving to God, trying to do so at minimal cost to ourselves.

## NUMBERS

1:2 *One by one*- Here we see the value and meaning attached to the human person by God.

1:18 The implication is that every single Israelite was part of a family. In such a large community there inevitably would have been some who had no family. In the context of commenting upon the Exodus, Ps. 68:6 observes that God set the lonely in families. This may have happened at this point. Those who had no family were arranged into one, so that God's people moved through the wilderness in family units. In this we see how God is a family God; the family is His desired way of human organization, and we should seek to preserve it.

1:20 *The number of the names*- Implies there was a written list. Moses had been educated in Egypt and therefore would've been able to write (Acts 7:22). We should use what worldly wisdom we have in the service of God's people.

1:46 Over a period of 430 years (Gen. 15:13; Ex. 12:40), the Israelites grew from 70 people (Gen. 46:27; Dt. 10:22) to 603,550 men. This was a primary fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, that his descendants would greatly multiply (Gen. 22:17; Heb. 11:12). We who are in the same covenant relationship with God will experience some element of blessing and fulfilment of the covenant promises in this life too. The large numbers may also have been due to the Egyptians joining the people of Israel.

1:50 We are a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). The spirit of the Levites should be ours. As they encamped around the tabernacle, having it as the centre of their lives, so the things of God's ecclesia, His church, should be central to our lives and have far more importance to us than our careers and associations in this world.

1:53 *That there may be no wrath on the congregation*- The wellbeing of others is dependent upon our efforts. If we don't do our part for them, we cannot assume that God will raise up someone else. There really can be Divine wrath on others because of our lack of attention to them.

2:1 Encamping around standards and by their tribes was different to how they had filed out of Egypt as one long stream of humanity (Ex. 13:18). After our exodus from the world through our Red Sea baptism, we find our place within the larger family of God. Their sense of which tribe they belonged to had probably been eroded in the 430 years they spent in Egypt; now even the isolated and lonely were given family groups to belong to (Ps. 68:6; see on 1:18).

2:2 The standards of the tribes were a pole with a symbol upon it. Israel marched through the wilderness towards the promised land, as we walk through the wilderness of life towards the Kingdom, carrying and walking behind poles- foreshadowing the cross or stake of Christ, which we are asked to daily pick up and walk behind. Is. 11:10-12 speaks of the cross of Christ as a standard lifted up, to which the believing Gentiles come and camp around- as if they take their place in the Israel of God.

2:3 Three tribes camped on each of the four sides, around the tabernacle. This place of meeting with God was to be central to the community. It is the things of Christ and our relationship with God which should be at the core of the Christian community; we're not held together by geography, personal friendship or shared denominational history. We are to be Christ centred. The language of

the numbering of Israel according to how many fighting men there were in each tribe, and the ideas of encamping and breaking up, all suggest that Israel were God's army on earth. According to Jewish tradition, Judah carried a lion emblem on their standard, Reuben a man, Joseph an ox, and Dan an eagle. In this case, the cherubim vision of Ezekiel 1 would allude to Israel, as if to say that above them there hovered an Angelic army organized the same way, and the armies of God's people on earth were a reflection of them. The tent of meeting in the midst of the troops of Israel would've been understood in military terms as the tent or pavilion of a general in the centre of an army. But there was nobody within that pavilion- just the presence of God over the sprinkled blood. We aren't just sitting around waiting for Christ's return; we are God's army in this world, with a very present although invisible Heavenly commander in our midst. But His invisibility led Israel many times to ask 'Is the Lord among us?', and we face the same doubt in our weak moments. But this is the essence of faith.

2:17 *As they encamp, so shall they march out*- Our attitude and position at rest or leisure is to be our attitude when on the move for Christ.

2:32 The size of Israel's encampment would've been huge- maybe twenty square kilometres, like a moveable city, with streets and lanes. The continual commands to move on, to follow the leading of the Angel in the pillar of fire and cloud, would've likely been received without enthusiasm because the breaking of camp would've been a long and tedious process. Yet as with us, God works things so that His people are always on the move. God looked down upon their orderly encampment and thought His people were beautiful (24:5,6). Perhaps Paul alludes to their order when he says that the body of Christ should likewise be characterized by orderliness when they are beheld by others (Col. 2:5).

3:4 *They had no children*- That is, no children who ministered as priests. Ultimately, from the perspective of the Kingdom, if our children don't serve God it will be as if we have no children. Hence the need in this life to train them up to be God's servants.

3:9 This meant that Moses' sons were Levites and not priests, and were given to serve Aaron's sons. Yet Moses time and again is revealed as the undoubted leader of the people, and more spiritually mature and committed than Aaron. Verse 38 could imply that Moses even camped separately to his children. There were no special privileges for the children of the leader, and Moses' humility would have been exercised by seeing his sons serve Aaron's sons. If all we want to see is God's work go forward, we will likewise not become resentful of such things as they work out in church life today.

3:10 *Keep their ministry*- The phrase from the Septuagint version is quoted by Paul about our service of the ecclesia / church today (Rom. 12:7). Whatever day job or career we have in this world, our real work is our ministry to God's people.

3:13 Those who had been spared from death by the blood of the lamb on Passover night weren't just free to do as they wished with their saved lives, but were to be devoted to God. We are those who have likewise been spared from eternal death by Christ's blood, and we are therefore not to see ourselves as having merely escaped eternal death but must go further to perceive ourselves as thereby dedicated to God's service. Hence the Christian community is called "the church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23)- we are all as it were the firstborn who were saved by grace on Passover night, because we are in Christ, the firstborn (Col. 1:18).

3:28 Some original manuscripts read 8,300. This could solve the apparent discrepancies in the numbers later on. The difference between the Hebrew letters for 8,300 and 8,600 is miniscule. Although the word of God itself is inspired and infallible, this isn't to say that there aren't minor errors of copyists as the manuscripts were passed on over the generations.

3:38- see on :9.

3:43 Levi was by far the smallest tribe- the numbers of the males over 20 in the other tribes (as recorded in Num. 1) is far larger than the number of males of the tribe of Levi. God uses as His special workers those who are weakest in human terms. It could be argued that Levi grew less in number than the other tribes because of some spiritual weakness- for at this time, Divine blessing was reckoned in terms of number of offspring. So perhaps spiritually as well as numerically they were the weakest, yet were chosen by God for His special work. God seems to love to work in this way.

4:1 Kohath wasn't the firstborn nor the senior born amongst the three sons listed here, but the Kohathites are numbered first and had the greatest responsibility. Again we see how God prefers to work not with the humanly best, strongest or most senior.

4:3 *Enter into the service*- The original words have a military connotation. Whatever our occupation in this world, we are to see ourselves as soldiers fighting for the only truly good and worthy cause of earth. There should therefore be in our lives an element of discipline, regimentation and focus on specific objectives. The New Testament is full of military metaphors (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:4).

4:5 The taking down of the tabernacle is turned by Paul and Peter into a metaphor for our death (2 Cor. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:14). The implication is that all the valuable things within the tabernacle through which God was manifest can on one level be interpreted as our lives. In this metaphor alone we see the immense value and meaning of human life if it is lived in God's service.

4:8 *Sealskin*- Taken by the Israelites from the shores of the Red Sea? Whatever we pick up along the wilderness journey of life we are to give to God's service.

4:15 In 2 Sam. 6:8, God slew Uzzah because he touched the ark when David brought it back to Jerusalem on a cart. Yet the Law clearly stated that the ark was to be carried only by the Levites, and was to be carried on poles rather than on a cart. Throughout Ps. 119, David declares how he loves God's law and studies and recites it by day and night. That surely included this passage in Numbers 4. But we have a tendency to read God's word, to know it well, speaking of it to others- and yet somehow assume that it doesn't apply to us personally, and we can take shortcuts as convenient to us. If righteous David did this, how much more should we be aware of our temptation to fail in the same way.

4:18 *Don't cut off the clan*- By Moses' inattention, a whole group of people could have died because of their inattention. Our sensitivity, or lack of it, to others' likely failings can lead to their losing their part amongst the family of the redeemed. We can't reason that human failure is simply their fault; we also bear some responsibility if we don't do what we can to mitigate against it.

4:19 Not touching holy things connects with the command not to touch the forbidden fruit of Eden (Gen. 3:3). Time and again, Adam's sin is presented (by way of such allusions) as the sin of everyman;



elements of it are to be found in all human sin, and therefore we can never blame Adam as the source of our present discomfort under the curse; for we would have done the same. In this sense, all humanity sinned as it were in Adam (Rom. 5:12 Gk.). It's no bad exercise to analyze our own sins in the light of Adam's failure and see wherein are the similarities in essence.

4:20 This law was applied even to Gentiles who looked into the ark (1 Sam. 6:19). God still feels sin as a committed offence against Him personally, even when it's performed by those not responsible to His law. It must be hard being God, seeing and feeling so much offence against Him every moment. In this we see not only His sensitivity to sin, but His grace in allowing the whole of human society to exist in its disobedient, sinful state, minute by minute. And thereby we can appreciate more fully the way that He delays judging this world and ending sin, all because He is so earnest that we and others might come to repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:9).

4:44 The Merarites had 3200 workers out of a total of 6200. Although they were the smallest of the three families, they had the most number of workers (Gershon had 2630 out of 7500; Kohath 2750 out of 8600). This may have been for various reasons, but it's also a fact that the smaller the group, the higher percentage are willing to work. God doesn't need great numbers to do His work.

4:49 Each man having his own burden to bear is an idea picked up in the New Testament (Gal. 6:5). We are each asked to carry the cross of Christ, and yet that cross is articulated in unique ways for each of us.

5:4 *The children of Israel did so-* Israel's obedience was mainly when it came to disciplining others, giving materially and making things. But the Pentateuch emphasizes their disobedience when it came to personal morality, internal spirituality and worshipping God alone rather than any idols. We must analyze our own obediences and see if they follow a similar pattern. To be externally religious isn't difficult, indeed we can rather enjoy being like that.

5;6-8 *When a man or woman commits any sin... he shall confess... the man-* Proof that the Bible often uses the masculine singular to mean 'any person', of either gender.

5:7 Both confession and restitution were required. These two elements are still required if we are to truly resolve broken relationships.

5:12 There were various possibilities for how a man should respond in this situation. He could have his wife stoned; divorce her; put her through this 'trial of jealousy'; or simply forgive her. We too have a range of options open to us when wrong is done to us or when we suspect it has been. The very existence of these options encourages us to think through our responses, and surely inspires us to choose the way of grace over the way of personal revenge or justification.

5:14 This provision for the trial of jealousy appears to have been a concession to human weakness, in this case, male weakness. For the New Testament outlaws envy (the Hebrew word translated "jealousy" here has this sense): Rom. 1:29; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Tit. 3:3. It could be that James 4:5 alludes to the spirit of male jealousy which this legislation sought to make a concession to (:14). The simple lesson for us can be that God does indeed make concessions to our human weakness; but we are to use them sparingly, and realize that their very existence is actually intended to inspire us *not* to make use of them but to serve God on the highest level we can.

**5:24 The Corinthians were told that they would “provoke the Lord to jealousy” by breaking bread and yet also worshipping idols (1 Cor. 10:22). This is surely an allusion to the “trial of jealousy”. A curse was recited and then the believer drank a cup; if they were unfaithful, they drank to their condemnation. Paul’s allusion suggests that each day we break bread and drink the cup, we as the bride of Christ are going through the trial of jealousy. Brutal honesty and self-examination, and not merely of our lives in the last few days, is therefore crucial before drinking the cup.**

6:3 Any Israelite could vow him or herself to special service to God; we too shouldn’t see our service to God in terms of doing the minimum. Realizing the wonder of His grace and the certainty of our eternal life in His Kingdom, we should be moved to special devotions. In this vow, the ordinary Israelite willingly submitted to some of the regulations specific to the priests on duty. The growing of long hair could be seen as an imitation of the High Priest’s mitre. They were not to see the priesthood as something reserved just for specialists, those born into it; nor were they to see the High Priest as so distant from themselves that he could never be imitated, in spirit at least. We likewise can take to ourselves some aspects of the personal work of the Lord Jesus; for all that is true of Him becomes true of we who are baptized into Him. As He was the light of the world, so are we to be.

6:6 The Nazirite was not only to not touch a corpse, but not go near one; likewise they were not only to not drink wine, but not drink grape juice nor eat seeds or skins of grapes, from which wine is made. This is the classic ‘hedge around the law’- forbidding something not because it unlawful of itself but because the associations may lead to breaking an actual law. We in Christ are freed from all legalism and casuistry; and yet in our daily struggle against temptation, it is no bad idea to remove far from us those things, associations, images etc. which may stimulate temptation and the power of sin.

6:11 It hardly sounds sinful for a person who has made a special dedication to God to be made unclean by a person unexpectedly falling dead next to him or her. But in this legislation God is seeking to teach us how sensitive He is to uncleanness. This principle can carry over into our lives today; if we love to view, read and talk about unclean things, even if we don’t do them, then we are not respecting the distance which God seeks to set between the clean and unclean, right and wrong, good and evil.

6:14 The need for a sin offering at the end of his period of dedication was maybe to remind him that his extra special devotion didn’t take away his sin and need for grace; for relationship with God depends upon this rather than upon our works and special efforts. Again, we can take that principle to ourselves in our age.

7:2 Continuing the voluntary spirit of the Nazirite vow explained in chapter 6, we read that the heads of the tribes now offered a voluntary offering. They weren’t commanded to bring these things; they chose to bring them. The constant repetition of chapter 7 can seem boring, but the point is that God remembered their freewill offerings, in every detail; and recorded and preserved them for millennia. He likewise remembers all our sacrifices for His sake (Ps. 20:3).

7:9 Significantly, David carried the ark on a wagon rather than have it carried on shoulders as commanded. One wonders whether his slip in this matter was because the Kohathites had resented seeing how their brothers got to transport their parts of the tabernacle in wagons, whereas they had

to carry their parts on their shoulders; and therefore they began to use wagons, because their brother did. We can also too easily do what our brothers do, and for us it can become sin, because we each have an individual calling. What may be permissible for them may not be for us. The fact they do it doesn't mean we can, because our context and calling is different from theirs.

7:89 The blood of atonement, pointing forward to the blood of Christ, was permanently on the mercy seat, i.e. the cover of the ark of the covenant, with the Angel-like cherubim peering down onto it. There in that most Holy of places, God spoke. The fact that the voice of God was associated with the blood which represented the blood of His Son is alluded to in Heb. 12:24-26, which likens the blood of Christ to a voice more powerful than the sound which accompanied the shaking of Sinai. God's word becomes powerful to us over the blood of Christ in that beholding Him there, we cannot walk away passively. We are spurred to action. Yet as we behold His blood in our mind's eye, in our reconstruction of how it all maybe happened on Golgotha, we face an insistent question: What can I do, what must I do, in response to this? That question is answered in God's word, and it is in this sense that His word becomes of especial power to us in Christ. In this sense He is that word made flesh, supremely in His time of dying.

8:7 Washing and becoming like new born children, with no body hair, looks forward to baptism. We're not baptized just for the sake of it; we do this so that we may be made holy or separated unto the service of God. We are God's, just as they were (:14).

8:12 The sin offering always preceded the burnt offering. Dedication to God, represented by the burnt offering, is on the basis of our recognizing first of all our sinfulness and need for His grace. This is why the sin offering always precedes the burnt offering in the Mosaic rituals. We too have been cleansed by the blood of Christ in order to serve Him and His Father (Heb. 9:14; 1 Thess. 1:9).

8:14 *Separate*- The Levites were separated unto God's service; it wasn't so much that they were separate *from* others in a negative sense; rather they were positively separated *unto* God's service. We shouldn't see holiness as negative- that we can no longer do certain things; but instead focus on what positively we have been separated *unto*.

8:19 *That there be no plague among the children of Israel*- The spiritual and physical wellbeing of others can depend upon third parties, in this case the faithfulness of the Levites. Others can suffer because of our lack of diligence; it's not that if we don't do our part for them, then God will raise up others to do what we ought to have done. He *may* do this, as He was prepared to at the time of Esther, but He wishes us to see the eternal consequence of our actions upon others.

8:24 *That which belongs to*- A reference to the fact the Levites had no possessions of land within Israel. What belonged to them was the honour of serving God; whether or not we own property in this present age, our eternal possession is the honour of being God's servants. To be a servant, in a world where perceived 'freedom' is so cherished, is to be our greatest possession.

9:6 These men are similar to us. We wish to keep the Passover, which for us is the breaking of bread service (1 Cor. 5:8), but we feel the burden of our uncleanness. But this is no barrier to God; He found a way for them to keep it, so eager was He for fellowship with His people. In our times, God has likewise found a way- and that way is through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus which cleanses us and enables us to legitimately have fellowship with God. This desire of God to 'find a way' for His

weak people to approach Him is found throughout the Law of Moses, e.g. in the possibility for a very poor person to offer a flour sacrifice rather than a blood one requiring an animal. This is a comfort to us, and should also be a pattern for us in how we deal with the weakness of others.

9:14 The Passover was open to Gentiles who wished to identify themselves with Israel, and to see in the Red Sea deliverance something of their own deliverance from this world. We should not be exclusive but rather inclusive when it comes to the breaking of bread service which was typified by the Passover.

9:22,23 There was no prior warning how long they were to remain in any one place; sometimes they stayed a year in one place, at other times they had to travel even by night. This was all at the commandment or word of the Lord. If the Red Sea deliverance represents our baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), the wilderness journey is like our journey through life towards the promised land of God's Kingdom. We are led by an Angel, and the path we take is determined by God. Sometimes we are suddenly and unexpectedly asked to move forward; sometimes quickly, travelling by night, as it were; other periods of our lives can appear static and leading nowhere. But in all these situations we are still being led- if we remain obedient to the word of God. A community of three million people would've been very hard to organize; setting up and breaking camp demanded a huge amount of time and effort. When they only remained a short time, even a day, in one place, the tendency would've been to complain 'Must we really break camp and move on so quickly?'. We too are tempted to resent the unstable nature of our lives; for those whose lives are led by the Spirit, as the Angel was in a sense the Spirit of God (Ps. 104:4), life will never be static and boring; even if we geographically remain in one place all our lives, we are being actively led forward by God's direction.

10:9 *When you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you-* If Israel were obedient, they were promised that they would live *in their land* in peace with no oppressors; they would only be oppressed if they were disobedient. So here we have another reflection of God's sensitivity to the weakness of His people; they very structure of His law foresaw their likely weakness, and offered a way out. In this case, it was through the blowing of the trumpets. The perceptive Israelite would have seen that the same blowing of trumpets was what had been done to command Israel to move forward during their wilderness journey (:5). Even in the settled existence in Canaan, they were to still see themselves as on a wilderness journey- just as we should in our settled lives. And when we fail, we are to rally ourselves and move onwards, rather like a 'Play on!' command in some sports, when a player has tumbled and fallen. We have to move on, as quickly as possible.

10:10 Also in the day of your gladness- The trumpet call was an appeal to God. It wasn't only to be made in times of crisis (:9), but in good times too. We shouldn't treat God as someone we rush to only in times of crisis, but should share with Him our good times as well as the bad times.

10:11 *The tabernacle of the testimony-* The tent of meeting is sometimes called the tent of the "testimony", a reference to God's word on the tables of stone which were within the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. Out of all the tabernacle furniture, the symbol of God's word was seen as central. God's word- the Bible, in our times- is to be utterly central to our lives and collective sense of community.

10:30 There's something very sad about this; Hobab could've identified himself with Israel and shared a place in the promised land with them, if he had travelled with them through the wilderness. But he preferred his own family rather than God's family, and so he turned back. We too invite people to share our future hope, but they turn back, even if they journey with us for a while as Hobab did with Israel.

10:31 *You can be to us instead of eyes*- This may have been a moment of weakness in Moses, for the Angel went before Israel to find them camping places (:33), and the Angels are God's eyes (2 Chron. 16:9; Rev. 4:6-8). Like Moses, we tend to seek for human guidance in our wilderness journey, rather than trusting in God's Angelic Spirit guidance of us.

11:1 *In the ears of Yahweh*- They doubtless grumbled amongst themselves. But what we say secretly, as we think, to ourselves and to each other is spoke right into the ears of God Himself.

*Those in the outskirts of the camp*- The implication could be that it was those who camped furthest away from the tabernacle who complained. An encampment of three million people (:21) would've been large, and for them to walk to the tabernacle would've been quite a journey. If we are wholeheartedly devoted to God, we won't want to be on the edge of God's people, just peripherally associated with the things of God.

11:5 They forgot their misery in the slave camps of Egypt, and imagined life had been much better there than it was. In our weakness, there are times on our wilderness journey towards the Kingdom when we look back to this world and think it was all far better than it was.

11:6 In the same way as Israel became ungrateful for the manna and became bored with it, so we can become bored with God's word in Christ which it represents (Jn. 6:63 and context). It all can become the same old scene- unless we remember the daily miracle God is performing in giving us His word and guiding us as Israel were daily guided by the fire and cloud, with His presence clearly amongst them. These things were soon taken for granted by them. We at times long for a more visible declaration of God's presence in our lives; but Israel had this daily, and yet it didn't result in their faith remaining. For faith isn't related to what we can see with our eyes (Heb. 11:1,2).

11:11 Moses earlier had had the same doubt, as to whether he had really found grace in God's sight; and God had magnificently assured Moses that indeed he had (Ex. 33:13-17). Yet Moses still struggled to accept this; the complex difficulties of his life coupled with what appears to have been some form of depression led him to again doubt it. We too struggle with accepting our salvation by pure grace; one moment we may grasp it, but life's difficulties trigger again the old doubt. Only perhaps at the day of judgment, as he see ourselves as it were from outside of ourselves, standing in the promised land of God's Kingdom, shall we finally realize that all is ultimately OK, His grace to me is for real.

11:13 The disciples had the same question- from where to find food to feed a great multitude in the desert (Mk. 8:4). If their minds had been more spiritually attune, they would have perceived that they were in essence in the same situation as Moses- and God would likewise provide. The more we are familiar with Scripture, the more we will realize that our life situations and the crises we face have in fact been faced and overcome, in essence, in previous Biblical situations.

11:15 Here we surely have Moses in depression; but God doesn't seem to rebuke him (although He does rebuke him for other failures at other times). He recognizes our humanity with incredible sensitivity; and depression isn't sin.

11:29 This incident has similarities with the disciples asking Jesus to forbid the disciples of John the Baptist from using the Spirit (Mk. 9:40). Because other believers aren't with us or in our group, we aren't to forbid them. This isn't to say that unity amongst God's people isn't important; but where there is fracture amongst them, this doesn't mean that God only works with one of the groups.

11:33 Ps. 78:31 adds the detail that those who were killed were the "fattest"- those who weren't really hungry, but simply wanted a better life in the wilderness with the delicacies of Egypt, rather than the basic provision of daily food which God had faithfully promised His people. This attitude can easily happen amongst us- discontent because we seek both eternity in the future, and the life of Egypt right now too. Jesus clearly teaches that we must carry the cross in this life before we can enter the eternal joys of His future Kingdom.

12:2 Yahweh heard it- It is a theme of the record of the wilderness journeys that God heard the thoughts and secret complaints of His people. His total knowledge and sensitive awareness of every word and thought of our wilderness journey should have an abiding impression on how we think and talk.

12:3 *Moses was very humble*- The Hebrew could imply '*made* very humble'. Moses appears to have been very angry at times, but this may be understandable in terms of his depression, and this great commendation, that he was the humblest person, must be allowed its full weight in our interpretation of his character. True greatness is in humility, as the New Testament often teaches. Moses was the leader because he was the most humble.

13:28 *The people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified*- Rahab informed the later spies that the cities were fortified from fear of Israel, and the Canaanites were weak and fearful before Israel at this time (Josh. 2:10,11). Those obstacles to our inheritance of the Kingdom which seem to us huge and too strong for us may actually be very weak and far easier to overcome than we imagine.

13:30 *Let us go up at once*- The Bible often records the immediacy of response in faithful people. Procrastination and endlessly weighing up the difficulties often leads to failure to act as we should.

13:32 *A land that eats up its inhabitants*- This was effectively calling God's descriptions of the promised land untrue. If we don't believe we can inherit the Kingdom prepared for us (Mt. 25:34), then we are effectively calling God a liar. Ps. 106:24 says that they didn't believe God's word of promise that they would possess the land (Gen. 15:18; 17:8; Ex. 23:30). These promises were clear and unambiguous; but the immediate and the visible seemed more true to them than the promises of God's word. Perhaps they had forgotten those promises, not recited them to themselves, not bothered to attend Moses' sessions of instruction, of which the Pentateuch is likely a transcript. Unless God's words of promise are regularly in our consciousness, we will likewise fail to believe it when we come up against the human obstacles in our paths.

14:3 There should be no question amongst us, not in our deepest heart, about returning to the world / Egypt, the life we knew before our baptism (cp. the Red Sea crossing, 1 Cor. 10:1,2). If we do allow this question, then it will lead to actually doing this in practice (:4).

14:4 *A captain*- Human beings so want human leadership. God through Moses was their captain, but they wanted a leader who would them where *they* wanted. The large number of human religions and religious leaders is proof enough of this desire for human leadership.

14:11 *How long will they not believe in Me*- It's not that the people were atheists. They speak about the existence of Yahweh quite freely (:3). But to not believe that He will give us the Kingdom, the promised land, is to effectively be in denial of Him. We too can be effective atheists when we doubt our salvation by grace.

14:13 To have done this would've resulted in God changing His stated purpose with Israel. He is prepared to alter His intentions, according to human behaviour. And He shows Himself here open to dialogue, to persuasion, from His faithful children like Moses who reason according to a desire to see *God's* glory rather than their own glory. It may be that it becomes clear that God intends to do something- perhaps to end a life, to relocate us geographically, to close one road and open another. Our prayers shouldn't be simply asking Him to do or not do something. Rather should we reason with Him, giving our reasons as to why we wish Him to act in the way we are asking. This is for our benefit and reveals our motives to ourselves; and also deepens our faith that we are really asking according to God's will as revealed in His word.

14:14 *They have heard that You, Yahweh, are... seen face to face*- It was only Moses who saw Yahweh face to face. But his personal relationship with God had been shared not only with Israel, but somehow the Gentile world of Canaan had got to hear about it. If we have a close relationship with God, we will not need to boast of this to others, it will become apparent, and the knowledge of it will somehow spread widely.

14:20 *I have pardoned according to your word*- Others can be forgiven because of our intercession (see too Mk. 2:5,6). This has huge implications; for in this case we should be praying constantly for others, if the prayers of a third party can have such power in another's life.

14:24 *Followed Me faithfully*- 'Caleb' means 'dog' in Hebrew, and God alludes to this in describing Caleb as His faithful follower. The intimacy between a man and his dog can be seen between God and His man.

14:33 *Your prostitution*- To disbelieve we will enter the promised land of God's Kingdom is effectively prostitution against God. The Bible often describes unfaithfulness in terms which are startling to us, but this is to show how serious is unbelief.

14:34 *The altering of My purpose*- That God can change His mind is an indication of the extreme sensitivity He has to human behaviour. The only thing in which He is unchanging is His patience with sinners (Mal. 3:6).

14:44 Those rejected by God at His judgment still desperately want to enter His Kingdom (Mt. 25:11). In that day of final judgment, all present will desperately want only one thing- to enter the Kingdom. Nothing else will matter. We should have that spirit with us now.

15:4 This section seems to be reminding Israel of the need not to forget to offer a grain offering at the same time as a major sacrifice; as if to underline that God is magnified in the little things of life, and these shouldn't be left outside the sphere of His influence just because we consider we have made a major sacrifice to Him.

15:17 *When you come into the land to which I bring you*- The Law of Moses, like the whole of God's word, is studded with such incidental reminders that truly we shall enter the promised land.

15:24 Sins of ignorance still required atonement. The passage of time doesn't work a quasi-atonement for our sins; confession of sin and earnest searching of our lives, both past and present, is one of the disciplines which characterize the spiritually healthy believer. It's likely we will come to the day of judgment with sins of ignorance still counted to us, and yet we believe God will forgive them- hence we ask to be forgiven for such sins which aren't perceived by us (Ps. 19:12). This means we will be forgiven without repentance. If we look forward to such forgiveness, we should show it to our brethren today, forgiving without demanding their repentance, hoping that they will later on in their journey perceive things more maturely.

15:31 *Despised the word*- These words are used about David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:9,10). But God's grace is such that even in this case, when David deserved to die for knowingly doing wrong, still a way was found for David to live. We are all in essence in the same situation, for our sins are often knowingly done.

15:35 *Outside the camp*- Heb. 13:12 stresses that the Lord Jesus died in the same place, outside the camp of God's people. Although Jesus never sinned, in His time of dying He so closely identified with condemned sinners that even in our moments of sin He can still identify with us (Gal. 3:13).

15:38 People touched the hem of Jesus' garment, the fringes mentioned here, in search of healing (Mt. 9:20; 14:36). By doing so, they were recognizing that their healing was possible because of His righteous obedience to the Father's commandments. His power to heal has a basis- not merely that He is powerful of Himself, but because of His moral obedience.

16:9 They didn't consider servanthood within the family of God to be a very great honour; they wanted leadership and personal honour from those they would be over. This is the great paradox, the acme of humility, that serving is actually an honour. But there are so few who really grasp this. Leadership, like respect, is something which can never be demanded nor sought after if we are truly God's people. Notice that to serve others in God's family is to come "near to [God] Himself".

16:16 *Moses was very angry*- Yet he was the humblest man on planet earth at the time (12:3). Anger isn't advisable for us, as it can easily lead us into sin; but of itself, anger isn't necessarily incompatible with humility.

16:22 *Shall one man sin*- It's clear from the record in this chapter that the architect of the rebellion was Korah, the "one man" whom Moses referred to (see too :40,49; Jude 11). But he influenced others to sin, and they were still guilty for their sin. Although God doesn't count people as guilty merely by association, He expects us not to identify ourselves with sinful behaviour- hence verses 23-25 are God's response to Moses' concern that God might be indiscriminately applying the unfair principle of 'guilt by association'.



16:32 *All the men who appertained to Korah*- Korah's sons didn't die (26:11); they separated themselves from their father and his supporters in time. There are times when our loyalty to the Lord will result in us having to experience some kind of separation from family members who choose not to go the Lord's way; Jesus foretold this would happen frequently (Mt. 10:34-37).

16:34 These people who "were around them" were saved by grace, considering the warning of :24-26, that whoever stood near those men would also perish. All the time in the Old Testament we are seeing examples of people breaking God's law and yet being saved by grace.

16:38 The example of sinners from previous generations ought to be a warning to us. Asaph in Psalm 73 explains how he struggled with the fact that sinners appear to have a blessed life and the righteous suffer; but when he entered the sanctuary, "then understood I their end" (Ps. 73:17), probably a reference to him beholding the plates on the altar made from the censers of these sinners.

16:46 Again we see Moses acting on his own initiative to persuade God to change His intended plan. Moses and Aaron could only have brought about this change of mind in God by intense, fervent prayer and desire- and it was for people who had just tacitly supported a revolution against them. No matter how much we are slandered and manipulated against by our brethren, they are still God's people and we should respect them and intercede for them as that.

17:5 Their murmuring against Moses was a murmuring against God; our attitude to our brethren is our attitude to God.

17:8 The language of budding, blossoming and bearing fruit is used in Is. 27:6 about *all* Israel. The initial hearers of Isaiah's words would have thought back to how Aaron's rod budded, blossomed and bore fruit as a sign that God had chosen that family and not all Israel. However, Is. 27:6 makes it clear that God's ideal intention was that all Israel would be a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6). This came to fulfilment in essence with the end of the Levitical priesthood and the establishment of all those in Christ as a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5).

18:6 The Levites were given to God, through having been given to the priests. What we give to God's people we give to God (see too on 17:5). Constantly we are being taught to see God as manifest in His people, and to treat them appropriately.

18:7 Again, serving God is presented as an honour, a gift from God (see on 16:9). Although the Levites had no physical land inheritance amongst the people of Israel, this was compensated for by being given the gift of serving God. Of course, this would only have been perceived as a gift by the more spiritually minded. We are to see service to God even in repetitive things as a gift we have been given to do.

18:11 The theme of giving gifts continues; what was given as a gift to God, He gave as a gift to the priests. See on :6.

18:20 *I am your portion and your inheritance*- The Levites had no land nor great material wealth to leave to their children; but they had this unique relationship with God to pass on. Jeremiah in depression, having lost all he had, concludes that God is his portion (Lam. 3:24), clearly alluding to this verse. Even if materially we lose all we have- our relationship with God is our true portion and

inheritance, which we will eternally receive in the Kingdom. The writers of the Psalms, some of whom like David weren't Levites, could use the same Hebrew word to describe how God was their "portion" and inheritance (Ps. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5). This should be our self-perception, whether or not we leave any material inheritance to anyone or not. Not for us the obsession with building up ownership of property, under the excuse we want to leave something to our children. Our service of God and His people is our inheritance, which we shall eternally receive back at the resurrection and the time of the Kingdom of God on earth. The priests and Levites were provided with enough to eat, but no great wealth. So it should be for all full time servants in God's house. By contrast, the priests of the surrounding tribes were generally more wealthy than the other people, and owned land, which was seen as especially holy (see Gen. 47:22).

18:26 The Levites numbered 22,000 males over one month old (3:34); they were to receive the tithe of 600,000 grown men from the other tribes (1:46). This may appear to mean that the Levites were to be extremely well provided for. However it's more likely that this is an example of where God foresaw the likely failure of His people to obey His Law fully, and built into that very Law some provision for this. In this we see His sensitivity to our human failure.

18:30 The tithes were to be paid to the Levites, not the priests. The priests survived by eating the sacrifices made by Israel. It's therefore incorrect for modern church leaders to demand a tithe be paid to them because they are equivalent of the priests. In any case, we are to be a community of priests (1 Pet. 2:5). The tithes were produce from the land, not money; although seeing money existed in some form, God could have commanded money to be given them. But the tithe was of agricultural produce, simply so that the Levites would have something to eat as they concentrated on God's service- not in order to make them wealthy.

19:2 This sacrifice was to provide purification from death through its ashes, which were to be mixed with water (:9), perhaps the running water from the rock, which water followed them through the wilderness- for what other source of "running [Heb. 'springing'] water" (:17) could they have had in the wilderness? It speaks very clearly of Christ's death; for He was without blemish and never came under the yoke of sin; He too was killed outside the camp of Israel (:3 cp. Heb. 13:12). Heb. 9:13 specifically alludes to how the ashes of this heifer were typical of Christ's sacrifice.

19:6 *Wood, and hyssop, and scarlet*- All associated with the crucifixion of Christ.

19:13 The sacrifice of the red heifer, like that of Christ, became meaningful and effective for the individual when mixed with water, which could suggest our need to appropriate the sacrifice of Christ to ourselves through baptism.

19:21 *Perpetual statute*- The implication is that this process of cleansing from the results of death was to be permanent; but the whole style of the command for Eleazar to kill the red heifer in :2,3 sounds as if only one red heifer was killed for all time. There is no command as to continuing to kill a red heifer, nor by whom or how often it should be done. The record may be framed to present the result of the red heifer's sacrifice as if it were eternal, clearly typifying Christ's sacrifice. Another option is that this entire ritual is to be understood in the context of the death of so many Israelites in the rebellion described in chapter 16. Chapters 17 and 18 provide the answer to the peoples' concerns arising out of that incident, and chapter 19 may also be in that context- describing how to avoid defilement by all the dead bodies which died in the plague.

20:6 When faced with unreasonable criticism and aggression, even from those amongst the people of God, our response should be not to argue back immediately, but take the situation to God.

20:11 Moses had previously struck the rock and water came out (Ex. 17:6), but this time he was asked to speak to it- yet instead, he struck it. He became over familiar with God, assuming he could do as he wished without careful respect for God's word. He failed to believe in the power of the spoken word (:12), effectively he rebelled against the commandment (27:14); he assumed that detailed obedience wasn't necessary to God's commandment; and he gave the impression that he rather than God was giving the water ("shall we bring you water...?", v. 10). One angry sentence can reveal so much about our attitudes. Moses had earlier asked that he be excluded from entering the land so that Israel might enter (Ex. 32:32- see note there). In a strange way, that prayer was heard. Although Moses sinned, repeatedly we read that he didn't himself enter the land for Israel's sake (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21). They are blamed for provoking him to speak poorly (Ps. 106:33). God works through our sins in a strange way; and what we ask for in prayer, we have a way of receiving, in essence.

20:12 Although Moses didn't believe in God as he should have done, God still did the miracle. He is prepared to accept even imperfect faith.

20:21 Soon after this incident, Israel were commanded not to despise an Edomite (Dt. 23:7)- although this is just what Edom had done to them. We aren't to treat others as they treat us, but leave their judgment with God. These incidents took place in the 40<sup>th</sup> year of their wanderings (33:38), and the commands of Deuteronomy were given at the same time.

21:2 *Then I will utterly destroy their cities*- But it was in any case a command to "utterly destroy" the Canaanites (Dt. 7:2; 12:2; 20:17). We shouldn't consider that which is our duty to do some kind of special dedication to God which deserves His reward. But so eager is God for relationship with His people that He all the same agreed (:3).

21:4 *By the way to the Red Sea*- Their route took them back on themselves at this point, heading back towards Egypt. This may have been the psychological trigger for their desire to be back in Egypt (:5). We must try to avoid things and situations which may stimulate a desire to leave the way to the Kingdom and return to the world.

21:7 *Moses prayed for the people*- Previously in such situations, God had just accepted Moses' prayer. But now He asked the people to additionally make some personal effort to demonstrate their faith. Quickly dashing off a request for Christ's mediation in the case of sin may sometimes be met by God seeking to convict us more deeply of our sin and asking us to make some more concrete effort.

21:8 This is interpreted in Jn. 3:14-16 as a symbol of Christ lifted up on the pole at His death; looking toward the snake is seen as faith in Him; and healing from the snake bite as eternal life. This is another reason for thinking that the 'cross' of Christ wasn't as traditionally understood; the Greek word *stauros* translated "cross" means a tree trunk or pole. The snake was a symbol of sin- but it was as it were dead in Christ. As He hung there, He was so deeply identified with our sins (despite never sinning personally) that a snake can legitimately be used as a symbol for Him there. We are in the position of the Israelites feeling the poisonous venom rising within them, knowing they had

limited time left in this life, recognizing they had indeed sinned and deserved death and yet didn't wish to die. In an encampment of over three million people living in single storey dwellings, i.e. tents, it would have taken some several kilometres walk to get to the bronze snake. To walk when you have been bitten by a snake is dangerous; you shouldn't let your heart work any more than necessary so that the venom isn't spread. So they were commanded to do that which is counter-instinctive, what is totally against worldly wisdom and sense. Our faith in Christ is similar. But it could be that the people were told about the existence of the bronze snake, and had to look toward it in faith from where they were, believing it was there, although not seeing it. This would be similar to our faith in Christ's death. We didn't see it, there is no physical representation of it within our sight, but we look to it from far away in time, space and understanding, and believe it was there- and believe that really, 2000 years ago, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside Jerusalem, it really did happen. We can imagine the relief of the people as they felt the temperature subside, the fever go; and their gratitude afterwards, their eager vowing to give their saved lives to God and not rebel again. These should be our emotions as we reflect on our salvation in Christ.

22:3 The fear of the tribes surrounding Israel is stressed in the record, yet Israel were so fearful of *them*. The obstacles to our inheriting the Kingdom aren't as insurmountable as they appear.

22:7 The simple lesson is that God's blessing is one of those things which money can't buy.

22:8 *Lodge here this night*- He should surely have immediately sent them away. He knew that whoever cursed Abraham's seed would be cursed, and had had experience of this (:6; Gen. 12:3). The longer we keep the possibility of sinning before us, the more likely it is that we shall fall into it.

22:9 *Who are these men with you?*- God knew. It was a rhetorical question, designed to make Balaam reflect that here in his home he had the enemies of God's people. God likewise at times makes us stop and think, sometimes making us put into words out loud the situation we are really in.

22:13 *Yahweh refuses to permit me to go with you*- There's a hint of resentment against God here; and Balaam should've told them direct that he was not going to curse God's people. It's rather like us excusing ourselves from doing something sinful by telling people that our "stupid religion" doesn't allow it- rather than personally identifying ourselves with the reason why we will not do it.

22:19 *Please wait also here this night*- Clearly Balaam wanted to go with them, because he loved the idea of getting the promised wealth (2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11). If he had sent them away immediately, the spiritual crisis would've passed. But instead, God confirmed Balaam in the sinful way he wished to go- for He now permitted Balaam to go with them, but to only speak His word (:20). By going with them- and it was a very long journey- Balaam was going deeper into temptation. This is an example of how whilst the process of temptation is internal (James 1:13-15), God can lead sinful people further into situations of temptation if this is what they wish in their hearts. Hence we should pray that God will not lead *us* into temptation (Mt. 6:13). Hence God was angry with Balaam because he went (:22), even though God told him to go (:20)- God led him further into temptation, but was angered that Balaam went that way.

22:22 *For an adversary*- The Hebrew word for adversary is "satan". Good people, Angels, even God Himself, can be 'satans' or adversaries. The word carries no bad connotation of itself as a word; the

word has been loaded with this meaning by the wrong idea that there is a personal 'satan' out in the cosmos who is in radical opposition to God. This isn't a Biblical idea.

22:24 The two times Balaam faces the Angel, albeit unknowingly, refer to the two times that Balak's messengers had come to him. Balaam didn't see God in it all; and he was angry with the donkey for perceiving God in a situation where he himself couldn't perceive God.

22:26 The New Testament describes Balaam as rushing headlong on this journey, running greedily for the money (Jude 11), in "madness" (2 Pet. 2:15). This is the effect which the hope of wealth can have upon people.

22:29 *I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed you-* Moments later, Balaam sees the Angel with a sword in his hand, thinking of killing him, but refraining by grace. God was trying to teach Balaam that He is indeed gracious.

22:34 *If it displeases you, I will go back again-* Still Balaam doesn't get it. Surely he knew his journey was displeasing to God. Sometimes people are pulled up by God in their path- and still they refuse to understand. They are blinded by the immediate rather than seeing God's perspective.

22:35 Again God leads him further into temptation, seeing he didn't himself decide to return home. God was pushing him onwards down the destructive road he so eagerly chose to go.

23:12 Clearly Balaam didn't want to say the words he did. The process of Divine inspiration means that men spoke God's word even against their will; they were moved, carried along, by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:15,16). The Bible is therefore not the words of men but those of God, and the fact some of those who gave the original words did so *against their own will* – and Balaam would be a classic example- is proof that it is indeed the word of God and not of men.

23:19 *Change His mind-* God does change His mind about some things due to His great sensitivity to His people; but He will not change His basic love for His people (Mal. 3:6). He will not arbitrarily decide now to curse His beloved people.

*Has He spoken, and will He not make it good?-* God had promised to give His people the promised land, as He has promised to give us the Kingdom, and there is no way He will renege on that promise.

23:21 *He has not seen iniquity in Jacob-* There was indeed much iniquity in Jacob- notice how Jacob's old name is used rather the new name, Israel. They took with them the gods of Egypt, and the tabernacle of another god as well as that of Yahweh (Acts 7:43). But God did not 'see' that sin; this is an Old Testament presentiment of the 'imputed righteousness' of which Paul speaks in the New Testament. God doesn't count sin, doesn't 'see' it, in His people; for this really is what love is about, seeing someone in a positive light and not imputing their weakness to them.

23:26 *Didn't I tell you-* Again there is a resentment in Balaam, repeating God's word to others but not personally identifying with it, bemoaning the limitations of it.

24:5 *How beautiful are your tents, Jacob-* God is described in the prophets as being in love with Israel at this time (Ez. 16:8)- just as He is with us on our wilderness journey towards His Kingdom. He didn't 'see' their sin (see on 23:21).

24:10 *These three times*- Balaam ought to have perceived that each time he tried to curse Israel and ended up blessing them, it was like him trying those three times to ride his donkey down the lane with God standing in the way to block him. The same phrase “these three times” occurs three times in that record (22:28,32,33).

24:17 This star and sceptre would seem to refer to Israel’s Messiah, the Lord Jesus. It seems He will yet win a resounding victory against Israel’s Arab enemies, represented here by Moab, and be higher than Agag (:7), or Gog. Ez. 38:1-7 speaks of Christ’s latter day conflict with Gog. It seems there will be a final conflict around the time of Christ’s return, in which He will finally save Israel from all their surrounding enemies.

24:25 We learn from 31:16 and Rev. 2:14 that at this time, Balaam advised Balak to entice Israel with Moabite prostitutes, so that the people would be cursed by their God for immorality. The events of chapter 25 were therefore on Balaam’s advice. This desperate strategy reflects how headlong was Balaam’s desire to receive the wealth promised him, and how he sacrificed the welfare of God’s people upon that altar. In essence we can do the same today.

25:3- see on 24:25.

*Baal Peor* refers to the Baal who was worshipped at the town of Peor, near where they were now encamping (Dt. 3:29; 4:46). Each town and geographical area had its own gods, rather like today there is a geography to religion, different parts of the world or even areas within a country tend to have their local religions. The true God and His Truth is the same worldwide, which allows a unique international bond between those who know Him and are in His Son.

25:5 This command didn’t need to be carried out, because Phinehas took the initiative in killing the chief offenders (:7,8) and this act so impressed God that the plague was ended (:11). Here we have an example of how God sets up one plan or purpose, but is prepared to amend or change it according to human initiative suggesting another one, as Moses did several times. We see here therefore how open God is to dialogue, to living relationship with His people.

25:8 The spear connecting Jew and Gentile in death could be seen as pointing forward to the cross of Christ.

25:11 *Jealous with My jealousy*- God’s feelings are to be ours. His colossal love for His people means that He is also therefore jealous over their devotions to any other god.

26:2 This numbering of the people just before they entered the promised land perhaps looks forward to the way that God will be aware of the exact number of those who will enter His Kingdom at the day of judgment when Christ returns. Ps. 87:6 appears to speak of a ‘writing up of the people’ in the last day.

26:9 *Strove against Moses... strove against Yahweh*- Moses manifested Yahweh and in this sense whatever was done to him was done to Yahweh. This doesn’t mean that Moses was Yahweh Himself in person. Likewise Jesus carried the Name of God (Jn. 5:43) but wasn’t God in person. We who are baptized into the Name are in the same situation- whatever is done to us is done to God, and our attitudes to those in His Name are our attitudes to Him (Mt. 25:40,43).

26:11 The inspired titles of the Psalms sometimes mention that the Psalm was written by the sons of Korah. They therefore dedicated themselves to God's service, not following the bad example of their father. We in Christ are a new creation, and not inevitable victims of our upbringing or bad parental example.

26:14 All these figures may seem irrelevant, but analyzing them provides confirmation that the Bible we read is indeed God's inspired word, because there is so much incidental confirmation of the truth of the record provided. The sum total of Israel at the end of their wilderness wanderings was 1,820 less than it had been at the beginning, nearly 40 years previously. But the tribe of Simeon had decreased by 37,100 (cp. 1:23). The plague of chapter 25 had killed 24,000 people for committing fornication with the Moabites (25:9); but the ringleader of that had been Zimri, a Simeonite prince (25:14). It's likely therefore that he led his tribe into the orgy with the Moabites, which resulted in so many of them being killed.

26:43 Dan had only one son and yet by this time had become the second largest tribe in Israel. Benjamin had ten sons (Gen. 46:21) but was one of the smallest tribes. Again we see how God doesn't work through human strength or advantage; the passage of time reveals over the generations that human blessing soon fades away.

27:2 Considering the low status of women at that time, we see here a commendable spirit of initiative and spiritual ambition for these women to dare ask a male dominated society to change their rules to allow them to have an inheritance. We see too how God and Moses weren't at all anti-women, and responded positively. Note how the women were allowed to come directly to the decision makers, without needing to appoint a male representative for their case, as was common in surrounding cultures. The value of the human person is consistently seen throughout the Pentateuch. They asked about this matter *before* the land had been possessed, reflecting their strength of faith that God would fulfil His promise of giving His people the Kingdom; they imagined what it would be like there, and acted accordingly even before they got there, as if the land was already theirs in possession- just as we should.

27:11 One wonders why this statute had not been included within the Law of Moses. Perhaps God had reserved it in potential, waiting the initiative of these women?

27:13 Moses seeing the promised land but being unable to enter it himself points to how the Law of Moses gave a view of salvation, but couldn't bring people into it.

27:16 We see here Moses' selflessness, his concern was always for the wellbeing of God's people rather than his own status. He didn't ask for one of his own family members to take over the leadership; for he realized that spiritual leadership must be based upon spiritual qualification, not family connection.

27:17 *Be not as sheep which have no shepherd*- Quoted by Jesus about the crowds of Israelites in the first century (Mt. 9:36). He clearly saw those confused and misguided people, with all their wrong beliefs and attitudes, as still the congregation of God. We also learn from what Moses says and the Lord's approval of it that God's people need shepherds. There is an undoubted teaching regarding the need for leadership / shepherding throughout the Bible. When God's people are leaderless, they go astray.

27:18 Because Joshua had the Spirit, Moses was told to lay his hand on him. Yet Dt. 34:9 says that Moses laid his hand on him so that Joshua might receive the Spirit. Here we see the upward spiral of spirituality at work- those who are of the Spirit are made more spiritual.

28:3 The commands about the continual burnt offering are repeated more frequently and in more detail in the Law of Moses than those about anything else or any other offering. It's as if God perceived the likely tendency of His people to forget the regular sacrifices and focus instead on the occasional ones; and to disregard the commands about the grain offering, which was so small and yet so valuable to God. It is likewise continually stressed in the legislation that these continual sacrifices were "a pleasant aroma to Me" (:2). Spirituality is about daily discipline, not occasional acts of devotion; hourly prayer, daily Bible reading, constant spiritual mindedness, rather than occasional attendance at a church meeting. When God later asked Israel "Did you offer unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?" (Am. 5:25; Acts 7:42), the answer that is implied is that no, they did not. Hence this repetition here at the end of the wilderness journey. The whole purpose of their being given Canaan was so that they would have an environment in which to keep God's laws (Ps. 105:45). Likewise with us- if we're not interested in keeping God's principles in this life, there will be little point in our being given the Kingdom, which is likewise an arena in which we can live perfectly according to His principles.

28:9 Here for the only time in the Law it is pointed out that the Sabbath sacrifices must include a grain offering, although this principle had been given in 15:3. The theme of this chapter is that the small offerings mustn't be forgotten nor minimized in importance.

28:24 *Besides the continual burnt offering*- It is so often stressed, both in this chapter and elsewhere, that these continual offerings mustn't be forgotten about at the time of the greater festivals. See on :3.

28:31 *To you without blemish*- Every animal is blemished in some way, but they were to offer that which in their eyes ("to you") was without blemish. Whilst we are to offer our best, it's only the best in our eyes, and is only accepted by grace.

29:11 *One male goat for a sin offering*- This additional sin offering on the day of Atonement isn't mentioned in the previous legislation about the day of Atonement in Lev. 16. Because Israel had failed to keep the sacrifices during the wilderness journey as they should have done (so Am. 5:25 implies), God now at the end of the wilderness journey added more sacrifices to be kept. Perhaps the Israelite was to see in this male goat a symbol of himself, worthy only of rejection- the goat being a symbol of the rejected in Mt. 25:33; and the "sin offering of atonement" as representative of the whole community's unforgiven sins. This is the great paradox- that those who consider themselves rejected will be accepted, and those who think of themselves as accepted in their own strength will be rejected. The Lord's right hand is our left hand, and vice versa, if we imagine ourselves standing before Him. Those who put themselves to *their* right hand , i.e. justify themselves, are putting themselves at His left hand; and vice versa (Mt. 25:34).

29:13 In total, the feast of Tabernacles required 70 oxen to be sacrificed. Far more animals were sacrificed in this feast than for any other. Yet this was the feast of joy- teaching that true happiness is related to sacrifice to God, rather than keeping for ourselves.



29:19 Each day of their rejoicing in God's grace toward them, Israel were to offer a sin offering as a reminder of the fact they were sinners, and all God's blessings toward them were given to a sinful people. We must never let slip our recognition of our sinfulness before God, and unworthiness in ourselves of His blessings.

29:39 *Besides your vows, and your freewill offerings*- God envisaged that at the time the whole community were engaged in extra special devotion to Him, the individual might still wish to make a private sacrifice. We can't ride into God's Kingdom on the back of others, e.g. our family members, our church. Our collective devotions shouldn't lead us to think that God doesn't seek our private freewill dedication to Him.

30:3 Girls married young in Semitic cultures of the time, usually in their teens. God here foresaw the possibility of a young girl wanting to do something extra special for Him. In contemporary religions, active participation in religion was typically something for older males. But such is God's value of the human person that He eagerly anticipated young people, even children, making a special act of devotion to Him on their own initiative. Mary's teenage ambition to become the mother of Messiah is the supreme example to today's youngsters, growing up as they do in a world where selfish ambition is the order of the day as never before.

30:7 The simple principle established here is that there are times when silence means consent. The Proverbs wisely advise us not to meddle in others' business and to hold our tongue in some cases. But there are other times when not to speak up can have damaging consequences upon others, especially those less mature than ourselves.

30:9 A divorced woman was counted as genuinely single; the sin of marriage breakup is in the factors leading to the breakup of the marriage, but afterwards the person is seen by God as single. Divorce under the Law of Moses was possible only for adultery, and adultery was punishable by death. Yet God foresaw that there would be women who had done this and yet remained alive by grace, or who had been falsely accused; and correctly imagined that such women would love to make a freewill dedication of themselves to Him.

31:2 *Avenge the children of Israel*- But in :3 we read of avenging Yahweh. The insults against God's people are against Him. Many of His children struggle today with a sense of justice not having been done to them, and a desire to see some level of justice or vengeance against their abusers. This day will come, if indeed the injustice has been done to us because of our devotion to God; because whatever is done to God's people is done to Him.

31:5 12,000 was a small army compared to what could have been raised- for there were over 600,000 fighting men numbered amongst Israel at this time. But throughout His military history, God has taken special pleasure in using small numbers to defeat far larger ones, and that principle continues in how He works today.

31:6 God chose Phinehas the priest to be the army commander, whereas Joshua was the more obvious human choice for that job at this time. But God wished to demonstrate that it is spiritual principle which must lead His people rather than human strength and appropriacy. It was of course Phinehas who had so well perceived the spiritual danger of the Moabites earlier (25:7).

31:15 Moses was distressed that the Israelite army had failed to perceive the spiritual reason for the battle- it was to stop the Midianites posing a temptation to Israel with their women as they had in chapter 25. Sometimes God's people can fight His battles and even be given victory, whilst failing to perceive the spiritual intent behind the war.

31:27 *And all the congregation*- This kind of policy of sharing the spoils of war with the congregation was repeated in Israelite history (1 Sam. 30:24,25; Ps. 68:12). It ensured that the minority called upon to do highly visible and humanly heroic work didn't do it for themselves nor to settle their own scores, but always, always, with an eye to benefitting the community of God's people.

31:49 *Your servants*- It's usual for military men to consider themselves as an elite in their own right. But these leading military leaders considered themselves as nothing but servants to their spiritual leader. Humility in leadership is vital amongst God's people.

31:50 *To make atonement for our souls*- Even in times of spiritual victory, we are to never lose sight of our basic sinfulness and need for atonement with God.

32:3 These place names occur in the later Old Testament, but always with reference to the fact that Gentiles lived there. So Reuben and Gad's short term desire for inheritance didn't last for long; subsequent generations lost those lands. Although they changed the names of these cities (:38), their original names evidently stayed with them because the Gentiles re-took them from Reuben and Gad.

32:5 *Don't bring us over the Jordan*- They said this to Moses, who so dearly wished to enter the land but wasn't able to. The paradox is obvious and intentional; Moses could easily have answered their request with reference to it, but he omits all personal reference, in his selfless way; and focuses instead on the impact their choice would have on God's people as a whole. For their salvation and not his own was uppermost in his mind.

32:7 Our attitudes to possessing the Kingdom affect others; if we don't want to go over ourselves, we will discourage others. The power of example is far greater than we realize. Jesus may have referred to this incident when He condemned the Pharisees for not entering the Kingdom of God themselves and not sending forth others on their way there either (Mt. 23:13 Gk.).

32:15 At first sight this may appear unreasonable- that the whole community would be punished for the sake of the sin and short-termist thinking of two tribes. But the eternal wellbeing of others is in our hands in that our example can discourage others from entering the Kingdom, and God may not compensate for our causing them to stumble.

32:17 *Until we have brought them to their place*- They thought that their human strength would give Israel their inheritance, whereas God had promised that *He* and not they ("*we*") would give the inheritance. Moses therefore corrects them by saying that *God* will drive out "His enemies from before Him" (:21). It was exactly because they failed to believe that *God* would do this that they preferred to stay the other side of Jordan and not enter Canaan; and they wished to share that attitude with others.

32:38 *Their names being changed*- Nebo and Baal were the names of Canaanite gods, and Yahweh forbade His people to even mention their names (Ex. 23:13; Hos. 2:17). The principle for us is that we

shouldn't surround ourselves with things which even suggest or stimulate the idea of being anything other than totally dedicated to the one true God, or which may trigger the idea of idolatry.

33:2 Moses kept this record of their journeys in the spirit of how God commanded His people to each one remember the way by which God had brought them out from Egypt to Canaan (Dt. 8:2). We need to keep at least a mental diary of how God has led us in our lives, to look back with feelings of gratitude and grace as we see how He has led us, how life for us is no mere succession of chance events, but has a definite direction and end point in entering the Kingdom.

*Their goings out*- The Hebrew word is used about the entire 'going out' of Israel from Egypt to the promised land. Our total journey from the world through the Red Sea of baptism to the Kingdom of God involves much wandering, backwards and forwards (32:13). But it's all under God's control and part of our total exodus from Egypt to the Kingdom. Although humanly the journey was a zig-zag and circular route, it is described in Ps. 107:7 as a "right" or 'straight' way- from God's perspective.

33:4 on their gods also Yahweh executed judgments- Each of the plagues targeted a specific Egyptian god, and it seems that on Passover night something dramatic happened to all the gods- maybe the idols to them fell over or were destroyed. Yet Israel still took the gods of Egypt with them through the Red Sea and worshipped them on the wilderness journey (Ez. 20:7; Acts 7:43). The pull of idolatry is against all reason, and yet there is such a strong tendency within us not to devote ourselves to only one God.

33:8 Their dramatic passage through the Red Sea is described in the same way as any other stage on their journey; our baptism into Christ is our Red Sea crossing (1 Cor. 10:1,2), but the other stages of our journey are no less led by God and part of our final deliverance into His Kingdom.

33:55 What can appear mere harmless associations with the world can in the end destroy us. Whilst we are to be in this world in the same sense as the Lord Jesus was, mixing and identifying with them to bring them too to God, the basic principle of separation from unbelievers must never be forgotten.

33:56 *As I thought to do to them, so will I do to you*- That is, drive them out of the land. And this is what happened to Israel. There is a theme in the Bible that the judgments of this world will come upon the unfaithful amongst the children of God; there's a need to be radically different from this world or else we will share this world's condemnation (1 Cor. 11:32; Rev. 18:4).

34:2 The land promised to Abraham was from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea, but here God redefines it as much smaller. He perhaps perceived that they simply didn't have the spiritual vision to possess that vast area. There is so much made possible for us in prospect; maybe we will ultimately receive less than we could have had because of our limited vision in this life. Yet He encouraged the people to go exploring beyond the bounds which He here gave them, right up to the Euphrates, promising to give them whatever land they walked upon (Dt. 11:24). It seems none rose up to that challenge. God invites His people to assume that they would receive this land and make preparations as if they had- for at this time they had not yet crossed Jordan into it. We are likewise asked to believe that we have been moved into the sphere of the Kingdom of God's Son, and have received an inheritance by reason of our being in Him (Col. 1:13; Eph. 1:11).

34:14,15 The triple emphasis here that those who chose immediate inheritance east of Jordan had already received their inheritance may be behind Christ's triple emphasis that some "have their reward" in this life rather than waiting for the future, eternal reward (Mt. 6:2,5,16).

35:2 This meant that the Levites were divided amongst the 12 tribes of Israel, enabling them to teach God's ways to the whole nation (Lev. 10:11; Dt. 33:9,10). In this way, the curse upon Levi that his children would be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7) turned into a blessing for all- and God so loves to work in this way, using the consequences of sin to bring about His work, purpose and glory.

35:15 We are all in the position of the person who unintentionally killed another person and is therefore liable to death. We have all sinned, and yet as it were in the spirit of how Paul describes our sin in Romans 7- committed against our better intentions. Heb. 6:18 speaks of us fleeing for refuge into Christ- suggesting we are the one who flees after committing manslaughter, and becoming "in Christ" by baptism is our entry into Him as our city of refuge. But we must abide in Him- for if we leave Him then we are liable to death (:26). And our final salvation from the effects of sin is guaranteed by the death of the High Priest, the Lord Jesus (:25).

35:19 The idea of blood vendettas, whereby a family member of the murdered has a legal right to hunt and kill the murderer, is widespread in primitive societies. Yet the Law of Moses seems to make provision for it. Seeing that God is presented as the ultimate avenger (see on 31:2), this may seem strange. Instead of grace and forgiveness being inculcated, revenge seems allowed. Yet the desire to repay murder with murder is so great within primitive society that it seems God made a concession to this weakness, and allowed it, whilst seeking to control it being applied in any wrongful or doubtful context. The fact God makes concessions to human weakness doesn't mean we should eagerly make use of them; the spirit of all God's revelation to us in His word is that we should forgive and leave judgment to Him.

35:25 The death of the High Priest enabled the 'guilty' person to be totally freed because the principle that death was required to atone for death had been thus fulfilled (:33)- as if in his death, the High Priest was taking upon himself the guilt of the sin of murder, as a total representative of the sinner. In this we see foreshadowed the representative nature of Christ's death for us.

36:6 *Let them be married to whom they will*- This verse is alluded to by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:39, where we read that a Christian widow can marry whom she will but only to someone "in the Lord" - in the same way as the women here could marry whom they wished, but only in the tribe of their fathers, unless they would lose their inheritance permanently. It could be that Paul is teaching that marriage within the faith, to those also "in the Lord" by baptism into Him, is so important that doing otherwise may cause us to lose the promised inheritance of the Kingdom. Marriage within the faith is indeed an important principle and ignoring it often has terrible spiritual consequences. But note that she was free to marry whom *she* wanted- in a culture where arranged marriage was the norm, God valued the dignity and free choice of the woman.

## DEUTERONOMY

1:2 *It is eleven days' journey*- It took Israel 38 years to complete this journey, but it was only 11 days if they walked directly. Their exit from Egypt through the Red Sea represents our baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2), and the wilderness journey is the prototype of our walk to God's Kingdom. We tend to walk around in circles as Israel did, rather than perceiving our end destination clearly and keeping our focus upon it.

1:3 *In the fortieth year*- Moses was now at the end of his life; Israel stood on the borders of the promised land, which he was disallowed from entering. He now gives his swansong, perhaps in the last month or even day of his life he gave Israel the address transcribed for us as 'Deuteronomy', literally 'the second [giving of] the law'. He repeats some of the laws he had previously given them, with some additional comments and clarifications, and shares with them his reflections upon their journey. In this book, therefore, we perceive a man at the point of spiritual maturity.

1:7 *The river Euphrates*- This was the boundary of the land promised to Abraham. But sadly Israel lacked the spiritual ambition to even go there, let alone settle and inherit the land. It may well be that we inherit the Kingdom, but not to the extent that we could do. We in this brief life are deciding the nature of how we will spend eternity.

1:22 The sending out of the spies was a concession to human weakness; Num. 13:17-20 says that they were sent in order to find out whether the land of Canaan was a good land, and the feasibility of overcoming the people who lived there. But God had categorically given assurances on these points already; yet Israel preferred to believe the word of men than that of God. However, God made a concession to their weakness, and gave the command to send out the spies (Num. 13:2). But when Israel heard their faithless tales of woe, they decided they didn't want to inherit the Kingdom prepared for them. When we make use of concessions to human weakness, we often end up in situations of temptation which we find too strong for us. The best way is to simply go straight forward in faith in God's word of promise rather than relying on human strength.

1:25 This is a very positive perspective on what the spies said; they said that Canaan was a good land, but the inhabitants of the land were far too strong for Israel, effectively calling God a liar. Moses is very positive about Israel in Deuteronomy. It's a sign of spiritual maturity that we impute righteousness to others and seek to focus on the positive rather than for ever dwelling on the terrible failures of God's people.

1:43 These Israelites who had crossed the Red Sea (cp. our baptism) and were now rejected from God's Kingdom, because they themselves had said they didn't want to inherit it, now wanted more than anything else to be there. This is a major Biblical theme- that the rejected will desperately ask to be allowed in to God's kingdom; the foolish virgins will knock on the closed door begging for it to be opened (Mt. 25:11; Lk. 13:25). Our ultimate destiny is to stand before the Lord wanting to enter His Kingdom with every fibre in our being. But this must be our attitude now, for then it will be too late to change anything.

2:7 *He has known your walking*- Because God 'knew' Israel's journey through the wilderness, therefore they "lacked nothing". The Hebrew language reflects certain realities about the nature of God's ways. The common Hebrew word for 'to see', especially when used about God's 'seeing',

means also 'to provide' (Gen. 16:13; 22:8,14; 1 Sam. 16:17; ). What this means in practice is that the fact God sees and knows all things means that He can and will therefore and thereby provide for us in the circumstances of life; for He sees and knows all things.

*2:12 The children of Esau succeeded them, and they destroyed them from before them and lived in their place-* This history had been arranged by God to encourage His people; if those in the unbelieving world could do this, then how much more could they with God behind them. God arranges our lives so that we sometimes encounter others who without faith in God have achieved great things in their lives- in order to inspire us that if they can do it, how much more can we. See on 2:21.

*2:19 Don't bother them or contend with them-* As also commanded about other areas in :5 and :9. The idea was that Israel weren't to take anything less than the real promised land; they weren't to seek to develop their own kingdom where seemed easier and more convenient to them. Likewise we are surrounded by temptation to have our own pseudo-Kingdom of God in this life; but we are to keep focused on the one and only true Kingdom of God which is yet to come.

*2:21 If giants weren't a barrier to the children of Lot taking land for a possession, neither should they be for Israel; but they greatly feared them (Num. 13:28,33).* If worldly people can achieve as they do, how much more can we with God on our side. See on 2:12.

*2:24 Contend with him-* The implication could be that Moses was disobedient to this and tried to avoid confrontation with him (:27). But we can't ultimately avoid the confrontations which God at times puts in our path (:32).

*2:29 The land which Yahweh our God gives us-* This phrase or idea occurs many times in Deuteronomy. Moses was urging the people to believe the most basic reality- that God would really give them the promised Kingdom. And we too are likewise continually encouraged by God's word. In this particular example, Moses quite openly tells a Gentile people about their destination, in the same way as we should be unashamed to speak of our hope of the Kingdom to unbelievers.

*2:31 Begin to possess-* Even on our wilderness journey, before we have possessed the Kingdom, we do have some foretastes of that Kingdom; in the same way as Israel began to possess the promised land in some limited sense whilst still in the desert.

*3:2 Into your hand-* God gives us potential victories, but we still have to fight the human battle.

*3:18 God has given you this land to possess it-* Moses has just said that *he* gave Israel their land possessions (:12,13,15,16). So often we encounter this kind of thing; Moses loves to emphasize that God is working through him, that he is identified with God and merely His agent doing His work. Likewise the language of God can be applied to all His servants and supremely to His Son. This doesn't mean that are God in person, neither was Jesus; but it also doesn't mean that we as individuals are meaningless because God is manifest through us.

*3:21 We are given some foretastes of the Kingdom of God even in this life; just as their victories in the wilderness were foretastes of the greater victories they would have against the inhabitants of Canaan.*

3:25 Moses knew God well enough to know that He is capable of changing His stated intentions; for Moses had persuaded God not to destroy Israel as He once planned in His wrath. God is open to dialogue, He isn't the impervious 'Allah' of Islam who must be merely submitted to; and this gives our prayer life real energy and zest, knowing that we're not simply firing requests at God in the hope we might get at least some response; we can dialogue with God, wrestling in prayer over specific, concrete situations and requests.

3:26 *For your sakes*- Moses says this several times. Although he spoke Deuteronomy in his spiritual maturity at the end of his life, it could be argued that like all of us, he died with some spiritual point of weakness; and in his case it would have been his failure to own up fully to his sin of striking the rock, still blaming it on others even at the end of his life. But Moses will be saved; without any complacency, we all the same shouldn't think that we won't be saved because we have weaknesses we failed to overcome, and likewise we shouldn't assume others won't be saved because they can't recognize what to us is an obvious failure in their behaviour or personality.

4:2 *So that you may keep the commandments*- The last message of Jesus, like that of Moses, emphasizes we are not to add to nor subtract from God's word (Rev. 22:19). The commandments we have been given are designed by God to be a system of living which brings us to Him as He wishes. Jesus was perfect before God not just because He kept the commandments fully, but because the life elicited by that obedience produced a totally God-like person. If we omit some commandments and add others, then this will not be the end result. They are intended to synthesize together to produce a truly spiritual character and way of life. If we ignore some of them and add others then we will actually find obedience to the commandments *in toto* far more difficult. See on 11:22.

4:9,29,39 *Your heart*- Time and again in Deuteronomy, Moses speaks of the state of the *heart*. He warns them against allowing a bad state of heart to develop, he speaks often of how apostasy starts in the heart. Moses makes a total of 49 references to the heart / mind of Israel in Deuteronomy, compared to only 13 in the whole of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. This was perhaps his greatest wish as he faced death; that God's people should develop a spiritual *mind* and thereby manifest the Father and come to salvation. He saw the state of our mind as the key to spiritual success. But do we share this perspective? There is so much in our modern world which is mind-corrupting. Perceiving the importance of spiritual mindedness is a sign of our spiritual maturity.

*Therefore make them known to your children*- The very process of teaching or explaining something to others makes us fully conscious of the material we are teaching; and so preaching or teaching our children God's principles enables us to be the more conscious of them and to ourselves remember them. The whole concept of evangelization is partly for our benefit.

4:10 The LXX uses the word *ekklesia* eight times in Deuteronomy, but not once in Moses' other words (4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 23:1,2,3,8; 32:1). Responsibility for the whole family God had redeemed was a mark of Moses' maturity. Both as the community of believers and as individuals, this will be a sign of our maturity too.

4:16 *Engraved image*- God's people are to accept Him as He is in His word, rather than try to create God in a form which seems attractive to us. As we read His word, it is not for us to say 'I don't think God would be like *that*, He will be like *this*, which is how I imagine He ought to be'. And it is not for us to work around those words of His which are inconvenient to us by forced, out of context

interpretation, dismissing their inspiration or other tricks of the human intellect. By doing so we are effectively making a graven image, fashioning God as we want Him to be rather than accepting Him as He is.

4:24 *Yahweh your God is a consuming fire*- This is quoted about us in Heb. 12:29 with a slight change of pronoun; “*Your (Israel’s) God*” becomes “*our God*”. The God of the Christian believers is the Old Testament Yahweh God of Israel; in this we see the significance of studying the accounts of how our God revealed Himself in the Old Testament.

4:27 *Left few in number among the nations*- Israel were indeed disobedient and were scattered throughout the provinces of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. “There you will serve gods...” (:28) - but the prophets (especially Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) condemned them for this. There is a downward spiral in spirituality, whereby if people choose to go to false gods, the true God confirms them in their delusions. This is why followers of false religions are so totally convinced they are right, everything makes sense to them within the theological system they adopt- because God confirms them in the delusion they have chosen (2 Thess. 2:11).

4:30 *In the latter days you shall return*- This is one of many indications that just before Christ returns, at least some Jews will repent and turn to the Father and His Son in truth. We should therefore always given special attention to witnessing the Gospel to Jewish people, because their repentance will be one factor which brings about Christ’s return.

4:37,38 *Brought you out... to bring you in*- Our separation from this world isn’t merely negative. We are separated *from* the world so that we might be separated *unto* the things of God. These two ideas are found together in the Hebrew word for ‘holiness’.

5:1 *Learn them and observe... them*- Learning / understanding God’s principles is the way towards being obedient to them. None of His laws are mere senseless tests of our obedience or submission to Him; they have specific intention.

5:3 *Didn’t make this covenant with our fathers*- We must read in an ellipsis here; clearly the idea is that what God had done at Sinai wasn’t *only* between Him and the people there at that time, but also with all His subsequent people. In our Bible study we must be aware that we are reading translations of languages which often rely on understanding the idiom for their real meaning to be delivered to us the readers. In Hebrew especially, we often have to read in an ellipsis; and this verse is a parade example.

5:5 The way Moses in his spiritual maturity in Deuteronomy sees Israel as far more righteous than they were reflects the way the Lord imputes righteousness to us. He says here that Israel didn’t go near the mountain because they were afraid of the fire, whereas Ex. 19:21-24 teaches that Israel at that time were not so afraid of the fire, and were quite inclined to break through the dividing fence and gaze in unspiritual fascination at a theophany which was beyond them. Counting others as righteous rather than endlessly holding them to their failings is the way of grace and is the mark of maturity.

5:9 *Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children*- Throughout Ez. 18 God clarifies that He doesn’t punish children for the sin of their parents; He deals with people on an individual level. However, the effect of sin is often felt in the society of subsequent generations, and in the process of how that



works out, God is there enabling and permitting it to happen; in the same way as we all suffer the consequence of Adam's sin and yet can still be God's acceptable children.

5:11 We take on the Name of the Lord in baptism into that Name, just as Israel carried God's Name as a people in Old Testament times. Our relationship with Him is not be a vain thing to us, a mere social club we joined, a casual association- it is to be our life, at the very core of our being.

5:21 The Law of Moses was the only legal code to as it were criminalize internal attitudes; nobody knows who covets what in their hearts, and there was no legal apparatus to punish this particular transgression of law. But the Law of Moses was a direct covenant between God and every individual amongst His people, and to Him they were personally responsible and answerable.

5:22 When Moses commented about the commandments that God "added no more", he foresaw his people's tendency to add the Halachas of their extra commandments... In this his time of spiritual maturity he could foresee the spiritual problems they would have in their hour by hour life, he appreciated how both their nature and their disobedience would be such a problem for them, and Moses foresaw that they would not cope well with it. Sensitivity to others' likely failures and concern for them is another indicator of spiritual maturity.

5:27 We too have a tendency to shy away from a direct relationship with God through His word, and prefer a system of human mediators to bring God to us- as we see in the established churches. But God wants to have direct contact with us through the medium of His word.

6:3 *The God of your fathers*- It's been observed that the phrase "The God of [somebody]", or similar, occurs 614 times in the Old Testament, of which 306 are in Deuteronomy. Our very personal relationship with God was therefore something else which Moses came to grasp in his spiritual maturity.

*That it may be well with you*- Moses really wanted Israel's well-being, he saw so clearly how obedience would result in blessing (see also 12:28). This is a major theme of Moses in Deuteronomy. There was therefore a real sense of pleading behind his frequent appeal for Israel to "hear" God's words. "*Hear, Israel*" must have had a real passion behind it in his voice, uncorrupted as it was by old age. He didn't rattle it off as some kind of Sunday School text. At least four times Moses interrupts the flow of his speech with this appeal: "*Hear, Israel*" (5:1; 6:3,4; 9:1; 20:3). At the end of his life, Moses saw the supreme significance of our attitude to God's word, and so he pleads with God's people: Hear the word, love the word, make it your life. For in this is your salvation. And the Lord Jesus (e.g. in passages like Jn. 6) makes just the same urgent appeal to us.

6:4 The fact there is only one God means that He is to have our total loyalty and love (:5). If there were two gods, each would have 50%. But the one God demands our total devotion.

6:5 Some time, read through the book of Deuteronomy in one or two goes. You'll see many themes of Moses in Deuteronomy. It shows how Moses felt towards Israel, and how the Lord Jesus feels towards us, and especially how he felt towards us just before his death. For Jesus was the prophet like unto Moses. "*Love*" and the idea of love occurs far more in Deuteronomy than in the other books of the Law. "*Fear the Lord your God*" of Exodus becomes "*love the Lord your God*" in Deuteronomy. Moses perceived that love is indeed the bond or proof of spiritual maturity (Col. 3:14).

7:1 God and Moses had stated that the Canaanite tribes would only be cast out if Israel were obedient, but here Moses enthuses that those tribes would indeed be cast out- so positive was he about Israel's obedience (see too 6:18,19). And yet on the other hand he realistically was aware of their future failures. He said those positive words genuinely, because he simply loved Israel, and had the hope for them which love carries with it. Throughout his speech in Deuteronomy, Moses is *constantly* thinking of Israel in the land; he keeps on telling them how to behave when they are there, encouraging them to be strong so that they will go into the land. Roughly 25% of the verses in Moses' speech speak about this. Israel's future inheritance of the Kingdom absolutely filled Moses' mind as he faced up to his own death. And remember that his speech was the outpouring of 40 years meditation. Their salvation, them in the Kingdom, totally filled his heart; just as like Paul we should enthuse about others' salvation, not simply our own. And likewise with the Lord Jesus. Psalms 22 and 69 show how His thoughts on the cross, especially as he approached the point of death, were centred around our salvation.

7:7,9,13 Analyzing usage of the word "love" in the Pentateuch reveals that "love" was a great theme of Moses at the end of his life (Moses uses it 16 times in Deuteronomy, and only four times in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers). Love is indeed the bond or proof of spiritual maturity (Col. 3:14).

7:16 Despite such great love for Israel, Moses knew them so well that he fully appreciated that they were extremely prone to weakness. This is one of the major themes of Moses in Deuteronomy. He did not turn a blind eye to their sins; Deuteronomy is punctuated with reminders of how grievously they had sinned during their journey, and yet at the same time Moses is so positive about them- setting a wonderful pattern for us in how to deal with others. Time and again he comments on how easily they will be tempted to disobey commandments. "Take heed" runs like a refrain throughout Moses' speech. He warns them here not to "take pity" on false teachers, but to purge them from the community (7:16; 13:8; 19:13,21; 25:12). Not once in the earlier giving of the Law does this warning occur. Moses had come to know Israel so well that he could see how they were tempted to fail, and so he warned them forcibly against it. The way the Lord Jesus knows our thought processes, the mechanism of our temptations, is wondrously prefigured here.

8:3 *Man does not live by bread only*- The passages quoted by Jesus in the desert to strengthen Himself against His desires ("the devil") are all from the same part of Deuteronomy, regarding Israel's experience in the wilderness. Jesus clearly saw a parallel between His experiences and theirs. The description of the Lord Jesus as being in the wilderness with beasts and Angels (Mk. 1:13) is another connection with Israel's experience in the wilderness- they were plagued there by "wild beasts" (Dt. 32:19-24). Jesus was led up of the spirit for forty days in the wilderness, as Israel were led forty years by a Spirit-Angel. The mind of Jesus was likewise proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11). Jesus also was allowed to hunger, to reinforce His understanding of the fact that we are to live not by physical food but by the word of God. The reference to Israel being 'chastened' (:5) in the desert recall how God chastened His Son, Jesus (2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89: 32). Thus Jesus showed us how to read and study the Word - He thought Himself into the position of Israel in the wilderness, and therefore took the lessons that can be learnt from their experiences to Himself in His wilderness trials.

8:4 God has likewise promised to provide us on our wilderness journey with basic clothing and food (Ps. 37:25). We should be content with this, and instead of giving our strength to earn money to tickle our taste buds and buy fine clothing, instead give our lives to serving God.

8:9 *You may dig copper*- But in Judges and 1 Samuel we read several times of how Israel hardly had any iron weapons and were dominated by the Philistines who did. So this was a potential for them- they *could* have had this blessing, but like us so often, they chose to be satisfied with the minimum and didn't realize it for themselves.

9:3 Moses uses the name "Yahweh" over 530 times in Deuteronomy, often with some possessive adjective, e.g. "Yahweh *your* God" or "Yahweh *our* God". Now at the end of his life, he saw the wonder of personal relationship between a man and his God. Jacob reached a like realization at his peak.

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

*Let Me alone*- This reflects the amazingly close relationship between God and Moses. It's as if God is saying: 'I know you might persuade me to change My mind on this one, but please, don't try, I might give in, when really they do need to be destroyed'. We too can have this level of intimacy with God.

*Blot out their name*- Moses prayed that *his* name would be 'blotted out' instead (Ex. 32:32). To be blotted out of the book God had written may have been understood by Moses as asking for him to be excluded from an inheritance in the promised land; for later, a 'book' was written describing the various portions (Josh. 18:9). The connection is made explicit in Ez. 13:9. If Israel were to be blotted out there and then in the wilderness, then Moses wanted to share this experience, such was his identity with his ungrateful people; and yet this peak of devotion is but a dim shadow of the extent of Christ's love for us. In 9:18 he says that his prayer of Ex. 32:32 *was heard*- in that he was not going to enter the land, but they would. Hence his urging of them throughout Deuteronomy to go ahead and enter the land- to experience what his self-sacrifice had enabled. In this we see the economy of God, and how He works even through sin. On account of Moses' temporary rashness of speech, he was excluded; Moses didn't enter the land. And yet by this, his prayer was heard. He was temporarily blotted out of the book, so that they might enter the land. This is why Moses stresses now at the end of his life that he wouldn't enter the land *for Israel's sake* (1:37; 3:26; 4:21). He saw that his sin had been worked through, and the essential reason for him not entering was because of the offer he had made. It "went badly with him *for their sakes*" (Ps. 106:32).

10:11 Moses led God's people to the land, the Kingdom, but couldn't himself take them in there- rather like the Law with which he was associated revealed the Kingdom, but it needed Joshua / Jesus to actually bring them into it.

10:12 Alluded to in Mic. 6:8, where walking in God's ways is understood as walking in humility; and 'loving God' is expanded into loving to show justice and mercy. We can be tempted to think that we can 'love God' without our own hearts by accepting His existence and reading the Bible. But it has to be more than that; to love God is to love others, to be merciful to the irritating and ungracious (:18). We cannot love God without loving our brethren (1 Jn. 3:17; 4:21). To love God in this way is in the end 'for our own good' (:13).

10:22 This was an initial, primary fulfilment of the promises to Abraham; we too have some foretastes of the Kingdom life even now.

11:4 *Destroyed them to this day*- We are to understand each victory and achievement of God as somehow ongoing right down to our own day and our own lives and experience. This is what makes the Bible a living word for us. This explains why David repeatedly refers to the miracle at the Red Sea as if this had affected him personally, to the extent that he could ecstatically rejoice because of it.

11:10 *Go in... came out*- See on 4:37,38.

11:11 The people were often reminded that they were about to "go over [Jordan] to possess" the land, as if they were on the banks of Jordan almost.

11:16 There are so many other examples of Moses showing his recognition of exactly *how* Israel were likely to be tempted (Dt. 6:11-13; 8:11-20; 9:4; 11:16; 12:13,19,23,30; 13:1-4; 14:27; 15:9,18; 17:11,12 ("will"),14,16,17; 21:18; 22:1-4,18; 23:21; 25:8). See on 7:16. We can take comfort in God's sensitivity to us in an age unlike any other and apparently with its own unprecedented temptations.

11:21 *As the days of the heavens upon the earth*- This is the essence of the New Testament idea of the "Kingdom of Heaven" [not, the Kingdom *in* Heaven] coming upon earth at Christ's return.

11:22 The idea of 'cleaving' to God is a big theme of Moses in Deuteronomy (4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4,17; 28:21,60; 30:20); the only other time Moses uses the word in his writings is in Gen. 2:24, concerning a man cleaving to his wife. Moses seems to have been suggesting to Israel that their covenant relationship with God meant they were *marrying God*. This was a real paradigm breaker. We may be used to such things. But against the theological background of the time, not to say the generally low level of spirituality among Israel, this was a shocking idea- that a nation's God was not distant from them and just occasionally involved, but married to them placing them as equal partners with Him in the relationship. It reflected the heights to which Moses had risen.

*All this commandment*- Note the singular. Israel weren't to add to or reduce the commandments because they were as a body of commandment intended to enable a complete life before God. See on 4:2.

11:24 *The river, the Euphrates*- The entire territory promised to Abraham could've been given to them if they had bothered to go there; but they settled just for the fertile land along the Mediterranean coast. They, like us so often, lacked any sense of spiritual ambition.

12:3 *Burn with fire... cut down*- The Lord's description of the rejected being cut down and thrown into the fire (Mt. 7:19) is surely referring to these words (cp. 7:5), where the idols of the world were to be hewn down and thrown into the fire. The Lord understood that those who worship idols are

like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Because all idols [of whatever kind] will be destroyed in the last day, all who worship them will have to share their destruction. And yet we can be hewn down by God's word now (Hos. 6:5) rather than wait for God to do it to us by the condemnation process. We must cut off (s.w. hew down) our flesh *now* (Mt. 5:30; 18:8 cp. 7:19).

12:5 Worldly religion is made as convenient as possible for the worshipper to come and participate in; the shrines of the Canaanite gods were everywhere in the land, whereas Yahweh insisted that there was one specific place to where His people should come to worship Him. This was perhaps partly to inspire national unity within the family of God. The pagan shrines were each different; they had no uniformity between them, as archaeologists have demonstrated. But the one true God has principles of worship and service which don't vary geographically and are consistently the same because truth is truth and in that sense doesn't vary from place to place nor context to context.

12:10 *He gives you rest*- Several times Moses describes Israel's inheritance of the land as entering "rest", mindful of how God had sworn that they would not enter into that rest, and yet he had pleaded with God to change His mind about that (Ps. 95:11; Heb. 3:11), even though Israel at the time didn't realize the intensity of pleading and self-sacrifice for them which was going on up in the mountain. Just as we don't appreciate the extent of the Lord's mediation for us, that we might enter the final "rest" (Heb. 4:9).

12:13 We can't worship God any way we like, thinking that the fact we accept His existence and even worship Him means that we are somehow free to do it as we think.

12:16 The blood was understood as representing life (:23; Lev. 17:11). We are not to take life to ourselves; not merely in that we aren't to murder, but we also aren't to assume that our lives, or any life, is in fact ours to use or dominate for ourselves. Our lives and those of others are God's, and we cannot take any life to ourselves.

12:18 *In all that you put your hand on*- Whatever they put their hand on to give to God they were to give with joy; for God *loves* cheerful giving, and hates reluctant or manipulated 'giving' (2 Cor. 9:7).

12:20 Vegetarianism is a matter of personal choice, but it certainly isn't commanded by God- indeed, quite the opposite (1 Tim. 4:3).

13:3 The reasoning here is helpful with respect to the claims made by some to perform supernatural feats. Even if it seems they might have done so, that isn't a good enough reason to believe them; our loyalty to the one true God must not be swayed by apparently impressive deeds or predictions by those who don't believe in Him.

13:5 Moses' frequent references to the way in which the Exodus had separated Israel from Egypt show the colossal difference there is between us and this world as a result of our Red Sea baptism into Christ (13:5; 15:15; 16:12; 1 Cor. 10:1,2); as our Lord in his time of dying was so strongly aware of the way in which He was redeeming us from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4).

13:6 So often family loyalties deflect a person from their loyalty to the one true God. The same has always been the case. Our spiritual family should ultimately be more meaningful to us than our natural family; that at least is the ideal, although all families have their dysfunctions, including our spiritual family.

13:14 *You shall inquire and make search and ask diligently-* Allegations of misbehaviour or wrong teaching within the family of God must be taken seriously and not pushed under the carpet. But they aren't to be acted upon without a very careful investigation, during which the love which believes and hopes all things is paramount. This passage cannot be used as a reason to divide from those who have a slightly different Biblical interpretation of something than we do, whilst believing in and worshipping the same Lord. The situation envisaged is if someone were seeking to draw Yahweh's people away to a totally different god (:13).

14:1 Whilst there is nothing morally wrong with cutting the skin, the idea was that Israel weren't to even appear associated with pagan rituals for the dead. We likewise should naturally not want to even appear like worshippers of any other god (of whatever kind) when Yahweh is our only God.

14:4 See notes on Lev. 11 for commentary on the clean and unclean food regulations.

14:21 *You must not boil a young goat in its mother's milk-* This was likely a pagan ritual which Israel weren't to follow. It may also be that God's sensitivity to the feelings of animals is coming out here; and He wishes us to live lives regulated by sensitivity to all of creation. See on 20:19.

14:26 *Rejoice, you and your household-* There was to be joy in giving to God rather than any sense of resentment; and the families ("your household") were to have this explained to them so that even the children learnt to rejoice in giving rather than being selfish. Again we see God's emphasis on the need for giving to be done cheerfully; He simply *loves* cheerful giving (2 Cor. 9:7).

14:27 There were three separate tithes commanded under the Law of Moses. Yet the tithing churches have simply said: 'There's something about tithing in the Old Testament. So, hey, give us 10% of your money!'. The first was the Levitical tithe of 10% on 100% of the produce for the first six years and was destined for the Levites and priests (Dt. 14:27; 12:19). The second tithe was the Festival tithe of 10% on 90% remaining produce after the Levitical tithe. This tithe had to be eaten in the presence of the Lord and was collected on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> years only. The third tithe was the tithe of the poor to be collected on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years only (Dt. 14:22-29; 26:12-15; Am. 4:4-5). No tithe was collected on the 7th year or Sabbatical year. The farmers were to let the land rest in that year. The tithe consisted of fruit, grain, wine and later animals that are typically harvested as produce from the land. It never consisted of money. Tithes were conducted annually and were based upon one's produce increase for the year. This just isn't talking about putting paper money or cheques on an offering plate each week as demanded by the tithing churches.

15:2 *He must not demand it of his neighbour and his brother because Yahweh's release has been proclaimed-* The final release was in the death of Christ releasing us from all our sins, which are likened to debts in the New Testament. We are therefore not to "demand" recompense for sin from others because of the great release proclaimed. Jesus foresaw the difficulty of doing this, and urges us to pray constantly that we forgive or release our debtors (Mt. 6:12). The year of release was proclaimed on the day of atonement, in the same way as the cross has initiated a time of release from sin. The idea of 'proclaiming' this release or forgiveness is behind the language Luke uses to record the great commission, to proclaim this wonderful news to absolutely everybody- that their debt is cancelled.

15:4 Moses knew that there would always be poor people in the land, even though if the Law was properly kept this would not be the case (:4, 11). Having reminded them that if they were obedient, "there shall be no poor among you; for Yahweh will surely bless you", Moses goes on to comment that "the poor will never cease out of the land"- and he gives the legislation cognisant of this (Dt. 15:4,11). Moses realized by the time of Deuteronomy that they wouldn't make it to the blessings which were potentially possible. And yet he speaks so positively of how they would inherit the Kingdom. God recognizes that His people won't totally make it spiritually nor receive all the blessings they could, and yet this doesn't mean they won't be saved. This is a comfort for us in our spiritual incompleteness; and it also means that we shouldn't expect the community of God's people to be perfect. Even God doesn't expect that, and the very structure of His own law foresaw that.

15:15 One of the most repeated themes of Moses in Deuteronomy is the way he keeps on telling them to "remember" all the great things which God had done for them on their wilderness journey, and especially the wonder of how he had redeemed them as children (his audience had been under twenty years old when they went through the Red Sea). He really wanted them to overcome the human tendency to forget the greatness of God as manifested earlier in our lives and spiritual experience. Our tendency as the new Israel is just the same- to forget the wonder of baptism, of how God reached out His arm to save us.

16:2 This seems to imply that now, in the 'second law' Moses was giving in Deuteronomy, the Passover sacrifice didn't necessarily have to be a lamb, and it could be boiled not just roasted (:7). See on 20:14. So eager is God for our fellowship that He is prepared to make concessions to our human situations; and we should have that spirit in dealing with others.

16:7 *You shall turn in the morning and go to your tents*- At the first Passover, which they were re-living, they left Egypt at night and in the morning went into the promised land. They were to imagine their homes as in a sense the promised land; there the principles of the Kingdom were to be upheld so that the home became a small imitation of the Kingdom. That principle applies to us too.

16:15 Moses was so positive about them, as we should be about others too. "God *will* bless you", even though these blessings were conditional upon their obedience (28:1,4,12). Moses was this confident of them, as Paul was confident of the obedience of the Corinthians despite it seeming humanly unlikely (2 Cor. 10:6). It's far easier to have a negative attitude about people than a positive one; but God's grace and imputing of righteousness to us personally should help us be positive about others.

16:17 *The blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you*- Notice the past tense. Moses often speaks of the "blessing" which God would give them for obedience; but he here speaks of the future blessing of obedience in the prophetic perfect, so confident was he that they would receive it. The blessings of the Kingdom were already obtained for us on the cross. It's for us to as it were claim them.

16:21 Moses in Deuteronomy adds a whole series of apparently 'minor' commands which were designed to make obedience easier to the others already given. Thus he tells them not to plant a grove of trees near the altar of God - because he knew this would provoke the possibility of mixing Yahweh worship with that of the surrounding world.

17:6 Insisting on more than one witness before accepting the truth of an allegation meant that gossip and slander were limited; and Jesus applies this principle to dealing with disputes within His church (Mt. 18:16). Those who served other gods had to die on the testimony of two or three witnesses. This idea is twice alluded to in the New Testament in the context of making the decision to cease fellowship with someone (Mt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1). The implication is that death under the Old Covenant pointed forward to church discipline under the New Covenant. But we must note that the reason for this was serving other gods and wilful departing from covenant relationship with the Lord- not minor reasons.

17:14 Moses often reminds them that he knows that they will turn away from the Covenant he had given them (e.g. 30:1; 31:29). Here he shows that he knew that one day they would want a king, even though God was their king. He had such sensitivity to their weakness and likely failures, and in some areas he makes concessions to them.

17:16 Moses commands any future king not to send God's people to Egypt to buy horses because he could see that this would tempt them to go back to Egypt permanently. There are many other example of this kind of thing (Dt. 14:24; 15:18; 17:17-19; 18:9; 20:7,8). The point is that Moses had thought long and hard about the ways in which Israel would be tempted to sin, and his words and innermost desire were devoted to helping them overcome. Glorious ditto for the Lord Jesus whom he typified (18:18). Note that the king was warned not to get horses for himself from Egypt because the very fact of sending Israelites back into Egypt might tempt them to return there; we are to be sensitive to the spiritual effect our actions may have upon others.

17:16-20 This has strong relevance to Solomon. He did multiply silver, gold, horses and wives; his heart *was* turned away (:16,17= 2 Chron. 9:20). Yet this passage says that if he studied the Law all his life, this would *not* happen, and also his heart would not be "lifted up above his brethren" (:20). Solomon's whipping of the people and sense of spiritual and material superiority (Ecc. 1:16; 2:7,9) shows how his heart *was* lifted up. Yet Solomon knew the Law, despite his explicit disobedience to the commands concerning wives, horses etc. But his knowledge of the word didn't bring forth the true humility which it was intended to. Solomon *assumed* he wasn't proud; he *assumed* God's word was having its intended effect upon him, when it wasn't. Such spiritual assumption is a major temptation for every child of God. God's intention that the king of Israel should personally copy out all the commandments of the Law was "to the end that his heart will not *be raised up* above his brothers"- i.e. reflecting upon the many requirements of the Law would've convicted the King of his own failure to have been fully obedient, and therefore his heart would be humbled. And soon after this statement, we are hearing Moses reminding Israel that Messiah, the prophet like unto Moses, was to *be raised up* (18:18). Human failure, and recognition of it, prepares us to accept Christ.

18:6 God encourages us to make special devotions to Him. Thus the Levites could choose to leave their areas in the provinces and go and serve at the sanctuary. We must ask what special devotion we could make in response to His grace.

18:18 Christ was the prophet like unto Moses (Acts 3:22). Moses was the shepherd of the flock of Israel, leading them on God's behalf through the wilderness towards the promised land (Is. 63:12), as Christ leads us after baptism to the Kingdom. It was only through Moses' leadership that they reached Canaan (10:11). As Moses very intensely manifested God to the people, so he



foreshadowed the supreme manifestation of the Father in the Son. The commands of Moses were those of God (7:11; 11:13,18; and 12:32 concerning Moses' words is quoted in Rev. 22:18,19 concerning God's words); his voice was God's voice (13:18; 15:5; 28:1), as with Christ. Israel were to show their love of God by keeping Moses' commands (11:13); as the new Israel do in their response to the word of Christ.

18:22 This is why the prophecies of Christ and of the last days all had some limited fulfilment in the lifetimes of the prophets who gave the prophecies.

19:2 The person who committed something worthy of death but didn't as it were wilfully do it represents each of us. The language of the city of refuge therefore becomes applicable to Christ, our refuge from the results of our sin (Heb. 6:18).

19:3 The command to prepare a way along which to flee to the cities of refuge is expressed with the very same Hebrew words used about God through the Angels preparing a way for Israel to flee along, out of Egypt to the promised land (Ex. 23:20). This was obviously done purely at God's initiative. But now, Israel were asked to do the same- to prepare a way for others' salvation. When we reflect upon our own way of escape from this world, it's clear enough that it was by grace. Our response to that grace must be like Israel's- to prepare a way for others to flee, when they like us find themselves in a situation that is spiritually against them, although not of their conscious choice. In fact, if Israel were indifferent to preparing the way for others' salvation, then innocent blood would be shed and they would be responsible for it (:10). Indifference to providing others with a way of escape from their sin and death means we are actually guilty of their lack of salvation. And yet we tend to think that committed sin is all we have to worry about / avoid. The lesson here, however, bites far more caustically and insistently into our comfort zone. If we are indifferent to marking out the way of escape for others, their blood will be upon our heads. Our chief excuses for not witnessing enthusiastically basically amount to laziness, indifference, not getting our act together because we don't see we have to... when actually, there is an intense urgency about our task.

19:6 *The avenger of blood*- But Israel were not to avenge (Lev. 19:18). But they *could* avenge, and provisions were made for their human desire to do so in some cases (see too Num. 35:12). These provisions must also be seen as a modification of the command not to murder. The highest level was *not* to avenge; but for the harshness of men's hearts, a concession was made *in some cases*, and on *God's* prerogative. *We* have no right to assume that prerogative. Rather than continually make use of God's many concessions to human weakness, we should seek to live on a higher level.

19:9 Israel would be provided with more cities of refuge if they were obedient; the way of escape from sin would become easier, as it does for us the more we are obedient to God's principles.

20:1-4 He foresaw how they would see horses and chariots and get frightened (Dt. 20:1-4).

20:14 The softness of Moses, the earnestness of his desire for their obedience, his eagerness to work with them in their humanity, is shown by the concessions to human weakness which he makes in Deuteronomy (with God's confirmation, of course). When they attacked a foreign city, OK, Moses says, you can take the women for yourselves- even though this is contrary to the spirit of earlier commands (see too 21:11). Likewise with the provisions for having a human king (17:17) and divorce (24:1-4). He knew the hardness of Israel's hearts, their likelihood to give way to temptation, and so

he made concessions contrary to the principles behind other parts of the Law (Mt. 19:8). See on 16:2. The fact God makes concessions to us doesn't mean we can eagerly use them in some spirit of minimalistic service; we should seek to serve God on the highest level we can. The fact there are these different levels- rather than a demand for unthinking submission to a meaningless law- encourages us to express our *love* for God.

20:19 Here again we see God's desire that we should be sensitive to the natural creation. See on 14:21.

21:11 See on 20:14. The legislation in :11-14 is unique amongst the surrounding nations, where women were seen as objects of booty and were treated with far less sensitivity than this and usually raped in this situation. Likewise the law of :18-21 teaches equal reverence for *both* parents and not just the father.

21:17 This means that in a situation where there were two sons, the younger son's share was one third. In the parable of the prodigal son, the younger son is given *half* – such was the Father's love for him. This element of unreality in the parable is to signpost the amazing level of love the Father has for us; even when He knows that we will waste what He gives, still He gives, and gives generously.

21:23 *Cursed of God is he who is hanged on a tree*- These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord Jesus as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. Crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning. Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly, as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Jesus died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for a few hours, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried.

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

23:1 Males who could not procreate were barred from the congregation, possibly in prototype of how spiritual procreation was to be a vital characteristic of the future Israel. To bring forth spiritual children in the course of our life before God is expected of us. Israel were seen by the Lord as the

tree by the roadside (Mt. 21:19), whose fruit should have been for all that passed by (23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord.

23:15 This was to remind them how they were escaped slaves. God wanted them to continually remember the way He had saved them (see too :7), and His law was designed to repeatedly prod their conscience about this in daily life. He wants us to live today in constant awareness of our salvation.

23:18 Prostitution was forbidden under the Law (:17), but this is another tacit recognition made by Moses that such failure would still occur. We see here how Moses forbade something and then went on to give legislation recognizing that it would still occur.

23:20 Christ in His parable told the rejected man that he should at least have given His money to others on usury (Mt. 25:27). He may have meant that the man should at least have done *something* even if he broke the letter of the law; or He may have meant that if the man had at least shared the Gospel with the Gentiles and got some fruit for Christ, all his other lack of achievement would've been overlooked.

24:1 In the case of adultery a man could have his wife killed; apply the trial of jealousy of Num. 5; forgive her; or divorce her, as allowed for here. We have choices as to how we respond to human failure against us, and the very existence of the choices is in order to exercise our spirituality.

24:4 The prophets describe God divorcing Israel for her infidelity and yet still asking her to return to Him. He chose this metaphor to reflect the level of His desperate love for His people- that He would do what His own law declared to be abomination to Him. That same kind of love is what He has for us today.

24:10 Moses does not repeat every single commandment in the Law. Rather are there several themes of Moses in Deuteronomy presented. His choice of which ones he does repeat indicates his feelings towards Israel. His sensitivity towards the weakest and poorest of Israel comes out in this. He was reaching the spirit of the Lord Jesus, who said that the weakest of His brethren represented Him (Mt. 25:40). Moses for all his wealthy background and high status amongst Israel could enter into the sense of shame and embarrassment of the poor man when a richer man enters his home. The Law in Ex. 22:26 did not stipulate that the house of the poor man should not be entered; by making this point in his farewell speech, Moses was showing his sensitivity, his ability now to enter into the feelings of the poorest of God's people. He typified in this the sensitivity of God's son to our spiritual poverty. In some things we all have some advantage over others; some 'wealth' which they don't have; for even the wealthiest person has some area of spiritual poverty in their lives. We are not to shame them, but to be sensitive to how they might feel if that poverty is exposed before us.

25:3 There's a tendency in us to be harsh in punishing others for their sin. This is psychologically explainable by our conscience for our own sins, and subconsciously realizing we deserve punishment; we then eagerly transfer this guilt and need for punishment onto others. Instead we are to confess our sins and believe that the final judgment for our sin was in Christ upon the cross; and if we believe this to the point of really feeling it, we will never punish anyone more than required, indeed we will be gracious to them as God has been to us.

25:4 Moses' sensitivity is shown by the kind of laws he added in Deuteronomy; e.g. "You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the grain". This is quoted by Paul as being actually part of the Law (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18), showing that Moses was so attune with the mind of God that these practical extensions which his sensitivity led him to command Israel were indeed the inspired commandments of God. In the same way as we should not appear unreasonable to men (:3), so we should not to animals. There are other examples of sensitivity to the natural creation in Deuteronomy in 14:21; 20:19 [see notes there].

25:5 This tacitly allowed polygamy. Here we have an example where one principle [the one man: one woman ideal of Eden] is in conflict with another [to build up the family name of your childless brother]. God could have arranged ethics in a more simple manner; but He has allowed and in this case encouraged the development of such conflicts in order that we think and reason things through, and make whatever decision we do consciously and from our own desire rather than merely in mindless submission to a commandment.

25:11 The principle from this is that each person has a weakness, an exposed point in their lives or character, which we are aware of. We are not to use that to unfair advantage- because if we were touched in that way, we likewise could not endure. And God saves His weak people and has historically been angry with those who do such things (:18).

25:14 *In your house*- To avoid temptation it's best to not even possess things which we may be tempted to misuse.

26:5 *A Syrian ready to perish*- Israel were to recognize that their Arab brethren were in fact their cousins, and Jacob their ancestor was at one time no more than a starving, desperate, homeless, wandering Arab. That they had been given a fruitful land was therefore a great grace to them.

26:18 God declared Israel "a people for His own possession... *in order that* you should keep all His commandments". But God had put it the other way around when He told Israel that *if* they kept His commandments, *then* they would be "a people for His own possession" (Ex. 19:5). This conditional promise is now referred to by Moses as having been fulfilled- Israel became His "own possession" by status even though they did *not* keep His commandments (7:6; 14:2 s.w.; Ps. 135:4). God said that *if* they were obedient, *then* they would be His special people. Yet He counted them as His special people even though they were not obedient. And He did this so that they would be so touched by this grace that they *would* be obedient. We are to live out in practice what we have been made in status by our gracious Father. The very fact He counts us as in Christ, as the spotless bride of His Son, must be both felt and lived up to by us. The way He counts righteousness to us is a wonderful motivation to live it out as far as we can.

27:4 The word "commandments" occurs 43 times in Deuteronomy, and only 19 times in the other three records of the Law; "remember" occurs 16 times compared to 8 times in the other three. And yet Moses commanded Israel specifically to engrave the law on tables of plaster, not stone, knowing that they would soon be washed away; thus he wished to teach Israel [or try to] the temporary nature of the Law (Dt. 27:4-8). Like Paul in his time of dying, Moses saw the importance of obedience, the harder side of God; yet he also saw in real depth the surpassing *love* of God, and the grace that was to come, beyond Law. See on 7:7.

27:5,6 God wants us to serve Him in simplicity without trying to make our altars externally beautiful as if to impress a human eye.

27:6,7 Eating upon a heap of unhewn stones was understood as a sign of having made a covenant on mutually agreed terms and being at peace with each other (Gen. 31:46,47). Our eating before God at the breaking of bread meeting is something similar.

27:15 *Secretly sets it up*- The list of sins which follow in :15-25 are all matters of the heart or things which are not seen by others. The people were confirming their acceptance of the fact that God sees and knows all things, and there really would be a judgment for them.

28:10 *You are called by the name of Yahweh* - Whatever carried the name of a person was seen as his property. If a city was conquered, it bore the name of the conqueror (2 Sam. 12:28); the names of owners were on their property (Ps. 49:12). So to bear God's Name is to recognize His complete ownership and even conquest of us. And yet there's a significant twist to all this in Is. 43:1: "I have called you by *your* name, because you are mine". It seems like a slip- we expect God to say that He has called us by *His* Name, because we are His. But no- He wishes us to bear both His Name and our own name, He doesn't wish to subsume us beneath His ownership and manifestation to the point that we are not significant as persons.

28:12 *You shall lend to many nations*- Money lending worldwide has been a feature of Jewish existence over the centuries, and yet this is here predicted as happening only if they were obedient. They have been disobedient, and yet it's as if God loves to advertise His grace to the world by still blessing the disobedient.

28:24 *The rain of your land powder and dust*- This has not yet been fulfilled; maybe because God in His grace has not punished His people according to all their sins. Or it could be that it has yet to be fulfilled in the final tribulation to come upon Israel. Nuclear fallout would fulfil these words- and likewise those of Is. 29:6, describing the invasion of latter day Babylon / Assyria, which have yet to be accurately fulfilled.

28:36 *There you shall serve other gods*- Israel and Judah are strongly rebuked by the prophets for their choice to do this, and are begged to cease doing so. But their freewill choice to sin was in fact a result of being cursed by God; they were led into sin, as it were, by God confirming them in the downward spiral they had chosen to be part of. In this case, if they didn't want to be cursed, then they simply had to stop living out the curse in their lives.

28:47 Israel would be rejected and cursed if they didn't serve God "with gladness". Service to God must be done with joy; if we lose the rejoicing of our hope, we lose the hope itself (Heb. 3:6). Joy is therefore a vital characteristic of God's true people.

28:47,48 Moses offered Israel the choice of bondservitude to either Yahweh or their enemies. The whole of Romans 6 plays on this idea. We are slaves to sin, and through entering Christ by baptism, we become slaves of righteousness. Total freedom to do what we personally want is not possible. We are slaves, we can't serve two masters. So why not serve Christ rather than the Biblical devil? The Lord Jesus spoke of His servants having a light yoke (Mt. 11:30). The Bible minded among His hearers would have thought back to the threatened punishment of an iron yoke for the disobedient (:48). 'It's a yoke either way', they would have concluded. But the Lord's yoke *even in this life* is light,

and has promise of the life which is to come! The logic of taking it, with the restrictions it inevitably implies (for it is a yoke), is simply overpowering.

28:50-57 Moses not only repeats all the curses of Lev. 26 to them, but he adds even more, under inspiration. Presumably the Angel had explained in one of their conversations how Israel would suffer even greater punishment than that outlined in Lev. 26. Notice that Lev. 26 and Dt. 28 are not strictly parallel. Moses in his spiritual maturity urged Israel to be the more fully aware of the nature and reality of Divine punishment for human sin; his increased focus upon grace and salvation didn't mean that he increasingly ignored the harder side of God- but rather the opposite was the case.

28:58 For all Moses' desire for Israel's obedience, there are some subtle differences in his attitude to law and obedience between Deuteronomy, and the law earlier given. Thus in Leviticus 26 it was stressed that obedience would bring blessing; whilst here, :58 says that obedience results in fearing the awesome Name of Yahweh and His glory. Fear shouldn't lead to obedience; but obedience leads a man to *know and fear his God and His Name*. This is blessing enough. Like Jacob and Job, Moses came to a fine appreciation of Yahweh's Name at his latter end, perceiving that the wonder of relationship with God far eclipses any material blessing we may receive from Him in this life. To respect or fear the Name doesn't mean to remember that God's Name is 'Yahweh'. It refers to his character (Ex. 34:4-6). The Lord Jesus fed off the majesty of the Name of Yahweh (Mic. 5:4)- this was how inspirational He found the things of the Name. To fear the Name of Yahweh involved practical obedience to "all the words of this law". Meditation and sustained reflection upon the characteristics of God as epitomized and memorialized in His Name will of itself lead to a conforming of personality to that same Name. If we declare that Name to others, they too have the chance to be transformed by it- thus Moses comments that "I will proclaim the name of Yahweh; you, ascribe greatness to our God" (32:3).

28:68 God's promise that Israel would never again see Egypt was therefore conditional, and thus capable of being broken; although those conditions aren't mentioned when He makes the promise in 17:16; Ex. 14:13.

29:10 Moses on that last day of his life addressed the whole assembly of Israel; and yet he so often speaks in the singular ("thee" rather than "ye" in the KJV), as if to emphasize that the laws and covenant he was giving them was to them *personally*. This is made clear in:10,12: "You (plural) stand this day, all of you, before Yahweh... that you (singular) may enter into covenant with Yahweh". That covenant was made anew by God to each generation and individual. We cannot hide within a family or a church. We are individually responsible to God and will personally be saved. In the same spirit, Moses points out that Yahweh is the only God that can be personally *known*; all the idols could not be known personally (:26). No fewer than 137 times in Scripture we read the phrase "my God". This was used in a public, unashamed way by many of God's children (it was a particular favourite of Nehemiah, David and Paul).

29:10-13 This is a very long sentence; from now until the end of his speech in Deuteronomy, Moses uses (in the Hebrew text) very long sentences, at times with unclear syntax- as if he was getting increasingly intense and excited as he speaks of the utter realities to which we stand personally related by our covenant with God.

29:12 For Israel in covenant with God, absolutely nothing- not sex, menstruation, the content of clothing fabric, diet- could fall outside the scope of their covenant relationship. And so in principle it is with us under the new covenant. Such a relationship also precludes the worship of *any* other God. The covenant we have entered has constant and binding claims upon our loyalty; and it also speaks of God's constant and passionate commitment to us.

29:18 Applied in Heb. 12:15 to those within the church who discourage others from total commitment to God. Those who don't totally commit to Him will poison others by their attitude and cause them to fall away from God's grace; and we must be keenly aware of this, because there are such people around- so says Heb. 12:15.

30:3 God's attempt to regather Judah from captivity *before* they had repented therefore indicates His grace, operating at times beyond the conditions which He has stated in His own word.

30:11-14 Moses assures them that full obedience to his Law is possible (even if finally nobody achieved it). It wasn't as if they had to climb up to Heaven or go down beneath the sea, they had to simply from the heart obey it as a way of life and thinking. In Rom. 10:6-9 Paul quotes this passage, having observed that in practice nobody has actually succeeded in fully keeping the Law. He says that the going up to Heaven was done by Christ at His ascension, and going beneath the sea by and returning by Christ at His resurrection; and so what remains is not to keep the Mosaic law but to believe in the word of Christ; and the "life" promised here (:15) will be *eternal* life for those in Christ.

30:15 Moses pleaded with them to see that "this day... this day... this day" he set before them life and death, forgiveness or salvation (:15-19). He saw the urgent importance of deciding now, in this moment, for the Lord. The Lord Jesus had His mind on this when He told the thief with the same emphasis that "this day" He could pronounce that he would be saved, not condemned (Lk. 23:46). He felt like Moses, but greater than Moses, in that He not only set before men the choice, but could grant them the salvation they sought.

30:17 The heart that *turns away* from God by free choice then becomes *drawn away* by other forces.

30:19 Finely aware of the seriousness of our relationship with God, Moses intensely pleads with Israel to "choose life", not with the passivity which may appear from our armchair reading of this passage. For he knew that the majority of Israel would not choose life.

31:2 That Moses lived to 120 with full faculties was as unusual then as it would be today; because lifespans at that time were around 70 years, and those older than seventy usually had weakened faculties as happens today too (Ps. 90:10). Moses says there in Ps. 90:10 that "*our years*" are 70- even though he himself had much longer life, and would've been writing Psalm 90 well he was well over 80 years old. We see here the empathy which comes from love, and his sense of identity with God's people. All this is a pattern for us in our relationships and feelings toward others, but it also typifies Christ's ultimate sensitivity, empathy and identity with the limitations of our humanity.

31:6 *He will not fail you nor forsake you*- Specifically applied to each of us in Heb. 13:5, in the context of appealing for us not to be covetous, worrying, as it were, how we are to cope on our journey into the Kingdom.

31:9 It takes about four hours to read through the book of Deuteronomy out loud. The many references in Deuteronomy to “this day” (see on 30:15) suggest Moses spoke it all on the last day of his life. It was a very busy day- he spoke Deuteronomy, wrote a copy of it (or of the entire Law; notice how Dt. 24 was *written* by Moses, Mk. 10:5), sings a Song to that silent multitude (surely with a lump in his throat, especially at points like 32:15), and then he turns and climbs the mountain to see the land and meet his death. The fact it all happened on his birthday just adds to the pathos of it all (Dt. 31:2). The huge amount of work which he did on that last day of his life looks forward to the Lord's huge achievement in the day of his death. No wonder Yahweh describes that day of Moses' death with an intensive plural: "Your days (an intensive plural, i.e. the one great time / day) are made ready that you must die" (:14). May our last day be as intensely productive as his.

31:14 The day of our death is made ready ahead of time by God.

31:19,21 God recognized the power of music by arranging things in this way; He knew they would sing this to themselves and the words would influence them. We must ensure that the music we listen to and hum to ourselves is leading us to repentance and to God, rather than the other way; because music and lyrics are powerful.

32:3 As Christ declared God's Name just before his death (Jn. 17:26), so did Moses (Dt. 32:3 LXX). Moses saw at the end of his life that there was no third way: it was either complete dedication and salvation, or rebellion and condemnation. See on 28:58.

32:5 *A perverse and crooked generation*- This description of Israel is quoted about the world in Phil. 2:15. If God's people worship this world's idols, then they are counted by God as the world.

32:10 *As the apple of His eye*- One of the most sensitive spots on the body. Anyone who even comes near God's people stimulates a natural response from God, so sensitive is He to our pain in this life.

32:11 *Carried them on His feathers*- The allusion is to how the eagle teaches its young to fly. The eagle appears from earth to be carrying the young on her wings, but actually she is throwing them into the air and teaching them to fly within the draft from her own wings. This is a beautiful picture of how God works through His Spirit to teach us independent flight, rather than simply carrying us. As the truly good parent, He seeks to give us independence and teach this to us in the course of our wilderness journey.

32:12 Although there was no pagan god with Yahweh at the time of the exodus, there was with Israel- for they took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea, just as we are tempted to take the world with us through the waters of baptism rather than seeing it as cut off from us (Ez. 20:7,8).

32:13 Tragically, Israel went back to those very “high places” to worship the local idols, as the prophets so often lament.

32:15 *Jeshurun grew fat and kicked*- Moses in Deuteronomy so many times warns that Israel would become unfaithful to God once they became prosperous. This is a major theme with him. Any request for material prosperity must be made knowing that really this is not for the best spiritually. And God must struggle with those requests as a parent does with a request for something which they want to give, because they love their child, but know that it will almost certainly be misused.



It's no surprise therefore that the majority of God's people have been poor- it is the poor who respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:5), and the wealthy are a minority amongst us (1 Cor. 1:26).

32:17 *Demons, not God, to gods that they didn't know*- Demons are associated with idols, and they are not the gods which they are believed to be (:21; 1 Cor. 10:20). The language of demon possession we meet in the Gospel records is therefore the language of the day to describe healing of illnesses attributed to demons; but demons have no real existence because there is only one God.

32:36 Israel assembled before Moses really do represent us, for this is quoted in Heb. 10:20 as relevant to all of us coming before judgment. But our verse goes on to say that at this very time of judgment, He will have compassion upon His people. Which is a comforting thought to take with us to the judgment seat of Christ.

32:47 Because Moses knew all this, he was pleading with Israel to "choose life". I wonder if he wasn't screaming this to them, almost breaking down in the climax of logic and passion which resulted in that appeal. Moses spoke Deuteronomy without notes. It was no reading of a carefully prepared paper. All these things were in his heart; their proneness to failure, the coming of judgement for sin, his knowledge of their future apostasy. Enter into the *passion* of it all. The man who was willing to give his eternal life for them, about to die for the sake of their provocation- singing a final song to them, giving a final speech, which showed that he knew perfectly well that they would turn away from what he was trying to do for them, and therefore the majority of them would not be saved. As he came to the end of his speech, he seems to have sensed they didn't grasp the reality of it all: "It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life"; and thus his speech rises to a crescendo of intensity of pleading with them, typifying the pattern of the Lord Jesus in His time of dying.

33:9 These words are alluded to by Jesus in explaining why He felt closer to those who listened to His word than to His natural family (Mk. 3:21,31-35; Mt. 12:46-50). He read these same words that we do. To feel this closely to those who are, like us, God's spiritual children, can seem an impossible challenge at times; especially in family-based societies where life is one endless social club.

33:20 *He who enlarges Gad*- If Israel had been obedient, their borders could have been enlarged (12:2). It seems God would have done this especially for Gad, even for the sake of one faithful man. Yet there's no evidence it ever happened; another potential set up which was left unfulfilled because of the chronic lack of vision and satisfied-with-what-I-have attitude of God's people.

33:29 *You shall tread on their high places*- Moses' very last words are a reference to the idolatrous "high places", which the prophets lament were a spiritual snare to Israel. Moses' final wish and knowledge was that ultimately, Israel would quit with idolatry and be Yahweh's alone. Seeing that he had predicted their spiritual failures, Moses perhaps had his eye on the day when finally God's people shall conquer all their temptations, even if only a minority of those with whom God works actually get there in the end, all the same, a minority will, and they will be God's true Israel.

34:6 *He buried him in the valley*- Is. 63:14 says that the Spirit [the Angel] caused Moses to rest as a man leads his animal to water in a valley. The way the Angel buried Moses is very touching. "According to the word of Yahweh" (:5) can bear the translation "By the kiss of Yahweh", as if the Angel with whom Moses was used to speaking face to face, as a man speaks with his friend, kissed

him and as it were reversed the kiss of life, took his breath / spirit away, and laid him down to rest there on the mountain, then carried the body down to the valley and buried him there, to rest until the resurrection. The softness, respect and gentleness of God with His beloved in their time of dying comes over very strongly here.

34:7 Moses was one of those old people who still had a 'young' attitude to life; not for him the cynicism which comes with old age; hence Deuteronomy is at times optimistic about people with what could be seen as an almost naive youthful optimism. One wonders whether he was therefore right to accept Jethro's advice that he needed to arrange helpers lest he wear out (Ex. 18:18), seeing that God had kept him so physically strong, and continued to do so.

## JOSHUA

1:5 *I will not fail you nor forsake you*- We may boldly say that we will *not* be fearful, as Joshua was, because God has addressed to *us* the very words which He did to Joshua: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5,6). In this especially, Joshua is our example. When Heb. 13:13 speaks of *us* going forth outside the camp, perhaps there is a reference to Joshua who dwelt with Moses outside the camp (Ex. 33:11)- thus making Joshua symbolic of us all.

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

1:7 *Courageous*- The language of military courage is applied here to the real battle- within the human mind, to obey God's laws. An element of bravery is required to do what God wants, to go against the grain of our natures and against the flow of our environment.

*That you may prosper*- God's servant Joshua [the same Hebrew name as the Greek name 'Jesus'] was intended to "prosper"; but in the end it was the Lord Jesus through His death who was the servant who would 'prosper' [Is. 52:13, same Hebrew word]. And so, in His foreknowledge, God spoke of "another day" when His begotten Son would fulfil what Joshua could potentially have achieved, and so much more (Heb. 4:8). The lesson for us is that so much has been potentially prepared for us to achieve. Our salvation may not necessarily depend upon achieving all those things, but all the same, so much potentially is possible which we refuse to reach up to, because we are petty minimalists, like Israel, satisfied with their little farm in the valley, rather than seeking to possess the fullness of the Kingdom prepared for them. In Ps. 1:1-3, David makes several allusions to Joshua. He speaks of how the man who meditates in God's word day and night will prosper in his ways; and he uses the very same Hebrew words as found in Josh. 1:8 in recounting God's charge to Joshua. But David's point is that the man who does these things will not "walk in the counsel of the ungodly"- he won't give in to peer pressure. The fact that Joshua was wrongly influenced by his peers in later life would indicate that he didn't fully keep the charge given to him.

1:13 After the pattern of the Reubenites, we have been given the promised rest of the Kingdom here and now (1:13 cp. Heb. 4:3); but we will, like them, only take possession of that inheritance after we have ensured that our brethren have received their possession (:15). So we have a paradox: the Reubenites were given their "rest", but they would only get their "rest" once their brethren had. Those Reubenites really were symbols of us: for this passage is surely behind the reasoning of Heb. 4, where we are told that we have entered into rest, but that we must labour if we want to enter into it.

1:13-15 Joshua didn't give the people rest (Heb. 4:8); but he said he had (Josh. 22:4). He failed to fulfil the potential spoken of here- that *he* would lead the people to "rest". The Messianic Kingdom could, perhaps, have come through Joshua-Jesus; but both Joshua and Israel would not. Dt. 1:38 states clearly that Joshua would cause Israel to inherit or possess the land. Yet by the end of Joshua's life, Israel were not inheriting the land in totality. He didn't live up to his potential. God's prophecy

here was conditional, although no condition is actually stated at the time. God's opening commission to Joshua was that the people were to possess the whole land promised to Abraham, right up to the Euphrates (1:4). But Joshua ended up drawing up the borders of the land far smaller than these; he didn't even seek to subdue the territory up to the Euphrates, even though God had promised him potential success and even commanded him to do so. Joshua was to divide up the whole land promised to Abraham amongst the tribes of Israel (1:6). And yet in the extensive descriptions of Joshua dividing up the land, we don't find him dividing up that whole territory up to the Euphrates. He seems to have lacked that vision, and fallen into the mire of minimalism, just content with a utilitarian, small scale conquest, rather than seeing the bigger picture of the potential Kingdom which God wanted to give His people. We can so easily be the same.

1:18 The repeated encouragement to be strong and of a good courage and not be fearful (:6,7,8,18; Dt. 31:23) could imply that Joshua was timid and in great need of encouragement.

2:1 *Secretly*- The sending out of the 12 spies about 40 years earlier was essentially a lack of faith- in the fact that God's Angel had gone ahead of them anyway to spy out the land, and Yahweh Himself had told Israel how good the land was. Perhaps the secrecy involved a sense that this was in fact not really a very spiritual decision and Joshua was somehow furtive about it.

*Came into the house of a prostitute*- Israel had never known urban life nor perhaps even seen walled cities like Jericho. The spies entered the city at evening time (:2), and the gate was shut (:5). Strangers always attract attention in such places- let alone when the city was in the direct line of attack of the Hebrews. The language / accent of the two spies would've given them away. It seems they entered the city gates at dusk, the gates were shut, and they'd have perceived that they were being watched and had been noticed as suspicious strangers. And so they used some desperate initiative, and dived into a whorehouse near the gate. This was the sort of place strangers would go to, as it would be today. We imagine them entering the house, and meeting the madame of the house. "What do you want?" was as dumb a question as the doctor asking the patient "How are you feeling today?". Rahab was a smart woman, accustomed to strangers, and knew what was going on. Within the first couple of sentences, she'd have figured who they were. And it seems they spoke for a short time, maybe an hour or so, realized they were busted, understood they were in a death trap within that walled city, and threw themselves on her mercy. And there, providence kicked in. James 2:25 calls those men "messengers", with a message Rahab believed. They hardly had an hour to tell her the message, before men were knocking on the door enquiring what Rahab knew about the spies. In that brief time, she believed a very sketchy and incomplete Gospel of the Kingdom. And her works reflected that faith, in telling the men [whom local culture would've barred from entering the house of a single woman] that the spies had come and gone. They and their message were 'welcomed in peace' by Rahab (Heb. 11:31), she 'received' their message and justified herself by works by protecting them (James 2:25).

2:9,10 When she says that she was aware that God had "given you the land" (2:9), she uses the same two Hebrew words used repeatedly in Deuteronomy regarding God's promise to give Israel the land of the Canaanites. "The fear of you is fallen upon us" is likewise an allusion to Ex. 15:16; 23:27 [the same Hebrew word is used by Rahab]. Rahab speaks of how her people are "melting" in fear- quoting Ex. 15:15 about how the inhabitants of Canaan would "melt" because of Israel. Knowing all this, she has the ambition to request the

impossible- that *she* would be the exception, that with *her* a covenant would be made. When she says that "we *have* heard" about the Exodus (:10), she may be referring to the prophecy of Ex. 15:14: "The people *shall* hear and be afraid". In this case, her emphasis would have been upon the word "have"- 'yes, we *have* heard indeed, as Moses sung, and yes, we *are* afraid'. Spiritual ambition of the type Rahab had lifts us far above the mire of mediocrity which there is in all human life under the sun.

2:10 Where did she, a whore in Jericho, get that knowledge from? How had she come to know about Yahweh? Presumably from her clients, who would've been travellers who had heard these things and passed them on to her. All this is wonderful encouragement for all sinners- that God has a way of working through sin to His glory, and He doesn't give up so easily with human weakness.

2:12 *Deal kindly*- Heb. 11:31 comments that it was by faith that Rahab did not perish; Rahab's faith was faith in God's grace. For Rahab was an Amoritess and according to the law of Moses there was to be no pity or covenant with them- only death (Dt. 7:2). Rahab had the spiritual ambition to ask that they make a covenant with her- she requests *hesed*, the common term for covenant relationship ("deal kindly", cp. 1 Sam. 20:8). And the spies made a covenant with her. Grace, like love, finds a way. Remember that she was also aware of what Israel had done to their enemies on their way to Jericho- and she appears to allude to Moses' commands to destroy utterly and *not* make covenant with the peoples of the land (Dt. 2:32-37; 7:1-5; 20:16-18).

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

3:1 There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1); Samuel (1 Sam. 15:12); David (1 Sam. 17:20; 29:11);

Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 29:20). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

4:1-3 This is a summary of what happened; the rest of the chapter explains how that situation came about. This is a common feature of Biblical writing; we note that the Greek, linear, strictly chronological approach of European languages isn't at all the same as Hebrew thought or writing, which presents themes and explanations at the cost of apparently 'jumping around' in chronology.

4:14 *Yahweh magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel*- As they entered Canaan, witnessing the waters of humanity held back (hence the reference to the waters stopping at a place called Adam, 3:16), they must have looked at Joshua with huge gratitude and reverence. When our wilderness journey ends and we enter the promised land of God's Kingdom, all our eyes and hearts will likewise be focused upon Jesus, and we will spend eternity magnifying Him. But we should begin that Christ-centred existence now.

4:23 Subsequent generations were to understand that this is what God had done *for you*; the Biblical record thus becomes alive for us who are God's people; it becomes a living word, with us as it were standing there on the banks of Jordan or the Red Sea, participating in the wonder of salvation which occurred then. If we grasp this, then any apparent lack of dramatic action by God in our lives today becomes easier to bear with; for He has done so many great things *for us* in what He did for His people historically.

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

5:5,6 The extent of spiritual despair, despondency and apostasy amongst the condemned generation in the wilderness cannot be overstated. By neglecting the circumcision of their they showed their rejection of the Abrahamic covenant with them.

5:10 The Lord told them in Jn. 6 that the true manna was His flesh, which He was to give for the life of the world. Some have supposed from Josh. 5:10-12 cp. Ex. 16:35 that the manna fell for the first time on the eve of the Passover, thus adding even more poignancy to the Lord's equation of the manna with His death.

5:13 As Israel were called to follow the Angel after their Red Sea baptism, so we too follow where the Angel leads. The conquest of Jericho is a classic example of following the Angel. The Angel who was the commander of *Yahweh's* army appearing to Joshua, the commander of God's human army

on earth, and standing "opposite him". Joshua was being shown that he had an opposite number in Heaven, a representative there before the throne of God- just as each of us do.

5:14 Note how the Angel answers Joshua's question- 'Are you for me, or against me?'. God has no interest in taking sides in human arguments, demonizing the one side and glorifying the other. The response was simply that the Angel stood for God and was His representative. Religious people so easily fall into this trap of demonizing their enemies, on the basis that "God is with me, and therefore, not with you my opponent, in fact, He hates you because I hate you". The true God and His Angelic servants are far above this kind of primitive, binary dichotomy.

5:13,14 This can be read as presenting Joshua in a negative light, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

5:14- see on 14:8. In prospect the Angels drove out every tribe that was in the land; the people of Israel had to just go in and possess the work which the Angels had done. So when they failed to drive out certain tribes, this was an example of human failing to be "workers together with God". Thus in prospect, the Angels led them to the promised "rest"- Dt. 25:19; Josh. 1:13; Is. 63:1; although in practice they did not enter that rest because of their faithlessness (Heb. 3:11-4:11), despite the Angel promising He would give them that rest (Ex. 33:4). Man is not alone, we have huge numbers of Angels working to create amazing potentials for us; but we have the choice as to whether we march with them to achieve them.

5:14,15 The Angel that met Joshua described Himself as "the captain of Yahweh's army", or "host"- the army of Angels that would go before Joshua and Israel to fight their battles. Therefore "Yahweh of armies" or "hosts" is a title often referring to the Angels.

5:15 The command to remove his shoe from holy ground is evidently reminiscent of the command to Moses in a similar situation. Shouldn't Joshua have perceived this, seeing his life was so clearly framed after that of Moses?

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

6:5 *Shout*- The command to "shout" was a reflection of the belief Israel were to have in the fact that God *had already* given them the city- for the Hebrew for "shout" usually refers to a shout of victory. The word is translated "triumph" in Ps. 60:8; 108:9. The same idea of shouting in victory over a city

which has been given to God's people recurs in Jer. 50:15- "Shout against her round about [cp. compassing the walls of Jericho]... her foundations *are* [present tense] fallen, her walls [cp. Jericho's] *are* thrown down" (AV). And this speaks of our latter day victory against Babylon- thus making this whole account of earnest relevance to us who live in the last days, and who will see Babylon fall by faith. Notice how literal Babylon fell by the water of the river being dried up, and the walls being opened- just the same sequence of events that occurred at Jericho.

6:10 "*Until* the day I tell you, 'Shout!'" implies that the people didn't know the battle plan- each day they would've walked around the city in silence, and nothing happened. The command to "Shout!" didn't come- for six days. The whole exercise was surely to develop their faith. Again, this was the most crazy of battle plans, in human terms. Heb. 11:30 associates the circling of the walls with faith: "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been circled seven days". 2 Cor. 10:3-4 is an allusion to the way that Jericho was taken with such a humanly weak battle plan. The point of the allusion is for us to see ourselves as those nervous Israelites desperately clinging on to their faith in God's victory rather than human strength. And we each have our Jerichos- habits, life-dominating patterns of thinking, that seem so impossible to shift. The deliverance at the Red Sea had been intended to teach Israel these very lessons. The account of the fall of Jericho is recorded in similar language, in order to teach the same lesson. Rahab's house had to be identified by a scarlet cord- like the blood of the Passover lamb sprinkled on the two doorposts and lintel of the Israelites' homes in Egypt. The silence demanded of the people was surely to recall Ex. 14:14, there the people standing before the Red Sea were assured: "The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent". Compare the command to keep silent whilst *Yahweh* fought, with the common practice of yelling war cries as an ancient army approached their enemy. All human convention, wisdom and strength, was placed in purposeful opposition to what seemed quite counter-instinctive- to be utterly silent whilst *God* did the fighting.

6:11 One wonders whether the comment that "So he caused the ark of *Yahweh* to go around the city" could imply that the entire fighting force of Israel didn't bother doing as commanded on the first circuit of the city- possibly they just sent the ark around it. Likewise the people were to shout when the trumpets sounded (:10). But in reality, like a Sunday School play gone wrong, the people shouted, the trumpets sounded, and then the people again shouted (:20). There's a distinct theme in the record that actually, God's people didn't do according to His ideal plan, and yet still He gave them the victory. According to Heb. 11:30, "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down". Whose faith? What faith? Was Joshua-Jesus' faith counted to the people? Or was their very weak, hope-for-the-best faith all the same accepted as faith by God's grace?

6:18 The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to God). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father. Mammon is an "abomination" (Lk. 16:13,15)- a word associated in the Old Testament with idol worship. We are to not only be free of such idolatry, but despise materialism.

6:24 1 Cor. 3:12-15 likens all the faithful to material which can pass through the fire of judgment- and this surely is a reference to the way that Jericho was burnt with fire, and only the metals along with Rahab and her family came through that fire to salvation. Thus according to the allusion, Rahab and her family represent all the faithful.



7:3-5 Shouldn't Joshua have led them into battle in person (1:5)? He did the second time they attacked Ai (8:15).

7:7,8 Joshua here lost faith in the promise of 1:5-7,9.

7:10,11,13 Joshua is being reminded not to just see himself as part of a community, but to remember his personal relationship with God, and not to have such a low self image.

7:11 All we have, are, were, shall ever be, is purely His gift. Therefore to take for ourselves what is God's is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God. This was Achan's sin- to take what was devoted to God for himself. And this was why he is described as having 'stolen'. But from whom? From God (cp. 6:18). The fact God owns everything means that there can be no distinction between what is ours and what is God's. To think like that is to steal from Him. And hence the power and force of Mal. 3:8: "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me". Have we robbed God in this way, especially in our attitudes and perceptions?

7:13 "Get up!" is repeated twice (:10), as if Joshua was so easily discouraged that he was still lying on the ground, disobedient to God's encouragement.

7:19 Joshua correctly perceived that repentance is a giving of glory to God's Name.

7:21 A condemned man having hidden God's money in the ground is clearly the basis of Christ's parable about the man who was given one talent, who hid it in the ground and did nothing with it (Mt. 25:25). But in the parable, the man didn't steal it; he was given it by Jesus, but didn't do anything with it. The connection is to perhaps teach us that passively doing nothing with God's wealth is the same as actively stealing it from Him; the sin of omission is just as bad as that of commission.

8:1 Joshua's dismay was a loss of lost faith in 1:3,9.

8:2 God told Israel to totally destroy the spoil from the cities they attacked. But when they failed to do this with Jericho, God told them that with Ai, the next city on the agenda, they were allowed to keep the spoil; even though Dt. 20:14-16 said that this was how they should treat their distant enemies, but *not* cities like Ai which were part of their inheritance. This was an undoubted concession to human weakness. The same concession to human weakness applied to other cities apart from Ai; it became a general policy that Israelites took all the spoil of the Canaanite cities for themselves; and yet following straight on from this we are told that Joshua "left nothing undone of all that Yahweh commanded Moses" (11:14,15). God accepted those concessions to human weakness, this living on a lower level, as total obedience. The grace of all this is marvellous.

8:5 *We will flee before them*- Fleeing before their enemies was perhaps a recognition of the truth of Dt. 28:25. This was included in the battle plan in order to show recognition that they had sinned and deserved to flee. God gave them, and us, victory on the basis they recognized that they deserved to be defeated.

8:18 The glint of the sun on the javelin would've been the signal for the ambushers to come and attack the city.

8:26 Given the similarities with the battle against Amalek, were Joshua's arms held up in fervent prayer? Prayer is commonly associated with upheld arms. Earlier, Moses had held his hands up whilst Joshua led the army into battle, succeeding because Moses had his hands held up in prayer (Ex. 17:10). Now, Joshua is the one holding his hands up in prayer, whilst Israel are in battle. Lesson: We go through experiences which later repeat; and we are in the position of those who had before prayed for us, and are expected to replicate their examples.

9:7 One gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their better judgment they disregarded the telltale signs. We all have a tendency to go against our better judgment.

9:10 Because a word or phrase means something in one context doesn't mean it *always* means this in *any* context. Thus "yeast" can be a symbol of both the Gospel and also sin. Another simple example is in Dt. 3:20; the land "beyond Jordan" refers to land on the West of the river; but in Josh. 9:10 the same phrase refers to land on the East. That same phrase "beyond Jordan" means something different in different contexts. We can't always assume, therefore, that the same phrase *must* refer to the same thing wherever it occurs.

9:14-18 Joshua here was too influenced by his 'committee', acting against his better judgment, it seems, because of the pressure of others upon him.

9:23 *The house of my God*- Paralleled with "the congregation" (:21). God's house is His people rather than any physical building.

10:8 Was this a lack of faith in 1:5?

10:10 It was due to Joshua's faithfulness to the Gibeonites that this great battle and victory occurred. We see how God worked through the Gibeonites' deception and Israel's un wisdom- to bring about a situation whereby His people could take possession of the Kingdom. He does things like this all the time; rather than turning away from human failure in disgust, He works through it; just as we should when confronted by it in ourselves and in others.

10:11 Joshua's conquest of the Canaanite tribes looks forward to the work of his greater namesake, Jesus, at His return. Adoni-Zedek, king of Jerusalem and the counterpart of Melchizedek, is representative of the latter day anti-Christ figure who will rule there in the last days. He leads a confederacy of Arab nations against Joshua-Jesus, and is destroyed with hailstones (:11)- an event which is the basis for the latter day prophecy of Rev. 16:21. Joshua's men placing their feet upon the necks of their enemies (:24) is the prototype of all enemies being subdued under the Lord in the last day; and the way "the God of Israel fought for Israel" at this time (:42) is the basis of many latter day statements to the same effect.

10:12 This is amazing faith in prayer; Joshua commanded things to happen, so sure of the prayer being heard.

10:13 There are a number of references in Scripture to books like the book of Jashar which we no longer have available to us. Whether they were inspired or not, we don't know; but the point is, they are no longer available to us because God knows that we do not need them. By contrast, the books in the Bible *have* been preserved for us; God would not have inspired and preserved books like Leviticus or the Chronicles genealogies unless they were important for us in some way.

10:14 The sun standing still could mean that a different dimension of time was entered into- see on :42. But in the midst of a very literal record, it could equally well be understood literally. This would've meant that the entire solar system was affected; for no one part of it can stop dead in its tracks without affecting the whole planetary system. And perhaps the effects of that would have been felt even further... possible the entire cosmos stopped. All because of the fervent prayer of a man standing on planet earth. Such is the power of prayer. And further, Joshua didn't just ask for this just in case God might hear it. He prayed the prayer of command, so intense was his faith that God would do this mighty act so that His work could go ahead.

10:25- see on 14:8.

10:28 *On that day*- A huge amount happened that day and over the next two days; see on 10:42.

10:42 The events around Christ's return were prefigured by those at the time of Joshua's conquest of the land. Some of the records of his campaigns require a huge amount to have been achieved by his soldiers within around 36 hours. The comment that so much was achieved "at one time" may hint at a compression of time to enable it. "The sun stood still" may well be intended to teach that the meaning of time was collapsed by God, rather than that the sun literally stood still (:12,13). And the sun standing still over Gibeon is mentioned in Is. 28:21 as typical of the time when Yahweh will do "His strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act" in the last days. The same may be

true when the shadow went back for Hezekiah. The movement of the planets need not have been altered; the meaning of time was simply suspended. This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence. If indeed time is collapsed, this would enable all these prophecies to come true, but not in time as we know it. Babylon is to be punished with famine in one day; yet famine is a process (Rev. 18:8). In one day her judgments come, and yet also in one hour (18:10). Surely the lesson is that time is compressed. Rev. 8:12, also speaking of the last days, says that "the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise". Could this mean that one day and one night last only two thirds of their usual length, whilst the judgments of the fourth Angel are poured out upon the land? This collapsing of time will enable us each to be judged individually without having to wait our turn in line.

11:4 *As the sand that is on the seashore*- The same phrase used about Israel (Gen. 32:12). The kingdoms of this world masquerade as the kingdom of God. The world is set up as a fake people of God, and this will lead to the final conflict between the real Christ and the imitation or anti-Christ at His return.

11:6,14 Can this be considered a lack of faith in 1:9?

11:9 This made no human sense, to destroy the latest military technology which had fallen into their hands. But this is the way of faith.

11:11 The word "soul" here doesn't refer to anything inherently immortal within us. It refers to the human person. All the people (*nephesh*) that were within the city of Hazor were killed by the sword (cp. 10:30-39). The "soul" is therefore not immortal.

*He burnt Hazor with fire*- A destruction of Hazor by fire at this time has been confirmed by archaeological exploration there.

11:15- see on 8:2.

11:22 Samson went to Gaza conscious that his people had failed to drive out the tribes. Judah had captured it in Joshua's strength (1:18), but had let the Philistines return. We too must do our part to retain the victory for us which has been won by Joshua-Jesus.

11:23 Much land was still not possessed (13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4); does 11:23 therefore imply that the land had been possessed only in the perceptions of Israel? How responsible was Joshua for this? Or was it that Joshua destroyed the leadership structure of the Canaanites, but Israel failed to go and possess what he had secured for them, just as we fail to appropriate to ourselves all the victory of Christ?

12:1,7 *The kings of the land* - The Hebrew word *eretz* refers to both the land promised to Abraham, and to the whole planet. When we read of "the kings of the earth / land" in Revelation, these likewise refer to the rulers within the territory promised to Abraham, from the Nile to the Euphrates.

12:7 *Joshua gave it to the tribes of Israel for a possession according to their divisions*- The comment of Ps. 136:17,22 is that the 31 kings were slain as an act of God's grace, in order to give the land to Israel for a heritage or possession. Israel didn't deserve these victories, they were by God's grace.

12:8 *The mountains... the slopes... the wilderness*- The conquests of Joshua-Jesus were extensive. Yet when Israel took the land, they settled just in the fertile areas and let the Canaanites live in those infertile areas, rather than completely destroy them (Jud. 1:34). We too can as it were take possession of those parts of the Kingdom life which are convenient to us, rather than in the spirit of Jesus-Joshua take full possession

12:9 The list of kings which follow appear to be in the order in which they were defeated. Not all these battles and victories are recorded, in the same way as not all the struggles and victories of Jesus are known or perceived by us.

13:1 *There remains yet very much land to be possessed*- Joshua, like Jesus, had won all the battles; but God's people failed to go and possess what could so easily have been theirs. Defining what exactly hadn't been possessed was a good idea psychologically; it also helps us if we set ourselves specific spiritual objectives, no matter how limited, so that we can tackle them.

13:14 The Levites had no material inheritance because "the sacrifices of Yahweh... are his inheritance... Yahweh... was their inheritance" (:14,33). Notice how "Yahweh" is put for what is sacrificed to Him. His very existence is an imperative to sacrifice to Him, despising all material advantage in doing so.

13:22 *Among the rest of their slain*- The impression is given that Balaam suffered their punishment and was counted amongst them. Yet it would seem that he was an Israelite, at one time a prophet of Yahweh, and in touch with the true God. Yet he died with the Midianites. If we side with this world in this life, then we will share their condemnation at Christ's return and not inherit the Kingdom; we will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

13:30 *Sixty cities*- Christ's parable of Lk. 19:12-18 likes our rewards in God's future Kingdom as being given varying numbers of cities to rule over. This confirms that Israel's entry to Canaan was seen by Him as typical of our entry into God's Kingdom on earth when Christ returns.

14:8 Joshua and Caleb were earlier characterized by the comment that they "wholly followed the Lord" when they went to spy out Canaan, and urged Israel to go up and inherit it (:8,9,14; Num. 14:24; 32:11,12; Dt. 1:36). This refers to the way that the Angel had gone ahead of them, and they faithfully followed where the Angel had gone, and believed that Israel could follow that Angel wherever it led. When Israel finally did go into the land, they were told that Joshua would 'go before' them, and they were to follow him and thereby inherit the land (Dt. 31:3). From this we see that circumstances repeat in our lives. As Joshua had been told to be strong good courage in order to take the land, so he had to tell others (10:25). Joshua had faithfully followed, and now he became the leader who was to be faithfully followed. We must walk in step with the Spirit / Angel in our lives; and yet no matter how much we've walked in step with Him, we can always allow pressure of circumstances to let us fall out of step with Him.

14:12-14 On one level, we can quite rightly ask for material blessing, and the Father is pleased that we should. But there is a higher level we can live on, where requesting physical blessings doesn't figure so largely. We can be like Caleb, who conquered Hebron (his part in the Kingdom) for himself and then gave it to others. In any case, Hebron became a priestly city for the Levites to live in. He gave his place in the Kingdom to others, reflecting the grace he had received- that was the level of love this great man reached. Moses reached a similar height of loving devotion to God's people in Ex. 32:32-34.

14:14 This is in the context of the Angel going before the people. Caleb zealously followed the Angel which went before him, and therefore he obtained his inheritance which in prospect the Angel had prepared for him. Our guardian Angels are preparing victories in prospect for us too. 'Caleb' means 'dog' and so the language of faithful following is a play on his name.

15:8 In the New Testament there are two Greek words translated 'hell' in many Bibles. The Greek *hades* is the equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol* which refers to the grave. 'Gehenna' is the name of the rubbish tip which was just outside Jerusalem, where the refuse from the city was burnt. As a proper noun - i.e. the name of an actual place - it should have been left untranslated as 'Gehenna' rather than be translated as 'hell'. 'Gehenna' is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew 'Ge-ben-Hinnon'. This was located near Jerusalem (15:8; 18:16), and at the time of Christ it was the city rubbish dump. Dead bodies of criminals were thrown onto the fires which were always burning there, so that Gehenna became symbolic of total destruction and rejection. What was thrown onto those fires did not remain there forever- the bodies decomposed into dust.

15:13 Joshua had taken Hebron (10:36) but Israel had not followed up his victory, and the Philistines had returned; and so Caleb then took it. Joshua / Jesus has won great victories for us against every barrier which might stop us entering the Kingdom- but we have to do our part in making good that victory.

15:18 Such examples of spiritual ambition are inspirational; just as soldiers inspire each other by their acts of bravery. Achsah followed her father Caleb's spiritual ambition in specifically asking for an inheritance in the Kingdom (14:12); and this in turn inspired another woman to ask for an inheritance soon afterwards (17:4). And so it ought to be in any healthy congregation of believers. 15:33-36 Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance, but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and took over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Those who don't want an inheritance in the Kingdom won't have it; those who truly love Christ's appearing and the things of the Kingdom will be given it (2 Tim. 4:8). Yet from such a weak, spiritually disinterested background, a man of faith like Samson came.

15:60 *Kiriath Baal (the same is Kiriath Jearim)*- Often in the lists of place names we are told that the name was changed; in this case, from "Baal" to "Jearim". All restimulations of and associations with paganism, idolatry and the old life are to be erased.

15:63 They, like us, could have driven them out, because Joshua-Jesus had won the victory; but they failed to follow up on it.

16:9 God redefined the boundaries of the land in accordance to what Israel had the strength to subdue; He made account for their weakness as He does for us. Thus Ephraim were given some cities within the inheritance of Manasseh, presumably because Manasseh wouldn't drive out the tribes living there. And the Lord Jesus seems to have alluded to this by saying that *we* will be given cities, the number of which depends upon our zeal to possess them. God had clearly promised that He would expel the tribes and "You *shall* possess their land" (23:5). But this promise was conditional upon them making the effort, even though that condition is not specifically mentioned. Ultimately, God will "enlarge all the borders of the land" (Is. 26:15 RV) because Israel will finally rise up to the spiritual ambition He desires of them.

17:1 *Because he was a man of war, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan*- These areas were where resistance was strongest. God will give us a unique place in the Kingdom appropriate to our personality.

17:4 We note the spiritual ambition of these women, bravely pushing forward their desire for personal inheritance in the Kingdom in a male world which generally ignored them.

17:13 One reason why Israel failed to drive out the tribes, and thereby lost the Kingdom, was simply because they wanted to take tribute from them. Ez. 7:19 defines "silver and gold" as Israel's stumbling block- moreso than idols. Wealth and the easy life have been the most common form of spiritual destruction in the history of God's people.

17:14 *Why have you given me just one lot*- The people were lazy to inherit the Kingdom, and lacking in real faith. So they blamed their lack of full inheritance on Joshua. The lazy and faithless will always seek a human scapegoat to excuse themselves for things which are solely their fault.

17:18 *You shall drive out the Canaanites* – This is an example of what appears to be prophecy being actually a command, not a prediction. For those tribes proved too strong for lazy, minimising Israel. And so in that sense the 'prophecy' wasn't fulfilled. Israel failed to be inspired by it. They waited for its fulfilment rather than went out to fulfil it. And we can do likewise.

18:3 One simple reason why Israel failed to inherit the Kingdom in the time of Joshua / Judges was that they were simply "slack", lazy, to drive out the tribes (the same Hebrew word is used in Ex. 5:8 regarding how the Egyptians perceived them to be lazy; and also in Prov. 18:9). They were happy to receive tribute from them, and to enjoy what blessings they received. They were satisficers, not men of principle or mission; not real bond slaves. And for this, God rejected them and they never really inherited the Kingdom prepared for them.

18:8 When Joshua told the spies "Go walk through the land...", they ought to have perceived that he was asking them to walk in the faith of Abraham- to believe that this land truly had been promised to them, as his seed. God sometimes sets us up in situations in which we are intended to perceive the similarity with some incident in Biblical history, and to thereby be encouraged to act

appropriately and in faith. For this to 'work' it requires a sensitive familiarity with Scripture; hence the advisability of daily Bible reading.

18:16 *The valley of Hinnom*- See on 15:8.

18:28 All these names would likely have been listened to by the tribes with the same attitude as we have when we hear or read them- they are places unknown to us, and so we tend to indifferently let them pass us by. But the tribes, in this case Benjamin, should've been paying careful attention and perceiving the extent of their inheritance, and what exactly was required of them. Instead they were satisfied with their farms and didn't want to see the bigger picture of what was possible for them. They could've not only possessed their own land allocation to its fullness, but also inherited the territory right up to the Euphrates. God conceded to their smallness of vision by trying to get them to concentrate on the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea; but they didn't want to even exploit that area as God enabled them to. We too can read the descriptions of God's Kingdom and not be really motivated by grasping the reality of the fact that this is really our land, our inheritance, our eternal destiny that's being described.

19:1 The inheritance of Simeon and Judah was merged because of their inability to expel the Canaanites. The boundaries of the promised land and indeed the individual possessions of the tribes were changed by God in accordance with the weakness of Israel to actually drive out the tribes and take the inheritance. Thus He "changed the portion of My people" (Mic. 2:4). Right up to our own day we see the same Divine sensitivity to the weakness of His people and His eagerness to work with them at whatever low level they relate to Him on.

19:9 We see a lot of grace in how the Biblical records are written, in how God perceives history. "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there. Likewise the extension of Dan's border by them in :47 overlooks the fact that actually the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, and Dan wasn't strong or faithful enough to live in the valley areas (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in :47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments that "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1).

19:50 This is an example of spiritual ambition. Note the huge breadth in attitude amongst the children of God at this time; some were so indifferent to their inheritance that they gave it to other tribes or never even went there to try to possess it; others took their inheritance and had the initiative to ask for more land. This breadth in commitment levels within the people of God can be very discouraging, but thus it has always been. Joshua and Caleb must have found the negative, faithless attitude of the others hard to live with, but they didn't let it take away from their own zeal for God.

20:4 Heb. 6:18 invites us to see ourselves as this person who had committed sin worthy of death and yet, as it were, without his conscious, wilful desire to do so; and our city of refuge is the Lord Jesus.

20:6 Final deliverance for the manslayer was given at the death of the High Priest, when his case was judged. This pointed forward to the final freedom achieved for us by Christ's death, which was in a sense our judgment (Jn. 12:31; 16:11). Christ's death on the cross is repeatedly presented as our judgment; hence in remembering His death in the breaking of bread we have a foretaste of our future judgment, and are in a sense judged there.

20:7,8 The cities of refuge were in inaccessible areas- up mountains or in the desert. There had to be a conscious effort to go there, just as we don't drift into Christ but must take the conscious decision to be baptized into Him, which is the counterpart to entering into the city of refuge (:4).

21:2 The implication could be that the people had been slack to give the Levites their cities. We get the impression that once they entered the land, it was every man for himself; very few saw the wider, larger picture of possessing the entire land and establishing a nationwide

worship system whereby the Levites would teach the people about God. The people of God today can likewise be very self-centred rather than thinking what would be best for the community as a whole. The Levites' request for an inheritance to be given them can be seen in continuity with Joshua, Caleb and Caleb's daughter asking for a specific inheritance and being given it; whoever really wants to be in the Kingdom will be there, all who truly love Christ's appearing (with all that true love implies) will be given salvation (2 Tim. 4:8). Maybe Jesus was alluding to these passages in Joshua when He taught that whoever asks will receive (Mt. 7:7). This isn't a blank cheque promise, but rather saying that whoever really wants salvation and an inheritance in the Kingdom will receive it.

21:41 The Levites were one of the smallest tribes and yet were given 48 cities, far more cities than some of the larger tribes. This was perhaps because it was God's intention to dramatically increase the number of the Levites if they were faithful (Ps. 115:12-14) in order to spiritually strengthen Israel yet more. But again, a great potential was set up by God, in some detail, but wasn't realized because of human weakness.

21:43,44 The Lord gave them the land, i.e. potentially, but they failed to possess it. Yahweh gave them rest, and yet Heb. 4:8 says that Joshua did *not* give them rest, and therefore there remains this "rest" to be received by God's people at Christ's return. Is this therefore an implied criticism of Joshua, or of Israel?

21:44 *Not a man of all their enemies stood before them* - But their enemies did stand before them, they didn't possess all the land. Yet God puts it over so positively, as if it's a story with a happy ending- when actually it's a tragedy. Even when rebuking them, God sees Israel as in some ways perfect (Num. 23:21; Is. 42:18-20). We stand related to the same grace, and should reflect it in being positive and gracious in our view of our brethren.

21:45 *All came to pass*- The promises by the Angel at the exodus came true in prospect; but tragically Israel did not make them good, so that in reality only a fraction of the blessings were realized. All of God's people today have in a sense been given the Kingdom; but not all will possess it because not all want to.

22:2-4 This seems an over positive view of Israel, an exaggeration of their true spiritual position- cp. 23:4; 24:14,23. Or is this rooted in Joshua's love for them, not seeing iniquity in Jacob? Moses had told the Reubenites and Gadites that they could return to their possessions when God had given rest unto the other tribes and they had also possessed their lands (Dt. 3:20). But Joshua tells them to go to their possessions simply because their brethren were now at "rest"; although Heb. 4:8 says that they did not inherit the "rest" at Joshua's time. He significantly omits the proviso that their brethren must also possess the land- because much of the land wasn't possessed. Was this Joshua getting slack, thinking that the main thing was that people were living in peace, even though they weren't possessing the Kingdom? Or is it a loving concession to human weakness? Indeed, the conditions of Dt. 3:20 were in their turn an easier form, a concession to, the terms of the initial agreement in Num. 32:20-32.

22:4- see on 1:13-15.

22:12 There is no record that they first of all attempted to ascertain the truth or otherwise of the accusation. The two and a half tribes had been fighting for them, helping them get their possessions, and had now returned home. The ten tribes should have been grateful to them; but instead they accuse them of apostasy on hearsay evidence alone, and seem eager to kill them. It so often happens that those we help the most, later turn against us. This is rooted in pride; we don't like to accept help, we like to think we have what we have because of our own efforts rather than the kindness of others; and so we like to find fault with our helpers. All the tribes should've been helping each other secure their inheritance, but it seems most of them just grabbed some land for themselves and didn't see the bigger picture of helping and enabling their brethren to also possess their inheritances. When we see others doing what we have failed to do and ought to be doing, we tend to want to pull them down to our level, eagerly listen to gossip against them, imagine the worst about

them, condemn them and even destroy them. The Biblical record of this kind of thing happening is a comfort to us.

22:16 *Thus says the whole congregation of Yahweh*- It was unlikely that these hypocritical heresy hunters [see on :18] had actually got consent from every single person in Israel to say this; so often, divisive heresy hunters falsely claim to be speaking on behalf of all God's people.

22:18 *Since you rebel today against Yahweh*- This was hypocritical, for the prophets repeatedly declare that Israel as a whole were persistently rebellious against Yahweh from the day that He had entered covenant with them at Sinai (Dt. 31:27; Ps. 78:8; Is. 63:10; 65:2; Ez. 2:3; 20:8). They were still themselves worshipping idols (24:14). Such hypocrisy is understandable in psychological terms; on a subconscious level, sinners know they have sinned and rebelled against God, and so they transfer this on to others and eagerly give them punishment for it. By facing up fully to our sins, repenting and accepting as just whatever judgment God gives us, we are saved from this tendency. We will not be hypocrites.

22:19 It seems they perceived the land to the East of Jordan as "unclean" (see :25 too)- even though right up to the Euphrates had been promised to them. They were told that if they considered it unclean, then they could inherit on the West of Jordan. According to Israel's perception of the land, so it was defined for them. And so with us- as we define God's working, so, in some ways, will it be unto us (Lk. 19:22,23). Note how they ended up playing God: "rebel against Yahweh... rebel against us", and went madly ahead quoting lots of 'Biblical' history which was irrelevant to the case in hand to try to justify their own anger.

23:6 As God had charged him to be courageous and obedient to the book of the Law (1:7,8), so Joshua on his deathbed charged his people. In spiritual maturity, our concern will be for the things of God's people rather than ourselves. We will encourage others from our own experience and example. See on 14:8.

23:7 This command not to make mention of other gods is alluded to in Eph. 5:3; the various ways of the flesh equate with the idols of Joshua's time.

23:9,14 Was Joshua being too positive, seeing things as achieved that hadn't been (cp. Jud. 1:1)? He seems to have tried to perceive the promises, which were conditional upon obedience, as having been fulfilled fully when they hadn't been. Solomon made the same mistake. See on 24:14.

23:12,13 To marry back into Egypt or Canaan, the non-Kingdom people, is to despise the covenant, to reverse the redemptive work which God has wrought with us, to not *love* God (:11). In the context of marriage out of the Faith, we read that God will destroy 'him that *hates* Him', and repay him to his face (Dt. 7:2-11). On the other hand, not marrying Gentiles was part of *loving* God. Wilful marriage out of the faith is a very wrong and sad thing, although God will seek to work through it as He does with all human failure.

24:2 Righteous Abraham was "gathered to his people" (or ancestors), on death (Gen. 25:8); and they were idolaters. Believers and unbelievers all go to the same place at death; it's not true that the good go to Heaven and the bad to 'hell'. The separation between sheep and goats happens at the day of judgment at Christ's return.

24:10 Balaam, in his heart, didn't want to bless Israel; he wanted to curse them so he could get his hands on the riches Balak promised him if he did so (Num. 22,23). Balaam knew if God had told him to bless Israel, there was no way of changing things. But God here says that He refused to hear Balaam's prayer to curse Israel. It seems that Yahweh read Balaam's latent, unexpressed desires as prayer to Him. When we are too weak or sick to pray, God still reads our situations as prayer, even if unexpressed in so many words.

24:12 Jacob's last words claim that he had taken Shechem from the Amorites "with *my* sword and with *my* bow" (Gen. 48:22). These very words are alluded to here and in Ps. 44:1-6, where the Spirit says that the land was given to Israel *not* on account of their bow and sword. Even at the end of his life, Jacob's old self-reliance was still not totally gone; his sense that through his own effort he could bring about the fulfilment of God's promises for Him. In this area, the weakness of Jacob remained.



This gives us patience with our fellow believers who never seem to 'get it' in some spiritual areas; and comforts us in our own failures to achieve perfection in other aspects of spirituality.

24:14 Compare Joshua's earlier over positive statements (see on 22:2; 23:9). Now in his spiritual maturity it seems he came to a final sense of realism about sin, obedience and Israel's failure.

24:15 *As for me... we will serve*- Joshua realized that Israel, whom he had seen as so obedient (see on 22:2; 23:9), actually weren't serving God at all.

24:16 *Far be it from us*- The kind of hypocrisy of 22:18 [see note there].

24:19,23 Joshua at the end of his life came to a final realism as to the real nature of sin, and the ultimate demands which God makes upon human life in practice.

24:24 *We will listen to His voice*- The people don't respond to the command to throw away their idols by saying 'Yes OK, we shall do so'; instead they say that they will hear God's word. Interest in the Bible, reading it and even enthusing about it, can be done whilst at the same time still serving idols.

24:30 *Buried him in the border of his inheritance*- As if they expected him to be resurrected and then enter into it at Messiah's coming.

## JUDGES

1:1 After the leadership of Moses, there came that of Joshua. When he died, Israel expected that another such leader would be raised up. They expected a man to be named. But instead, they were told that the whole tribe of Judah must go up. The reality would have sunk home- no more charismatic leaders, now the ordinary people must take responsibility. The same is true in our generation.

1:3 This was effectively a lack of faith that God would give Judah victory; but God still worked through this lower level of faith shown by Judah, and gave them victory (:4). God so thirsts for relationship with us that He is prepared to accept lower levels of faith than the ideal; this shouldn't elicit from us any sense of personal lack of commitment, but rather inspire us to greater patience with others whose faith isn't on the highest level it could be.

1:14 We see here a wonderful spiritual ambition; not merely accepting the portion given by God and wondering how ever even this was to be possessed. Rather does Achsah have the ambition to ask for even more territory to possess.

1:21 The fact we fail to realize our potentials doesn't mean God quits working with us. Reflect how Judah was given the potential to possess the whole land, and yet they selfishly only focused upon their own inheritance (Jud. 1:2,3). And yet God still worked with them, giving them victory in what battles they did fight (Jud. 1:4). Yet even then, Judah didn't follow through with the help God was so eager to give them. They took Jerusalem, but later we read that the Jebusites were soon back living there (Jud. 1:8,21).

1:34 God's grace to His people is reflected in how He records their weaknesses, and always focuses upon their obedience no matter how small. Thus the allotted inheritance of the children of Dan is described as too small for them (Josh. 19:47), although actually "the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the hill country, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley". When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance.

2:1-3 The Angel here speaks as if He is God Himself speaking. Both men and Angels can carry God's Name (Ex. 23:21) and thus can functionally be as God, whilst not being God Himself in person. This explains how God's Son, Jesus, isn't God Himself but carries God's Name (Jn. 5:43) and acts as God whilst not being God Himself.

2:9 *They buried him in the border of his inheritance*- So that when Joshua is resurrected at Christ's return, he can go directly into his inheritance.

2:18 *It grieved Yahweh because of their distress*- God like the truly loving parent took no pleasure in punishing His children. The idea of eternal conscious torture of the wicked isn't taught in the Bible; God has no pleasure at all in punishing sinners (Ez. 18:23; 33:11).

2:22 This is rather similar to God telling Balaam to go with the messengers of Balak, but to be obedient to His word. God as it were pushes people down the downward spiral if this is the way they choose to go. Obedience would be so much harder with the Canaanite tribes still existing amongst

Israel; but God let this be so. We pray "lead us not into temptation" (Mt. 6:13) because it is possible for God to lead us into such situations, even though the process of temptation is totally internal to ourselves (James 1:13-15).

2:23 God drove out the tribes from Canaan slowly, not immediately- or at least, He potentially enabled this to happen. But Israel were to destroy those tribes "quickly" (Dt. 9:3); yet they chose not to. Because they didn't want to be obedient to that, or at least to only be 'slowly' obedient, God went along with them and confirmed them in the level of response to Him which they chose.

3:1 *The nations which Yahweh left to test Israel*- The process of temptation is internal to the human mind (James 1:13-15; Mk. 7:15-23). But God can test us as He did Abraham (Gen. 22:1). It could be argued that God knows all about us anyway, and so the testing process is really to reveal us to ourselves. Another angle is that this language is relevant to the Angels, who were the practical manifestation of God at this time (see on 2:1-3), but their knowledge isn't total (Mt. 24:36); it could be that some of our tests are to reveal us to our guardian Angels. The cases of Divine 'testing' of people are usually in the context of Angelic involvement with people.

3:2 *Might learn battle experience* - elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. God therefore works through His judgments of sin in order to try to positively teach His ways to people.

3:6 In nearly every reference to marriage to Gentiles, there is the comment that this would surely lead to adopting the religious views of the Gentile partner; views which inevitably take a man away from his covenant with Yahweh. The connection between marriage out of the covenant and adopting idolatry is emphasized: Ex. 34:12-16; Dt. 7:2-9; 1 Kings 11:2,3; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14. Dt. 7:4 dogmatically predicts that a Gentile man will definitely turn away the heart of his Hebrew son-in-law. So certain is it that marriage to Gentiles leads to accepting their idols that Ezra 9:1,2 reasons that Israel hadn't separated from idols *because* they had married Gentiles. Time and again, those who marry out of the covenant claim that they feel strong enough to cope with it, that marriage is only a human thing, and that their spiritual relationship with God is between them and God, and unaffected by their worldly partner. Yet this is exactly the opposite of what God's word says. It's not true that you can marry into the world and be unaffected in your own spirituality.

3:8 The book of Judges describes a consistent sequence of Israel turning away from God, being punished by neighbouring Arab enemies, and then being sent a 'saviour' - a 'Jesus'. This points forward to how Israel will be brought to her knees by the future Arab oppression, resulting in the coming of the true Saviour (cp. Mt. 1:21). It is significant that almost all the judges were initially rejected by Israel, and had various features which meant that they did not have charismatic appeal to the people. Those facts make them all types of Christ. The pattern of 'serving' their Arab conquerors and then 'crying unto the Lord' (:8,9,14,15) recalls their servitude to the Egyptians, resulting in Israel 'crying to the Lord' (Ex. 2:23), and being answered by the Passover deliverance - which also represented Christ's coming. Their deliverances by the judges also typify this. "Saviours (judges) shall come up upon mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau (so that) the Kingdom shall

be the Lord's" (Obadiah 21). "Saviours / judges" may be an intensive plural referring to the one true saviour / judge, Jesus.

3:21 There are seven weak things which are mentioned in Judges as being the tools of God's salvation: a left handed man; an ox goad (3:31); a woman (4:4); a nail (4:21); a piece of a millstone (9:53); a pitcher and trumpet (7:20), a jaw bone of an ass (15:16). God delights to work through the weak; indeed, only if we perceive our own weakness can God work through us.

4:7 *I will deliver him into your hand*- It was God's desire to effect deliverance for Israel at the hands of a man, Barak; but he failed to live up to that potential, indeed the male leadership collapsed in Israel (5:7), and so God worked through a woman.

4:8,9 The incomplete faith of men like Baruch was counted as full faith by later inspiration (Heb. 11:32). God likewise counts our weak spirituality as total if we are in Christ, whose righteousness is counted to all those baptized into Him.

4:14 Deborah here quotes the words of Dt. 9:3 concerning the Angel going before Israel to drive out the nations to Barak, to inspire him with courage in fighting them. She recognized that the work the Angels did when they went out many years ago to do all the groundwork necessary for Israel to destroy all the tribes of Canaan was done for all time. It was not too late to make use of that work by making a human endeavour in faith. So with us, the smaller objectives in our lives as well as our main goal of reaching the Kingdom have all been made possible through the work of Christ and the Angels in the past. Deborah's recognition of this is shown in her song, when she says that the Angels fought against Sisera (5:20).

4:21 We have to piece together all Scripture to get an accurate picture of events. 5:27 suggests he arose and then fell down, as if she didn't kill him with just one blow as he lay asleep but had some struggle with him.

5:2 The examples of leaders amongst God's people can influence the flock positively or negatively- when the leaders "offered themselves willingly", so did the people (:9).

5:4 As so often in the Psalms, God's people see the deliverances He works in this life as repeating in essence the great deliverance at the Red Sea and His entering covenant with His people, which things represent our baptism and deliverance from this world (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

5:5: *The mountains melted*- to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were. The Bible sometimes speaks of things as they appear to human eyes; hence the use of the language of 'demon possession' in the New Testament. Demons don't exist, but the miracles of healing mental illness are described from the viewpoint of a human observer. This principle must be remembered when reading the account of creation.

5:6 This was the first time in which the curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 began to be realized upon Israel. "Your highways shall be desolate" (Lev. 26:22) is alluded to here.

5:11 *His rule in Israel*- Israel at this time were the Kingdom of God on earth, a Kingdom which was overthrown when they repeatedly refused His Kingship over them (Ez. 21:25-27) and which will be re-established at Christ's return (Acts 1:6).

5:13 The coming down of Yahweh is paralleled with the coming down of His willing people. One theme of this victory is that God's people on earth acted in tandem with the Angelic movements in Heaven above.

5:14 Barak's victorious warriors were civil servants and writers, not military men; in the same way as God used goldsmiths and traders to do the work of builders and engineers to rebuild Jerusalem's walls at the time of Ezra. God often uses those not suited to a particular job to do it, because the victory must always be of Him and not of human ability.

5:19,20 The reference is to the Angels fighting on Israel's behalf. If we walk in step with the Angels, success is assured. Here, Israel's fighting is paralleled with the Heavens and stars [=Angels, Rev. 1:20] fighting for them. The Lord of Hosts of Angels was working in tandem with the hosts of Israel. And it's the same for the new Israel. Heb. 12:22 speaks of how we, the hosts of the church, are paralleled with hosts of Angels.

5:20 The Hebrew for 'courses' is almost identical with that for 'ladder' in the account of Jacob's vision of a ladder of Angels; it strictly means a 'staircase'. See on 4:14; 5:19,20.

5:23 *To help Yahweh*- The fact that God so loves us is itself a limitation to Him. Because in any relationship, one person usually loves more than the other. And the one who loves the most- which is unquestionably God- has the least power. This is why He, the more powerful in physical terms, speaks with such language of limitation. In a sense God requires not help from man; and yet in another sense He has delegated His work to us, and limits His achievements according to what we are willing to do.

5:24 *Blessed above women*- Lk. 1:28,42 alludes here, as if Mary was already as Jael who had killed Sisera, an incident typical of the Christ's destruction of sin with the hammer of God's word. Mary is tied up with her son's victory- for He was part of her.

6:2 The Israelites who fled to the dens and caves at this time are described as heroes of faith because of what they did (Heb. 11:38). And yet their domination by the Philistines was a result of their idolatry. They were idolatrous, and yet some had faith; and it was this faith which was perceived by God. God is so eager to perceive spirituality and faith amongst His people, despite their weakness in other areas; we should have the same positive attitude to each other.

6:12 *You mighty man of valour*- Gideon's constant need for Divine reassurance indicates he wasn't so brave; but God addressed him according to his spiritual potential. He does the same with us, hence the challenges He sometimes gives us which appear far beyond what we feel capable of.

6:12,13 We need to realize that God deals with us as individuals. No matter how functional and holy, or dysfunctional and evil, is our church, we are still treated by the Father as His individual children. So many have struggled with this, tending to see themselves rather as inevitably part of a community, faceless cogs in a machine. And this is actually quite attractive to humanity- hence the popularity of Roman Catholicism. God told Gideon: "Yahweh is with you" [you singular], and yet

Gideon responds: "Oh, my Lord, if Yahweh is with *us*..." (:13). Gideon had to be taught that God saw him as a separate, unique individual, and didn't deal with him automatically merely as part of a community as a whole. But it was a slow process. When Gideon saw in a dream a man saying that God had delivered Midian into *his* [singular] hand, Gideon then tells Israel that God had delivered Midian into *their* hands (7:14,15). He still found it so hard to believe that God treated *him* as so important to Him. It could be that Gideon intentionally misunderstood the offer of personal strengthening by arguing back that if Yahweh is really with *us*, then why are they suffering so much (6:13). He flinched at the personal call of his Angel to action- just as we can, seeking instead to take refuge behind the community. Yet God Himself turns to Gideon and bids him "go in the strength of this One"- the Hebrew grammar referring to the Angel. And this is the same call to us- to go in the strength of the Angel which goes before us, and seek to replicate Him, Heaven's plan for us, on this earth. And God backed up this call to Gideon to follow the Angel by saying he should go out in faith, because "I will be with you" (:16)- a direct quotation from the Angelic manifestation to Moses in Ex. 3:12. It's an interesting exercise to follow the parallels between the Angelic commander of Yahweh's armies, and Joshua as the human commander of them on earth. And one doesn't have to be a military leader in iron-age Israel to feel that same call to follow the Angel.

6:13 Gideon knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (as in 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). This opens up our understanding of Christ's cry from the cross "Why have You forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46). It seems He was so identified with us that He genuinely felt He was bearing the punishment for sin as a sinner; thus although He never sinned, He genuinely felt as a sinner, so that not even our sin means that Christ can't empathize with us.

6:31 Joash told the Baal worshippers to let Baal plead for himself, rather than them pleading for him. He was saying that they were assuming that they had to 'play God' for Baal; they had to manifest the god they thought existed. Joash says that if Baal really exists, he himself will act for himself, openly. And this of course is where the One True God excels; He does act for Himself, and doesn't rely *solely* upon manifesting Himself through men in order to achieve anything. He doesn't need us to as it were apologize for Him through 'apologetics'; He Himself is witness unto Himself regardless of us.

7:4 God said that He would try / judge the people with Gideon at the waters- but they effectively judged themselves by deciding with their own freewill whether to kneel down [as before an idol?], or lap. Idols were worshipped by kneeling before them, and perhaps those who lapped rather than knelt were the minority with sensitive consciences to Yahweh, not wanting to even 'go there' by even vaguely appearing to have anything in common with idolatry.

7:10 Gideon's constant need for reassurance is found throughout the record. Yet God knew that potentially, Gideon was a brave, faithful servant of His (6:12); and yet He made concessions to Gideon's weakness and need for human company, whilst at the same time strongly teaching him that God saves by the few and the weak (:7). He works in the same way with us, teaching and stretching us whilst sensitive to our weaknesses and fears.

7:12 Saul tried to copy Gideon in his own fighting with his enemies (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5). We too should be inspired by Gideon's victory in our battles. See on 13:15.

7:14,15- see on 6:12,13.

7:19 *They had but newly set the watch*- This was humanly speaking the worst time to attack, when the guards were fresh and alert. Likewise going in to battle cumbered with pitchers and trumpets rather than weaponry was a sign of trusting in God for victory rather than human strength. God's battle plans often specifically require us to attain victory in a way which is foolish and weak in human terms.

7:22 God so often destroyed mighty armies by setting them against each other. Division is not only a human work, but is used by God to destroy communities which displease Him.

8:3 *Then their anger was abated*- The Proverbs are full of allusion to Israel's earlier history; Prov. 15:1 "a soft answer turns away wrath" clearly alludes here. Gideon could've responded that they could've come to help him in his hour of need but chose not to, and now wanted to share the glory of the victory. But he speaks humbly to them. We don't always have to state truth as it is; rather there are times when we must follow the things which make for peace with people, however wrong they may be (Rom. 14:19). See on 12:2.

8:6 This was the exact spirit of Israel's suspicious cousins when they were on their way from Egypt to Canaan (Num. 20:17,18). They should have learnt the lesson from Divine history.

8:23 Here we again see how Israel were God's Kingdom on earth; this Kingdom was overturned when the last king of Judah was removed (Ez. 21:25-27) and will be re-established on earth at Christ's return (Acts 1:6).

8:24-27 When Gideon received the golden earrings of the Ishmaelites, his mind should have flown back to how golden earrings were turned into the golden calf (Ex. 32:2). He was potentially given the strength to resist the temptation to turn them into an idol. But he must have blanked out that Biblical precedent in his heart; he ignored his spiritual potential, just as we are tempted to do so often.

8:27 Twice in 1 Timothy, Paul speaks about a snare; the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7), and the snare of wanting wealth (6:9). The desire for wealth in whatever form is the very epitome of the devil, our internal sinful tendencies which we must struggle against. The idea of a snare is that it results in a sudden and *unexpected* destruction. The implication is that those who are materialistic don't realize that in fact this is their besetting sin, and therefore their rejection in the end because of it will be so tragically unexpected. It's rather like pride; if you're proud and you don't know it, then you really are proud. And if we're materialistic and don't know it, we likewise really have a problem. The idea of riches being a snare connects with frequent references to idols as Israel's perpetual snare (Ex. 23:33; Dt. 7:16; Jud. 2:3; 8:27; Ps. 106:36; Hos. 5:1). Paul's point is surely that the desire for wealth in our generation is the equivalent of idolatry in the Old Testament.

8:30 Although Heb. 11:32 speaks of Gideon as one of the faithful who will be resurrected to live eternally in God's Kingdom on earth at Christ's return, it seems that he rested on the laurels of earlier spiritual victories, and in later life became complacent. Although this is a failure we should avoid, we are comforted by God's grace in still accepting Gideon.

9:7 *Listen to me... so that God will listen to you*- Jotham was speaking prophetic words from God. Insofar as we hear God's word, so He will hear our words in prayer; if His words abide in us, we shall know His will, and our will becomes His will, and thereby our prayers according to His will are heard (Jn. 15:7). See on 13:9.

9:9,10 People of true integrity will get on with what they are obviously called to do by God, rather than seeking leadership for the sake of it, swaying around in a light and meaningless way above others.

9:18 *You... have slain his sons*- Abimelech personally had slain Gideon's sons, but the people of Shechem had enabled it by their lack of resistance. The Bible doesn't teach 'guilt by association', but there is also a sense in which communities are counted as guilty for allowing evil to be perpetrated by individuals.

9:23 *God sent an evil spirit*- To say that demons were cast out of someone is to say that they were cured of a mental illness, or an illness which was not understood at the time. People living in the first century tended to blame everything which they couldn't understand on imaginary beings called 'demons'. Mental illness being hard to understand with their level of medical knowledge, the people spoke of those afflicted as 'demon possessed'. In Old Testament times, an evil or unclean spirit referred to a troubled mental state (as here and 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:10), in that the 'spirit' often refers to the mind or disposition. Note that in every Old Testament reference to evil spirits, they were sent *by God*, not a personal, sinful 'Satan' being.

God is capable of sending a spirit of disunity between people, as He did to Egypt (Is. 19:1,2,14). God created the division between Israel and Judah as a punishment for their apostasy. Whilst division between people is a work of the flesh, it's also true that God confirms people in the divisions they wish to have, and He does this as a punishment. There are times when people who have an existing disagreement encounter situations which involve genuine misunderstanding and unfortunate coincidence of circumstances which confirm their division yet further; and this 'extra' factor in their relationship breakdown is sent by God. In this sense stubborn hearts are also sent from God (Ps. 81:13); God can work positively and negatively directly upon the human heart. Likewise God confirms a desire for unity amongst His people.

9:27 This was some kind of dedication of the harvest to Baal; yet God had commanded that the firstfruits of the harvest should be given to Him, and His people should rejoice before *Him* (Lev. 19:23-25). We see here how Israel appropriated pagan rituals and mixed them with Yahweh worship, in the same way as an apostate church took the pagan Winter solstice festival of December 25 and applied it to Jesus. We too are ever tempted to worship our own flesh in the guise of Yahweh worship- e.g. we may gossip, kidding ourselves that this is in the defence of God's Truth (as if it needs any defence by us); hoard huge wealth under the excuse we may one day use it for God.

9:54 Abimelech therefore knew that it was a woman who had thrown the millstone; presumably he had looked up at her and seen her and assumed that a woman could never kill him as a man. His despising of the person of another and assumption of intrinsic superiority because of his gender led him to his death.

9:56 Abimelech appeared to have had a very blessed and successful life; but the lesson of the story is that finally, sin catches up with us and will have its judgment, if not in this life, then at the day of judgment when Christ returns.

10:13 *I will save you no more*- But they begged Him, and He did. Likewise in Hosea, He said He would love them no more, but just couldn't bring Himself to do it (Hos. 9:15; 14:4). These aren't



contradictions, but rather a window onto the passion and emotion of God; how His love is greater than His anger with sin. And this God is our God.

10:16 *His soul was grieved*- There is in the Hebrew text here something which defies translation. We read there that God was so hurt by Israel's sufferings that in sympathy with them, "His *nephesh* ["soul"] was grieved / shortened" or expended. The phrase is used in 16:16 and Num. 21:4 about death or the diminishment of life. God's pain was such that this was how He felt, because He so internalized the sufferings of His people. And how much more in the death of His Son? He even feels like that for the sufferings of Gentiles. As something of each of us dies in the death of those we love, so "God was in Christ", sharing in His sufferings and death. It was not of course that God died. But He fully shared in the sufferings of His Son unto death. We also see here how God truly takes no pleasure in punishing His children; eternal conscious torment of the wicked isn't a Bible teaching (Ez. 18:32; 33:11).

11:2 Again we see how God worked to save Israel through a man whom others despised and rejected, looking forward to His Son, Jesus, the stone whom the Jewish builders rejected who became the corner stone (Mt. 21:42).

11:7,8 Israel's attitude to Jephthah was their attitude to God; they rejected Him, but turned to Him in times of trouble. The way Jephthah speaks in :7 and :12 suggests he appreciated this, and took comfort from it.

11:8 Both illegitimate children like Jephthah and Ammonites were excluded from Yahweh's congregation (Dt. 23:2,3). But God brought the Israelites to such desperation that they had to recognize that the letter of God's law couldn't save them. Jephthah could have reasoned that because his brethren excluded him, therefore he would have no passion for his own people and would certainly not fight for them. But he adopted, as we should, a more gracious perspective. Whatever the rejections suffered at the hands of God's hypocritical people, he still saw them as God's people and identified with them. This is a lesson for the many who have been unjustly excluded from congregations of God's people over technical issues which weren't their personal fault; this is no reason to be unfaithful to or cease to identify with God's people as a whole.

11:24 Jesus spoke about demons as if such things existed, even though He did not believe they did; for demons referred to idols, which have no real existence (1 Cor. 8:4). In a similar way, faithful Jephthah spoke of the idol Chemosh *as if* he existed.

11:27 We are in God's judgment presence in this life just as much as we will be in the last day. The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now (Mic. 7:4 Heb.). Jephthah understood this when he said that Yahweh the Judge *is* judge "this day". Because God *is* judge right now, this means we should realize that He will and does judge here and now.

11:35 **Jephthah** could have redeemed his daughter from the vow he involved her with (Lev. 27:4). But he decided in his mind: "I have made a vow to Yahweh and I can't go back on it". Actually he could have done; but he so firmly chose the higher level that it was as if there was no way back. Ps. 15:4, in evident allusion to Jephthah, describes those who will attain the Kingdom as fearing Yahweh, and swearing to their own hurt and changing not. Some may swear and change and attain the Kingdom; but we are invited to follow Jephthah to the highest level. Another possibility is that

Jephthah was ignorant of the Lev. 27:4 provision that he could rescind a vow. In which case we learn that someone can be of great faith and acceptability to God even if they are ignorant of part of His word. This shouldn't justify us in a careless attitude to His service, but rather should inspire our toleration and acceptance of our more ignorant brethren.

12:2 An identical thing happened to Gideon- see on 8:3. Gideon could've said the same as Jephthah, but instead gave a soft answer and turned away wrath (Prov. 15:1). Here, Jephthah answers the complaint on a purely factual level- and conflict ensued. We are perhaps left to conclude that we can answer provocation in either of these two ways- it's not a moral issue, it's totally our choice, but we can avoid conflict if we take the "soft answer" route.

12:6 *Shibboleth* means 'the river', so presumably the Gileadites made them ask if they could cross 'the river'.

12:8,10 The double connection of Ibzan with Bethlehem exemplifies how all the judges- the Hebrew word means 'saviours'- were types of Jesus, the ultimate 'saviour' of God's people. The Hebrew form of "Jesus" means 'Yahweh is saviour'.

13:5 Although he was to be the beginning of serious deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, the whole story of Samson is prefaced by the fact that during the 40 years of Samson's ministry (15:20;16:31), "Yahweh delivered (Israel) into the hand of the Philistines" (:1). It is emphasized in 14:4 that "at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" (see too 15:11). The point is hammered home in 15:20: "He judged Israel in the days of the Philistines for twenty years". God's intention was that Samson was to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but somehow he never rose up to it. They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. One interpretation of his life is that he made a few sporadic attempts in red hot personal zeal, confirmed by God, to deliver Israel. But he never rose up to the potential level that God had prepared for him in prospect. And yet for all this, he was accepted in the final analysis as a man of faith. This provides comfort not only to us in our weakness, but assists us in more positively and hopefully perceiving others whose weaknesses are so apparent to us. When she relayed the incident to her husband, Samson's mother omitted to repeat the part of the Angel's conversation about Samson delivering Israel from the Philistines (:7)- perhaps because she didn't believe that her child would be capable of this. And perhaps this was a factor in his failure to achieve what God had intended for him.

13:7 It may be possible to understand that the breaking of his Naziriteship was yet another way in which he never lived up to his God-given potential. He was "a Nazirite unto God from the womb to the day of his death". Yet he broke the Nazirite vow by touching dead bodies and having his hair shaven (Num. 6:6). This may mean that he chose to break God's ideal intention for him, to take a lower and lower level of service to God until actually he had slipped away altogether. This is the problem with eagerly making use of God's concessions to human weakness. However, it may be that God counted *his desire* for the high standard of Naziriteship to him. He saw him as if this never happened, in the same way as He saw Abraham as if he had offered up Isaac, even though ultimately he didn't (Heb. 11:17; James 2:21). Intention, not the human strength of will to do the act, seems to sometimes be what God earnestly looks for.

13:8 *The child who will be born*- We see here Manoah's respect and belief of his wife's word, which he accepted as God's word. When a wife says she is pregnant because an Angel visited her- it's quite

something for the husband to believe that, especially in a culture which stereotyped women as untruthful and likely to be unfaithful. Manoah's example likely inspired Joseph centuries later when Mary said the same. Manoah's respect of his wife's word was again put to the test in :9,10.

13:9 *God listened to the voice of Manoah*- His hearkening to *God's* word led to God hearing *his* word in prayer- see on 9:7. Manoah asked for the prophet (whom he thought the Angel was) to come again and tell them how to train their new child. His prayer was answered- but actually, his request wasn't specifically dealt with. The Angel came- not a prophet, as he asked- and confirmed to Manoah that really his wife was going to have a child. The spirit behind his request was understood and answered, rather than the actual words which he spoke.

**13:15** The record of Samson and his parents has a large number of situations where he was connected into the experience of those who had gone before; they were intended to learn the lessons, as we are to turn God's word into flesh, making the historical accounts have practical relevance to life today. Consider: Manoah's desire to detain the Angel (cp. Gen. 18:5). Manoah's desire to detain the Angel and offer sacrifice was exactly that of Gideon (6:18). His belief after he had seen the Angel ascend (13:20 = 6:21), and his subsequent fear, were again expressed in the words of Gideon (13:21,22 cp. 6:22). As Gideon was, perhaps subconsciously, the hero of Manoah, so Samson followed his father's spirituality in this (see on 14:1; 15:4). It seems he lived out parental expectation, and imbibed the spirituality of his father without making it his own. Born and raised believers, beware. See on :24; 14:1,3; 15:4,15,19; 16:24,25.

13:24 *The child grew, and Yahweh blessed him*- cp. Samuel, John, the Lord Jesus- all chosen from the womb.

13:25 The Spirit of the Lord had been troubling his conscience as to why the people of Dan had not followed up Joshua's victories, and had allowed themselves to be overrun by the uncircumcised. The only other references to "troubled" are in Gen. 41:8; Ps. 77:4; Dan. 2:1,3. The Spirit of God worked with Samson's spirit, so that it was troubled as he went for his solitary walks of meditation.

14:1 Judah also did wrong in Timnah (14:1) with a woman, and was deceived and shamed by her (15:1 = Gen. 38:17). Earlier Scripture, which it seems Samson well knew and appreciated, was crying out to Samson to take heed. But he was blind to the real import of it all. See on 13:15.

Samson "went *down*" to take a Philistine girl for wife (:1,5,7,10); and yet by doing so he was seeking an opportunity to slay Philistines. He may well have had in mind the sustained emphasis on the fact that Gideon went *down* to destroy the Midianites (7:9,10,11,24). He went down morally and physically, and yet he justified this by thinking that as Gideon went down physically, so would he. Such is the complexity of the process of temptation.

14:2 It could be argued that because the father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (12:9; 15:2; Gen. 24:3-9; Neh. 10:30), therefore Samson's father was equally guilty for Samson's 'marriage out'. Many of the commands against intermarriage were directed to parents, commanding them not to give their children in intermarriage.

14:3 The disappointment of Samson's parents cp. that of Esau's (cp. Gen. 26:35; 27:46; 28:1). See on 13:15.

"Is there never a woman among the daughters of your brothers" implies that she wasn't the first one; he had often got involved with Philistine girls down in the valley, despite his conscience for Yahweh troubling him as he walked alone on the heights (13:25 Heb.). Samson gave no good answer to his parents: simply "Get her for me; for she is right in my eyes" (repeated in :7 for emphasis- he really did fall for the lust of the eyes). This insistence rather than explanation would suggest a bad conscience in Samson. Likewise the crowd only shouted out the more when asked why and for what crime they wished to crucify Jesus (Mt. 27:23). But she was 'right in his eyes' not for beauty but in the sense that 'she suits my purpose' (Heb.). The same Hebrew is used not concerning beauty but rather utility in 1 Sam. 18:20; 2 Sam. 17:4; 1 Kings 9:12. The way in which Samson set up the riddle, almost expecting that they might tease it out of him through his wife, the way in which he agreed that if they did this, he would give them the clothes of 30 Philistines... it all suggests that Samson set the whole thing up to seek an opportunity against the Philistines.

14:4 The whole question of Samson's marriage is overshadowed by the fact that "It was from Yahweh"; He used this failure to deliver His people. There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. However, it is more likely that God worked through Samson's wrong desires, through his human weakness, to bring about God's purpose and glory.

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

*To the vineyards-* Why did he as a Nazirite go for a walk in vineyards, among the forbidden fruit? This was typical of him: a great zeal and understanding, mixed with a desire to walk as close to the edge as possible, and to ultimately have a little of both. He had a fascination with vineyards, which the record brings out. Like an ex-alcoholic staring at the bottles in the shop 'just out of interest', so Samson fooled about with what was forbidden- just as we all tend to. He later teased Delilah to tie him with seven "cords" (16:7), the Hebrew word implying made from a vine. He just would mess with the forbidden. The way he burnt up those vineyards in 15:5 may have been as a result of realizing that the answer lay in total devotion and rooting out of temptation; cutting out the eye that offends.

14:6 Samson's zeal to deliver Israel was confirmed by God, in that he was given gifts of Holy Spirit in order to enable him to deliver Israel. However, this doesn't mean that he himself was

a man rippling with muscle. The Philistines wanted to find out the *secret* of his strength; it wasn't that he had such evidently bulging muscles that the answer was self-evident. He told Delilah that if his head were shaved, he would be like any other man (16:17). He was therefore just an ordinary man, made strong by the Father after the pattern of the Saviour he typified. The stress is on the way in which the Spirit came upon Samson (14:6,19; 15:14), as it did on other judges (3:10; 6:34; 11:29). The New Testament gifts of the Holy Spirit were likewise for specific things at specific times, and were withdrawn once the intended work had been done.

14:10 Samson was a Nazirite to God (i.e. in God's eyes?) all his life (13:7)- although he broke his Naziriteship by contact with dead bodies (14:19; 15:15 cp. Num. 6:6) and probably here by drinking wine at his wedding ("drinking feast"). This was not only imputed righteousness, but God counting the essential intentions of a weak willed man to him as if he had actually achieved what he fain would do.

14:16 "Why should I tell *you*" implied that his wife should expect that he was closer to his Hebrew parents than to her. Gen. 2:24 taught that a man must leave his parents and cleave to his wife in marriage; she must be closer to him than them. It could be that by saying this, Samson was reminding her that he didn't see their relationship as full marriage; he was only using her (cp. how he 'used' a Philistine as his best man, :20). Yet he did what only days before had been unthinkable: he told her his finest and most personal secret, which he wouldn't even tell his dear parents. Such is the fickleness of our nature. Yet it seems no accident that he chose Timnah, 'a portion assigned'- to Israel. This was part of the land promised to Dan, but which they had allowed the Philistines to overrun (Josh. 19:43,47).

14:18 They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (:12). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They ploughed behind his wife as a heifer, and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (:18).

14:19 When he slew the thirty men at Ashkelon, as he seemed to have planned right at the start in his seeking occasion against the Philistines, he was burning with anger. His motive was partly bitterness and the revenge of a man humiliated and deceived by a woman; but his slaughter of the Philistines was also done in faith (Heb. 11:32-34), with God given strength to confirm his faith. Our motives can be terribly mixed, even when doing God's work.

15:2 He seems angry that he had let himself fall too deeply for that Philistine girl (14:19), and "utterly hated her" (15:2). He transferred his anger with himself onto someone close to him; and we must beware we deal with our guilt and sin by repentance, rather than transferring it onto another and harshly punishing them for our own sin. Yet Samson really loved that girl (14:3,17; 15:1,7,11), even though he also hated her (15:2; he must have gone through this process again with Delilah in the time that led up to her final betrayal). This true love for her makes Samson's marriages look more questionable.

15:3 He burnt those vineyards in a desire to be "blameless in regard to the Philistines". The same word is translated unpunished, guiltless, innocent, clean, acquitted; as if he knew he had sinned, but believed that by further fighting of Philistines he could gain his forgiveness. He had to be brought to the shame of Gaza Prison to learn that forgiveness was by absolute faith,

not works and hatred of this present world, nor by transferring our sin and deserving of judgment onto others.

15:4 As the Spirit came upon Gideon (6:34), so it is described as coming upon Samson (14:6). It seems that when Samson visits his wife with a kid and uses this as an excuse to kill many Philistines, this was planned by him to reflect Gideon's zeal. The way Gideon brought a kid to Yahweh (6:19) may reflect how Samson came with a kid (15:1). He then takes 300 foxes and puts firebrands in their tails. Why 300? Surely this was in conscious imitation of how Gideon took 300 men and put firebrands in their hands, and with them destroyed God's enemies (7:16). The connection between the faithful 300 and the foxes could suggest that in Samson's eyes, he didn't even have one faithful Israelite to support him; he had to use animals instead. As Gideon "went down" to destroy God's enemies (7:9), so Samson justified his 'going down' to the Philistines to take their women, as well as to destroy their warriors (14:1,5,7,10). As Gideon was somehow 'separate from his brethren' in his zeal, so was Samson. And yet Samson seems to have copied just the externalities of Gideon; not the real spirit. And therefore as Gideon foolishly multiplied women to himself in the spiritual weakness of his middle age, so perhaps Samson saw justification for his attitude. 'If heroic Gideon could indulge the flesh in this area, I surely can'. He fell into our common trap: to compare ourselves amongst ourselves, to measure ourselves against human standards as we find them among the contemporary brotherhood (2 Cor. 10:12). See on 13:15.

15:5 Burning up the corn and vineyards of the Philistines was in conscious allusion to how the law stipulated that a man who did this to his Israelite neighbour must make retribution (Ex. 22:5). He was emphasizing that these people were *not* his neighbours, they were not in covenant relationship, and he openly showed that he treated them accordingly. Likewise he took vengeance on the Philistines (15:5; 16:28), when the Law taught that Israel were not to take vengeance (same word) *on each other* (Lev. 19:18), but could do so on their enemies (Num. 31:2; Dt. 32:43 cp. Josh. 10:13).

15:11 *As they did to me, so have I done to them*- If we ask 'What exactly did they do to him? What did they kill and burn of his?', the answer must be 'His wife'. He perhaps felt that she was worth hundreds of them, and the burning of their livelihood, causing famine as a result, was what they had done to him emotionally. Yet it is curious how he loved the Philistines and yet hated them; was humble and yet had too high an opinion of himself. We see the same contradictions of human nature within ourselves. The Philistines had earlier said that they wanted to take Samson "to do to him as he did to us" (:10). And Samson replies in the same primitive way: that he only did to them what they did to him. It seems that Samson spoke to them on their level. It seems his zeal for God was also very humanly motivated.

15:12 It should be noted that his strength was not somehow magically associated with his hair; his strength went from him because Yahweh departed from him (16:19,20). He had to beg his own people not to try to kill him themselves (even whilst he had long hair), because he knew that the strength he had was only for certain specific purposes- i.e., to deliver God's people from the Philistines.

15:14 When he was strolling in the Timnah vineyards, a lion had come across him (14:5). It was only after it roared against him that the Spirit came upon him and enabled him to kill it. He had to take the first nervous steps towards that lion in faith, and then the Spirit came upon him and confirmed his actions. The fact he didn't tell his parents what he had done may not

only indicate his humility, but also suggests he was not naturally a strong man. To say he had just killed a lion would seem ridiculous (14:6). The Spirit likewise came upon him to kill the Philistines in Lehi (15:14). It wasn't a permanent strength. This is in harmony with the way in which the Spirit was used in the NT. The Spirit came upon the apostles and they were filled up with it, as it were, and then drained of it once the work was done; and had to be filled with it again when the next eventuality arose.

15:16 Samson slaying Philistines with a jawbone suggests Shamgar slaying Philistines with an ox goad (15:15 cp. 3:31). See on 13:15. Samson grabbed a jaw-bone and exalted that with *that* he had slain a thousand men at Lehi. This was a conscious allusion to Josh. 23:10 (and Lev. 26:8), that one faithful man would chase a thousand. It could be that he counted the bodies, or counted each man he slew, consciously trying to get up to 1,000 in order to fulfil the prophecy. Samson doesn't say that he alone killed the thousand men; he did it with the jaw-bone (coming from a Hebrew root meaning 'soft', 'weak'). This jaw bone is one of the seven weak things which are mentioned in Judges as being the tools of God's salvation: a left handed man (3:21); an ox goad (3:31); a woman (4:4); a nail (4:21); a piece of a millstone (9:53); a pitcher and trumpet (7:20).

15:19 Samson dying of thirst crying desperately for water recalls Hagar's experience (15:19 cp. Gen. 21:19). See 13:15.

16:1 When Samson decided to attack Gaza by going into a harlot's house, he may have been consciously imitating the way the spies played their part in Jericho's destruction. And yet it was once again only a surface imitation. He fell for the 'little of both' syndrome, justifying it under the guise of Scriptural examples. The warnings about not *looking* at a strange woman recall how Samson *saw* the Philistine girl in Timnah and the prostitute in Gaza (14:1; 16:1). The wicked woman lying in wait to kill the simple man (Prov. 23:25-27) is a clear enough reference to Delilah and her henchmen lying in wait in the bedroom. And yet, for all this reflection upon Samson, Solomon went and did *par excellence* according to Samson's well-studied folly. And we can do the same, in principle. There is this vast distance between knowledge and belief.

16:3 Samson went in to spend the night with the prostitute, but Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the city gate. If he went in to spend the night there, he presumably entered the house at around 7 or 8. He had what he wanted, and then lay there thinking, the record seems to suggest, and decided to not lay there all night as he planned, but get up and do God's work. Whilst it is unrecorded, surely there were prayers of deep and fervent repentance as he lay there? His conscience likewise seems to have struck him after he attempted to marry the Philistine girl, and also when he burnt up the vineyards. And so again here. He may have justified his behaviour by reference back (in his deep subconscious, maybe) to how the spies sought to destroy Jericho by entering the city and lodging with a whore. We must ever examine our motives.

16:7 *Cords*- see on 14:5.

16:9 *Samson should have already learnt*. As his first wife had vexed her with her words to tease his secret from him, so Delilah did. As the Philistines laid wait for Samson as he lay with the whore in Gaza (16:2), so they laid wait in Delilah's bedroom (16:9). He had already repented of using God's service as an excuse for satisfying his own flesh in the incident with the Gaza prostitute. He had

bitterly walked away from his first Philistine wife. He burnt down the vineyards, recalling how he had foolishly strolled in them as a Nazirite. He must have looked back and seen how he had played with fire. And now, he goes and does it all again. He goes to the valley of Sorek, 'choice vines', and Samson falls for Delilah, 'the vine'. He went down to the vineyards again; the Nazirite tried to take fire into his bosom again.

16:13 "If *they* tie me..." (:7) now changes to "If *you* [*singular*]" ; he knew beforehand that she would betray him, although couldn't admit it to himself. And so we see the complexity of Samson's situation. It was not that his telling of the secret to Delilah was necessarily a sin in itself. He trusted her and yet knew on another level she would betray him. This is just a psychological condition. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). A man can know something about someone on one level, but in love act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires.

16:17 The question arises: why did Samson tell Delilah that if his hair was cut, he would become weak? Surely he must have known within him that she would do it, in line with past experience? He went out as before to fight the Philistines, surely aware that he had been shaved, and yet assuming God would still be with him. He had come to realize that his long hair was not the real source of his strength, on some kind of metaphysical level. He saw that his strength was from the Spirit of God, not long hair or Naziriteship. He went out knowing, presumably, that his hair had been shaven, and yet still assumed he would have God's strength. And even when his hair began to grow again, he still had to pray for strength (:28). He fell into the downward spiral of reductionism. He figured that if his hair was shaved, well it was no big deal. He was supposed to be a Nazirite all the days of his life, and yet perhaps he came to reason that because he had touched plenty of dead bodies, he therefore needed to be shaved anyway (Num. 6:9). He thought that therefore God would accept him in principle as a Nazirite even though he had broken the letter of Naziriteship, and therefore losing his hair was only a surface level indicator of spirituality. And yet there is also good reason to think that there was an association in Samson's mind between his hair and his God-given strength. For why did he "tell her all his heart" by saying that if he were shaved, he would lose his strength? And of course, when his hair was cut off, then his strength went. Samson saw a link between being a Nazirite and having strength (:17). When Samson went outside from Delilah and shook himself as he usually did, was he not shaking his hair free before attacking the Philistines, as if he saw in his hair the source of his strength?

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



God intended, to the point that he ended up justifying sin as righteousness. The idea of binding the strong man (Mt. 12:29) must surely look back to Samson. This means that the Lord saw Samson at that time as the very epitome of Satan, even though ultimately he was a man of faith (Heb. 11:32). Thus the Spirit doesn't forget a man's weakness, even though ultimately he may be counted righteous.

16:22 He only ground in the prison a short time, until the great sacrifice was offered to Dagon in thanks for Samson's capture. In that time, his hair grew- but not very long, in such a short time (no more than months, 16:22,23). The growth of his hair is to be associated with his renewed determination to keep the Nazirite vow. He was reckoned by God as a lifelong Nazirite (15:7); the time when his hair was cut was therefore overlooked by God. His zealous repentance and desire to respond to the gracious way in which God still recognized him as a lifelong Nazirite, although he wasn't one, inspired him to a real faith and repentance. It was this, not the fact he had some hair again, which led to God empowering him to destroy the palace of Dagon.

16:24 Gentiles praising their gods, mocking Yahweh, and then suddenly being destroyed (16:24) was a scene repeated in Dan. 5:4. See on 13:15.

16:25 Samson suddenly called up out of the prison house (16:25) cp. Joseph (Gen. 41:14), John (Mt. 14:9). See on 13:15.

16:30 Samson's desire to die with the Philistines could be read as suicidal. In this case, he had elements of weakness at the end, and yet he was accepted as dying in faith. Or it could be understood that he wanted to die because he believed that through his death, he would achieve God's plan for taking the gates of his enemies. In this case he would have had the spirit of Christ. Samson's death plea for vengeance against the Philistines for his two eyes (:28) sounds woefully human. In some ways, for all the intensity of weeping before God in repentance (16:28 LXX), Samson had not progressed much from his attitude in 15:7, over 20 years before- where he once again had admitted that his motive for 'seeking occasion against the Philistines' was partly just personal revenge. The spirit of not avenging oneself but leaving it to God to do was evidently something he never quite rose up to in his life (Rom. 12:19). Although it seems to me it was wrong, and betrayed some unspirituality, yet it is taken as the epitome of the desire of all the faithful for vindication through the coming of Christ (Rev. 6:10).

16:31 Heb. 11:34 says that that Samson was a man of outstanding faith- yet the record in Judges seems framed to paint Samson as a womanizer, a man who lacked self-control and who only came to God in times of dire personal need. But just imagine if only the negative incidents in our own lives, over a period of 40 years, were recorded. Anyone reading it would conclude that we were a complete hypocrite to claim to have any hope of salvation. In our self-examination, we sometimes see only this negative record; we fail to see that God has justified us, that in His record book, we are ranked among the faithful, as Samson was in Hebrews 11. Any reflection on Samson needs to bear this in mind. He seems to have lived the rest of his life full of faith and zeal- although I this doesn't in any way minimize the mistakes he made.

17:3 We see here the continued theme of Judges- that the people confused serving the true God with serving idols. The man repents, he has a conscience; and his mother isn't an atheist, she's not rejected Yahweh; but their morality has become so confused. We see the same all around us today both doctrinally and practically, and we can easily be sucked into the same nexus of confusion unless we base our conscience, faith and understanding upon God's

revealed word. The fault for the situation is also put upon the fact there was no leadership, and people did what *they* felt was right rather than what God had declared in His word (:6). There is no 'light within', as the Proverbs frequently declare, the way that seems right to man is often not (Prov. 14:12; 16:25; 21:2).

17:10,11 Micah asked the young Levite, who was "unto him as one of his sons", to "be unto me a father and a priest" (note the paradox- the son is as a father), resulting in others likewise asking him to "be unto us a father and a priest" (18:19). The point is, no matter how unqualified a person may be for the job, they may be pressed into being leaders because that's what nominally religious people so desperately need. There's a desire in most people for religious leadership rather than forging a direct relationship with God through personal response to His word and accepting His system of mediation between Him and us, which in our day is through His Son.

18:2 Again we see the quasi spirituality of the people at this time; this sending out of spies was framed in the language of Joshua sending out spies and then taking the land. They likewise say that the land is "good" (:9) just as the faithful spies said; and their description of the land as lacking nothing good (:10) is quoting Moses' words about the land in Dt. 8:9. But these Danites hadn't taken the land assigned to them by Joshua (:1). Mixing the flesh and the spirit is the way to total destruction; unless we are completely devoted to God's ways we will fail.

18:6 The men ask him to enquire of "God" but he immediately replies that "Yahweh" is blessing their plans. He didn't know the true God in practice but he used all the right language. There are other examples of men assuming all too quickly that they are speaking on God's behalf (2 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kings 22:15-17). We aren't to assume that we instinctively, intuitively know what God's will is, but to base our view upon His revealed word.

18:19- see on 17:10,11.

18:24 *What else do I have*- This man's false religion meant everything to him; he was very religious, but didn't know the true God. Sincerity of devotion won't save us if we are devoted to the wrong understanding of God; those like Cornelius who sincerely seek the true God will find Him, but religious devotion of itself isn't serving God in spirit and truth as He requires (Jn. 4:24).

19:12 This man was likely an alcoholic (note he got drunk four days in a row, and took wine with him, :19), a polygamist and hard hearted and brutal toward his woman (he told her when unconscious and gang-raped to just get up and carry on the journey, :28). Yet he still had a religious conscience, and thought that separation from the Gentile world was important; we note that he emphasized the externality of his religious devotions in :18. But separation from the flesh must begin internally; it's no good to be separate from the world and yet live the life of the flesh in our private lives.

19:30 This was done so that all who received the parts of that broken body would "consider" and be motivated in response. It was designed to elicit the declaration of their hearts, and above all to provoke to concrete action. Splitting up a body and sharing it with all Israel was clearly a type of the breaking of bread, where in symbol, the same happens. Consider some background, all of which points forward to the Lord's sufferings: The person whose body was divided up was from Bethlehem, and of the tribe of Judah (:1); They were 'slain' by permission of a priest; They were dragged to death by a wicked Jewish mob; They were

“brought forth” to the people just as the Lord Jesus was to the crowd (:25); “Do... what seems good unto you” (:24) is very much Pilate language; A man sought to dissuade the crowd from their purpose- again, as Pilate. There should be a like effect upon us as we receive the emblems of the Lord’s body- the inner thoughts of our hearts are elicited, and we are provoked to action.

20:1 *As one man*- Repeated in :8,11. In the same way as disparate parties became united in killing Christ, so self-righteous anger against brethren who are scapegoated can produce an apparent unity (Lk. 23:12; Acts 4:26). But the parties soon go back to their anger with each other once the group they have set up as their common enemy is either destroyed or the situation moves on.

20:16 We read of men being able to sling stones and not miss “a hair’s breadth”- an idiom which of course isn’t literally true. The Bible uses such inexact language at times in that it uses human terms; which explains why the New Testament speaks of ‘demons’ as if they exist whereas elsewhere it shows clearly that they have no real existence.

20:23 Both sides were in the wrong. But God as it were lead the idolatrous and hypocritical Israelites further down the downward spiral. We learn from this that division amongst God’s people is in a sense sent from Him in the sense that He confirms divisive brethren in their position they wish to adopt, and even uses it to destroy communities which displease Him. Even with Gentile nations, His preferred manner of destroying their armies was to turn their swords against themselves.

21:2 This repentance of people who had many other weaknesses in their lives is similar to the situation in 17:1-4. It shows there is a religious conscience in people, no matter how far they stray from God. We should bear this in mind when we become discouraged in our preaching by the thought that ‘nobody’s interested’. People are, passively.

21:4 Peace offerings were offered in times of Israel's sadness and defeat (see too 20:26). In our traumas of life, we need to remember that the only thing that matters is our peace with God, the joyful fact that we have nothing separating us. As Israel made their peace offerings at those times, so we too should consider the possibility of breaking bread, perhaps alone, as we meet the desperate traumas of our lives.

21:5 Israel made oaths before Yahweh which they didn’t keep and yet God worked through their failure in order to preserve His people... we see here how God works through human self-righteousness, failure and hypocrisy, in order to do His work and save people. We likewise shouldn’t totally turn away from those guilty of such things but try to patiently work through them still to God’s glory.

21:24 *Each man did that which was right in his own eyes*- It was right that there was no human king in Israel, because God was their king. This statement may therefore not be a criticism, but rather an observation- that in the absence of a human king, the people were to make their own personal decisions about what was right and wrong, just as we should. The sad thing was that Israel turned away from God’s word and therefore lost a correct sense of right and wrong.

## RUTH

1:5 The simple message is that marriage out of the faith and leaving God's people- no matter how apostate they are- and going into the world, simply doesn't bring blessing.

1:8,9 Naomi uses the term "Yahweh" freely to her Gentile relatives; she was quite open about her faith, even though the Moabites had their own gods.

1:16 In Jn. 20:18, the risen Jesus stresses to the disciples that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God. He appears to be alluding to Ruth 1:16 LXX where Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God". This allusion would therefore be saying: 'OK I am of a different nature / people to you now, but that doesn't essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God'.

1:17 To swear by a god meant that the swearer had accepted that god as theirs. The fact Ruth swears by Yahweh means that she had accepted Yahweh as her God; thanks to the quiet witness of her mother in law. Ruth came to really love the God of Israel. She willingly decided to forego re-marriage after her husband died for the wonder of the fact she had been allowed in to the commonwealth of Israel. As it happened, this *is* a story with a happy ending. But she was prepared for it not to be. Note that humanly speaking, Naomi's life had been a disaster. If Ruth was looking for a God which gave His devotees present blessing, then it wasn't Yahweh; for all she had seen of Him was in the life of Naomi and her family. That woman had lost all her men, and thus become a nobody in the eyes of society. Naomi wasn't seeking any present benefit from her God; it must've been the relationship with God right now which Naomi had, His grace to her in spiritual terms, and the hope of the future Kingdom which must've so attracted her. And the attraction must've been in the example of Naomi, rather than in the pages of a book.

2:12 See on 3:7.

*A full reward*- 2 Jn. 8 quotes this in saying that the hard mental effort to know Christ and believe in Him will be given a 'full reward'. Here a 'full reward' is given to Ruth for working hard all day gleaning in the fields. It may be that this allusion was because "the elect lady" addressed by John was in fact a proselyte widow, like Ruth. But the point is, we have to *labour*, as much as one might work hard gleaning in the field all day, in order to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

2:14 Offering bread and wine was a sign of fellowship and acceptance. The fact we are invited to do this by the Lord Jesus is a sign that He eagerly accepts us and seeks fellowship with us.

2:20 *Near kinsman*- Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el*, redeemer (Is. 41:14; 43:14; 44:6,24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7,26; 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26,47-55). This is how close God becomes to us in Christ. Boaz was therefore manifesting God to Ruth by marrying her, in the same way as in Christian marriage the husband manifests Christ's saving work to the wife (Eph. 5:23).

3:7 Ruth is a wonderful example of a spiritually ambitious person. It was unheard of in those times for a woman to propose to a man; yet by coming to him, uncovering his feet and laying under his

mantle, she was stating that she wished to see him as a manifestation of God to her (:7,9 = 2:12). She went after him, following him (:10); the poor, landless Gentile aspired to be a part of a wealthy Jewish family, in order to fulfil the spirit of the Law. And she attained this.

3:16-18 It is hard to find women-only scenes in contemporary literature written during Biblical times. The women are presented in terms of the men with whom they inter-relate. Yet Elizabeth and Mary are recorded as having a conversation with no male present (Lk. 1:39-45); and there are other such passages in Scripture here in Ruth (1:6-2:2; 3:16-18; 4:14-17). In all these passages, the reader is invited to share the woman's perspective. It can hardly be said that the Bible is somehow anti-women, in fact God's acceptance of both male and female and deep recognition of the value of the human person, whether man or woman, marks it out as quite different from human literature of the time.

4:5 A man *had to* redeem the property of a dead relative in some cases by marrying his late brother's wife; but this would have resulted in polygamy (Boaz surely had other wives), thus creating a situation whereby one principle had to be broken (in this case, of one man : one woman as ordained in Eden), in order to keep another principle (to raise up children in love to your deceased brother). God has made spiritual life not always so black and white- in order that our personal ethical debates, our prayerfulness and reflection upon God's word, will result in our taking whatever decisions we do from a good motivation, rather than out of mere submission to a law we have no understanding of.

4:6 *Otherwise I will spoil my own inheritance*- He was concerned that if he had children by another woman apart from those he already he had, then his land which he would leave them as an inheritance would have to be split up between his existing children, and those children he would have by Ruth. It's clear from 2:3 that the fields were split up into strips, each strip belonging to different people. The best thing was to have one large field, rather than strips here and there. This nameless relative didn't want to spoil or break up his inheritance, he wanted to preserve it intact. He thought only of himself, not his brother. This man died and even his name wasn't preserved; yet Boaz who did care for his brother and was prepared to spoil or split up his physical inheritance received as it were an eternal inheritance, in that through Ruth he became the ancestor of Jesus (4:21).

4:15 Hezekiah had lamented that he would die without a seed (Is. 38:12), and so did those who had also become (in their minds?) eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom (Is. 56:3-8). There was that human desire for a seed, a "house" to perpetuate their name. But they are promised a name in God's house (family) in the Kingdom, better than of sons and daughters in this life (Is. 56:5). This alludes here, where Ruth is described as being better than sons to Naomi. In other words, the Ruth: Naomi relationship, featuring as it did a willingness to deny marriage to unbelievers for the sake of the God of Israel, is a type of *our* relationship with God.

## 1 SAMUEL

1:18 After praying for a child, Hannah went her way “and her face wasn’t sad any more” because she truly believed she would soon become pregnant. She’s a great example to us of believing and feeling that what we have prayed for, we have actually received (Mk. 11:24).

1:19 Hannah’s prayer of thanks is clearly the basis for Mary’s prayer; and Hannah had requested a child, and received it. As Hannah described herself as “our handmaid” (1 Sam. 1:18), so did Mary too (Lk. 1:38). God remembered His mercy in making Mary conceive (Lk. 1:54), just as God had remembered Hannah in answering her prayer (:19). And just as Hannah “rose up” and went to Ramah, so Mary “rose up” and went to Judea (Lk. 1:39). There is reason to think that Hannah too desired to bear Messiah. The lesson is that examples of prayer influence others, both in prayer and style.

2:3 Hannah had reflected upon God’s omniscience; and on this basis she tells Peninnah not to be proud and use hard words against her, exactly because of this. That He sees and knows all things should humble us and affect our speech.

*Yahweh is a God of knowledge, though actions be not weighed-* Although actions are not judged immediately and publically (“weighed”), they surely will be- because, quite simply, God knows.

2:6 Clearly *sheol* refers to the grave and not any place of eternal condemnation in fire.

2:12 *Men of Belial-* The idea is ‘sinful men’. In the Old Testament, sin was personified as ‘Belial’, so we shouldn’t be surprised if it’s personified as ‘the enemy’ or ‘satan’ in the New Testament.

2:24 *You make Yahweh’s people disobey-* We can spiritually *destroy* our brother, for whom Christ died (Rom. 14:15); we can undo the work of the cross for a brother who would otherwise be saved by it. We can make others sin (Ex. 23:33; 1 Kings 16:19). There is an urgent imperative here, to really watch our behaviour; e.g. to not drink alcohol in the presence of a brother whose conscience is weak.

2:25 *They didn’t listen to their father, because Yahweh intended to kill them-* God has an ability to confirm men in the path to destruction they chose to tread. The very experience of sin confirms sinners in that way: “the way of the wicked seduces them” (Prov. 12:26). The spiritual effect of God upon men over and above their own strength is indicated by this example (cp. Josh. 11:20; Jud. 14:4; 2 Chron. 10:15).

2:30 God is unashamed about the fact that He can change His stated purposes about people in response to human behaviour; the fact God does this is simply an indication of the extent to which He is sensitive to our actions and decisions.

2:32 *The wealth which I would have given Israel-* Some prophecies simply won’t come true because they refer to what God had potentially prepared for His people, but they disallow Him from giving them what He had intended. This is an example. Knowing this, women like Hannah clearly hoped and prayed that their sons would be Messiah (2:10 = Ps. 89:24); for they perceived that God’s purpose was open to such a thing.

3:13 Eli *did* rebuke his sons; but in God's eyes he didn't (cp. 2:24). He said words for the sake of saying words, but in his heart he didn't mean them. He honoured his sons above God, to make himself "fat with the best of all the offerings". The description of Eli as being fat surely reflects his guilt (2:29; 4:18). And yet he appeared on the surface to run his family life on a spiritual footing. Eli is presented as a kindly old man who had a heart for God but was too soft on his children; but God's judgment of him is much harsher, teaching us the serious consequence of sins of omission, and of allowing abuse to continue when it is in our power to stop it. Because Eli wouldn't restrain the abuse, he was seen as committing those very things which he failed to rebuke. Likewise the man who wouldn't discipline his wayward ox was to be treated like as if he had committed the crime the ox did, and therefore must die if the ox killed a man (Ex. 21:29).

3:18 When Samuel told Eli of the prophetic vision which he had received, Eli commented: "It is Yahweh". He meant 'It is the word of the Lord'; but he saw God as effectively His word. "The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of God" are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. Our attitude to God's word is our attitude to Him.

4:10 God wished to demonstrate by this defeat that mere religious tokenism wouldn't save anyone. Israel's tokenistic use of the ark, a mere wooden box, is similar to the way some use the crucifix and icons today. It is the essence behind the symbol rather than the symbol itself which we must understand and believe in. See on 5:9.

4:13 *His heart trembled for the ark of God*- The record emphasizes Eli's love for the ark; even after the shock of hearing that his sons had been killed, it was only when he heard that the ark had been taken that he had a stroke and died (:18). Likewise his daughter in law died with mourning for the ark on her lips (:22). But this love of the external things of one's religion (see on :10) wasn't the same as true spirituality. For all Eli's love of the things associated with the true God, he was severely condemned for not having the glory of God and care for His people at heart (see on 3:13). It's not difficult to love the external trappings of our religion- the church hall, the social events, the regular activities, the general ambience. But this isn't the same as true spirituality.

5:9 God didn't give Israel victory because they had the ark with them in battle, and yet He kills many Philistines because they have the ark with them. So strong was His desire to demonstrate that religious tokenism will not bring blessing, in fact the very opposite- it is the path to death (see on 4:10 and 4:13).

5:12 God has a sensitive heart even for the sufferings of unbelievers. He so hates to see any of His creation suffering. Those believers who fear God's final rejection should remember this; that He has a hugely sensitive heart. Note that as 'ascending to Heaven' is hyperbole and not literal (see too 2 Chron. 28:9; Ezra 9:6; Ps. 107:26), so likewise the language of 'falling from heaven' in verses like Is. 14:12-14 must also not be read literally.

6:9 *He has done us this great evil*- God is repeatedly described as the source of both good and "evil" in the sense of disaster; God is all powerful, and it isn't the case that all good comes from Him and all "evil" from some supposed 'Satan' figure. God creates both good and "evil" (Is. 45:5-7).

6:19 The men of Beth-Shemesh were smitten because they looked into the ark, probably because they wanted to find more jewels which the Philistines might have placed there (:15). In the face and presence of the things of the supreme glory of Yahweh of Israel, they scavenged around in a spirit of petty materialism- just as men gambled for the clothes of Jesus at the foot of His cross; they trampled upon the supreme holiness of God in their crazed fascination with wealth. And people are doing this all around us.

7:6 The pouring out of water before God symbolized the state of their hearts in repentance before God. Repentance is literally a re-thinking, something internal, a pouring out of self before God. Water poured on the ground can never again be gathered up where it was before; some permanent change happens every time we experience an episode of true repentance. Water being poured on the ground became a Hebraism for death (2 Sam. 14:14); in repentance, we recognize that we have sinned and ought to die for what we have done, but in the continued life given us by God's grace we will seek to live for Him.

7:9 As the Philistines closed in upon Israel, Samuel was busy offering up the burnt offering, symbolizing Israel's plea to God for help, with all the intensity of the suckling lamb crying to its mother- when the natural reaction would have been to think 'Enough of that, come on, do something practical now...'. We see here the supreme priority of prayer and the urgent intensity of powerful prayer. The desperate bleating of the suckling lamb was intended to be identified with Samuel's prayer.

8:3 Samuel failed as a father in the same way as his mentor Eli did, although he wasn't condemned for it as Eli was. The lesson is that even in later life, we are influenced by the examples we saw in the spiritual mentors of our youth. The power of influence is far greater than we imagine; we have more responsibility for our actions and examples than we think. Nobody lives life to and for themselves, because every life has such a powerful effect upon others (Rom. 14:7 and context).

8:7,8 Here is an example of the mutuality between God and man: 'They didn't reject you, they rejected Me, but they rejected you, in that you are with Me'.

8:8 Israel sinned not only by worshipping idols but by thereby omitting to worship God as He required. God is highly sensitive to human sin; sins of commission often lead to and involve sins of omission, which are equally significant to God.

8:11,12 Israel were told *three times* that Saul would have many chariots. If they were spiritually aware, they would have realized that by multiplying horses and chariots, he was going to be a King who ruled in studied disobedience to the Mosaic Law (Dt. 17:16-21). They were given the spiritual potential to grasp this. But they were already hard bitten in their rebellion, and this potential spiritual help went unheeded (although God still gave it to them potentially, even at a time when it seemed pointless. He is so *ever* willing to coax His people back!).

8:14 When God offered Israel a king, He did so with a series of warnings that this king would treat them just like the prophesied invasion of condemnation described in Dt. 28; he would take their sons, seed, vineyards etc. in just the same way. The links are unmistakable (8:14 = Dt. 28:30,33; 8:11,14 = Dt. 28:41; 8:15 = Dt. 28:38; 8:17 = Dt. 28:43). Through these allusions, Yahweh was saying to Israel: Do you want the condemnation for disobedience? And they answered 'Yes!'. And yet, in His grace, Yahweh still worked through the system of



human kingship to bring about His purpose of salvation with Israel. Thus through our unfaithful actions now we will be witnesses against ourselves at the final judgment (Mt. 23:31); indeed, in that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned *of himself* (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God.

8:22 God was Israel's King and they were His Kingdom. To reject Him as king was therefore to count themselves as not His Kingdom. And yet God still tried to work with them through the system of human kingship. Likewise, He didn't want a physical temple; but they wanted one, and so He came and dwelt in it and worked through it, but it wasn't His idea desire. God thus makes concession to human weaknesses, so eager is He to remain at work with us; and yet our use of those concessions often makes spirituality harder rather than easier. We should also learn to allow others some concessions to their human weaknesses- for God certainly does so with us.

9:15,25 What we hear in the ear, that we must preach on the housetops (Mt. 10:27). This is built on these verses, where God speaks in Samuel's ear, and then he speaks that word to Saul on the housetop. Jesus is saying that in essence, we are all in Samuel's position; we hear the word of this world's salvation, the word about "the Kingdom" as it was for Saul, and that very fact is in itself the imperative to overcome our natural reservations and share it with those for whom it is intended- even if, as with Saul, we may consider them unlikely and unspiritual hearers.

9:16 Their request for a human king was, as God Himself mightily demonstrated to them, an utter rejection of Him, and He grieved because of it. And yet when God gave them a King, He expresses His decision in quite a different tone- as if Saul would save them from the Philistines in response to the people's request to God. God speaks as if the gift of Saul was akin to the provision of Moses, to save poor Israel from their unwarranted persecution. Actually, Saul was slain by the Philistines- in His foreknowledge, the Almighty knew all about Saul. But in His pure grace, He doesn't reflect this in the way He speaks at this time. Another view would be that Saul could have saved Israel from the Philistines, that potential scenario had been enabled by God, but like so many people, he failed to live up to the potential God had created for him.

10:9 *God gave him another heart*- God is able to work directly on the human mind, giving us mindsets and attitudes which are more spiritual than we would otherwise have. He can make us "another person" (:7). But despite this will and ability of God to do this, Saul was ultimately untransformed, because he simply preferred the flesh.

10:19-21 It was God's wish that Israel would not have a human king; hence His sorrow when they did. Yet in the Law, God foresaw that they would want a human king, and so He gave commandments concerning how he should behave (Dt. 17:14,15). God foresaw their weaknesses and somehow provided for them, as He does with us. These passages speak of how Israel would choose to set a King over themselves, and would do so. Yet God worked through this system of human kings; hence the Queen of Sheba speaks of how *God* had set Solomon over Israel as King, and how he was king on God's behalf (2 Chron. 9:8). Israel set a king over themselves; but God worked with this, so that in a sense *He* set the King over them. However, by opting to make use of God's concessions to human weakness, real spirituality became harder to achieve. Thus it was harder to accept Yahweh as King if they had a human king demanding their allegiance.

10:27 *As though he had been deaf* – Much later, David describes himself as responding to criticism like this: “I as a deaf man, heard not” (Ps. 38:13). Yet he was alluding to how Saul, when likewise criticized by wicked men, “was as though he had been deaf” to their words. David learnt the secret of seeing the positive in our weak brethren, even in our persecutors, and he didn’t let all that was wrong with Saul interfere with this. He saw the good in Saul, he remembered that one good example he showed- and it empowered him to follow it. This not only develops and reflects humility, but it helps us cope with ongoing abusive situations without completely losing any sense of the value and significance of every human person- including the person of our abusers.

11:5 The call of God comes to us right in the midst of ordinary, mundane life. Gideon was called whilst in the middle of threshing wheat in a time of famine (Jud. 6:1), Saul whilst he was out looking for lost cattle (1 Sam. 9:10) and again whilst he was coming home from work one evening (1 Sam. 11:5); David whilst he was looking after the sheep; Samuel whilst he was asleep; Amos whilst he was leading the flocks to water (Am. 7:14); and see too 1 Kings 11:29; 19:16; 2 Kings 9:1-13,18. Christ likewise called men, arresting them with His radical call in the very midst of daily life, at the most utterly inconvenient moment, even the most humanly inappropriate moment- such as being on the way to your father’s funeral, or in the very act of casting a net into the sea.

11:11 Saul attacked in three groups because he was trying to imitate Gideon, whom he had as his spiritual hero: 1 Sam.11:11 = Jud.7:16; 13:2 = Jud. 7:8; 13:5 = Jud.7:12; 13:6 = Gideon offering before fighting Midian; 14:5,20 = Jud.7:22; 14:24 = imitating Gideon and his men going without food; 14:28,31 = Jud.8:4,5; 11:7 = Gideon killing his father's oxen. But merely replicating the outward actions of a faithful person doesn't of itself mean we are spiritually minded nor finally acceptable to God.

12:14 *With both you and the king*- If all Israel had been obedient, then Saul would have been too. If a majority are spiritually minded, this can at times and in some ways influence a potentially weaker minority; even though the reverse is more often true. And yet Saul made the people “follow him trembling” because they weren’t spiritually stronger than him (13:7).

12:14,15 Israel requested a human king. God was Israel's king, and therefore their desire was effectively a rejection of God and Israel's special relationship with Him. And yet God gave them a human king. If they had a human king, it was harder for them to be God's Kingdom, to personally realize that God was their King, that He was the one to whom they owed all allegiance and duty. And yet God gave them a human king, because this was the path they had chosen; and by so doing He in one sense pushed them down the downward spiral of disobedience because they had chosen this themselves.

12:20,21 If we don't serve God whole-heartedly, we will serve the idols of this present age. There's no third road.

12:23 It is an actual sin- albeit a sin of omission- to cease to pray for our brethren.

13:9 Are we going to be like those Israelites who offered a peace offering, when actually they were not at peace with God at all (see too 2 Kings 16:13; Prov. 7:14; Am. 5:22)? This is a thought worth bearing in mind as we approach the breaking of bread service.

13:13 *Yahweh would have established your kingdom in Israel forever* – God sets up amazing potentials for people, and yet they fail to achieve them. It must be so tragic for God, seeing all the wasted potentials of humanity. And yet this would explain His enthusiasm to confirm us in our attempts to rise up to the potentials He has enabled for us. God’s punishment of Saul may appear

severe, but Saul's actions obviously embodied a large amount of unspirituality which was beneath the surface.

13:14 *A man after His own heart*- The God whose ways are above our ways as far as Heaven is above earth can say that David was of the same mind as Himself. This shows the extent of God's humility, His enthusiasm to connect with man, and His eagerness to count our feeble spiritual mindedness for far more than it really is of itself.

14:6 Perhaps David was in fact "the young man who carried his armour". Saul also calls him "young man" in 17:58. There was evidently an intense spiritual and physical rapport between Jonathan and his armour bearer which was similar to that described between Jonathan and David. "I am with you according to your heart" (:7) has firm connection with David and Jonathan being described as having their souls knit together in 18:1. The record of David's battle with the Philistines in 2 Sam. 5:17-24 has certain similarities with the exploits of 14:8-11; as if, years later, David replicated his early adventure of faith. David already had a reputation in Israel for being "a mighty man of valour, a man of war" (16:18), even before the Goliath incident. This would be understandable if he had gone with Jonathan in chapter 14. His becoming *Saul's* armour bearer (16:21) would then be seen as a logical promotion from being Jonathan's armour bearer. David came to lead Jonathan, rather than the other way around. And yet Jonathan accepted this, recognizing his own weakness and David's spiritual superiority to him, without any jealousy. In this we see a wonderful humility. See on 18:3.

14:10 It is open to debate whether we should set up signs for God to fulfil. As we mature spiritually, it should become clearer and more intuitive to us from His word what we should do and how we should decide issues, without the agonies of indecision and dilemma.

14:20 *Every man's sword was against his fellow*- This was God's preferred method of destroying Israel's enemies in so many of the victories He gave them. Division within a community is therefore a sign of God's judgment of it; and those who justify and encourage division are therefore living out a position of condemnation.

14:33 Pointless following of legalistic obedience often leads people into sin because of their basic humanity.

14:37 In the same way as answered prayer reflects God's pleasure, so prayer which God doesn't respond to at all is one indicator of His displeasure (e.g. Saul's experience in 1 Sam. 14:37). This isn't to say that when we don't receive the answers we expect, then God hasn't responded. There's a difference between God *responding* to prayer and God *answering* prayer as we expect Him to answer.

14:39 *Even if it is Jonathan my son*- It would seem that Saul was purposefully manipulating circumstance in order to kill his own son. This is how far jealousy blinds eyes, breaks families and relationships and obsesses people beyond reason.

15:6 Guilt by association isn't a Biblical idea; in fact the very opposite is taught, and we should be careful not to practice this.

15:11 God tells Samuel of His rejection of Saul, and Samuel cries to Him all night. The implication is that Samuel was pleading with God to consider another future with Saul (see too :35; 16:1). Having stated His intentions, God is open to persuasion before He carries them out; that gap period is intended to inspire intense prayer and dialogue with God on our part.

15:17 Notice the links between Saul and Paul. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (10:11) was directly matched by 'Is Saul of Tarsus also among the Christians?'. The way Paul was let down through a window to escape persecution (Acts 9:25; 2 Cor. 11:33) was surely to remind him of what King Saul had done to David (see on 19:12). They were both Benjamites, and perhaps his parents saw him as following in Saul's footsteps. And it seems Paul was aware of this. The implication is that Paul consciously changed his name from Saul to Paul ('the little one'), consciously alluding to this statement that when Saul was little (Heb. 'the littlest one') in his own sight, God anointed Saul and made him the *rosh*, the chief, over Israel. Maybe Paul's parents intended him to be the *rosh* over Israel; and it seems he would have made it had he not been converted. Paul saw how he had persecuted Christ, as Saul had David. He saw the self-will within him as it was in Saul. Yet he went on to see how pride had destroyed a man who could have achieved so much for God. And he determined that he would learn the lesson from Saul's failure; so he changed his name to Paul, the little one. What influence his sustained meditation on one Old Testament verse had upon him! It affected some basic decisions in his life; e.g. the decision to change his name. There was a time when Saul felt he was 'the littlest one' (as demonstrated in 9:21; 10:22). Paul alludes to it when he says he is less than the *least* of all saints, *least* of the apostles, chief of sinners (1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15). He earnestly resolved to be like Saul was at the beginning. "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19) is surely a reference back to Saul's *disobedience* (:22). What Bible characters are we trying to consciously learn from? For the Bible is largely history, and the range of characters and situations recorded are chosen so that we can always find some Biblical precedent and guidance for whatever situation we are in (Rom. 15:4).

15:23 *Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh, He has also rejected you-* Our attitude to God's word is our attitude to Him; as we treat God's word, so He will treat us.

15:35 *Samuel mourned for Saul-* Any condemnation of the wicked by God or occasional separation from them which we are asked to make must be the result of much sorrow (see too Lev. 10:6; 1 Cor. 5:2; Phil. 3:17-19). The idea of 'block disfellowship' - the cutting off of whole groups of believers because of their association with some more questionable ones - hardly enables 'mourning' and pleading with individuals as is required.

16:14 The "spirit" often refers to an attitude of mind (e.g. Dt. 2:30; Prov. 25:28; Is. 54:6; 61:3; Ez. 18:31; Mk.14:38; Lk. 2:40; 2 Cor. 2:13; 12:18; Eph. 4:23). The "evil spirit" refers to Saul's state of mind here; just as a "holy spirit" refers to a sanctified state of mind. The idea that 'evil spirits' refer to invisible cosmic beings isn't Biblical; they would hardly flee just because of how a man plays a harp. Notice that here the "evil spirit" was "from Yahweh" - this is emphasized (:14,15,16; 18:10); this attitude of the mind was sent by God, not a super-human evil being acting in radical opposition to God.

17:9 This conflict is prophetic of Christ's victory over sin on the cross (see on :54). The way that Israel failed to find a man to fight until David arose is exactly the language of the prophecies which speak of our inability to find a single man who could overcome sin, until Christ did so on the cross (Is. 41:28; 50:2; 59:16). There was a very real possibility that Christ like David could have failed [for He was man, not God Himself]- with the same disastrous consequences.

17:16 The faithful Israelite would have thought of the sacrifices being offered morning and evening, and would've reflected that they were powerless to give victory (cp. Heb. 10:4).

17:26 *What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine...?*- David asks this having just heard what would be done for the man who killed Goliath (:25); and then he asks it again (:30). The implication is that the offer of Saul's daughter he found motivating. As Saul's servant, from a poor family, he likely would've looked on at her from a distance, regretting that she was unreachable (18:23); and she was in love with him (18:20). Jonathan, her brother, was perhaps already his good friend (see on 14:6). Perhaps this looks forward to how Christ was motivated in His battle with sin by the thought of thereby winning us, His bride.

17:32 *Let no man's heart fail*- Just before Christ destroyed the power of sin on the cross, He assured us in similar words (Jn. 14:1,27).

17:35 *I went out after it and struck it, and rescued it out of its mouth*- This shows an unusual level of commitment to the sheep, after the pattern of the unusual shepherd in Christ's parable who risks His life in fighting a wild animal to save a sheep- no normal shepherd would do this. David not only prefigured Christ as the ultimately "good shepherd", but shows the value he attached to all God's creation.

17:40 *Five smooth stones*- He took five not because he thought he might miss a few times but because Goliath had four sons whom he likely intended to kill at the same time (2 Sam. 21:18-22; 1 Chron. 20:4-8). This was indeed spiritual ambition. But those four sons were killed later, by David's men; just as we are left with some aspects of Christ's victory against sin to follow up on ourselves.

17:46 *I will strike you down and cut off your head*- David was completely confident in faith, and had worked out what he would do after the initial victory- he would cut off Goliath's head. Christ likewise was confident of victory on the cross and His parables and teachings assumed that victory ahead of time.

*That all the earth may know that there is a God*- The spirit of Christ's words just before He went out to kill the power of sin on Golgotha (Jn. 14:31; 17:23).

17:49 *His forehead*- This is twice emphasized; pointing forward to how Christ's victory over sin was ultimately in the mind.

17:54 'Golgotha' meaning 'The place of the skull' may well be the place near Jerusalem where David buried Goliath's skull. The whole incident opens up as a prototype of Christ's victory over sin on the cross, with Goliath presented as a "man of sin".

18:3 Our notes on chapter 17 have shown that David's killing of Goliath was typical of Christ's killing of sin on the cross. His victory there enabled the new covenant to come into operation with those who believe in Him; and so Jonathan becomes representative of us, and the covenant he enters with David looks ahead to the new covenant. Jonathan as the king's son and commander of the army was the one who ought to have fought Goliath; but he didn't (see on 14:6). Instead of being filled with envy, he humbled himself, stripped himself and gave his all to David, as we should to Christ, motivated by the wonder of His victory.

18:5 To achieve this state of mind must have required a lot of conscious thought and self-analysis by David. We get the sense that David pitted his wisdom against Saul's anger and bitter persecution; David's wisdom and prospering is repeatedly mentioned in tandem with Saul's anger against him (:5,11,14,15,30). These words are referring back to Dt. 29:9, which promised that those who kept the words of the covenant would prosper. David's charmed life and prospering despite all manner of plotting against him was due to his single-minded devotion to the Law; to those very chapters which tired Bible readers are wont to skip over as boring and not motivating. Yet David found something immensely inspiring and practical about the Law. The word made him wiser than his foes (Ps. 119:98)- and there is reason to think that Ps. 119, which is all about how much David loved God's word, was written by David at the time of his persecution by Saul.

18:10 *An evil spirit from God*- See on 16:14.

19:5 Saul wanting to slay "innocent blood" = Mt.27:4; his persecution of David "without a cause" was exactly what the Jews did to Christ (Jn. 15:25). We see clearly David as a type of Christ and Saul as representative of the Jewish opposition to Him.

19:12 There are many connections between Saul and Paul; and Paul noticed them and was motivated by them (see on 15:17). The way Paul was let down through a window to escape persecution (Acts 9:25; 2 Cor. 11:33) was not of his own choice; God set up that situation to make him realize that he should not be as Saul, his namesake. And so, led by God in this, he purposefully changed his name from Saul to Paul, 'the little one', recalling how when Saul was "little" in his own sight, he was acceptable to God (15:17). We too are to look for the similarities between our lives and those of Biblical characters, and act accordingly; and God will work in our lives to make the similarities, differences and lessons the more apparent to us.

19:13 *An idol*- Although both Michal and David were in love with each other when they married and they were both members of God's people, indeed Michal's brother Jonathan was a very faithful believer, Michal was clearly not devoted to Yahweh as she should've been- for she had a large idol in the house. Ultimately the marriage didn't work out. Being in love and both being nominally believers isn't enough to make a marriage work as God intends; there must be on both sides a genuine love of God.

20:8 *Your servant*- David was respected by Jonathan as his spiritual superior because of David's victory over Goliath (see on 18:3), but despite that, David

considers himself Jonathan's servant, in the spirit of servant leadership which characterizes Jesus.

20:16 *Yahweh will require it*- This affects the question of whether there will be a specific 'going through' of many (all?) our deeds at the day of judgment, or at least, all the sinful deeds of the condemned. Actions in this life will be "required" by God (Dt. 18:19; 23:21; Josh. 22:23; 2 Chron. 24:22; Ez. 3:20; 33:6,8)- at judgment day, when an explanation for our behaviour will be "required". The Hebrew word translated "require" in the above passages has the sense of to search / enquire- which suggests a process of discussion during the judgment process. Likewise God will "require" the flock at the hand of the pastors (Ez. 34:10; Heb. 13:17). There must be answerability before God for human actions; in this life and / or at the day of judgment when Christ returns. The apparent silence of God in this life can lead us to think that there are things we can 'get away with'; but ultimately there will be accountability before God.

20:27 The Jews asked about Jesus "Where is he?" at a feast time (Jn. 7:11); just as Saul did about David.

20:30 *To the confusion of your mother's nakedness* – The Hebrew idiom is hard to interpret, but it could suggest that Saul was falsely accusing Jonathan of having a homosexual relationship with David. If you feel you have been slandered by gossip in the church, remember that almost every servant of God has been through this at the hands of those they counted as their brethren: Joseph, Moses, Job, David, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, Paul, and above all Jesus Himself

20:31-34 Jonathan represents us all in our relationship with Christ (see on 18:3). He lived in an environment which was bitterly opposed to David; yet he stuck up for him, at the risk of embarrassment and opposition, and certain damage to his own prospects; as we should in this wicked world. As Saul cast a javelin at David, so he did at Jonathan; as we should fellowship the sufferings of David's greater son. Saul's hate of David resulted in Jonathan being "grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully". Is this not our response to our world in their ceaseless blasphemy of Christ?

21:9 David's eager taking of the sword of Goliath contrasts sadly with his earlier rejection of such weapons in order to slay Goliath (17:39). And David later reflects how he knew that his faithless taking of that sword and the showbread would lead to the death of Abiathar's family (1 Sam. 22:22). But still he did it. David was ultimately a righteous man, but if we were to draw a graph of his level of faith, with time along the bottom and his level of faith on the side- it would be a jagged graph. Just like our lives.

21:13,15 Going down South to Achish of Gath and playing the mad man has sad connections with the patriarchs going down to Egypt in times of weak faith. This was a weak period of David's life; see on :9.

22:2 David at this time could be likened to Christ in our period of history, still awaiting being enthroned and given the Kingdom promised to Him. Those who followed David at this time would then represent us who follow Christ at this time, when society generally doesn't accept Him. Those who came to Him were initially spiritually weak, but they developed during their time in the wilderness with Him. And it was those who were loyal to Him in the wilderness who later became

the rulers in his Kingdom, as we will in Christ's Kingdom when it is established on earth (Rev. 5:8). Those who came to David were initially driven to him by their hard experiences in this world, rather than attracted to him for purely spiritual motives; and so it is with many of those who come to Christ. Our motives for doing so change and mature over time.

22:5 *Go into the land of Judah*- David's whole experience with Saul was of course led and arranged by a loving Father. The sensible thing would have been for David to get out of Saul's way and lay quiet- and this is what he tried to do, by going to Moab. But then God tells him to go back into Judah. This was political suicide; it's similar to how Christ returned to Judea in a similar situation (Jn. 11:7,8). It made no human sense to expose himself to Saul again. And then God tells David to go and fight with the Philistines in order to rescue the people of Keilah (23:2). Yet the men of Keilah weren't allies worth having- even they were prepared to betray David to Saul, and by this action he made the Philistines hate him yet more, so refuge amongst them was no longer possible. Again and again, God led David into situations that were politically suicidal, that only made things worse for him... because He wanted David to trust in Him alone. And so it happens in our lives. Time and again.

22:22 David had great sensitivity and this led to an almost telepathic ability to enter into other's problems; it became legendary throughout Israel, and this was one of the things which endeared him to his people (see too 2 Sam.14:17,20; 18:13)- and there is a powerful similarity here Christ, whose sensitivity was greater than anyone's. His ability to know things may have been partly due to direct Divine guidance, but sometimes it may've been simply due to His acute sensitivity to people and human situations. We can take comfort that He is the same today as He was yesterday, and is highly sensitive to all our circumstances.

23:2 See on 22:5. This situation is typical of Christ's in Jn. 11:7,8.

23:15 *To seek his life*- Psalm 54 was written when David received the news that the Ziphites had betrayed him. The reference to oppressors 'seeking after my soul / life' (Ps. 54:3) uses the same Hebrew words as here, where Saul seeks for David's life at Ziph. That Psalm gives an insight into the mind of David; how he perceived himself, how he understood God. He was obviously in a desperate situation- he'd been betrayed, and Saul appeared certain now to corner him and kill him. He asks God of course to save him; he doesn't just resign himself to what looked like an impossible situation. He had the vision to believe that God *can* do miracles. He asks God to 'judge' him, to 'plead my cause' (Ps. 54:1 Heb.). There he was, just having received the news... and he prays, and composes a Psalm, right there and then. Composing poetry in the heat of the moment was his way of calming down and focusing his faith. That's not to say, of course, that he didn't later refine Psalm 54 and 'write it up' as it were.

23:16,17 Only occasionally could Jonathan and David meet, brief moments of intense fellowship away from the rest of the world, strengthening each other's hand in God, re-confirming their covenant together (18:3; 20:8,16; 23:18). No wonder their goodbyes were so hard (20:41). Not surprisingly, they looked forward to the promised day of David's Kingdom. Our communion meetings with Christ (see on 18:3) during our wilderness journey must surely mirror those meetings.



23:21 *Yahweh bless you, for you have had compassion on me-* Saul made the common mistake of assuming that anyone on his side and against his perceived enemies was therefore also on God's side. But our enemies' enemy isn't therefore necessarily a good person or Godly. This logic leads to all manner of damaged relationships between individuals and groups.

23:26 *Saul went on one side of the mountain and David and his men on the other-* David was going up one side of the cone shaped mountain, getting higher and higher, whilst Saul was chasing him, never catching up with him, but going around the other side. The dust from David's group would've been visible to Saul's army. It was clear that soon David would reach the summit- and there would be no way out, apart from upwards to Heaven. He was in a no way out situation, just as God sometimes puts us into. But amazingly, God stopped Saul in his tracks, just as He sometimes saves us from such humanly hopeless situations, so that we will walk humbly and gratefully before Him the rest of our days. See on 29:4.

23:27 The way Saul returns from pursuing David because of a rumour of invasion is so similar to Rabshakeh's retreat from Jerusalem after rumours of incursions (Is. 37:9,10). There is a tremendous repetition within the Biblical narratives. Individuals tend to go through very similar experiences, and often the same words are used in the descriptions of the experience or their response to it. Some of these similarities are so specific and humanly unlikely to be replicated that one can only conclude that there was a higher power over-ruling their situations. It may be that the Angels work in human lives according to some kind of Divine pattern, and this accounts for the sense of repetition and *déjà vu*. But it may also be because it is God's intention that we meditate upon the lives of previous servants to the point where we see their experiences coming through, in principle, in our own lives; and we are urged on to a like victory as they attained.

24:4,5 David saw Saul for who he was, the anointed of God. Christ too taught *His* men to have respect for the Pharisees, who 'sat in Moses' seat', and therefore ought to be given reverence on that account (Mt. 23:2). David's extreme respect for Saul is shown in the fact that Yahweh had explicitly told him that he would deliver Saul into David's hand, and David was free to do as he wished to him; but because of his genuine respect for Saul, David didn't take the liberty of killing him; he chose a higher level on which to relate to Saul. Indeed, he even felt guilty at cutting off the blue ribbon from Saul's coat, such was David's *respect* for Saul. All those baptized into Christ have been "anointed" in that we are "in Christ", 'the anointed one' (2 Cor. 1:21). We must truly respect others on account of their being in the body of Christ / God's people, as Saul was. Paul deeply loved Corinth and respected them for their status as men and women in Christ, in receipt of the Father's love and grace, even though they abused him. Therefore he like David could love his enemies within the ecclesia; for Saul was in the ecclesia of Israel as much as David was.

24:15 *Yahweh therefore be the judge and give sentence between me and you; may He plead my cause-* It's not as if God isn't watching what's going on now, and will only open the books and judge human behaviour when Christ returns. His judgment is in a sense ongoing; we live out our lives before His judgment presence, and the final day of judgment will be a public declaration of the

verdicts which have already been announced; it will largely be for our benefit rather than God's. David mixes metaphors here- God is for him both the ultimate judge, and also his counsel for the defence. Paul does the same in Romans 8, concluding in awe that if God in Christ is both our judge and our personal advocate, the one on our side in the case, then nobody and nothing can be against us; our salvation is assured.

24:18 it seems God later gave Saul into David's hand when "a deep sleep from the Lord" fell upon Saul at the very time David intended to kill him (26:12). Saul himself realized that the Lord had delivered him into David's hand to kill him. God thus gave David the possibility to get revenge and freedom from persecution- and yet at the last minute, it seems, David chose an even higher level; of love and deep respect for this spiritually sick man.

25:3 *He belonged to the family of Caleb*- A reminder that a faithful believer doesn't always have faithful descendants. We each stand independently before God, and yet nurture can play a significant part in the final algorithm determining why some end up faithful and some don't.

25:19 *Go on before me; I am following you*- Abigail was learning from Biblical precedent, just as we should; in this case, the example of Jacob trying to appease the approaching Esau and his men (cp. :20) by sending extravagant presents and then following behind them (Gen. 32:13-22). The similarity presents David as unspiritual Esau, and indeed this was a low point in David's spiritual life; see on :33. Her bowing with her face to the earth was exactly what Jacob did to Esau (:23 = Gen. 33:3). Her mind was clearly in that record, and she succeeded as we should in translating Biblical history into a practical template for our daily crises.

25:33 David thanks Abigail for persuading him not to 'shed blood' and "avenging myself with my own hand"- the very things he elsewhere condemns in his Psalms (e.g. Ps. 44:3). Time and again in the Psalms, David uses that Hebrew word translated "avenging myself" about how God and not man will revenge / save him against his enemies, for God saves / avenges the humble in spirit not by their strength and troops but by His. But in the anger of hot blood, David let go of all those fine ideas. In the heat of the moment we too can let go of all the far higher principles we know and love, and do the very things we detest when we see in others.

25:34 David sent messengers to Nabal meaning well to him, and they were rudely rebuffed, resulting in his anger which only Abigail's grace and wisdom saved him from . And yet the same situation repeated in its essence when he sent messengers to Hanun who were likewise misinterpreted and rebuffed (2 Sam. 10:3). Again, David got angry- but there was no Abigail to restrain him, and he did get into an impossible fight... from which by grace God delivered him. David failed to learn from his previous experience. David had just been tested by God in the matter of sparing the life of his enemy Saul- and he came through the test with flying colours (1 Sam. 24). But now, soon afterwards, he was tested again in the same area in the matter of Nabal- and he initially failed, intent as he was to take the life of his enemy Nabal. Thus a circumstance can repeat over a matter in which we were previously successful- and we can still fail that test. God is ever seeking to teach us by repeating circumstances in our lives.

25:35 It seems that the thief had a deep Bible knowledge. It could be that when he asks to be remembered for good when the Lord Jesus returned in His Kingdom, he had in mind Abigail's words: that when David returned in glory in his Kingdom, "my Lord, then remember your handmaid" (:31). This was prefaced by her asking: "Forgive the sin of your handmaid" (:28). David's response was marvellously similar to that of the Lord Jesus to the thief: "Go up in peace to your house. I have listened to your words and have granted your request". It would seem that the thief saw in David a type of Christ, and saw in Abigail's words exactly the attitude he had. And Christ accepted this. Again we see how the faithful didn't just read the Bible as history but proactively saw the similarities with their situations and spoke and acted accordingly.

25:39 *Has kept back His servant from doing wrong*- God is able to work in our lives to stop us sinning over and above our own steel will; and we should ask Him to do so. We should also seek to be like Abigail, using wisdom and humility to stop others falling into sin.

26:12 See on 24:4,518.

26:19 So many of the Psalms contain references to the smear campaign against David (Ps. 27:12; 31:13; 109:23 all seem to have reference to this verse). This frequency of reference in itself indicates the weight with which this tragedy rested upon David's mind.

*They have said 'Go and serve other gods!'* – Whether or not they said these very words, to exclude someone from the worshipping community [which can be done by anything from being too lazy to give them a ride to a meeting to formal excommunication] effectively invites people to go to "other gods". Many fail this test; others like David learn that in fact God is far wider than what they had previously thought (see on :20).

26:20 *Far from the presence of Yahweh*- David still held the wrong idea that a national god, in this case Yahweh of Israel, could only be served on his own territory and not outside of it. This explains why David so bitterly regretted that Saul had made it practically impossible for him to remain within the territory of Israel (:19). Yet David's later Psalms reflect his realization that Yahweh is the one and only God of all the planet, His presence is everywhere and He can therefore be worshipped anywhere on earth. Although David had a wrong understanding of God on this point, this didn't mean that he couldn't have faith in God nor please Him; and through reflection on the circumstances God sent him, David came to the truth about this matter.

26:21 *I have sinned*- The very words of Judas (Mt.27:4), again confirming David as a type of Christ and Saul as representative of the opposition to Christ.

26:24 Here we see established the principle that the grace we show others is related to the grace God will show us. David could have killed Saul, indeed God gave him the legitimate opportunity to do so, but he chose the higher level- of grace and forgiveness, despite Saul's lack of repentance at the time. We learn that someone doesn't have to be grovelling in repentance before we show grace to them.

27:1 *I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul* is surely a collapse of faith, given that God had anointed him as king. And it led to the way in which David deceived Achish by pretending he was attacking Israelite towns, when in fact he was going out and attacking the Amalekite settlements, killing all men, women and children in them so that nobody was left alive to tell that it was David who had attacked them (:8-10). Innocent people were slain by David's sword for the 'political' reason that he had to keep Achish 'in the dark' about what he was really up to. And so in case a five year old says something incriminating later, David simply killed the little boy. Indeed, when Achish later says that David would be best not to go with him to fight Saul, David hypocritically insists that he has been a loyal and upright servant of Achish (29:8). This was hardly an example of the "integrity" and "uprightness" which David glorifies in his Psalms, and which he insisted he was full of (Ps. 25:21). Indeed he claims that his integrity is the basis of his acceptance by God (Ps. 26:1). It's recorded that in this ethnic cleansing which David performed, he took the spoil of those settlements for himself (:9). Indeed when he destroyed Ziklag, he took away their herds "and said, This is David's spoil" (30:20). The pressure of circumstance can so easily lead us to slip into periods of life where we betray the principles we enthusiastically proclaim in worship, as David at this time lived quite contrary to the spirit of his own Psalms.

27:4 *Searching*- It's emphasized that Saul "sought" David in order to kill Him (19:10; 23:14,15,25; 24:2; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4; 2 Sam. 4:8), and likewise the Gospels stress that the Jews "sought" to kill Christ (Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11,55; Lk. 19:47; 20:19; 22:2,6; Jn.5:16,18; 7:1,11,25,30; 8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56; 18:4,7,8).

27:8 *From ancient times*- The Hebrew word *olahm*, often translated 'for ever', clearly doesn't always mean literal future infinity- although in *some* places it can have that sense. It's actually used in places to describe *the past*; events of a long time ago, but not events that happened an 'infinitely long time' ago. It describes up to the time of the Exodus (also in Is. 51:9; 63:9); and elsewhere the time of a previous generation (Dt. 32:7; Job 22:15); to the time just before the exile of Judah (Is. 58:12; 61:4; Mic. 7:14; Mal. 3:4); to the time just before the flood (Gen. 6:4). Descriptions of the Law of Moses and other things as being *olahm*, eternal, must be understood in this more limited sense of a long time, an age, but not necessarily literal eternity.

28:6 *When Saul inquired of Yahweh, Yahweh didn't answer him*- But in God's final analysis of Saul, He says that He smote Saul because Saul sinned against God's word by *not* enquiring of God, but of a witch (1 Chron. 10:13,14). But Saul *did* enquire of God (see too the same Hebrew word in 14:27), but God didn't answer him. Although Saul prayed to God and enquired of His word on the surface, in his heart, he did nothing of the sort; and therefore his prayer and enquiry was reckoned never to have happened. And we must ask how much of our prayer and Bible study is seen by God as being only spoken and read on a surface level. This was exactly the problem of natural Israel (Hos. 7:14; 11:7).

28:11,12 Death is total unconsciousness (Job 3:17; Ecc. 9:5,10). Notice that Samuel came "up" out of the earth as in a resurrection, not down from heaven, where we would expect him to be if common ideas are correct. (:14,15). Samuel appeared as an old man, not a "soul" (:14). The woman surely guessed she was talking to Saul- he was the tallest of the Israelites (10:23), and was well known to everyone as the king; hence she could accept his assurance of immunity from prosecution (:10). She was used to running fake séances (because nobody truly communicates with the dead), and so she pretends she has some insight to know she's talking to Saul even though it was obvious (:12), and then describes Samuel in the kind of terms Saul would've expected- an old man wearing a prophets' mantle (:14), just as Saul would've last remembered Samuel. However, Samuel then appears for real, temporarily resurrected by God according to the principle of Prov. 26:5, that God answers fools according to their foolish requests. Perhaps her scream of :12 was in genuine shock at seeing Samuel appear for real. This would explain why the woman stops speaking to Saul and Samuel talks directly to Saul- not through the woman as a medium between them, as was usual for such a séance.

28:19 Saul, Jonathan and Samuel all went to the same place at death. Righteous Abraham was "gathered to his people" (or ancestors), on death; they were idolaters (Gen. 25:8; Josh. 24:2). The division between sheep and goats will be when Christ returns, at the resurrection and judgment seat (Mt. 13:48; 25:33)- not at the moment of death. At death we return to dust like the animals, good and bad all go to the same place- but the difference is that those responsible to God will be resurrected and judged, and the faithful will then live eternally in God's Kingdom on earth.

29:4 David was in an impossible situation; he had not been attacking Israelites as he had previously claimed to the Philistines; he had a strong conscience against killing Saul; yet he had given the impression he was willing to zealously fight against and kill his own Israelite people; it seemed there was no way out. And then, God's gracious hand acted. Some of the Philistine army leaders objected to David's presence on the battlefield- at the very last minute! God leads us into apparently dead end, no way out situations- and then delivers us out of them by His grace, in ways we had never considered. See on 23:26.

30:6 Yet David was innocent. Grief leads to a strong desire to blame someone for the loss, and that desire can lead to friends and brethren turning upon each other. Indeed, much harmful behaviour arises from the basic human need to find a scapegoat, someone or something upon which to place guilt. One implication of our seriously accepting that Christ on the cross was a guilt offering, the fulfilment of the Mosaic scapegoat ritual, is that we will no longer experience such a need to scapegoat and lay guilt. For all guilt, however perceived and from whatever cause, has finally been carried away into the wilderness by His unique and far reaching sacrifice there.

30:7 There are several references to the ephod and to "Urim" and "Thummim" in the historical records. The ephod was the priest's waistcoat upon which the breastplate was hung. It seems that Urim and Thummim were the names of two stones kept within the ephod. From the questions answered by them, it would seem they were capable of giving binary answers to questions, presumably through flashing in a certain sequence- if God chose to work through them in response to prayers for answers about yes / no choices.

30:22 Paul considered that Mark *had not gone with them* to the work (Acts 15:38). This is quoting the Septuagint of 1 Sam. 30:22, where "all the wicked men and troublemakers among David's followers said, Because they *didn't go with us* we will not give them any of the spoil". Why does the Spirit make this connection? Is it not suggesting that Paul, zealous soldier of David / Jesus as he was, was in those early days in some sense a sinful man, bent on achieving his own glory in preaching, and unwilling to share it with anyone who wasn't spiritually or physically strong enough to do it as he was (cp. the weaker followers of David)? If this is the case, then this is a far, far cry from the Paul who wrote his letters some years later, begging Timothy to come to encourage him. Paul like David developed spiritually over the course of his spiritual journey.

30:31 We wonder why God arranged for David to have the experiences of this chapter just before the death of Saul. The moment of Saul's death was of huge significance to David psychologically- it was the end of an era of persecution, the end of a love-hate relationship which must have emotionally and spiritually drained him, and the beginning of his own kingship. God is very sensitive to us, and He obviously knew that David needed these humbling experiences in order to prepare him for the news of Saul's death- e.g. he had to go through the experience of having his supporters turn against him to the point of almost literally killing him, falsely blaming him for a disaster (:6), in order to prepare him for widespread acclaim and desire to crown him king just days later.

31:4 *His armour bearer would not, for he was respectful*- David had been known throughout Israel for teaching by example that he would not harm the Lord's anointed, and that anybody who did so would have to give account (24:6; 26:9-11). Although Saul's armour bearer was likely one of his most loyal supporters in the campaign against David, David's spiritual reasoning and example had influenced him, so that in the heat of battle he acted accordingly. We learn from this that our examples are far more powerful than we may realize.

## 2 SAMUEL

1:16 *Your mouth has testified against you*- From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16). And yet perhaps even now, men are justified by their words before the court of Heaven- for 'justify' means to pronounce righteous, and this pronouncement / justification is therefore given even now. As the judgment seat of God is in a sense ongoing, our words are as it were our testimony at our own court case before God. At the last day, it could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation (cp. 1 Kings 20:40).

1:17 We can all too easily pray for what we will later ask to be changed. David prayed for deliverance from "the evil man", Saul; he asked that Saul be slain and punished (Ps. 140:1,9,10). But when this prayer was answered, David wept with the amazing lamentation over Saul which we have here. It's a lesson to think carefully about what we're praying for, and imagine our response and situation if actually the prayer is answered. We need to pray as if every prayer *will* be answered, not just expressing our feelings and immediate desires, as it seems David did in his prayers against Saul.

1:18 David's lament over Saul was taught to the children of Judah; and the early chapters of 2 Samuel are full of examples of David's expression of love for Saul in every way he knew how. David's love for Saul was truly amazing. Saul was his enemy, he drove David to absolute despair, his senseless persecution of David was articulated in every way he could. In all this we see played out the prototype of the hatred between the Jews and Jesus. Yet when Saul was slain for his sins, David's love for him was overflowing, to the point that his people saw that this was no political theatricism (3:36,37). But it was not only at Saul's death that David had these feelings; after all, it's a lot easier to love someone when they're dead. Psalm 35 is David's commentary on his feelings for Saul: "They laid to my charge things that I knew not. They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul (spiritually). But as for me, when they (Saul and his family, in the context) were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into my heart. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother (i.e. Jonathan, 2 Sam. 1:26): I bowed down heavily, as one that mourns for his mother" (Ps. 35:11-15). Bowing down heavily as a man weeps at his mother's graveside is a powerful image. A man's grief for his mother must surely be the finest picture David could have chosen. That sense of infinite regret that he didn't appreciate her more. David realized that he had reached the point where he knew that he really did truly love his enemies. He wept for Saul as a man weeps at his dear mother's graveside. And he did this for a man who was utterly worthless. And this is a poor, poor shadow of the Christ's love for Israel. And how much more does He love us, who at least try to make up for Israel's cruel indifference?

2:5 The way of grace is sometimes counter instinctive and can be seen as political suicide.

2:16 This incident was surely to show the tragic wastage and pointless destruction caused by conflict between brethren. Perhaps both sides were being prompted by this incident to call off the entire armed conflict with each other, but they failed to respond to the providential hint.

2:19 *He didn't turn to the right hand nor to the left*- This phrase is typically used in the Bible to describe our faithful following of God in this way; he didn't turn aside to the right nor the left in following his brother (:21), another phrase usually used about faithful following after Yahweh.

Asahel justified his persecution of his brother as a faithful following of God- and died because of it. The same mistake is often repeated in essence in the church.

2:26,27 Both sides in this conflict between brethren sensed it was wrong, and yet they had still done it. Reconciliation between brethren should seek to appeal to this conscience which there often is- that conflict and division is wrong.

3:16 David's breaking of up of this marriage for reasons of personal politics and pride seems totally wrong. This was not only a breach of Mosaic law, but displayed a sad elevation of politics above others' relationships and marriages. It may be significant that her renewed marriage with David wasn't blessed with any children (6:23).

3:35 David is at great pains to demonstrate that he is against the pointless shedding of blood. But his earlier life had featured much pointless shedding of blood- e.g. he killed 200 Philistines when only 100 were required (1 Sam. 18:25,27), and thought nothing of killing the man who informed him of Saul's death (1:15; see too 4:12). He said that he was disallowed from building the temple because of how much blood he had shed (1 Chron. 22:8). His Psalms often call for the death of his enemies. We are left to reflect that perhaps now he was maturing, as we should over the course of our lives, to perceive the value and meaning of the human person. Or it could be that he was simply emphasizing that he really didn't seek the blood of Saul's family because he had truly forgiven him; or perhaps as a highly emotional person, he demonstrated both great sensitivity to the death of people and also great insensitivity; a very soft side and a very hard one, all within the same personality. Human nature is capable of very contradictory behaviour.

3:36,37 See on 1:18.

4:4 *His nurse took him up, and fled*- She failed to believe in David's grace; she assumed that he and his men would come and kill Jonathan's son, despite David's grace to Saul and demonstration of his loyalty to Jonathan. We too find it so hard to believe in grace, even when it is demonstrated by the cross. Grace is the hardest thing to believe in because it is so contrary to all we have experienced at the hands of people and all we see around us; it is Divine in origin and doesn't come naturally, so we so struggle to believe it- and, as in this case, catastrophe's happen because of it which damage others permanently.

4:8 *Yahweh has avenged*- This was true, but they were wrong to have taken the work of His vengeance and judgment into their own hands. Vengeance is God's, and by taking it for Him we are as it were playing God; we aren't to take vengeance exactly because vengeance is God's, not ours; and this is written in Scripture, Paul says (Rom. 12:19). Whilst Paul's allusion may be to Dt. 32:35, he may also (under inspiration) be drawing his Old Testament teaching from this incident. If we would forbid ourselves to even think of taking vengeance, we and others would be saved so much hurt and trouble.

4:12 See on 3:35.

5:1 *We are your bone and your flesh*- This idiom is quoted in Eph. 5:30 about how we who are baptized into the body of Christ are as it were His bone and flesh. David again represents Christ, and his people represents we who are following Christ.



5:2 *You shall be shepherd of My people*- Yahweh was David's shepherd (Ps. 23:1), and David was to shepherd Israel. There is a wonderful mutuality in God's relationship with people.

5:6 *Unless you take away the blind and the lame*- The idea was that the blind and lame amongst the Jebusites would be enough to hold off David's men.

5:8 *The blind and the lame can't come into the house*- The lame, blind etc. were not allowed to serve God under the law (Lev. 21:18), nor be offered as sacrifices (Dt. 15:21), nor come within the temple. Christ purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind (Mt. 15:30), and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace. We are the lame and blind who have been invited to the Messianic banquet; and we are to reflect God's calling of us, the desperate, in our calling of others- we too are to invite the lame and blind into our homes and thus into God's Kingdom (Lk. 14:13,21). A person who feels they are somehow a nice guy and worthy of invitation will be the one who tends to consider others as unworthy of invitation to the Kingdom. He or she who perceives their own desperation and the sheer grace of our having been called into the Kingdom will eagerly invite even those they consider to be in the very pits of human society.

5:23,24 David didn't get victory by the mulberry trees the same way each time. God changed the method; just as we too can't assume God will deliver us just because He has in the past.

5:24 *The sound of marching*- David was being taught that he on earth must follow the movement of the Angel cherubim marching above him; in Ezekiel's terms, we as the wheels of the cherubim on earth are to faithfully follow wherever they move above us.

6:2 The blood of atonement was always present on the top of the ark (the "mercy seat"), where the very presence of God was. This foretold the intense association of God Himself with the future sacrifice of His Son. In this sense, God was in Christ in His reconciliation of the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). As the Angel cherubim overshadowed the top of the ark, so the Angels were intensely aware of Christ's death; He could have called upon them to rescue Him out of it (Mt. 26:53), but He didn't- in order to achieve maximum identity with us for whom He died.

6:5 The lesson is that all the fine worship in the world is meaningless unless it is underpinned by careful awareness of and obedience to God's word. The great worship procession ended very abruptly- to drive home this point. See commentary on 1 Chron. 13 for more about David's mistake and Uzzah's sin.

6:9 Elizabeth's words: "Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:43) are remarkably similar to the Septuagint of 2 Sam. 6:9, where David asks "How can the ark of Yahweh come to me?". As a result of this question of David's, the ark remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom (:11). And was this why Mary, seeing herself as the ark bearing the special Name and glory of Yahweh in Christ, remained for three months in the house of Elisabeth straight after hearing this same question asked (Lk. 1:56)? There are further links, between the gladness of Lk. 1:44 and the joy of :12; and the loud cry of Lk. 1:42 and that of :15. If one combines Lk. 1:31 and Jn. 1:14 we

have the word of God becoming flesh and “tabernacling” among us in the womb and faith of Mary. The Angel’s description of Holy Spirit ‘overshadowing’ Mary (Lk. 1:35) could have sent her mind back to how the Spirit-Cherubim and the cloud of Spirit glory overshadowed the ark (Ex. 25:20; 1 Chron. 28:18). The Septuagint uses the word for “overshadow” about the cloud of glory overshadowing the ark in the wilderness (Ex. 40:35; Num. 9:18,22). If these connections are valid, then Mary would have felt that within her was He who would be the covenant of the Lord, the stones of the word of God made flesh in a little boy. This was perception indeed, all achieved within the spiritual mind of an illiterate teenage country girl from a dumb village in Palestine. Depending how deeply we meditate upon God’s word and perceive the relevance for us, such connections are easily possible in our minds too, and can guide us in our decisions and actions, just as they did in teaching Mary she should remain three months with Elizabeth.

6:17-19 One of the most obvious similarities between the peace offering and the breaking of bread is that they both feature bread and wine, associated with a slain animal in the midst (see too Num. 15:9,10). Both require the eating of the sacrifice by the offerer. The peace offering and Passover (also typical of the memorial meeting) featured the offerer eating the sacrifice “before Yahweh”. This phrase “before Yahweh” is continually emphasized in the records of the peace offerings. Our sense of the presence of the Father and Son at our memorial meetings has much room for improvement. We really are “before Yahweh” as we sit there. God came unto men when they offered acceptable peace offerings (Ex. 20:24), as He is made known to us through the breaking of bread (Lk. 24:35).

6:21 *Before your father*- This is a good example of “before” meaning ‘before’ in importance rather than time. God chose Saul well before He chose David. But God chose David before or *above* Saul in terms of importance and honour. This explains how in Jn. 8:58 Jesus was “before” Abraham in the sense that he was “before” him in terms of importance- but not in time, because He didn’t literally pre-exist.

6:20-22 *In the eyes of the handmaids... in the eyes of Yahweh... in my own eyes*- David is highly perceptive here. He’s saying that if this is how he feels in his *own* eyes, then this is how he is before the eyes of God, and therefore this is how he will be before the eyes of Israel and the general public. David is saying: ‘Who I am, my real self, is the one God sees, and I’m not going to hide it from the world; let them see me how I see myself and how God sees me’. In this incident, there was no gap between the ‘real self’ of David and the image he projected to the world. There was complete congruence between how he felt about himself, how God saw him, and how the watching world saw him. And this incident ought to be programmatic for our entire lives. This will ever keep us from worrying too much what others think of us, doing what is smart and acceptable and right in the eyes of men... rather we will think only of what is right in God’s eyes.

7:3 *Do all that is in your heart*- As in 1 Kings 22:14-17, the prophet was tempted to assume that he knew God’s word and therefore spoke too quickly, according to what they sensed a person wished to hear. We too should learn the lesson of needing to be sensitive to what is written in God’s word.

7:5 It was God’s clearly expressed wish that He should *not* live in a physical house (see too Acts 7:48; 17:24). Yet He accommodated Himself to human weakness in wanting a physical house in which to worship Him; He came and lived (in a sense) in just such a house. He makes concessions to human

weakness because He so thirsts for relationship with us; but by making free use of those concessions we in fact make relationship with Him more difficult.

7:12 *I will set up your seed*- "Set up" in the Septuagint is the same word as "resurrect", as if in some way the promise would be realized through Christ's resurrection.

7:14 The "seed" or descendant is ultimately Jesus, the Son of God (confirmed in Rev. 22:16; Rom. 1:3; Acts 13:23; Lk. 1:32,33). Jesus, the descendant, was to be a literal, bodily descendant of David, and yet have God as his Father. This could only be achieved by the virgin birth as described in the New Testament; Jesus' mother was Mary, a descendant of David (Lk. 1:32), but he had no human father. God acted miraculously upon Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit in order to make her conceive Jesus (Lk. 1:35). The "virgin birth" was the only way in which this promise to David could be properly fulfilled. The genealogy of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 1 frames Him as the product of 42 generations, divided into three groups of 14. The numerical value of 'David' is 14 [D = 4; w = 6; d = 4]. The emphasis is therefore on the fact that Jesus was so very intrinsically a descendant of David- and not, therefore, a pre-existent being. 2 Sam. 7:14 and Ps. 89:27 predicted that a literal descendant of David would *become* God's firstborn. He was clearly not in existence at the time those passages were written, and therefore not at the time of the Genesis creation either. Jesus became "the Son of God with power" *by* His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). The "house" He would build is the spiritual dwelling of God in people (Is. 66:1,2). He is the foundation stone of God's temple (1 Pet. 2:4-8), believers are like the temple stones (1 Pet. 2:5).

*If he commits iniquity*- This speaks of Christ's possibility of sinning. This had to be true if His temptations were to be of any real meaning (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15,16); and clearly therefore Jesus is not God Himself (James 1:13-15). Punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned; yet Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. Although He didn't sin, Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner- because of His deep and willing association with us there. We must confirm that connection He made between Him and us by confessing our sins and being baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3-5) so that He becomes before God our representative.

7:16 "I will establish the throne of his (Christ's) kingdom for ever... your (David's) house and your kingdom... your throne shall be established for ever" (:13,16 cf. Is. 9:6,7) shows that Christ's kingdom will therefore be based on David's kingdom of Israel; this means that the coming kingdom of God will be a re-establishment of the kingdom of Israel (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:11). To fulfil this promise, Christ must reign on David's "throne", or place of rulership. This was literally in Jerusalem. Thus the kingdom must be established here on earth at Christ's return in order to fulfil these promises.

*Established for ever before you*- "Before you" suggests that David would witness the establishment of Christ's eternal kingdom. This was therefore an indirect promise that he would be resurrected at Christ's return so that he could see with his own eyes the kingdom being set up world-wide, with Jesus reigning from Jerusalem.

7:18 David was humbled when he received the promises, just as we should be by realizing that we really are in covenant relationship with God. "Who am I...?" was his response (2

Sam. 7:18). Like Jacob, he felt himself unworthy of all the “mercy and truth” shown him in the promises (Gen. 32:10).

7:18-20 The promises to David are described as the mercy of God (Is. 55:3; Ps. 89:33,34). God having a son is the sign of His love for us, and this must elicit a response in us. David himself marvelled that such mercy had been shown to him. Soon afterwards, we read of how David made a renewed attempt to show mercy to the house of Saul. Mephibosheth says that he is "your servant... what is your servant, that you should look upon such... as I am?" (9:8). Mephibosheth is using the very words which David used to God; David is showing mercy to Mephibosheth in the very way in which the promises of God to him were the "mercies" shown to David. Appreciating that the promises concern us personally, and that they reveal such loving grace from the Father, can only lead to a similar response in showing love and grace through entering into the lives and destinies of others.

8:4 *But reserved of them for one hundred chariots*- The king of Israel was not have chariot horses (Dt. 17:16). David destroyed most of them, but kept a few for himself. This weakness which he allowed himself led to his son Solomon becoming obsessed with horses and chariots, trading with Egypt in order to get them, and turning away from God completely. Weaknesses which we may allow ourselves can lead to others taking them much further and losing their faith. David seems to have tried to ‘get around’ God’s intention that the king of Israel trust in the heavenly cherubim horses and chariots of Angels rather than human ones; for he hamstrung the horses, so that they could only breed and not be used for work. But of course the next generation of horses were his. If we have a heart for God we won’t seek to get around His laws or have a little of both- obedience to Him and also the ways of this world. Yet despite David’s weakness in this matter, God still gave him victory and blessing (:5,6). We shouldn’t turn away from other believers because we perceive in them some weakness; for God doesn’t treat us nor any of His children like that.

8:13 *David made himself a name*- A name in Hebrew thought isn’t merely a personal identification tag, it speaks of a person’s achievements and character- hence the significance of God’s Name (Ex. 34:4-6) being His character and personality. By baptism into the Name, all God’s righteousness is counted to us.

8:17 Those who had faithfully followed David in his wilderness years, when he seemed a hopeless cause, were the ones who later became the rulers in his kingdom. We who follow Jesus now will be the rulers in His Kingdom (Rev. 5:10).

9:1 We too should consciously seek out opportunities to show grace, even to the relatives of our enemies. We have been shown kindness or grace from God (:3) and we should respond to this by reflecting it to others, thinking up ways to do so as God has done to us. The challenge is to ask ourselves when was the last time we thought up a way of showing grace to others.

9:8 See on 7:18-20. To be invited to eat bread at someone’s table was a sign of their grace and acceptance of you. We who are in Christ are openly and warmly invited to eat bread at the table of the King of the cosmos; and yet so many can’t be bothered to accept the invitation, or feel unworthy do so. We should note too that it’s not for us to control which of His people Christ invites to His table; we are there as grateful guests, not as the host.

9:13 *He was lame*- Christ taught that He has invited the lame to *His* table and we should also invite them to the table of the Messianic banquet in His future Kingdom on earth (Lk. 14:13,21).

10:3 David had earlier sent messengers to Nabal meaning well to him, and they were rudely rebuffed, resulting in his anger which only Abigail's grace and wisdom saved him from (1 Sam. 25). And yet here the same situation repeated in its essence when he sent messengers to Hanun who were likewise misinterpreted and rebuffed. Again, David got angry- but there was no Abigail to restrain him, and he did get into an impossible fight... from which by grace God delivered him. David failed to learn from his previous experience; and God repeats situations in our lives too, that we might learn from them and develop. Note how suspicious people were in the societies of those days when they encountered David's grace (see too 3:24,25); and today too, we tend to disbelieve God's grace because we haven't encountered it very often from people.

11:1 *But David stayed at Jerusalem*- When it was the season for a king like himself to be out in battle. The obvious lesson is that when we are doing nothing and not doing what we are intended to, then we are more prone to fall into sin. He appears to recognize his attitude problem in Ps. 30:6: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be (spiritually) moved". In the lead up to the sin, God had given him victory after victory- leading him to think that he must therefore be spiritually OK because of his many physical blessings (1 Chron. 18:6). His conscience had been blunted by the easy life.

11:2 *He saw a woman*- Christ had His eye on this passage when he spoke about him that "*looks on a woman to lust after her*" has committed adultery with her already (Mt. 5:28). James 1:14,15 speaks of the process of temptation and sin, in any matter, as looking lustfully upon a woman, with the inevitable result of actually committing the sin. In this he may be interpreting David's sin as an epitome of all failure. David is our example. Likewise the Lord's list of the 12 evil things that come out of the heart (Mk 7:15-23): fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness, evil thoughts... all seem to describe the completeness of David's sin with Bathsheba. It incorporated all these things, and was not just a one time, lustful failure of the moment.

11:3 *Daughter of Eliam*- David and Uriah knew each other very well; they had spent David's long wilderness years together, and lived next door to each other in Jerusalem (:13; 12:1). Bathsheba had been brought up by Uriah (12:3). She was the daughter of Eliam, who had been another of David's mighty men (23:34). Presumably he had been killed and Uriah adopted her, bringing her up from babyhood, mothering her by feeding her from his bowl and letting her sleep in his bosom. This may imply that his own wife died early, and that he brought her and his own children up alone, and then married her when she was older. A very special spiritual and emotional bond must have been forged between those who stuck with David as a down and out, and who later on shared in the glory of his kingdom. That Uriah had such easy access to David would have been unthinkable for an ordinary soldier whom David hardly knew. Nathan criticizes David for having "no pity" on Uriah, implying that David well knew the relationship between Uriah and Bathsheba. Moreover, David would have been a larger than life figure for his followers, and Bathsheba would have grown up with this image of David as the saving hero.

11:4 *David sent messengers*- The use of messengers is emphasized throughout the account (3,4,5,6,19,23,27); what David had done would soon become very public knowledge, and it would seem that Uriah himself understood.

*For she was purified from her uncleanness*- Bathsheba's evening washing of herself which exposed her nakedness would have been in response to the principles of the Law. However, the Law didn't actually state that the woman must wash herself after menstrual uncleanness; but the man who touched her must. So it could be that she had gone beyond the Law in washing herself; such was her spiritual perception, which was a factor in David's attraction to her. Sexuality and spirituality are related, hence sexual temptation is especially strong for people who on one level respect spiritual principle.

11:21 *Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth?*- Joab warned the messenger to quickly explain to David why the soldiers approached so near the wall of Rabbah, *because* he knew that David would *immediately* quote an example from the history of Israel, to prove that such an approach was unwise. David's familiarity with the spiritual records of Israel's history and use of them to guide behaviour was therefore well known, and it presumably did not depart from him during the months between his sin and repentance of it; we can retain God's word in our minds and act upon it whilst at the same time in other areas being deeply displeasing to God.

11:25 *Don't let this thing displease you*- But those very Hebrew words are used again in :27: "But the thing that David had done displeased Yahweh". No matter how we or others may rationalize and cover up sin, God notices and judges in due time.

12:4 Nathan's parable about David's sin with Bathsheba blamed the act on a traveller 'coming to' David asking to be satisfied. The traveller of the parable represented David's lusts which led to adultery and murder, although this was not his usual state of mind- they were as a traveller to him. It's a helpful picture of how our lusts come to us- from within (Mk. 7:21-23; James 1:13-15), not from any external cosmic being.

12:8 There will be anomalies in the lives of our brethren- just as there are in the lives of us all (if only we would examine ourselves ruthlessly enough to see them). And in some ways at some times, God goes along with them. Thus He gave Saul's wives to David, which would've involved David being married to both a mother and daughter- for he had married Saul's daughters. And this giving of Saul's wives to David may not have occurred simply after Saul's death. For David's eldest son, Amnon, was borne by Ahinoam (3:2), who was initially Saul's wife (1 Sam. 14:50). Now this is not to justify sin. Adultery, taking another's wife or husband, is all wrong. Let there be no mistake. But God at times sees the bigger, or longer, perspective, and tolerates things which we may quite rightly find intolerable. And if He loves us despite of our sin and failure- are we surprised that we are invited to show love to others in the face of their sin and failure toward us? A black and white insistence upon God's standards being upheld in the lives of others, demanding their repentance for having hurt us, is what has caused so much division between believers. Whilst God alone will apportion the guilt for this, in the final algorithm of Divine judgment, it's worth observing that the fault for division isn't always with the sinners, the wider thinkers, the freewheelers; but with the inflexible intolerance of those in power.

*If that would have been too little, I would have added to you*- This seems to be saying that God would have made concessions to David's sexual weakness, even further than the ones He had already made. It is as if God had prepared those concessions on different levels. If David

had felt that he needed yet more sexual fulfilment, God had a way prepared to meet this. Yet David took it into his own hands to decide what God would concede to him. However, God's concessions to David cannot necessarily be extrapolated to our lives today. "Too little" recalls 7:19, where the promises to David are described as a "little thing"; the promises were so wonderful that David should not have allowed himself to fall into such sin. And us likewise. Such is the wonder of God's promise to us that we really have no excuse to sin. Every sin is in a sense a denial of His promises.

12:9 David murdered, committed adultery and even the deadly sin of presumption (cp. Num. 15:31). All of which required his death; and yet he is held up in Rom. 4:7 as representative of each and every sinner. Only if we appreciate the seriousness of our position before God will we be able to feel true joy, peace and commitment after realizing our forgiveness. Note how God reads our motives; He saw David as if *he* had killed Uriah with *his* sword; even though David's command to Joab to retire from Uriah and let the Ammonites kill him was carefully calculated not to break the letter of the law.

12:9,10 David "despised the word of Yahweh... you despised Me". His attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the word of God, in that sense, was and is God.

12:13 David's "I have sinned" is word for word what Saul said at his condemnation (1 Sam. 15:24). David then lies all night upon the earth, refuses to eat, people try to raise him up from the ground, and then they succeed in setting bread before him and he eats it (:16,17,20). David was consciously doing exactly what Saul did in 1 Sam. 28:20-25, the night before his death / condemnation. David was recognizing, of his own volition, that he was no better than Saul. And by doing this, he was saved. Unlike Saul, he altered the verdict of condemnation by meaningful repentance. Paul makes the point that if we condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The terms of the judgment pronounced against him are framed to echo the rejection and condemnation of Saul. He despised the commandment of Yahweh (:9) as did Saul (1 Sam. 15:29). Evil was raised up against David out of his own house (:11)- what happened to Saul (1 Sam. 20:30). David's wives were given to his neighbour (:11), as Saul's wives were (12:8; 1 Sam. 15:28; 28:17).

*You will not die*- David at that moment represents us all, today. The Spirit changes David's personal reflections upon this forgiveness in Ps. 32:1 ("Blessed is *he*") to "blessed are *they*" (Rom. 4:7) to make this point. "Blessed is the man (e.g. David, or any sinner- David is our example) unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity" (Ps. 32:2) is alluded to in 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ... not imputing (the world's) trespasses unto them". Through being justified, any repentant sinner will then have the characteristics of Christ, in God's sight. In Christ there was no guile (1 Pet. 2:22), as there was not in David (or any other believer) after the justification of forgiveness (Ps. 32:2). "Blessed is the man... in whose spirit is no guile" (Ps. 32:2) is picked up in Rev.14:5: "In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God". The picture of forgiven David in Ps. 32 is what we will each be like after acceptance "before the throne of God". Yet David's experience can also be ours here and now; in those moments of true contrition, we surely are experiencing salvation in prospect.

12:16 Prayer and repentance can change God's stated purpose. Prayer changes things. It really does. What would otherwise have happened can be changed by prayer. We, little and tiny humans, can change the mind of Almighty God. This is the extent of His sensitivity to us. Moses, Samuel and Jeremiah had the power to *within limits* change God's mind towards His

people (Jer. 15:1). David prayed and fasted for his child by Bathsheba not to die- even though God had said that it would. He clearly believed that God was a God who was open to changing in response to prayer.

12:23 This verse is sure proof that David didn't believe that dead children go to live in Heaven; there is no immortal soul taught in the Bible.

12:28 Whatever carried the name of a person was seen as his property. If a city was conquered, it bore the name of the conqueror, as here; the names of owners were on their property (Ps. 49:12); and in this context, God's Name is over His people (Dt. 28:10). So to bear God's Name is to recognize His complete ownership and even conquest of us. By baptism into His Name we become totally His. And yet there's a significant twist to all this in Is. 43:1: "I have called you by *your* name, because you are mine". It seems like a slip- we expect God to say that He has called us by *His* Name, because we are His. But no- He wishes us to bear both His Name and our own name, He doesn't wish to subsume us beneath His ownership and manifestation to the point that we are not significant as persons.

13:15 Any giving in to the lust of the flesh, especially sexually, can never bring happiness but rather yet more anguish. This incident teaches clearly enough that sexual desire and love aren't always the same thing.

13:20 There are Biblical examples of refusing to take guilt when others feel that it should be taken. Recall how the Lord's own parents blamed Him for 'making them anxious' by 'irresponsibly' remaining behind in the temple. The Lord refused to take any guilt, didn't apologize, and even gently rebuked them (Lk. 2:42-51). In similar vein, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Even if I made you sorry with a letter, I do not regret it" (2 Cor. 7:8). He would not take guilt for their being upset with him. Likewise Absalom comforted his raped sister not to 'take it to heart', not to feel guilty about it, as it seems she was feeling that way, taking false guilt upon her. We should take true guilt before God for our actual sins, and not allow others to put guilt on us.

14:8-10 The slayer of innocent blood was to be slain without pity, and this would in fact bring some kind of blessing: "that it may go well with you" (Dt. 19:13). But David seems to have stepped up to a higher level when he told the woman of Tekoah that he would protect her son from revenge murder, after he had slain another man. The woman pointed out that if her son was slain, the inheritance would be lost in her husband's name. Here was a case where two principles seemed to be at variance: the need to slay the guilty, and the need to preserve the inheritance. The higher level was to forgive the slayer of innocent blood, even though the Law categorically stated that he should be slain.

14:11 The woman of Tekoah wanted David to show mercy, and so she says: "Let the king remember Yahweh your God". To be aware of who Yahweh is, of the characteristics outlined in Ex. 34:5-7 that comprise His Name... this must surely affect *our* behaviour, seeing we bear that Name. It is an understanding of the Name that inspires our faith in forgiveness and our ability to show grace.

14:13 The woman understood the implications of the promise in Eden when she tells David that God "devises means" to bring back the banished and expelled to Him. Whom did God banish? Adam, and all his children. But God 'devised means' through the promises of Gen. 3:15 so that this banishment was not permanent expulsion. The means devised was the death



and resurrection of His Son, the seed of the woman. But the woman's point was that as God sought to restore His banished sons, through the pain and cost to Him of the blood of His Son, so we ought to likewise be inspired to win back the banished. And so we look to those banished from ecclesial life by disfellowship, church politics, personal animosities of past decades, or simply their own outright sins; or those marginalized by poverty, education, disability, health, geography... these are the banished whom we ought to be winning back.

14:14 Her point was that as God in some sense breaks His own laws, e.g. that sin leads to permanent death, so surely David likewise could have the same spirit of grace and bring about the salvation of someone rightly appointed to death. Legalism fails to understand grace.

14:20 The woman thought that Angels know everything and therefore David was like an Angel (2 Sam. 14:20). Angels don't know *everything* (Mt. 24:36). Yet the woman's immature concept isn't corrected, just as wrong understandings of demons weren't.

15:8 *If Yahweh shall indeed bring me again to Jerusalem, then I will serve Yahweh*- Absalom was quoting the words of Jacob in Gen. 28:20,21. But a little reflection ought to have shown that these were the words of Jacob in a very weak part of his life. Both Jacob and Absalom should've wanted to serve God anyway, whether or not He gave them blessing in this life. Absalom thought that all would be good for him just by quoting the words of the Bible and thus identifying himself with a righteous man (even though he paid no attention to the context of his quotation). This kind of surface level Biblicism and spirituality can easily happen today as a cover for simply doing what the flesh naturally wants to do.

15:13 *The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom*- The record of the various rebellions against David show how fickle are the hearts of men; they changed loyalty so easily according to whatever seemed to offer them the most immediate advantage; just as a study of the theme of "the crowds" in the Gospels shows the same. For all their apparent culture, sophistication and education, people's hearts today are the same, and we can never trust in human loyalty generally; although our experience with God's people can be amazingly better.

15:23 *The brook Kidron*- David's exit from Jerusalem has many similarities with Christ's crossing the brook Kidron and the mount of Olives (:30) and going to His death, surrounded by a few faithful followers who had promised to follow Him to the death (:21 = Mt. 26:35). The support which David had within the Jerusalem leadership points forward to that of Joseph and Nicodemus for Christ at the time of His betrayal and final rejection.

16:2 This unexpected grace formed the basis of Ps. 23, where David marvels at God's kindness in furnishing a feast for him in the wilderness at the very time that it seemed he was walking in the valley of the shadow of death. Sometimes God does things like this in our lives too- His grace bursts into the darkness of a situation.

16:10 Shimei was a wicked man who hated God's servant David. God told him to curse David. Afterwards, Shimei repents and acknowledges that by doing so he sinned (2 Sam. 19:20). And although David recognized that God had told Shimei to curse him, David tells Solomon not to hold Shimei "guiltless" for how he had cursed him (1 Kings 2:9). Thus a man is encouraged by God to do the sinful act in which he has set his heart.

16:18 This is one of several Biblical examples of untruth being told in vague, ambiguous terms in order to save others' lives. See on 17:20.

16:21 Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather (11:3 cp. 23:34); his inability to forgive David despite his evident repentance and the Divine blessing of the marriage led him to a bitterness which led him to death.

16:22 From this we could infer that David lay with Bathsheba in that same place on the roof top. This is significant insofar as it shows how exactly the thought leads to the action. David's thoughts in that spot were translated into that very action, in precisely the same physical location. The roof top is also the place of prayer, and in this we see the schizophrenic nature of David's spirituality; he went to pray, and then stood at the edge of the roof in order to view Bathsheba, with his hands on the railing around the roof which surely he would have erected, in obedience to the Law. And he realized that it was evening, and that in accordance with the Law's principles a menstruating woman ought to wash and be unclean until the evening. In this we see the mixing of flesh and spirit which is at the root of most of our failings. See on 11:4.

17:11 *As the sand that is by the sea for multitude*- Baptism means that we are *now* the seed of Abraham, and the promised blessings are right now being fulfilled in us (Acts 3:27-29). Israel were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore (1 Kings 4:20), they possessed the gates of their enemies (Dt. 17:2; 18:6)- all in antitype of how Abraham's future seed would also receive the promised blessings in their mortal experience, as well as in the eternal blessedness of the future Kingdom.

17:14 Ahithophel advised Absalom to attack and kill righteous king David without any more delay. Absalom refused this advice. The inspired record comments: "For Yahweh had ordained to defeat the *good counsel* of Ahithophel". Was it really *good* counsel? Not in God's eyes. It was only 'good' for Absalom from a fleshly viewpoint. And yet the record speaks from Absalom's perspective; it speaks of something definitely evil as being "good" within the context in which it was given. Thus the record here refers to men's bad thinking as if it is correct. This principle explains why the New Testament uses the language of demons to describe mental illness, even though demons don't exist and God is all powerful.

17:20 *They have gone over the brook of water*- The Hebrew is ambiguous; they were literally over the water in that they were hiding over a well (:18). See on 16:18.

17:23 Ahithophel was like so many people- giving up his life, even if not everyone does it by suicide, because he felt he had failed, he ran out of highway and lost his political power to others. For those in Christ, life becomes valuable; we number our days with wisdom (Ps. 90:12). We no longer fear failure, for firstly we know there is forgiveness in Christ; and secondly, our realization will be that we're on a journey, living the real life of ultimate discovery and adventure, able to live with the fears which this presents to us. Failure is no longer a problem to us; for the aim of the Kingdom is ever before us. Our failures are nothing more than temporary setbacks, as the baby who stretches out her hands to the lamp on the ceiling and cries because she can't reach it. We take them all, even our sins, in the spirit of the cross- the supreme failure which became the supreme triumph of God and the spiritual person.

18:3 David was described as the chiefest among ten thousand, and yet this is how Solomon's illegal girlfriend describes him (Song 5:10). He had clearly told her all about his father David- and she evidently pleased Solomon by describing him as being like his father, even though she probably had never known David. He sought a wife who would be a surrogate parent rather than someone he could serve and assist towards God's Kingdom.

18:27 *He is a good man, and comes with good news*- This is the kind of comment which would be uttered by someone in David's position, and it has total psychological credibility. This kind of thing gives us every confidence that the Bible is indeed the inspired record of the actual words spoken by people thousands of years ago. We also note that what David says here is typical of our human tendency to associate the nature of the messenger with the message. The good news of the Gospel must be associated with the 'goodness' of the messenger. The Greek word *evangelion* translated 'Gospel' means, strictly, 'good news that is being passed on'; for example, the good news of a victory was passed on by runners to the capital city. It reflects the Hebrew association of carrying tidings, and good news which we see here. Once it had been spread around and everyone knew it, it ceased to be *evangelion*; it was no longer news that needed to be passed on. But in that time when there was a *special urgency* to pass it on, it was *evangelion*. This is to be the spirit of our spreading of the news about Christ; such heralding is not the same as lecturing or indifferently mentioning facts to someone. Such lecturing seeks no result; whereas the herald of God has an urgency and breathlessness about his message. There must be a passion and enthusiasm in us for the message of Christ and His Kingdom. More to be feared than over emotionalism is the dry, detached utterance of facts which has neither heart nor soul in it. Man's peril, Christ's salvation... these things cannot mean so little to us that we feel no warmth or passion rise within us as we speak about them. Remember how the early preachers were so enthusiastic in their witness that they were thought to be drunk. We are insistently pressing our good news upon others- evangelising.

19:6 Material relevant to David is applied directly to all believers in the New Testament, thus setting him up as our example and realistic pattern rather than merely a historical figure. Joab's comment about the way David loved his enemies was thus set up by Jesus as the example for each of us (Mt. 5:44). And yet David only came to be so kind and forgiving because of his experience of God's forgiveness to him over the Bathsheba incident. Just as God did not impute iniquity to David over this (Ps. 32:2), so David did not 'impute iniquity' to Shimei for cursing him, and did not carry out a rightful death sentence against that man (:19,21). Note how Shimei uses the very same wording which David used in *his* repentance: "I have sinned" (:20).

19:11 "We are of (Christ's) bones and flesh" (Eph. 5:32) is a direct allusion back to the way David called the men of Judah *who were not enthusiastic for his return in glory* "my bones and my flesh". How much more intimate then can we feel to Christ, we who are baptized into His body and who look for His return eagerly?

19:14 *He bowed the heart of all the men of Judah*- See on 15:13.

19:22 This is an example of where we read of Israel's King having a human being who was an adversary [Heb. *Satan*, the Greek Septuagint version here uses *diabolos*]. There are other such examples in 1 Sam. 29:4; 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25). We face a simple choice – if we believe that every reference to 'Satan' or 'Devil' refers to an evil cosmic being, then we have to assume that these people weren't people at all, and that even good men like David were evil. The far more natural reading of these passages is surely that 'Satan' is simply a word meaning 'adversary', and can be applied to people [good and bad], and even God Himself – it carries no pejorative, sinister meaning as a word. The idea is sometimes used to describe our greatest adversary, i.e. our own sin, and at times for whole systems or empires which stand opposed to the people of God and personify sinfulness and evil. But it seems obvious that it is a bizarre approach to Bible reading to insist that whenever we meet these words 'Satan' and 'Devil', we are to understand them as references to a personal, supernatural being. See on 24:1.

19:23 David graciously overlooked Shimei's cursing, promising him that he would not die because of it (16:10,11). But he didn't keep up that level of grace to the end: he later asked Solomon to ensure that Shimei was killed for that incident (1 Kings 2:8,9). Perhaps it was Shimei's words which so broke David's heart that he later wrote: "Because that he remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man... as he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he delighted not in blessing, so may it be far from him. He clothed himself also with cursing as with a garment..." (Ps. 109:16-18).

19:28 To be invited to sit at the King's table is an honour indeed; we have this invitation to break bread with Jesus the King.

19:35 Even in the cynicism of Ecclesiastes, written in Solomon's later life, he still uses words and phrases which have their root in his father David- e.g. his description of women as snares in Ecc. 7:26 goes back to how his father dealt with women who were a snare (1 Sam. 18:21); his whole description of old age in Ecc. 12 is based on his father's experience with Barzillai here. The simple point is that the influence we have upon our children will continue all their lives, even into their old age.

20:2 *All the men of Israel changed-* See on 15:13.

20:5 As Samuel tarried longer than Saul expected (1 Sam. 13:8), so Amasa "tarried longer than the set time which [David] had appointed him". Circumstances repeat within our lives and also between our experiences and those of characters in Biblical history. God through His Angels is working out a script for us, so that potentially we are enabled to see that God is teaching us through repetition and through re-framing circumstances in different contexts to see if we have really learnt the lesson intended. We learn from this that we are not in the hands of random fate, but rather there is meaning attached to every event, even if we can't immediately discern it- and perhaps in some cases we will only finally discern it in the Kingdom.

20:8 It *seemed that* the sword at Joab's side accidentally fell out of its scabbard as he went toward Amasa to greet him- but it was on purpose, of course. The Bible at times like this is recording situations according to how they appear to men, rather than how they are in ultimate reality. This helps us understand the apparently non-scientific parts of the Bible, e.g. the attribution of mental illness to 'demons' in the New Testament.

20:10 *Amasa took no heed to the sword-* Drivers can see a collision coming, but not swerve; there is a lack of cognition somewhere in the human psyche. Pilots take off at times knowing that their wings are frozen, and crash. Amasa saw the sword and must have seen the possibility of death, but didn't take cognisance of it. Samson must have known, on one level, what Delilah would do. Jesus too was human, and knew what Judas would do from the beginning; and yet felt and acted as if He hadn't taken cognisance of it. But mankind is in partial amnesia, somewhere, somehow, we fail to recognize the obvious. Likewise with the nearness of the Lord's return, with the urgency of our task in witness, with the evident need to follow God's word- this lack of cognisance so often comes into play. We really ought to pray, earnestly, for open hearts and eyes and obedient lives before our daily reading.

20:24 *The men subject to forced labour-* 1 Kings 12:4

21:1 *There was a famine*- Innocent people suffered because of others' sin. This is why babies die and why we all suffer as the result of Adam's sin. The sinfulness of sin is largely in the effect which it has upon others. God will not force people not to sin, because He has given humanity genuine freewill; and because of this, He will not shield others from the consequences of sin, because sin and its consequence cannot be divided; sin is the consequence of the sin.

21:16,18 The "mighty *men*" of Gen. 6:4 weren't anything other than ordinary men, even if they were very large in size; that text is no proof for misguided ideas about Angels sleeping with women on earth. Here and in Dt. 3:11, the same term is used about ordinary men who could be killed; the *Rephaim* had children like other human beings, inhabiting an area known as the valley of Rephaim (Josh. 15:8).

21:22 *These four were born to the giant in Gath*- David killed Goliath but took five stones to do the job, only one of which he used (1 Sam. 17:40). He was spiritually ambitious (as we should be), and so he had planned to kill Goliath's four giant sons too. Our notes on 1 Sam. 17 show that David's victory over Goliath was typical of Christ's conquest of sin on the cross; this should inspire us to rise up against the other giants of sin which we encounter, inspired by Christ's victory there. Hence we read that Goliath's sons died at the hand of David's men and in that sense also at David's hand.

22:6 "The cords of Sheol" are paralleled in the poetry here with "the snares of death". 'Sheol' is the Hebrew word often translated "grave" in many Bibles, and refers simply to the grave and death rather than any supposed place of fiery punishment for the wicked. Righteous David 'went there' in that he was close to death; Christ also died and was in the grave, so it clearly isn't a place where only the wicked go.

22:7 *My cry came into His ears*- This is the wonder of prayer. Our actual words are personally heard by the God who is so far away; and He acts mightily on earth (:8) in response.

22:8 "The earth" is paralleled with "the foundations of heaven". This (and also Job 26:11; 1 Sam. 2:8) speaks as if Heaven / the sky rests on the mountains, from where earth seems to touch the heavens (Is. 13:5), with the stars stretched out in the north (Job 26:7). Prov. 8:28 speaks of God establishing "the clouds *above*", and the surrounding context seems to describe God as forming the sky around the earth and then putting a horizon in place – just the sort of scientifically incorrect geo-centric view held by people at the time. The point surely was that *however* people understood creation to be or to have happened, God had done it, and in wisdom. God adds no footnote to David's words, pointing out his understanding to be incorrect. This is important to bear in mind in our days, as we who believe in God as creator encounter so many scientific theories about the origin of our world.

22:10 God Himself is spoken of as coming, descending etc. when He 'preaches' to humanity (see too Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20; Num. 11:25; in this sense Christ 'went to' people and preached without going Himself personally, 1 Pet. 3:19). We are therefore very intensely manifesting Him whenever we take His word to others, and our behaviour should reflect that.

22:11 The Old Testament describes Yahweh, the one true God, as riding through the heavens on chariots to the help of His people Israel (see too Dt. 33:26; Ps. 18:10; 104:3; Is. 19:1; Hab. 3:8). But Baal was known as 'the one who rides upon the clouds'. Clearly the language of Baal is being appropriated to Yahweh, teaching Israel that there was no other God apart from God, no cosmic satan bringing evil, no gods of good bringing blessing- all was from Yahweh (Is. 45:5-7). Often the Bible alludes to contemporary language used about false beliefs and deconstructs them, and the

passages which do this are often misunderstood because readers are unaware of the local language and ideas being deconstructed.

22:21-25 David at the end of his life could say that he was upright and had kept himself from his iniquity- despite his sins concerning Bathsheba and Uriah. He could only say this by a clear understanding of the concept of imputed righteousness (Ps. 32:1-8), believing that he was totally "purified" from the past (:27). He really believed it and felt it, as we should. Paul's claim to have always lived in a pure conscience must be seen in the same way (Acts 23:1; 2 Tim. 1:3)- when there were times when he kicked against the goads in his conscience (Acts 9:5).

22:26 *To have bowed the neck*- The Hebrew word only occurs elsewhere in Prov. 25:10 concerning 'bowing the neck' in shame or reverence. And this is what the Hebrew means: to bow the neck. This, David recognized in his time of spiritual maturity, was what God does in response to those who show a truly spiritual attitude to their brethren. David thus recognized the humility of God; all the characteristics we are asked to demonstrate are emulations of His characteristics, and humility is one of them.

22:31 David was very much involved in Israel his people. He saw himself as their representative. "God, my rock [is] my shield... he is a shield to *all* those who take refuge in Him" (:3,31). "*I am in distress; let us fall now into the hand of Yahweh*" (24:14) reflects this. When he sung Psalms, he invited Israel to come and sing along with him (Ps. 105:2; 107:22; 111:1). In this we see foreshadowed the representative nature of the work, being and sacrifice of Jesus.

23:2 The inspired writers of the Bible spoke their words because God's Spirit was moving them (1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

23:4 *Like the clear shining after rain*- David was talking about his promised descendant, Jesus, for he knew his own immediate family wasn't going to totally fulfil the promises to him about the Kingdom of God (:5). Christ's future Kingdom will be like the dawn of a new day in which He is like the sun (Mal. 4:2), after the rain of all this world's problems has finally ended.

23:5 Is. 26:8,9 parallels "the desire of my soul" with "my spirit"; it is the dominant desire of a man. For David, the salvation promised to him through Christ was "all my desire". The direction of his life was towards that end. 2 Chron. 15:12,15 parallels seeking God with having our whole desire for Him, giving all our heart and soul to Him. God judges a man's life with regard to where the essential, dominant desire of his heart is focused. And like David, our dominant desire should be for the coming of the Kingdom.

23:6,7 *The ungodly shall be as thorns... the man who touches them must be filled with iron and the staff of a spear. They shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place*- Jesus had this in mind when He taught that only He could root up the weeds; we cannot do so (Mt. 13:24-30). The wicked will be destroyed in the same place (just outside Jerusalem) where Christ was "filled with iron" by the spear thrust. It isn't possible for us to uproot the tares because this can only possibly be done by the One who totally uprooted sin in Himself, dying to it on the cross. This association between Christ's unique right to judge and His victorious death is shown by the way the "thorns" will be burnt in the same area as He was crucified in. Literal Gehenna was in the same vicinity as Golgotha; and this in this sense His death was a foretaste of the future judgment. Phil. 2:9-11 reasons along the same lines; because Christ died for us, He *therefore* has the right to have every knee bowing to Him at the

judgment. On account of being "the Son of man" and yet also being our perfect Messiah, He has the right *therefore* to be judge (Jn. 5:27 cp. Dan. 7:13,14).

24:1 The books of Samuel and Chronicles are parallel accounts of the same incidents, as the four gospels are records of the same events but using different language. 2 Sam. 24:1 says that Yahweh moved David against Israel in order to make him take a census of Israel. The parallel account in 1 Chron. 21:1 says that "Satan" moved David to take the census. In one passage God does the 'moving', in the other Satan does it. The only conclusion is that God acted as a 'Satan' or adversary to David. He did the same to Job by bringing trials into his life, so that Job said about God: "With the strength of Your hand You oppose me" (Job 30:21); 'You are acting as a Satan against me', was what Job was basically saying. The word 'satan' of itself carries no sinful or evil connotation; it simply means an adversary. See on 19:22.

24:14 It is truly written in the context of God's final condemnation that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). But David said that he would prefer to fall into the hands of God rather than into the hands of man. To fall into the hands of God is thus a figure for judgment / condemnation by Him. Fearful as it is, it is actually far milder than the judgment of men. This is how cruel our judgment of others can be; this is how awful is human condemnation of each other. It is worse than God's. No wonder that the Lord established "Judge not..." as a foundation principle for His true people. God is kinder than men. It's better to be punished by Him than by men. This puts paid to the Catholic conception of God as a merciless torturer of wicked men. Clearly the doctrine of eternal torments was invented by men, not God.

24:16,17 Thanks to David building an altar at his own expense and asking God to kill him and his family, God stopped the plague upon Israel; the stretched out hand of God in destruction was what David asked to be upon him and his family. Israel were suffering the effect of their own sin, in not paying the temple tax (Ex. 30:11-16); but in the spirit of Christ, David was willing to die for them. And his dominant desire was counted as if it had been done, and thanks to his self-sacrificial spirit, the people were saved when they personally were unworthy. The wrath of God can be turned away by the actions of those He is angry with (Num. 25:4; Dt. 13:15-17; Ezra 10:14; Jonah 3:7,10; 2 Chron. 12:7; Jer. 4:4; 21:12). And yet that wrath can also be turned away by the prayers of a third party (Ps. 106:23; Jer. 18:20; Job 42:7). This means that in some cases, our prayers for others can be counted as if they have repented. We can gain our brother for God's Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7).

## 1 KINGS

1:2 This cure for hypothermia seems to leave somewhat to be desired in moral terms. Even if we want to do the best for someone, that genuine motivation shouldn't lead us to cross moral boundaries; for we may lead others into sin by doing so. There are many such incidents recorded in Biblical history which are left open-ended, as it were, for us to reflect upon as to whether they were sin or not. This is intentional; to provoke our thought and introspection.

1:6 David hadn't disciplined his son because he wanted to please him- and it resulted in this awful betrayal. The parental role isn't to please their children, but to raise them to be God's children.

1:15 There's something very tragic in this scene; Bathsheba, the one time beautiful woman whom David had risked his salvation to sleep with, comes in and finds a younger woman sexually stimulating David. The sins of youth seem so far away from old men on their deathbeds, but then they like all of us suffer the consequence of our sins. David's calling of Bathsheba to come to him (:28) recalls how he had called her to come sleep with him many years before.

1:31 *Let my lord king David live forever*- This is an example of using language without literally believing the truth of the words; for Bathsheba has just pointed out that David is going to die (:21). The language of demon possession in the New Testament and other non-scientific usages of language in the Bible must be considered in this light.

1:42 *You are a worthy man, and bring good news*- We too can assume that the message carried by a person must be good and true because we perceive them to be a good person. Yet they are only 'good' in our eyes, in our experience and perception of them. The messages we receive from others must somehow be separated by us from our perception of them as a person, and in our context, compared against God's revealed word before we accept them as true.

1:48 *My eyes even seeing it*- The promise of 2 Sam. 7:16 about David's great son being established on his throne referred to Christ reigning on David's throne at His return to earth, when David would be resurrected to see it. But in his old age, David seems to have lost focus upon Christ and become obsessed with the idea of having God's promises fulfilled in this life, and he came to see Solomon as the fulfilment of the promises more than Christ. No matter how long we have been in Christ, we must be aware that we can always let our focus upon Him slip, and seek for the fulfilment of the Kingdom promises in this life rather than their main, intended fulfilment in the future Kingdom.

2:8,9 David graciously overlooked Shimei's cursing, promising him that he would not die because of it (2 Sam. 16:10,11; 19:23). But he didn't keep up that level of grace to the end: here he asks Solomon to ensure that Shimei was killed for that incident. And one wonders whether it was Shimei's words which so broke David's heart that he later wrote the words of Ps. 109:16-18 wishing cursing upon Shimei. We too must struggle to keep up the level of grace we may show to a person, to the end of our lives. Forgiveness in this sense isn't a one time act, but an ever continuing process we engage in.

2:2 *Show yourself a man*- David here redefines manliness as obedience to God's law; he entirely subverts the stereotype of 'manliness'.



2:7 *Let them be of those who eat at your table*- To eat at the king's table was a sign of acceptance and special favour; and all believers are invited to eat at Christ's table at the breaking of bread. To refuse or ignore the invitation is to turn down a great honour.

2:24 *Who has made me a house, as He promised*- The promise to David was that he would have a son who on account of his obedience would be given an eternal kingdom / house. The main fulfilment was to be in Messiah, the Son of God. But Solomon too quickly assumed the promise was to him and that his success in establishing his own kingdom was a fulfilment of that promise; and he overlooked the conditions. He does the same in :45 when he pronounces that "king Solomon shall be blessed", again ignoring the conditions attached to the promised blessings. We too can do the same- overlooking, skimming over, the conditions of immortality, and assuming any present blessing is a sign we are ultimately acceptable with God.

2:28 The legal codes of the surrounding nations held that certain physical, sacred places could be entered and provide even murderers with freedom from judgment. The Torah allows this in some cases, but not in the case of deliberate murder. Thus when Joab grabs the horns of the altar, thinking he therefore couldn't be slain for his sin, he is dragged away and slain. This would've read strangely to many of the surrounding peoples. Hammurabi's laws had a sliding scale of punishment according to the social status of the person who had been harmed by misbehaviour – if a rich man struck out the eye of a 'commoner', he had to pay less compensation than if he did so to a person of higher status. The Torah reflects the immense value placed by God upon the human person; for such distinctions are totally absent in it. We are to likewise perceive the value and meaning of persons, and treat them accordingly.

2:45 See on :24.

3:3 It seems that Solomon loved God insofar as this was a living out of parental expectations; David is spoken of by both Solomon and the record as Solomon's "father" hundreds of times. Yet God will work in our lives so that our love of Him is purely of our own account, rather than the living out of parental or others' expectations.

3:12 *I have already given you*- God may have prepared great things potentially for us, which are only 'released' by our prayer for them. Solomon asked God for a wise heart- but he was told that God had already given him this. The process of educating Solomon in wisdom would have started long before; but it was released, as it were, by Solomon's specific prayer.

3:26 Solomon immediately demonstrated his wisdom by the way he judged between the two prostitutes who came to him. They lived in the same house, and had given birth at the same time. The whole situation spoke of the kind of shameless prostitution which the Mosaic Law demanded should be punished by death. But the way of Divine wisdom in this case was not to automatically apply Divine law in condemning sinners. Instead, by cutting to the conscience within those women, and appealing to it, they were led to at least the possibility of repentance, transformation, salvation. Solomon's wisdom was given him in order to know how to guide God's great people. The way of wisdom is therefore sometimes not to press a point when someone's in the wrong. We see this in all levels of relationships. There are weak points in relationships, fissure lines, which when pressed or brought under tension will cause earthquakes and destruction. It's best not to press on them; and yet if they are ignored, then the quality of relationship suffers and descends into interacting only over 'safe' matters. So what are we to do? By not raising the obvious issue- you're prostitutes and must be put to death- Solomon showed grace, but he showed it in such a way that those women surely couldn't have felt the same again; rather like the woman taken in adultery. The very fact she

was not condemned by the One who could condemn her- meant that she went away indeed vowing to “sin no more”.

4:20 The promises of the future Kingdom were fulfilled to a limited extent at this time; Israel were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore (2 Sam. 17:11), they possessed the gates of their enemies (Dt. 17:2; 18:6)- all in antitype of how we, Abraham's future seed would also receive the promised blessings in their mortal experience, as well as in the eternal blessedness of the future Kingdom.

4:25 Rabshakeh promised the Jews an Assyrian Kingdom where everyone sat under their own vine and fig tree- consciously parodying Micah's contemporary prophecies of God's future Kingdom (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic. 4:4). The Assyrian Kingdom was being presented as a parody of Solomon's, which was the Kingdom of God (2 Chron. 9:8). Our surrounding world comprises “the kingdoms of this world” (Rev. 11:15); it is a fake kingdom of God. We have a choice between God's Kingdom and that of this world, although to unspiritual eyes, this world with its promises of a wonderful life here and now can appear a replica of *God's* Kingdom.

4:29 *According to the sand which is on the seashore*- The same term is used in :20 to describe the number of the Israelites. Solomon was given wisdom in order to assist them. We should search for wisdom in order to be of spiritual assistance to others, to God's glory. Bible study is of no value unless we harness it to the service of God's people. Our search for knowledge in every aspect of life must be because we seek to turn it into wisdom.

5:4 *Adversary* – Heb. ‘satan’. The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses the Greek word *diabolos* to translate the Hebrew ‘satan’. Hence Devil and Satan are effectively parallel in meaning. Thus we read in the Septuagint of David being an adversary [Heb. *Satan*, Gk. *diabolos*] in 1 Sam. 29:4; the sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam. 19:22), Hadad, Rezon and other opponents to Solomon (1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25). We face a simple choice – if we believe that every reference to ‘Satan’ or ‘Devil’ refers to an evil cosmic being, then we have to assume that these people weren't people at all, and that even good men like David were evil. The far more natural reading of these passages is surely that ‘satan’ is simply a word meaning ‘adversary’, and can be applied to people [good and bad], and even God Himself – it carries no pejorative, sinister meaning as a word. The idea is sometimes used to describe our greatest adversary, i.e. our own sin, and at times for whole systems or empires.

5:12 The practical result of wisdom was peace between persons, and this should be the practical outcome of translating all our knowledge of God into practical wisdom.

6:7 We are represented by these stones of the temple (1 Pet. 2:5); we are being quarried and shaped now by the hand of God in our lives, and will be assembled into the temple at Christ's return. It will be too late then for corners to be knocked off; the shaping process is going on now. Stones need shaping so that they fit nicely with the other stones, in order to be a useful part of the entire house. Spiritual isolation isn't therefore what God intends; the shaping process involves us in inter-personal relationships and getting along with others, rather than walking away every time there is awkward conflict.

6:12 God saw the need to remind Solomon that he was still required to be obedient; the promises about him were always conditional upon this. Solomon was tempted to reason that because of his works and his outstanding effort in building the temple, he was thereby excused from practical obedience in other areas of his life. We too can face the same temptation; to serve God in one area of our lives and think that this excuses us from submitting our entire lives to His word.

6:13 Thanks to Solomon's prayer, and *if* he had been obedient, all Israel would have been blessed and experienced Yahweh dwelling amongst them. Our obedience or disobedience really can affect third parties.

6:19 *Inner sanctuary*- Translated in some Bibles as "oracle", the Hebrew word thus translated also means 'the word', and can be interpreted as meaning 'the speaking place'. God speaks to us today in His word; as we read His word and respond to it, we are in the most holy place, as God speaks to us and we respond- whether we read on the bus, hear it on our headphones or read in bed at night. Daily Bible reading is therefore so important in our personal relationship with God.

6:38 *He was seven years in building it*- Perhaps prophetic of God's 7000 year plan to build a spiritual temple for Him to dwell in. Throughout the temple there was the theme of God's glory- the cherubim motif was throughout the building (:29). Our entire purpose both now and eternally is to give glory to God and not to ourselves.

7:1 Solomon spent nearly twice as long building his own house as he did God's house (6:38). He liked building (Ecc. 2:4); he served God in ways convenient to him, rather than taking up a cross and going against his own natural desires. See on 9:1.

7:12 *Like as the inner court of the house of Yahweh*- Solomon was maybe unconsciously playing God, creating a throne for himself in similar and more glorious style to God's throne room in the temple.

7:23 Sometimes the Bible is very vague. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And here 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as "thirty cubits", although it was ten cubits broad. Taking 'pi' to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, "thirty". Surely this is to show that God is God, not man, and as such He's not on the back foot, writing under the fear of criticism. His word is not contradictory, but on the other hand, God has more spiritual culture than to sink down to the level of a man who wanted to foresee all criticism in writing something which could stand all petty criticism. He has a spiritual culture much higher than this. And this is the answer to many of the petty objections about 'Bible contradictions' which are raised by cynics.

7:25 The sea or laver was a washing place in which the priests and sacrifices had to be washed before approaching God. It speaks of baptism under the new covenant, and is alluded to in Tit. 3:5, which speaks of our being saved by faith through the laver or bath of regeneration. Water baptism is part of the process of regeneration, the required expression of our faith in God's salvation, and is therefore vital for all who would come to God in this age.

7:50 *The hinges... of gold*- Gold wasn't the most suitable material for many of the utensils. But it represents faith (1 Pet. 1:7). The life of faith means that we may do things which appear to have a very weak human basis, and yet this is how God loves to work- through the human weakness of decisions taken and work done in faith.

8:5 *Sacrificing sheep and cattle, that could not be counted nor numbered*- Solomon hadn't learnt the lesson his father David did after his sin with Bathsheba- that God doesn't really want multitudes of animal sacrifices, but rather the sacrifice of a broken heart and true internal spirituality (Ps. 50:8-15; 51:16,17; Is. 1:11; Jer. 7:22; Am. 5:25). We must be aware that organized religion so easily leads us

to think that the externalities of religious devotion are all important; whereas it is internal spirituality which God seeks above all, and any organized religious system we are part of should be merely an assistance towards that, rather than an end in itself.

8:17 *It was with the heart of David*- In the Hebrew Bible, the idea of being "with" someone means to "be in one's consciousness, whether of knowledge, memory or purpose". Thus Job speaks of how what God plans to do to him is "with God", i.e. in His purpose (Job 23:14); David is spoken of as having the idea about building a temple "with" him (here and 2 Chron. 6:7)- and see too Num. 14:24; 1 Kings 11:11; 1 Chron. 28:12; Job 10:13; 15:9; 23:10; 27:11; Ps. 50:11; 73:23. When we read of Jesus being "with" God from the beginning (Jn. 1:1-3), the Western mind can assume this means sitting literally together with Him. But Jesus didn't physically pre-exist His birth. It is this refusal to read the Bible within its own Hebraic context which has led to so much misunderstanding, and adopting of doctrines and positions which simply don't stand up to closer Biblical scrutiny.

8:18 Whether God did in fact say exactly this to David is open to question, because it would contradict God's own reasoning about why He didn't want a temple, and the fact the promises to David were mainly about the spiritual temple to be built by God's Son Jesus (Lk. 1:31-35). David assumed this is what God meant; and Solomon now repeats it as if it is the very word of God. This kind of error so often occurs.

8:22 Such public, ostentatious prayer is surely not in the spirit of Christ, who commanded us to pray secretly (Mt. 6:6).

8:29,30 *Listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place*- Solomon had the wrong idea that the existence of the temple somehow made prayer more noticeable by God. One of the reasons for the destruction of the temple was to bring God's people into direct, prayerful contact with Him in their exile in the Gentile world. God likewise takes away the props of our religion in order to bring us directly to Him.

8:39 *Hear in heaven Your dwelling place*- We are invited to see God as having a "throne" (2 Chron. 9:8; Ps. 11:4; Is. 6:1; 66:1). Such language is hard to apply to an undefined essence which exists somewhere in heavenly realms, but is rather appropriate to a personal God having a specific location. We can better understand the idea of 'God manifestation' in personal human beings if we understand Him as being Himself personal. It also provides focus to our prayers, as it did for Solomon here.

8:49 *Hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven... and maintain their cause*- This is legal language, implying that our situations on earth are acted out within the Heavenly throne room, where God is both judge and the one who advocates for us to Himself, maintaining our case and supporting our supplication. We need never feel, therefore, that the complexities of our situations on earth are unnoticed. They are known and analyzed better than we know ourselves, in Heaven itself.

8:58 *He may incline our hearts to Him*- We're wrong to think that God passionlessly waits for us to repent or pray to Him, and then He will forgive or act for us. He loves us, simply so; and with all love's manipulation of circumstances, seeks to pour out His love upon us. Thus repentance itself is a gift which God gives and is not totally upon human initiative (see too Dt. 4:29-31; 30:1-10).

9:1 *Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do*- See on 7:1. Solomon's building work was what he naturally desired to do, he built for his personal "pleasure" (:19); he didn't understand that true service of God requires us to go against the grain of our natural desires.

9:3 God didn't ideally want to have a physical temple, in the same way as He didn't want Israel to have a system of human kings. But He made concessions to human weakness, as He does today, so eager is He for fellowship with us.

9:4 Notice all the time God uses the word "if" in this communication. There are times in our lives when like Solomon we need to be reminded that whatever successes we have had in spiritual life, our eternal future is always conditional upon our enduring to the end (Mt. 10:22). The sense of the eternity we might miss should in some form be ever in our consciousness.

9:7 *I cut off Israel*- A whole nation would suffer as the result of Solomon's disobedience; our sins really can affect third parties, and this is the very sinfulness of sin.

9:22 *Of the children of Israel Solomon made no bondservants*- But he did later, and the people complained bitterly about the harshness he showed them (12:4). He began by being inhumane to unbelievers, and then came to treat God's people with the same hardness he showed people in the world; and we can take a lesson from this.

10:4-8 The Queen of Sheba saw Solomon's wisdom through seeing the "sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their clothing". It was through her observation of Solomon's people that she perceived and understood his wisdom. The nations will likewise learn the knowledge of Christ through observing the example of natural Israel and ourselves; as they should in this life too. People tend not to believe mere words until they see them lived out in practice before their eyes.

10:9 Because of God's enthusiasm for human response to His ways, the exalted language in which He describes believers, even in their weakness, is an essay in His humility. Thus God "delighted" in Solomon- translating a Hebrew word meaning literally 'to bend down to'. It's used about men in love (Gen. 34:19; Dt. 21:14; 25:7), and about Jonathan's deferential attitude to David (1 Sam. 19:2). If God is humble, so should we be.

10:14 *Six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold*- The connection with 666 as the number of the man of sin (Rev. 13:18), and the similarities between Babylon's merchandise in Rev. 17 and 18 and that which came to Solomon, all indicates that all was not spiritually well with Solomon. His kingdom was on one hand God's Kingdom, and yet it was also a kingdom of sin. This is ever our temptation- not atheism, but a serving of sin under the impression of serving God.

10:29 Solomon's love of horses was not right for the king of Israel (Dt. 17:16). He began by being a middleman, bringing horses out of Egypt and selling them on to other nations. But he ended up being addicted to them. We should choose not to have involvement with sinful things, because it's likely that the more we deal with them, the more likely it is we will ourselves start to use them.

11:2,3 The following passages all make the same connection between marriage out of the covenant, and adopting idolatry: Ex. 34:12-16; Dt. 7:2-9; Jud. 3:6,7; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14. Dt. 7:4 dogmatically predicts that a Gentile man will definitely turn away the heart of his Hebrew son-in-law... So certain

is it that marriage to Gentiles leads to accepting their idols that Ezra 9:1,2 reasons that Israel hadn't separated from idols *because* they had married Gentiles. Marriage to unbelievers is very serious.

11:6 Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes. We see here the logic of total devotion to Him.

11:13 The extent of grace explains many apparent contradictions and paradoxes throughout God's relationships with men- e.g. God repeatedly said that He would leave David with "one tribe". But actually by grace He gave David and Judah two and a half tribes.

11:14 1 Kings 11 mentions that God raised up 'adversaries' to Solomon (see too :23,25). The Hebrew word 'satan' used here means simply an adversary. God didn't stir up a supernatural person or an angel to be a Satan/adversary to Solomon; He stirred up ordinary men. The original word 'satan' has no negative connotation in itself. Mt. 16:22,23 speaks of Peter as a 'satan' to Jesus. Note that God is in control of these 'satans'. He raised them up and put them down; 'satan' doesn't refer to anyone in radical opposition to God.

11:28 The final comment upon Jeroboam is that he was not as God's servant David (14:7-9). And yet he was set up with that potential possibility. Consider how he was a young "man of valour" as was David (1 Sam. 16:18; 17:58); a ruler over all (as David, 1 Sam. 18:5); taken by God to reign over Israel (:37) as was David (2 Sam. 7:8); would have a house built (:38) as David (2 Sam. 7:11); and compare :40 with 1 Sam. 19:2,10. We are set up with great potentials; our lives are sometimes potentially guided to be similar to those of Biblical characters. But we have to make the right decisions and choices in order to realize that potential.

11:29 The division within Israel was the greatest tragedy to come upon God's people, just as it is today (Is. 7:17). The way the new garment of Ahijah was torn up to symbolize the division, reflects the utter waste. For an outer cloak was a garment a man could wear for life; to have a new one was something significant. The Lord's coat being unrent at His death may therefore be a reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves.

12:7 We see here the paradox of servant leadership- if Rehoboam had been a servant of his people, then he would have ruled over them. In all ways, the Lord is our pattern. He was a servant of all, and so should we be. His servanthood dominated His consciousness. He said that He came not [so much as] to be ministered unto, but so as to minister, with the end that He gave His life for others (Mk. 10:45). This is what makes Him Lord of all- because He was servant of all.

12:15 There are times when God has influenced men not to respond to the evidently wise words of other men, in order to fulfil His purpose (see too 2 Chron. 25:20).

12:21 The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself (Mk. 3:23-26) in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (see too 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom. Dividing against our brethren makes us Satan's Kingdom rather than God's.

12:24 *So they listened to the word of Yahweh*- It requires quite some humility to change our plans when we have already set up a plan of action which involves mobilizing others.

12:26 'Said in his heart' is a common Biblical phrase (e.g. Gen. 17:17; 1 Sam. 27:1; Esther 6:6). The focus of the Bible is upon our spiritual mindedness, rather than upon any cosmic conflict between God and a supposed Satan figure. The arena for spiritual conflict is ultimately within the human heart.

13:6 The prayer of the man of God caused Jeroboam's hand to be healed. The prayers of someone else can affect the fortunes of another in a way which would not happen if they just prayed for themselves. What stronger motivation could we have to pray earnestly for each other?

13:18 These two prophets both loved God's word and showed themselves faithful to Him at a time when God's people had gone badly astray. But the point of the history is to show that this alone isn't enough; we must not make assumptions about what God's word is, nor must we assume that because we love His word therefore our gut feelings and natural desires are thereby justified and we can do as we wish.

13:21 When we read God's word, we hear His voice from His very mouth. We hear "the *mouth* of God". Jeremiah spoke "from the mouth of the Lord" (2 Chron. 36:12). His word brings Him that near to us, if we will perceive it for what it is. Thus "Scripture" is put for "God" (Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:8) and vice versa (Mt. 19:4,5). When we speak and preach God's word, we are relaying God's voice to men, and should make appropriate effort to deport ourselves as the ministers of His word and voice.

14:14 *Even now*- This reflects how God's words are as good as done as soon as they are uttered, so certain are they of fulfilment. This is the way to understand those passages which appear to teach that both Jesus and ourselves existed physically before our birth. God doesn't completely express Himself in our terms and language (although of course to some degree He does). There is a degree to which God is God, and He expresses Himself as He is. We must bring ourselves to accept His perspective. Indeed, faith is the ability to believe that what God has said will actually happen physically, and that therefore we can live as if we see that future physical event as actually having happened. In other words, faith is about adopting God's time-less perspective.

14:15 As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). The language of the world is thus applied to God's people because this is how they thought and acted. Apostate Israel are spoken of as the pagan world; and therefore at the day of judgment the rejected of the new Israel will be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:32); assigned their portion "with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46).

14:31 *His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess*- This is repeated twice (:21). The emphasis is on the fact that Solomon's marriage to a Gentile unbeliever resulted in unbelieving children.

15:11 Asa is recorded as serving God just as well as David, when actually this wasn't the case; but God counted him as righteous. The incomplete faith of men like Baruch was counted as full faith by later inspiration (Jud. 4:8,9 cp. Heb. 11:32). Sometimes the purges of idolatry by the kings is described in undoubtedly exaggerated language- such as God's joy that at least something was being done? Or because, again, He imputed righteousness to those who had some faith in Him?

15:14 *The high places were not taken away: nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect with Yahweh all his days*- God appears prepared to overlook some failures because our conscience is still right with Him. And yet, despite the significance of conscience, we will be judged at the last day according to God's word rather than our own conscience as it were jumping out of us and standing there as the

yardstick for our judgment. Asa and Jehoshaphat removed the high places, but in a sense they didn't (1 Kings 15:14 cp. 2 Chron. 14:5; 17:6 cp. 20:33). We read of how the land was purged of Baal, Sodomites etc.; but in a very short time, we read of another purge being necessary. Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah all made major purges within a space of 80 years. Jeremiah therefore condemns the Jews who lived at the time of Josiah's reformation for not *knowing* God in their hearts.

15:15,18 Asa gathered the gold and silver vessels back into the temple- and then went and used them to make a political treaty. He *apparently* treated them as God's riches, but then in reality he used them as his own. Many a believer has this very same tendency.

16:2 We can make others stumble from the path to His salvation. Baasha made other people sin and thus provoke God to anger; his own sin and that of the people are described in identical language, to portray how he influenced them. We have far more spiritual influence upon others than we might think.

16:25 *Dealt wickedly above all who were before him*- The same is stated about his son, Ahab (:30). The weaknesses of the fathers tend to be repeated by the children, even worse. Sin tends towards a downwards spiral, people become morally worse and worse without the influence of God's word.

16:31 Ahab's marriage to a Gentile was far worse than *all* the sins of Jeroboam; the idolatry, the perversion, the making of Israel sin; these were "a light thing" compared to the evil of marriage out of the faith. That perspective on marriage to unbelievers needs to be shared by us today. And further, those who married the daughters of Ahab were led astray by them (2 Kings 8:18,27).

17:1 *There shall not be dew*- Elijah was motivated in this by the way Gideon asked that there should only be dew upon the ground (or perhaps even upon the whole land of Israel) according to his word of faithful prayer (Jud. 6:37-39). It is quite possible that we, too, may be given certain prompts in life by reason of particular experiences repeating those of a Biblical character. David also prayed just the same things (2 Sam.1:21). When it comes to prayer, there is a positive pattern of influence and example both amongst us as believers and from our absorbing the spirit of Biblical examples.

*But according to my word*- His faith was based upon being attune to the will of God and His ways of working with His people, to the extent that he knew that because God's word abided in him, he could ask what he wanted and it would be heard, because he asked according to God's will (Jn. 15:7). But when the time comes for rain, we read that "the word of Yahweh [not Elijah's word] came to Elijah... saying... I will send rain on the earth" (18:1). God's word reveals His will, and therefore the more in touch we are with His will the more we will be able to confidently ask for things in prayer.

17:6 *Ravens*- These were unclean animals, and yet God made Elijah depend upon them and the unclean food. He was trying to teach Elijah not to trust in legalistic obedience.

17:9 God had sought to gently teach Elijah his need for others when He told Elijah to go to the widow woman in Zarephath who would "sustain you"; it worked out that Elijah sustained *her*. And he must have reflected upon this. God's intention was that *spiritually*, his experience with that woman would sustain *him*. Our efforts to sustain others lead to our being sustained.



17:12 *A handful of flour in a pitcher*- The idea is of a handful of meal in a very large container; it's an eloquent picture of her poverty, and how she was down to the last little bit of flour in a large container that was once full. And the Lord through Elijah demanded this of her, that He might save her. God can be demanding, but we don't have the same right to be upon others. She had to *first* feed God's representative, and *after* feed herself and her son (:13)- rather than give God the leftovers after she had firstly taken what *she* needed.

17:21 *Three times*- Perhaps the way that the first six prayers of Elijah for rain went unanswered and his need to pray three times for the child to resurrect, were all part of God teaching Elijah that no matter how close we are to Him, we have no right to expect automatic answers to prayer, even if they are according to God's will.

17:22 The woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer; Heb. 11:35 alludes to this incident by saying that through faith- in this case, the faith of Elijah, a third party- women received their dead raised to life. Our prayers really can make a huge difference in the lives of others.

18:4 God tried to correct Elijah's despising of the other prophets of the Lord. Elijah was in a cave, and was also fed bread and water- just as the other prophets were. And yet Elijah didn't see, or didn't want to see, that connection- after having been reminded of this experience of the other prophets, he claims that he alone was a true prophet of Yahweh (:22)- he wrongly believed that all other valid prophets had been slain (19:10). But the record shows how that during Elijah's lifetime there were other prophets of Yahweh active in His service (20:13,35). And yet the lesson is that God still works through the conceited, the spiritually superior, those who despise their brethren. God didn't give up on Elijah because he was like this, and neither should we give up in our relationship with such brethren.

18:8 *Go, tell your lord*- Elijah didn't have too positive a view of anyone apart from himself- and that included faithful Obadiah. Obadiah repeatedly calls Elijah "my Lord" and describes himself as "your servant"; but Elijah responds to this by calling Obadiah the servant of Ahab- he tells him to go and tell "your Lord", i.e. Ahab. Elijah is insisting that he and Obadiah have nothing in common- Obadiah serves Ahab, and he is nothing to do with Elijah. 'Obadiah' means 'servant of Yahweh'- the name surely reflects very faithful parents to have called him that at the time of the Baal cult. But Elijah insists that Obadiah is really a servant of Ahab, not of Yahweh. The fact Elijah was hidden by God meant that he was forced into fellowship with the prophets of Yahweh whom Obadiah hid in a cave (:4). Elijah was thus intended to see a link between Obadiah and God, and himself and the other prophets of Yahweh. But Elijah's pride didn't let himself make the connection, just as ours often doesn't. For he continued doubtful of Obadiah's sincerity, and still insisted that he alone remained a faithful prophet of Yahweh- even though Obadiah had hidden one hundred other prophets from Jezebel's persecution. Those one hundred prophets were presumably part of the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. And maybe they weren't that strong- they are set up as representative of those who will only be saved by grace, not their works (Rom. 11:4-6). But, by implication, Elijah, for all his love of Israel, did not look upon them through the eyes of grace. Elijah insisted that he alone was "left"; yet God says that He has "left" Himself the 7,000 (19:18). The preservation of the people of God, or 'the truth' is done by God Himself; yet the likes of Elijah consider that it is *they* who 'preserve the truth'. Again, Elijah had to learn that we are all saved by grace. God will leave for and

to Himself His people, without requiring the help of man. Elijah struggled with this issue of accepting others and not thinking he was the only one who could do the job right up to the end of his ministry; for he ascends to Heaven clutching his mantle, the sign of his prophetic ministry. It seems he took it with him because he felt that not even Elisha was really fit to do the job and take his place; but perhaps in what were possibly the last seconds of his mortal life, he learnt his lesson and let go of it, allowing it to fall to the earth to let another man take it up.

18:15 Elijah assured Obadiah that he was really telling him the truth, because Yahweh of Hosts (Angels) is real, and he stood before those Angels. A sense of Angelic presence and observation will likewise inspire us to transparent lives (1 Cor. 11:10; 1 Tim. 5:21).

18:21 The inertia of indecision is a huge problem. Your own example of making clear choices, doing what is right before God rather than what is wise and smart in human eyes, will reveal a sense of clarity about you which will become inspirational to your brethren. Yours will not be one of those many lives that is paralyzed by constantly postponing the choices, by indecision, like Israel on Carmel, hopping backwards and forwards between two opinions. When Elijah demands that the people chose which lord they will serve- Baal [=‘lord’] or Yahweh, he is really getting to the very crux of spirituality- for truly, there can be no halting between the two opinions of serving Baal and serving Yahweh. Jesus based His words of Lk. 16:13 on those of Elijah here- we can’t serve two masters. Note that although on one hand the Lord Jesus Himself quotes Elijah’s ‘truth’ approvingly, there is evidence galore that at the very same time, Elijah’s attitudes were far from Christ-like

18:26-29 The idea of prophets was well known in the world around ancient Israel. The idea of a prophet was that a person was caught up in some kind of ecstasy, transported into some ‘other’ world, leaving behind their humanity. The true prophets were different. Their inspiration was about being attuned to the mind of God, they remained very much in the flesh and in the world, and the subjects of their prophecy related to very real, human things- injustice, a guy building an extension on his house without paying the labourers. Not flashing lights and ethereal coasting through space. The pagan prophets (e.g. the prophets of Baal here) worked themselves into a frenzy in order to reach a state of depersonalization and loss of consciousness, in the hope that then they would be filled with Divine consciousness. True prophets were absolutely different; the inspiration process required them to be fully in touch with their own consciousness and personality, and it was exactly through their humanity that the personality of God came through in the inspired words they spoke and wrote. This is why at times the prophets give God’s word but then interrupt, as it were, in full consciousness, to plead or even protest (e.g. Am. 7:2). Whereas the false prophets aimed to lose consciousness in order to receive something from God’s consciousness, the true prophets received heightened sensitivity and conscience / consciousness in order to receive God’s word and to know His mind. The message which the true prophets received wasn’t some vague abstraction or personal transport into an unreal world. What they received from God was the sense that this world and its fate are very dear to its creator. It was because the true prophets entered into the mind of God, that this issued in the experience of words. The false prophets tended to experience something *happening*; whereas the true prophets experienced the thoughts of God, which issued in words. Their experience had form, but no content. The Pentecostal ‘Holy Spirit’ experiences appear to be the form of ecstasy claimed by the false prophets. Receipt of God’s true revelation involved dialogue with God, even disagreement with Him for a moment, response, pleading, speech and counterspeech. It wasn’t a case of merely passively hearing a voice and writing it down.

18:27 *To the toilet*- This kind of mockery and crudeness is surely not how the Father and Son would have us act. We aren't to mock false beliefs in this way. Yet Elijah did this whilst at the same time deeply believing the fire would come down, and bringing it down by his faith. Elijah's mocking attitude is also shown by the way in which he demands they find him four barrels of water- on the top of a mountain, after a major three and a half year drought (:33). Presumably they took the water from the sea at the bottom of the mountain- and thus Elijah's sacrifice would be offered with salt. He was strictly obedient to the requirements for sacrifice- yet amidst an abusive, self-justifying mindset. The very possession of truth can take our attention away from our need for self-examination and right attitudes towards others. In this lies one of our most subtle temptations.

18:36 Elijah "prayed in his prayer" (James 5:17 Gk.)- there was a deep prayer going on within his prayer, words and feelings within words- the prayer of the very inner soul. This was how much he sought their repentance. The James passage sets Elijah up as a pattern for our prayer for our wayward brethren. He really is our pattern here. He clearly saw prayer as requiring much effort; and the way he prays at the time of the evening sacrifice on Horeb suggests that he saw prayer as a sacrifice.

18:37 *Answer me*- Elijah appears utterly certain that God will answer by a bolt of fire, without having asked Him first. He asks God to "answer me" without specifically requesting for fire to be sent down; he brings the situation before God and asks Him to 'answer' that situation. Prayer is often answered in ways we do not perceive, or by an answer which will only much later be revealed. Elijah's prayer here will only be finally answered when Elijah comes in the last days (Mal. 4:6).

*You have turned their heart back*- God appeals for people to respond by pointing out that in prospect, He has already forgiven them. Thus Elijah wanted Israel to know that God had already in prospect turned their hearts back to Him (see too Is. 44:22). We preach the cross of Christ, and that through that forgiveness has been enabled for all men; but they need to respond by repentance in order to access it. God has potentially enabled their conversion (see Jn. 1:7). Hence the tragedy of human lack of response; so much has been enabled, the world has been reconciled, but all this is in vain if they will not respond.

18:40-44 Believe that you really will receive; avoid the temptation of asking for things as a child asks for birthday presents, with the vague hope that something might turn up. Remember how Elijah heard, by faith, the noise of rain even before he had formally prayed for it, and when there was no hint of rain.

19:10 "I, even I *only* am left" was Elijah's cry to God as he realized the depth of Israel's apostasy. But this was interpreted by God as a prayer for God to condemn Israel (Rom. 11:2,3). God read what was in Elijah's heart, and counted this as his prayer.

19:11,13 The Angel tells Elijah to actually go and stand before the Lord and learn what it really meant; so he had to literally stand before the Angel as He passed by. Yet Elijah hid his face; he was no longer so happy to be before the Lord once he realized the humility and breaking in pieces of a proud man's spirit that it really implies. So (:13) he wrapped *his face* [in Hebrew, the words for 'face' and 'before' are the same] in his mantle and "stood" in the cave mouth before the Angel. Too

ashamed to really stand before the Lord, Elijah therefore wrapped his face. Earlier, he had been so keen to use this phrase of himself (17:1; 18:15); he had prided himself on the fact that he stood before the Lord. But now he hid his face, an idiom often used by God for withholding fellowship. The fact we too are God's covenant people can initially be a source of pride to us as we do our theological gladiatorship with others. But the implications are so far deeper; and through Angelic work in our lives, we too are brought to see this. The word for "mantle" is translated "glory" in Zech. 11:3; Elijah wrapped his presence in his own glory, rather than face up to the implications of God's glory. A desire for our own glory prevents us perceiving God's glory. Only at the very end does Elijah cast away his mantle (2 Kings 2:13), his human strength, allowing himself to merge with God's glory. He should have cast away his mantle earlier, when he stood before the still small voice on Horeb. The question of :13 "Why are you still here, Elijah?" may imply that Elijah should have allowed himself to be carried away by the cherubim, he should have surrendered himself to the progress of God's glory, rather than so obsessively insist upon his own personal rightness and the wrongness of others. And this was why God's ultimate response to Elijah's attitude on Horeb was to dismiss him from his prophetic ministry and instate Elisha as his successor (:16). Elijah seems to have finally learnt his lesson, for he calls Elisha to the ministry by 'passing by' Elisha as in a theophany, taking off his mantle and throwing it upon Elisha (:19). He realized that he had hidden behind that mantle, using it to resist participating in the selfless association with God's glory [rather than his own] to which he was called. But he got there in the end; hence the enormous significance of Elijah giving up his mantle when he finally ascends to Heaven in the cherubim chariot (2 Kings 2:13).

19:16 The call of God comes to us right in the midst of ordinary, mundane life. Christ called men in just the same way. This was what was and is so unusual and startling about the ministry of the Lord. His love sought men out, He didn't wait for them to come to Him; and He does the same today in calling us to live as Him, often unexpectedly and in the midst of life's repetitive course. Other examples in 2 Kings 9:1-13,18; Jud. 6:1; 1 Sam. 9:10; 11:5; Am. 7:14.

19:18 There is such a thing as feeling lonely when we needn't. Elijah is an example of this; he felt that he was "left alone" faithful in Israel- even though there were another 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (Rom. 11:3). The Hebrew could mean that God reserved 7,000 of Elijah's brothers and sisters who potentially would not bow the knee to Baal. Yet Elijah didn't want to see the potential of his brethren. He set himself in a league above them, like the Psalmist, saying in his haste that all men are liars (Ps. 116:11).

19:20 Elisha bade farewell to his family before following Elijah, and Elijah allowed him to do this- but the Lord Jesus was more demanding (Lk. 9:59-61).

20:28 Sometimes God gives victory to unspiritual people because He wishes to justify Himself or teach others a lesson through that victory. The fact God uses us doesn't necessarily mean we are therefore acceptable with Him.

20:40 *So your judgment shall be; you yourself have decided it-* Right now, men are justified by their words before the court of Heaven- for 'justify' means to pronounce righteous, and this pronouncement / justification is therefore given even now.

21:4 *Sullen and angry*- As in 20:43. Living with a bad conscience before God, endlessly seeking our own pleasure, doesn't bring happiness but rather depression and anger (1 Tim. 6:9,10).

21:21 *I will bring evil on you*- We expect this to be prefaced by a "Thus says Yahweh"- but Elijah was so close to God he assumed he was speaking directly from Him. And yet Elijah doesn't repeat what God had told him to say in :19. Was he too familiar with God? Assuming he knew God's will and words? But Elijah improved- in 2 Kings 1:6 he says that what he says is the word of Yahweh, and he repeats verbatim what he was told to say. We too know God's word. We know the Bible text well. But this can lead to a wrong assumption that we speak for God; that we must be right in all our attitudes and positions we adopt on issues.

21:29 *Before Me*- Yet Elijah also lived a life "before Yahweh" (17:1); it's as if God was trying to get Elijah to see that he wasn't the only person in God's presence. Spiritual elitism is so wrong, and God works hard to bring people out of it.

22:15 *Go up and prosper*- Like the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam. 7:3, Micaiah initially said what he knew his audience wanted to hear. We who know God's word are tempted likewise; human nature has a strong ability to sense what our audience wants to hear, and to say it. This is where speaking according to God's word is at times counter-instinctive.

22:20 God deceived prophets to speak things in His Name which were actually false (see too Ez. 14:9). He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer them (Is. 66:3,4). Jeremiah feared God had deceived *him* (Jer. 20:7)- showing he knew such a thing was possible. God is constantly pushing people up an upward spiral of spirituality, or further down a downward spiral of unspirituality whereby He makes those who don't love His truth to believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:10,11).

22:22 Here the Angels present their various plans of how to slay Ahab. God says to the one whose plan He accepts that he must go out and "prevail" or 'struggle' to operationalize a command from God which they know is His will to perform. And we have to do likewise, not least in the preaching of the Gospel, both obeying and prevailing. We shouldn't think that God is unaware of our situations on earth. The Angels discuss their plans for us in the court of Heaven, coming up with various possibilities of how to act in our lives, discussing them with God. We will take over the roles of the Angels in administering God's future Kingdom (Lk. 20:35,36; Heb. 2:5). Their knowledge and power isn't total; they still have to go through a process of working out how to operationalize God's will, coming up with differing suggestions.

22:32 Jehoshaphat nearly lost his life because of his alliance with Ahab. Even though Ahab was nominally one of God's people, he had no respect for Yahweh's word (:8). We have to choose our friendships and associations carefully even amongst those who are numbered amongst the body of believers.

22:49 Jehoshaphat had learnt the lesson about not working together with the family of Ahab (:32). Sometimes God repeats situations in our lives so that we learn the lesson and have practice in it; this is why it's clear that our life situations tend to repeat, under God's providential hand. See on 2 Kings 3:7.

## 2 KINGS

1:2 This clearly tells us that Baal Zebub, or Beelzebub, was a false god of the Philistines. When the Jews of the first century accused Jesus of being in league with this god, Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. Rather He spoke as

if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, ‘actually, they do not exist’, He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

1:9,10 When Elijah is ordered by the captain of 50 to “come down”, Elijah responds by saying “let fire come down”. Elijah sees himself as the fire sent from God; he associates himself directly with God and His judgments. He hadn’t learnt the lesson that God wasn’t in the fire but in the small voice. The captain wanted Elijah to come down from the high hill (cp. Heaven), so Elijah calls fire to come down from Heaven. He sees himself as the fire, as God coming down. The incident is specifically rebuked by the Jesus as not being of *His* Spirit (Lk. 9:54,55). And He rebukes His followers for assuming that their natural prejudice against others can be justified by an appeal to Elijah’s example. Elijah failed to see the value of those 100 lives; the value and meaning of persons was lost on him. All he could think of was fighting apostasy and judging it. Elijah called the fire down in allusion to how fire came down from the Lord to destroy Nadab and Abihu and also Sodom (Lev. 10:2; Gen. 19:24). He did the wrong thing from wrong motives and yet he Biblically justified it- for the prophets themselves saw an apostate Israel as being like Sodom (Is. 1:10). Elijah had the wrong attitude, lacking the spirit of Christ, and yet God still heard his prayers; God worked with Elijah as Elijah wanted. And so we perceive the subtleties of a man’s relationship with God. Prayer may be answered, and the extent of Elijah’s faith in ‘commanding’ the fire to come down is indeed awesome, but we may even then still be ‘playing God’ in a wrong way.

1:15 *Don’t be afraid of him*- Elijah may appear to have been a fearless aggressor, but underneath he was fearful, just as the Canaanites seemed so strong but in fact they were very fearful. Others’ aggression to us is sometimes simply because they fear us on some level.

2:11 *Into the sky*- This doesn’t mean that Elijah went to get his reward in Heaven. Nobody has ascended to Heaven (Jn. 3:13). Jesus was the first person to be given immortality (1 Cor. 15:20), and was the only person who never sinned. Elijah therefore had to die, because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). The Bible presents the Kingdom of God on earth as the reward for the righteous, not going to Heaven at death. The dramatic snatching away of Elijah was in order to openly demonstrate that his public ministry had ended and been passed on to Elisha. It seems Elijah was snatched away into the sky and returned to earth somewhere else- hence the men go searching for him (:16). It seems this happened often in Elijah’s life (1 Kings 18:12). Some time after this, Elijah sent a letter (2 Chron. 21:12)- implying he was on earth.

2:12 The chariots and horseman of God appeared; and Elisha perceived that Elijah had finally become identified with them. For Elisha sees them and then describes Elijah as being them- the chariot and horseman of Israel. The Hebrew word for “mantle” is translated “glory” in Zech. 11:3. Elijah had earlier wrapped his presence in his own mantle / glory, rather than face up to the implications of God’s glory. But he got there in the end; hence the enormous significance of Elijah giving up his mantle when he finally ascends to Heaven in the cherubim chariot. Finally, Elijah became part of God’s glory; He merged into it rather than resisting it for the sake of his *own* glory. He was the charioteer of the cherubim; for his prayers had controlled their direction. This identification of ourselves with God’s glory, this losing of ourselves and our own insistence upon our rightness, and our focus on others’ wrongness... this is the end result of our lives if they are lived out after the pattern of Elijah’s. See on 13:14.

2:19 It could be that the people thought that the barren land was causing their women to be barren. This was evidently an incorrect superstition of the time; barren ground cannot make the women who live on it barren. But Elisha does not specifically rebuke them for believing such nonsense. Instead he

performed the miracle of curing the barrenness of the land. The record says that there was no more barrenness of the land or women *"according to the saying of Elisha which he spake"*. Normally the people would have resorted to wizards to drive away the relevant demon which they thought was causing the problem. But the miracle made it evident that ultimately God had caused the problem, and He could so easily cure it. This was a far more effective way of sinking the people's foolish superstition than a head-on frontal attack upon it. The way Jesus dealt with the demons issue in the first century is identical in principle.

2:21 Land and water were seen as barren and bad because they were salty (Dt. 29:23; Jud. 9:45; Jer. 17:6); to put salt into bad water to cure it was therefore counter-instinctive. But this is how God loves to operate; we have to recognize the badness and acknowledge that God can work through it. Hence in this case, salt was used to cure saltiness.

2:23 *Go up, you baldhead*- They were doubting that Elisha was really in Elijah's place, and were asking him to go up into the sky as Elijah had done; and they mocked the difference between hairy Elijah and Elisha's baldness.

3:7 Jehoshaphat had been taught in 1 Kings 22:32 the error of association with the wicked kings of Israel; he learnt the lesson when it was repeated in 1 Kings 22:49; but now he fails the test again. Thus Jehoshaphat found himself repeating his words of 1 Kings 22:7 when he says "Isn't there here a prophet of Yahweh, that we may inquire of Yahweh by him?" (:11). This is too often the pattern of our lives; God brings repeat situations, in essence, into our lives; sometimes we learn the lesson, other times we don't. But through it all, He seeks to patiently teach us His principles and obedience to His ways. See on 7:18.

4:3 *Don't borrow just a few*- According to the level of our faith, so life will be unto us. The more and the larger the containers borrowed, the more oil they would have. God's power and ability is unlimited; it is us through our faith who control the extent of His activity (Mk. 9:23).

4:4 *Shut the door*- This is emphasized (:5). God's response to human faith is a very personal thing, not to be bragged about. Our relationship with Him is ultimately personal.

4:9 *I perceive that this is a holy man of God*- It seems Elisha said nothing of his ministry as a prophet; he simply stayed at the woman's house when travelling. But our relationship with God will be perceived by others in the end, even without our specific preaching (1 Pet. 3:1).

4:13 *This care*- The Hebrew word for "care" here also means "reverence". To reverence someone is to care for them. Care therefore comes out of a respect / reverence for the person. If we respect persons for who they are, we will care. Care in that sense can't in any sense be properly done or shown if it's simply from a sense of duty, because we're paid to do it, because we might get some benefit from doing so, etc. It arises out of a basic respect for the human person, made as we are in the image of God.

4:29 Christ's command in Lk. 10:4 to go preach the Gospel and greet nobody by the way (greetings in the East can take a long time) clearly alludes here. We are all to have the urgent intensity of Gehazi in taking the hope of resurrection to others.



4:33 *Shut the door... and prayed*- Jesus as it were takes a snapshot of this moment and posts it as a pattern to each of us (Mt. 6:6). Biblical characters like Elisha thus cease to be distant figures, but are to be realistically followed by us as living examples.

4:34,35 1 Kings 18:42 says that Elijah *cast himself* down in prayer. The Hebrew word occurs again only here, as if it was Elijah's example which inspired Elisha likewise to cast himself down upon the child. The implication is that Elisha did so in prayer; and we wonder whether this implies that Elijah's stretching himself upon another child, although a different Hebrew word, was also in prayer (1 Kings 17:21). Elijah's prayerful example inspired another. Our attitude to prayer is so easily influential upon others, and we ourselves are likewise easily influenced. It should be no shame nor embarrassment to us to instantly break into prayer, nor to kneel down to further our intensity in prayer, regardless of the social embarrassment this may involve in some cultures. But we have to ask: Do we *cast ourselves down* in prayer as Elijah and Elisha? Do we know that kind of intensity in prayer?

4:42,43 This incident presents Elisha as a clear type of Christ, who did the same in His feeding miracles (Mk. 8:6-8). Those who know God's word will find encouragement there in their experiences of life- but that encouragement is dependent upon their appreciation of the word, and their ability to see the similarities between their situation and that of others who have gone before. An example is to be found in the way the Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from :42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of :43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been an encouragement for their faith.

5:3 The girl said this in total faith; because at that time, no lepers had been healed by Elisha in Israel (Lk. 4:27). This girl had great spirituality; she had been taken captive by the Syrians (:2) and so had almost certainly been raped and abused, and now she was a domestic slave, possibly still liable to abuse. But she so loved her enemies that she wanted the army commander to be healed- when he was the visible figurehead of the organization (i.e. the Syrian army) which had abused her.

5:9,10 Naaman was the chief of the Syrian army and could easily have killed Elisha or destroyed his home. But Elisha isn't courteous to him, doesn't open the door of his home, but just sends someone to Naaman to tell him to go and wash in Jordan. This wasn't rudeness, but rather a desire for Naaman to respond to God's word. Sometimes God presents His word to us in such a way, without any attractive packaging, just bald demands- to test and develop our obedience.

5:14 The way Naaman was effectively born again by dipping in water looks forward to Christian baptism, which also requires humility to accept.

5:15,16 Elisha was accustomed to thinking of himself in terms of a man who stood before Yahweh, in His presence, before His face (3:14 Hebrew). Naaman and his "company" 'stood before' Elisha. Remember that this was the Syrian army General, standing with a "company" in Israelite territory, at

Elisha's house- at a time when 'companies' of Syrian soldiers carried out raids upon Israel (:2). Any Israelite would've been terrified. But Elisha responds that he 'stands before' *Yahweh* more than before Naaman (:16). Elisha was so aware of how we live in God's presence, before His very face, that he wasn't the least phased by this. If only we can share this sense, of standing in God's presence... the most frightening of human situations will have little effective 'presence' because we know we are ultimately in God's presence, 24/7. But how, concretely and actually, did Elisha come to have this serenity? A clue is to be found in how in 6:17, Elisha prays that God will open the eyes of his frightened servant to behold the Angelic horses and chariots around him. Elisha was *so* confident they were there, that he didn't ask to see them himself. He *knew* they were there; he simply asked that his servant be enabled to see the unseen reality which he calmly knew was there. He of course had had first hand experience of the Angelic horses and chariots (a kind of cherubim) when he had been parted from Elijah in 2:11. This must have left an abiding impression upon him- he knew that those Angelic horses and chariots were in fact permanently encamped around him (cp. Ps. 34:7). And so we see significance in the way that Naaman came to Elisha's house with *his* horses and chariot- for this is surely a development of a theme of connection between Elisha, horses and chariots (:9). Most other Israelites would've been petrified to have the horses and chariots of Naaman and a company of Syrians pull up at their door. But Elisha was quite unphased. He didn't even bother coming out to meet Naaman, knowing this was an insult to Naaman's pride, and was humanly certain to result in Naaman simply killing him and burning his house. Surely the horses-chariot-Elisha connection taught Elisha that in fact there were Angelic horses and chariots around him- he need not fear any human horse and chariot. There is no hint that Angelic activity is any less, or operates in any different way, for us today.

5:17 This shows that Naaman was influenced by the surrounding superstition that one could only worship a god of another nation whilst on their soil. But this is not explicitly corrected by Elisha; he simply but powerfully comments: "Go in peace". In other words, Elisha was saying that the peace experienced by Naaman in his daily life was so wondrous that it obviated the need for worshipping on Israeli soil. This is a similar approach to that taken by Jesus with regard to demons. See on 5:27.

5:18 This disproves the theory of guilt by association. God was willing to tolerate this believer in Him still being associated with a pagan religion. This concession of weakness shouldn't be used to justify us in living lives which are indistinguishable from those of unbelievers; we are the light of the world, and if we hide that light, then it will go out (Mt. 5:14). But there are times when our faith in the true God is a matter of the heart, and our external appearance may have to be otherwise because of the life situation we are in; and God is understanding of that, as we should be towards other believers. And yet Naaman chose a lower level of serving God than he could have chosen. The higher level would surely have been, as Daniel's friends, not to bow down to an idol. And when we ask what the rest of the Jews in Babylon did on that occasion, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that they took the lower level which Naaman did- and bowed down. But when we choose a lower level of service, God works to inspire us to take higher levels- see on 6:11.

5:27 The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea accommodated by God although it's incorrect. God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with the curing of Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time. This explains why the New Testament can speak of 'demons' whilst also denying their actual existence- it's an accommodation to the ideas of the time. This is in harmony with similar accommodations in the Old Testament. See on 5:17.

6:11 Naaman wanted to be a secret believer, even bowing down to Rimmon to keep his boss happy. God seems to have allowed this, but He worked in Naaman's life, so that his faith was no longer secret. For soon after his conversion, his master got the hunch that one of his courtiers was "for the king of Israel". And Naaman would have been the obvious suspect, as he had gone to Israel and been cured of his leprosy by an Israeli prophet. We then read that the army of Syria came against Elisha the prophet and sought to surround him in order to capture him. They were then judged by God. Could it really be so that Naaman would have led that army? Surely the situation arose so as to force Naaman to resign the job. Thus God worked to stop him being a secret believer, and to remove him from a position where he could not live with a free conscience before the Father. And so God will do in our lives- if we respond.

6:17 Elisha saw with the eyes of faith that the horses and chariots of their enemies were matched by the Angel cherubim around them. He was so certain they were there that he didn't need to physically see them for himself, but he asked that the eyes of his servant would be opened to see them. We imagine Peter walking confidently through the dark streets with his Angel next to him, and then perhaps phased for a moment by the Angel's disappearance. But the truth is that the Angel walked with him through every street he ever walked along (Acts 12:10). The actual presence of the Angels in our lives ought to motivate us to live as in the presence of God; the fact we don't physically see them doesn't mean they aren't literally present (1 Cor. 11:10; 1 Tim. 5:21; see on 1 Kings 18:15).

6:23 The showing of such great grace, to the extent of making a feast for them, stopped the aggression recurring. Grace is ultimately the only way to conflict resolution.

6:33 *This evil is from Yahweh*- Evil in the sense of disaster comes from God; it's not true that only good things come from God and all negative things from some cosmic 'Satan'; both good and "evil" come from God (Is. 45:5-7).

*Why should I wait for Yahweh any longer?*- Elisha here has an apparent roughness with the Almighty that could only surely come from his knowing that God fully viewed and knew his inner feelings; and so like David in some of the Psalms, he speaks his rough thoughts before God just as they are, because he knows God sees them anyway. Elisha's roughness with God isn't good, but it does reflect a level of intimacy with God which is commendable.

7:2 *If Yahweh made windows in heaven*- He forgot that there *are* windows in Heaven (Gen. 7:11; Mal. 3:10) through which blessing can be given. He believed in God's existence. But he didn't think this God could do much, and he doubted whether He would ever practically intervene in human affairs. We must be aware of this same tendency.

7:4 These utterly desperate men were chosen by God to be the heralds of good news (:9)- the Gospel. He uses desperate people today, even middle class comfortable people who perceive their desperation, as the means of His witness.

7:8 Jesus used this as the basis for His parable about the man who finds the Gospel, as the treasure in a field, and hides it (Mt. 13:44). But surely He intended us to think of what those men did afterwards. They even felt that woe would be unto them if they did not share the good news of what

they had found. The same joyful urgency must be ours; and there is a “woe” unto us if we don’t share that good news (1 Cor. 9:16).

7:18 Jehoshaphat was on balance a righteous man, but his association with the sinful family of Ahab (see on 3:7) led to his children going astray from God because of his weakness in that area, which they repeated (:28). Whilst we may retain the faith, our spiritual weaknesses can lead to our children losing it.

8:5 There are no coincidences in the lives of those with whom God is working; there is meaning attached to events, and perceiving this will preserve us from the sense of meaninglessness and pointlessness which afflicts so many unbelievers.

8:9 Even unbelievers in their extremity try to turn to God; there is in all people some level of conscience toward God, a sense of their need for Him, however deeply buried it is. The task of preaching is to reach down through their defences and connect with that sense.

8:10 Here we see how God is aware of multiple possible futures. To see individuals time and again messing up what He has made potentially possible must be so sad for Him (see too Mt. 11:21,22).

9:2 Jehu arising from amongst his brethren and being anointed pointed forward to how Christ was anointed with oil above His brethren- for He was of our nature, one of us (Heb. 1:9). Jehu could have been a Messiah figure, but his pride in later life stopped him realizing his potential.

9:19 *Fall in behind me*- The emphasis seems to be on the word “me” (:18,32; 10:6). Jehu did God’s work at this time, and yet he was very self-centred in doing it, seeking a personal following and glory to himself rather than to God. Our involvement in God’s work doesn’t automatically make our attitudes correct in all ways. Jehu seems to have used his service of God as an outlet for his anger (:20). See on 10:11.

9:20 Truly our style of driving often reflects our inner state of mind.

9:27 Ahaziah failed to learn from Biblical history- that association with the wicked kings of Israel would be to his own hurt (see on 3:7; 7:18). The Bible is largely history, specially selected for us to learn from and discern the relevance to our own lives (Rom. 15:4).

9:36 *This is the word of Yahweh*- God’s word is put for its fulfilment- so certain is it of fulfilment.

10:11 This would seem unethical; Jehu was being wilfully aggressive and bloodthirsty, justifying it in the name of zeal for God. Likewise he killed Ahaziah simply on the basis of ‘guilt by association’ with Joram, and then killed 42 of Ahaziah’s relatives by taking ‘guilt by association’ to yet another degree (:14). Defence of God’s Truth must never become an outlet for our native anger and dysfunction; see on 9:19.

10:16 *See my zeal for Yahweh*- True zeal for God is never so overtly self projected. Pride in spirituality means we’re not spiritual and simply ‘don’t get it’. Claiming to be obedient to God’s word (:17) can never justify such spiritual pride; such pride is utterly reprehensible to God and we likewise should turn away from it when we encounter it.

10:18 This deceitful behaviour is surely unethical. We cannot justify unethical behaviour in the name of obeying God and defending His Truth against apostasy. So many sins have been committed in the name of this. Elijah gathered together all the Baal worshippers to a showdown on Carmel, but he did so on a transparent basis.

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

10:31 *Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Yahweh*- Jehu had been obedient to God's word about Ahab's family and Baal as an outlet for his own aggression, anger and pride. But Jehu clearly didn't really have a heart for God, because he only focused on those aspects of God's word which were convenient to him and reinforced his own personality type. An obsession with criticism of others for their doctrinal and moral weaknesses has often been passed off as zeal for God's word, when the whole spirit of God's word in other matters has been totally ignored. God asks for our devotion to His word in every part of our hearts and living, not just as a justification for what we naturally would like to do.

11:1 In response to the murder of her son, Athaliah murdered others. The cycle of hurt continues like this in so many lives, doing to others what was done to us. Only the gospel of grace in Christ can break this cycle.

11:17 The covenant between Yahweh and the king was related to the covenant between the king and the people. Our covenant relationship with God isn't just between Him and us. It demands that we are in covenant with His people; we can't love Him that begat without loving those others begotten by Him (1 Jn. 4:9).

11:18 This purge of Baal worship came soon after Jehu's purge of Baal worship (10:18). The reforms were obviously never far reaching. We can remove the external appearance of sin from our lives, but it will come back quickly unless we replace sinful practices with dedication to the true God. Otherwise, the void created will again be filled by sin, in one form or another. Breaking sinful habits must be followed up by replacing them with something spiritual, or else we will revert again to sin.

12:2 Our spirituality can be dominated by others for a time, but in the end, God wants us to have a personal relationship with Him- and therefore He has a way of removing all the props which we have had holding up our faith, and then we are left alone to directly engage with Him totally on our own

initiative. This may account for some of the midlife crises of faith which there are amongst believers who were raised in the Faith.

12:18 *He went away from Jerusalem*- Sometimes our faithless actions appear to have worked out and bought us the deliverance we sought, but the parallel record in Chronicles makes it clear that Jehoash paid for this with the loss of his personal faith.

13:14 Elijah's example clearly influenced Elisha, both in the nature of the miracles which he performed, and in how when Elisha died, he was likewise seen as "My father, the chariot of Israel, and the horseman thereof". How Elisha related to Elijah, was how people came to relate to Elisha. This is not only a neat cameo of the immense personal influence which we have upon each other; it reflects how Elisha learnt the lesson from Elijah, which we too must learn, of freely and totally absorbing ourselves in the progress of God's Angelic, cherubic work to bring about *His* glory and not our own. See on 2:12.

13:19 Yahweh in some ways and at some times allows Himself to be limited by the perceptions and faith of His people. If Joash had perceived deeper what Elisha meant and discerned the symbolism of the arrows, he would have smitten many times and the Syrian threat would have been eliminated entirely. But he didn't, and therefore Elijah was frustrated with him; the great potential victory was limited by a man's lack of spiritual perception. Whilst theoretical understanding alone can't save anyone, it plays a part in the quality and nature of a person's relationship with their God.

13:21 Jesus was the first person to be given immortality (1 Cor. 15:20,23); the people resurrected before His time must therefore have died again. God's plan is that all His people will be rewarded with immortality together, at the final resurrection and judgment (Heb. 11:39,40; 2 Tim. 4:8).

14:2 *His mother's name*- So often this is mentioned in the records of the kings, teaching us the huge spiritual influence of a mother upon her children throughout their lives.

14:3 There are levels of devotion to God, reflected in the different levels of reward at the last day (Lk. 19:17-19; 1 Cor. 15:41). If we have a heart for God, we won't be minimalists in His service; motivated by love for Him rather than any seeking of personal glory in the future, we will seek to always serve Him on the highest level we can. Amaziah served God on the same level as his father; our service of God shouldn't be a living out of parental expectation, nor should we feel content and self satisfied because we serve God on the level of our parents. We are to be motivated by our personal engagement with the fact God has loved us and His Son died for us, rather than comparing ourselves amongst ourselves; for Christ is to be for us the only standard of comparison (2 Cor. 10:12). The common phrase in the record of the Kings of Judah "he did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh", used here in :3 about both Joash and Amaziah, is hard to conclusively interpret. Many of the men of whom this was said were not very righteous, and some (e.g. Uzziah, 15:34) were punished for their later apostasy. Possible explanations are that they repented at the end, although unrecorded; or that they were initially righteous; or that God counted them as righteous although they did wrong things. Or perhaps a man can *do* (and maybe this is the word that needs emphasis) what is right in God's eyes, but still ultimately be condemned because his *heart* is far from God. Amaziah "*did* that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, yet not like (i.e. he didn't do his works like) David his father" must be paralleled with 2 Chron. 25:2: "he did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, but not with a perfect heart". Working for God as David did therefore involved doing the

works with a perfect heart, the open conscience which David so often displayed in the Psalms. But Amaziah was deceived by the fact he was doing good works, and the real essence of his relationship with God was thereby overlooked. And we too can project a shadow-self to others, an image of spirituality, which eventually we come to believe ourselves; when our heart is far from God. This feature of human nature explains why a man or woman can reach such heights of devotion and then turn round and walk away from it all, out into the darkness of the world.

14:10 Success in the cut and thrust of worldly life shouldn't lead us to have the same attitude to our brethren, even if we consider ourselves stronger than them spiritually. We shouldn't treat our weaker brethren as if they are unbelieving worldlings; that was the mistake Amaziah made here.

14:12 *Each man to his tent*- Although by this time the people were living in houses, their home was described idiomatically as their 'tent' (8:21). This was a reflection of the fact that God always wants His people to live in recognition of the fact that this life isn't permanent, we are travellers on a journey towards His future Kingdom, which will be our permanent home (Heb. 13:14). We need to bear this in mind in how we perceive our room, apartment, house or mansion in which we live. All is temporary, a mere tent on the journey; and our resources of time and money should go towards the final destination rather than our temporary abode.

14:26 We must watch out for the tendency to think that because a man has dug a hole and then fallen into it, well, that's his problem. But we have all done this, hopelessly so. We only have ourselves to blame. And yet God has rushed to us in Christ. He was grieved for the affliction of Israel, even though it was purely due to their own sin and wilful rebellion. If a man has fallen into his own hole, he is still down there and needs help, however he got there.

15:3 *According to all that his father Amaziah had done*- See on 14:3.

15:9 *The sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin*- This phrase runs like a refrain throughout the record of Israel's kings. The sinfulness of sin is that it leads others into sin; Jeroboam's sin influenced many generations to sin in the same way. The Biblical record so strongly emphasizes this. Our behaviour has more influence upon others, for good or for bad, than we may realize; and it continues after our death, even if in this life we may consider ourselves insignificant to others. Jeroboam's sin was in creating another centre of worship apart from the temple; thus he divided God's people. It could be argued that this sin of division was what was so extremely serious to God. Our divisive behaviour, or upholding the divisions created by others, will have serious consequence to the next generation of believers.

16:2 *In the eyes of Yahweh*- This could be a reference to the Angels. Although God can see and know and do all things directly of Himself, it seems He always prefers to work through some kind of mechanism. The Angels are perhaps the mechanism by which He is aware of all things in the lives of people on earth; we are continually in their presence, with them feeding back to God the situations on earth, and perhaps discussing them in the court of Heaven (1 Kings 22:22).

16:7 *I am your servant and your son*- Ahaz ought to have been aware that he was Yahweh's servant and son, and that Yahweh's claims upon us are total. We can't serve two masters. Ahaz likely justified himself by arguing that this was merely a form of words which was common at the time; but

words have meanings and power, and by them we shall be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:37). We use so many of them each day that we can forget their colossal significance to God.

16:13 He offered a peace offering, when actually he was not at peace with God at all (other examples in 1 Sam. 13:9; Prov. 7:14; Am. 5:22). We must examine ourselves to know whether we are at peace with God before offering the “peace offering” of the breaking of bread service.

16:20 Wicked kings usually had wicked sons, but good king Hezekiah demonstrates that bad parents don’t have to have bad children; the power of God’s word is such that the vicious circle can be broken. For in God’s word and for those baptized into Christ, there is the power of new creation whereby we can be genuinely born again (Jn. 3:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:17).

17:13-18 Sinfulness is sometimes attached to people apart from the things which they currently do wrong. Sin is serious. The last generation of Israel were judged for their sins not because they had sinned more than any other generation, but because the collective, unforgiven sin of Israel had accumulated with God to such an extent that His judgments fell (:2,13-18; Ez. 9:9). God is not passive and overlooking of unrepented sin, even though His patience and the high threshold level He sets before releasing judgment may make it look like this. The Amorites were likewise only judged once the cup of their iniquities reached a certain level (Gen. 15:16). The passage of time doesn’t work some kind of atonement for our sins.

17:15 *They followed vanity, and became vain-* The idols are referred to as ‘vanities’; those who served them became like them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Whilst we may not worship pieces of wood and stone, modern society is full of vain things such as never before. The internet has encouraged this to a huge extent, so that by the end of many modern lives all a person has done is to click a mouse and hit some keys millions of times in vain entertainment and frivolous social commentary, and watched thousands of hours of movies flickering on a screen. Yet the service of the true God provides us with opportunities to use our lives with ultimate, eternal significance and purpose. If we serve Him, the God of ultimate purpose, the antithesis of vanity, we shall become like Him.

17:33,34 *They feared Yahweh... they don’t fear Yahweh-* To serve God and also other gods isn’t serving God at all- because we simply can’t serve two masters (Mt. 6:24). There is no third way- devotion to God must be total, for anything less than that is effectively not serving Him at all. This explains the apparently exaggerated language of :15,16- that Israel rejected all God’s laws and broke every one of His commandments. It’s clear they didn’t become atheists, they didn’t formally reject Yahweh, they kept some of His laws. But because their obedience was so incomplete, God counted them as effectively not being obedient at all. Clearly enough, our relationship with God can’t be a mere hobby, an intellectual assent, an occasional fascination, a Sundays only affair. It has to be of the heart.

17:37 *The commandment which He wrote for you-* God’s word is personally written to each generation; the words of the Bible aren’t of merely historical interest. God’s word is a living word, speaking to and written for each generation in a way which human words and documents can never be. Because the Bible is literature, we can too easily assume it is *only* literature. As a genre of communication, it is unique; such is the wonder of the inspired Bible.



18:4 The bronze serpent had become a totem and idol, it was worshipped for what it physically was rather than there being any perception of the salvation in Christ which it had prefigured. The cross has been likewise abused in many Christian traditions.

18:6 *He joined with Yahweh*- This is what God seeks- that we should intertwine our life and spirit with His. The Hebrew idea of 'joining' suggests marriage (Mt. 19:6), and by entering covenant relationship with God through joining to Christ in baptism, this is effectively what we have done. This is an amazing concept- that the God of the universe would join in such intimate relationship with tiny people on this earth. The difference between us is huge beyond words; no wonder we have such difficulty in understanding and responding to His love.

18:13 This stands in intended contrast to the chapter so far, which has described Hezekiah's obedience in such stellar language. The point simply is that bad things happen to good people; commitment to God doesn't shield us from disaster.

*In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah*- Hezekiah was mortally sick but then healed by God and given an extra 15 years to live (2 Kings 20:6). He reigned 29 years (:2); therefore this sickness was also in the fourteenth year of his reign. The invasion and his sickness were at the same time. Sometimes the coincidence of serious trials in our lives is such that we are left with no other conclusion but that this has to be God's hand; of itself this destroys any possibility that God gives only the good and there is some cosmic 'Satan' being bringing the evil. Hezekiah's sickness may explain his uncharacteristic lack of faith displayed in :14-16 and :21; or it could be that those decisions were taken in his name by others due to his sickness.

18:20 In the face of overwhelming human odds against him, Hezekiah trusted in the more abstract things of faith in God's word; to the eyes of the world, this is simply laughable. But in life after life, situation after situation, such faith is justified- not only in Biblical history but in examples of faithful believers all around us.

18:26 The fact Rabshakeh spoke Hebrew suggests he was a Jew who had turned traitor. Hence he was aware of the prophet Micah's words (see on :31).

18:31 Eating from one's own vine and fig tree is the very language which the contemporary prophet Micah had used to describe God's Kingdom on earth (Mic. 4:4). Rabshakeh was presenting the kingdom of Assyria as being the promised Kingdom of God on earth. The kingdoms of this world stand as an imitation Kingdom of God; the subliminal message of advertising and much human reasoning is that if we go the way of the world, we can have our promised Kingdom here and now. This was the very temptation with which Jesus struggled and overcame in the wilderness (Mt. 4:8).

19:1,2 Our response to crisis should be like Hezekiah's- to turn to God in prayer, and to His word and His people, rather than to desperate worldly alternatives.

19:3 *A day of trouble*- The phrase in the Greek Septuagint version is that also used in Dan. 12:1 and Mt. 24:21 about the latter day "time of trouble" for Israel. There will therefore be an equivalent of the Assyrian invader in the last days, and Jerusalem's deliverance will be by means of God's dramatic intervention in the return of Christ to earth to save Israel from their Middle Eastern invaders. The whole incident can be read as a detailed type of the latter day invasion of Israel before Christ returns.

19:4 *The words which Yahweh your God has heard*- God hears every word and is fully aware of the detail of every situation which we face. Isaiah picks up this sentence and rephrases it by telling Hezekiah to not “be afraid of the words that *you* have heard” (:6). The words *we* hear which so frighten us are in fact heard by *God*.

19:7 *I will put a spirit in him*- The Hebrew word translated “spirit” in the Old Testament has a wide range of meaning, but here it refers to the mind. God can give people an attitude of mind; He can give us a holy spirit or mindset if we seek it. And He can just as easily give people a spirit of fear, making them turn away from doing what is the humanly obvious thing to do, as He did here with Rabshakeh.

19:14 Whilst God sees and knows all things, it can be psychologically good for us to place the documents which are causing us grief ‘before the Lord’ and pray over them. God hears and reads those words just as much as we do (see on :4).

19:16 *Hear the words of Sennacherib*- On one level, Hezekiah knew that Yahweh had heard those words (:4), but he still asks God to hear them and respond to them. And God patiently assures him, that He has indeed heard (:20). Our faith is rarely if ever total; we know of God’s possibilities on one level, and yet doubt them in practice. When the disciples prayed “Look upon their threatenings...” (Acts 4:29), they were surely inspired by the praying of Hezekiah here, and used the same words. Daniel seems to also have paraphrased Hezekiah’s prayer in his prayer of Dan. 9:18. And these examples ought to specifically fire our prayer life, too, quoting words of Biblical prayers as part of *our* prayers. And yet Hezekiah’s prayer had been inspired by the prayers of those who had in turn gone before *him*- he is alluding to the prayers of repentant Israel (1 Kings 18:39), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:6) and Solomon (2 Chron. 6:40).

19:19 *That all the kingdoms of the earth may know*- The motivation for our prayer requests should always be the ultimate glory of God.

19:21 The “daughter of Zion” refers to the faithful remnant within Jerusalem, centred around Hezekiah. But they hardly appeared to be confidently ridiculing the Assyrians; they were scared and doubting whether God really could save them (see on :16). But because they did have some faith, God counted this as total faith, in the same way as He imputes righteousness to those in Christ. Their weak faith was counted by God as utter confidence.

19:22 That attitudes are read as prayers is reflected in the way that Rabshakeh’s arrogance against Yahweh is described as him lifting up his eyes against God. By contrast, Hezekiah prayed at the same time: “Unto you do I lift up my eyes” (Ps. 123:1). ‘Lifting up eyes’ is therefore an idiom for prayer. Rabshakeh didn’t consciously pray blasphemous words to God, but his attitude was counted as a prayer.

20:1-3 Here we see how God can state an intended purpose of His in very definite terms, as if there is no changing it- and yet such is His sensitivity to human prayer and love for Him, that He is willing to change it. He did the same when Moses persuaded Him not to destroy Israel as He planned (Ex. 32). There is often a gap between God’s statement of His purpose and the fulfilment of it, and during that gap period we can reason with Him to act otherwise. His purpose is perhaps structured this way so that we can learn to pray more intensely and connect with Him more intimately than would

otherwise be the case. It also inspires us to be spiritually ambitious enough to think of changing God's intended plan of action.

20:5 Prayer isn't always specific words; God understands situations as prayers. Thus here we see Hezekiah's tears paralleled with his words. God interpreted his tears as a prayer. Hezekiah had earlier requested for God to both hear and see the words of Sennacherib (19:26), as if these too were to be read as a prayer for Divine intervention.

20:8 Like Gideon wanting a sign, Hezekiah's faith wasn't total; and yet God still counted it as faith.

20:19 This seems a very selfish and short termist thing to say. It seems Hezekiah overcame so much- bad parental background, apostasy in his nation, terminal sickness, invasion- and yet failed to get through the hoop of materialism, acclaim, acceptance and the soft life. Many modern disciples are challenged likewise. We must realize the massive power of these temptations. See on 23:3.

21:4,7 Because the Name was called upon the temple, therefore it should have been simply impossible that those who realized this could worship idols in it; whatever has God's Name called upon it, whatever bears His image, must be devoted to Him alone. We who are baptized into His Name, who have that Name called upon us, cannot have idols in our lives.

21:14 *I will cast off* - God has cast off His people (see too Zech. 10:6); and yet, because a minority of them will always accept Christ, it is not true that God has cast off His people in a total sense (Rom. 11:1). It was only because of this remnant that Israel have not become like Sodom (Rom. 9:29)- even though Old Testament passages such as Ezekiel 16 clearly liken Jerusalem to Sodom. Yet they are not as Sodom ultimately, for the sake of the remnant who will believe. In all this we see the very real tension within God, reflective of His extreme love for His wayward people.

21:16 2 Chron. 33:13,23 describe Manasseh's repentance and humbling of himself; but that isn't mentioned in the record here in 2 Kings. We learn from this the importance of comparing Scripture with Scripture in order to build up a more complete picture. Perhaps God wrote the Bible in this way in order to reveal things in truth to those who humbly and sensitively read *all* His word, and to confuse those who read partially without due reverence toward it.

22:11 Josiah lived a life pleasing to God, as did others of his generation, and yet he was in ignorance of all the details of God's law. Full knowledge, even of some quite important things, didn't stop Josiah from being credited with doing what was right before God and not 'turning aside to the right hand or to the left' (:2). He was judged according to how well he responded to that which he *did* know. And this may be a helpful window for us into how we should feel towards those who sincerely seek to follow the Lord and yet with imperfect knowledge. Time and again the prophets judged Israel according to their "ways", rather than according to their theological or academic knowledge (Ez. 18:30). We must bear this in mind in considering the status of those who only have partial access to or understanding of God's word. And yet once Josiah knew these words of God, he eagerly obeyed them as far as he could and asked for forgiveness for his disobedience to them- thus recognizing that sins of ignorance are still a felt offence against God. Our ignorance doesn't stop Him being hurt by our disobedience, just as others' ignorance doesn't mean they don't hurt us by their inappropriate words or actions. Hence sins of ignorance still required atonement under the Law of Moses.

22:13 It would seem that the part of the book of the law which was found included God's threatened judgments against Israel for their disobedience; it was "the book of the covenant" (23:2) and likely included the curses of Lev. 26 and Dt.28. Yet Jeremiah comments that when this was discovered, this word of God was for him the joy and rejoicing of his heart and he fed on it with joy (Jer. 15:16). All of God's word, including those parts of the Old Testament which some may consider as repetitive judgments which we'd rather not read, should be fed on by us and be some source of joy to us.

22:14 The fact that a woman was a prophetess at this time shows that women aren't disqualified from speaking forth God's word in any context.

22:19 *Your heart was tender*- How is our response when a new understanding of the word's teaching in practical, everyday issues stares us in the face from the pages of Scripture?

23:3 God had promised Josiah that all would be well in his lifetime, but He would judge the next generation for their sins. Josiah learnt the lesson of Hezekiah, who appeared to be satisfied with that (see on 20:19); for Josiah launches a major campaign to return Judah to Yahweh and to re-enter covenant with Him. It seems that Josiah believed that Judah's repentance could really change the intention of God to destroy Israel in the next generation. We too should have this kind of concern for the body of believers in the next generation, rather than being merely content that we ourselves remain in fellowship with God.

23:4 When last did you read / understand something from Scripture, and then get up and *do something real, concrete and actual about it*? Josiah discovered the book of the Law- and he then went on to do something about it in practice. Reflect through what he did: Passover kept in Jerusalem (23:21-23) = Dt. 16:1-8; removed Asherahs (23:4,6,14) = Dt. 12:3; 16:21; star worship (23:4,11) = Dt. 17:3; the 'high places' and cults (23:8-20) = Dt. 12; child sacrifice (23:10) = Dt. 12:31; 18:10; the cultic stones (23:14) = Dt. 12:3; 16:22; conjuring up the dead (23:24) = Dt. 18:11. It would seem that Josiah was motivated by Deuteronomy 12-18, perhaps this was part of the book of the covenant which was discovered. Here we have a man who allowed Scripture to live in his life, and who was immediately motivated by it to tangible action. His was not a religion of fine Sunday morning words, intellectually admired and aesthetically pleasing. The word should likewise be made flesh in us as it was in Christ. What is required is passionate, real, actual, tangible, concrete action and re-action to what we read and understand.

23:7 The fact these sexual abominations were committed within the temple of God suggests that they had become part of the ritual of Yahweh worship, in the same way as the letters of Paul and Christ to the churches suggest that sexual immorality became part of apostate Christian worship in the first century. The tendency to mix spirituality with illicit sexuality has always been a temptation for the people of God and one of their most persistent weaknesses; we must beware of it.

23:21 The Law of Moses stated that Israel must keep the Passover, and if they didn't, or kept it incorrectly, then their covenant relationship with God would be fractured (Num. 9:13). But it seems that whilst the legislation about the Passover had been lost, they hadn't kept the Passover properly, if at all. And yet there were many faithful individuals who lived during that time when the book was lost who still retained relationship with God. This is no reason to conclude that obedience to God's

covenant is irrelevant, or that it's all simply a matter of the heart and conscience; but it does show the extent of God's eager acceptance of people despite their ignorance of His word.

24:1 *Three years*- During which time the attacks of :2 occurred. This corresponds exactly with other indications that in the latter day judgment of Israel there will be an extended period of Arab raiding and desolation of Israel (for three and a half years?), culminating in the final invasion of the land by 'Babylon' and her smaller Arab allies in order to take Jerusalem.

24:3 *For the sins of Manasseh*- A whole community can be damaged by the long term influence and consequence of one man's sin, even if he later repents as Manasseh did.

24:20 God's anger was such that He propelled Zedekiah and Judah further down the downward spiral they had chosen. He has the ability to give people mindsets and to make decisions which are humanly unwise; and we see Him doing this here, by making Zedekiah rebel against the king of Babylon, when this was political suicide. And yet as the book of Jeremiah makes clear, God at the same time was pleading with Zedekiah through the prophet Jeremiah to repent. So whilst God confirms people in the downward spiral in which they chose to go, He still earnestly seeks their repentance and doesn't abandon them totally until they themselves have totally broken away from Him and He can do no more without excessively controlling their own freewill.

25:2 *The city was entered into*- Judging Israel like this wasn't done by God in a flash of anger but after huge internal turmoil. He had passionately declared in an outburst of love for His wayward people "I will not enter into the city" (Hos. 11:9- the same Hebrew word is used as here). His condemnation of His people is very hard for Him, and is a result of much thinking, re-thinking and struggle about it (Hos. 11:8). Those believers who fear God will condemn them should take comfort from this- that He reveals Himself as struggling within Himself about doing this, and it is not something He wishes to do.

25:5 *Overtook him in the plains of Jericho*- The parable of the good Samaritan speaks about a man taking this same journey, from Jerusalem to Jericho, and being attacked and overcome on the way- and yet restored by grace (Lk. 10:30). The injured man of the parable represents each of us; and yet he is based upon Zedekiah, who had been given every opportunity to heed God's word through Jeremiah and yet through human weakness and peer pressure had not done so. Zedekiah in all his pathetic weakness represents each of us; Christ, the good Samaritan, really does save each of us by grace alone.

25:19 *Those who saw the king's face*- This is a technical term describing the king's inner circle. Yet we are promised that we shall see God's face at Christ's return (Job 19:25-27; Rev. 22:4). The prospect is wonderful, almost beyond our grasp to comprehend- that we shall be as it were in God's inner circle, at the very hub of all existence, His special friends. We who are so weak, dysfunctional, often disinterested and limited; we shall be His special people, forever and ever. See on :29.

25:25 The fact Ishmael, one of the royal family of Judah still at large, killed the Chaldean garrison would have suggested that the response of the Chaldeans would have been to destroy all the Jews who were left in the land. But strangely there's no record of this. Coupling this with the information in :28 that the king of Babylon for no apparent reason showed great kindness to the king of Judah, we are left with the impression that despite all Judah's sin and the inevitable punishment, God's

grace shone through and He didn't punish them as their iniquities deserved, but in wrath remembered mercy and grace (Ezra 9:13), perhaps in specific response to Habakkuk's prayer for this to be the case (Hab. 3:2).

25:29 To eat bread at the king's table was a sign of special favour. And yet Jesus, King of the cosmos, invites us to do this weekly, as if we are His specially favoured inner circle of friends; to refuse the table is strange indeed, and rejecting an amazing grace. See on :19.

## 1 CHRONICLES

It seems the genealogies of 1 Chron. 1-9 were completed at the time of the restoration, when there was a problem in finding a High Priest and priesthood because it was hard to prove who was descended from Aaron, presumably because the genealogies were destroyed when the temple was burnt. The genealogies give much emphasis to the descendants of Aaron, far more than to the other tribes. There are a number of references to faithless men being punished by invasions (e.g. 5:6). Ezra 8 contains a genealogy recorded in similar style and language to these in Chronicles. Nehemiah made a special study of the genealogies in order to find an acceptable priesthood (Neh. 7:5,64). So there were Israel returning from captivity, led by a faithful remnant of the priests, looking back through their history, right back to Abraham and beyond, and seeing that their history was shot through with failure. Such self-examination extended even to considering the names parents gave their children, which frequently included the names of false gods like Baal. Marriage out of the faith was a problem at the time of the restoration (Ezra 9:1,2), and therefore the records of the genealogies stress how this had been a problem in the past- and had still not been forgotten by God. The prophets foretold that Israel's restoration would only come once they achieved a suitable recognition of their sinfulness. The priests who wrote those records in Chronicles were writing down the result of their national self-examination. This was the record of their lessons from Chronicles. Ezra 2:62 records Judah being 'reckoned by genealogies', using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of 1 Chronicles (4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God's 'bringing out' of Judah from Babylon with His 'bringing out' the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion's fortunes: "Yahweh shall count, when He writes up the people, that this man was born there". Each individual was and is significant to God.

1:19 *The land was divided*- This doesn't refer to any movement of the earth's plates. Rather is it a reference to the division of languages at the time of Babel, as recorded in Gen. 11. It seems that any revival of God's Truth has given way to apostasy within two or three generations. Gen.11:11-16 shows that from the time Shem (living after the flood) to Peleg was three generations. Thus in the three generations from the time of the flood to Babel, the revival of God's people had faded away again.

1:43 The point is being made that Israel's desire for a king was influenced by the fact the surrounding peoples had them. The world is always trying to conform us into its mould, whereas we are to be transformed by the Spirit (Rom. 12:1,2).

1:44,45 The Septuagint states that Job was the "Jobab" of :44,45, who lived five generations after Abraham. Job lived in the land of Uz (1:1) mentioned in :17,42. The books of the Bible aren't always in chronological order, and it's likely that the book of Job is set quite early on in Biblical history.

2:4 Israel's sinfulness seems to be emphasized in the various 'interruptions' in the flowing list of names. Thus it is sometimes stressed that a man did not have many children (e.g. :4,6,16), as if to indicate that God's blessing was not with him (there seems an undoubted connection in Old Testament times between blessing and number of sons). Thus information such as that Jether died without children, Sheshan had no sons but daughters, Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters; but his brothers had few children... (2:32,34; 4:27) all this would have been read as highly significant in spiritual terms. Some outstanding weaknesses amongst the patriarchs are recorded (e.g. 5:1), and

the fact that the duty of the priests was to make an atonement for Israel (6:49) appears to be an obvious detail added in passing- until it is appreciated that these records are highlighting the weakness of Israel. This is one of the major lessons from Chronicles.

2:12 Boaz's marriage to a Gentile is not highlighted; simply "Boaz begat Obed", whereas others' marriage out of the faith is recorded in the same chapter (2:3,34). The same action- in this case, marriage to a Gentile- can be done by different people with different motives. For one it may be an act of righteousness, for another- a sin. Thus when Uzziah acted as a priest he was condemned for it (2 Chron. 26:17-21), but when David (as a non-Levite also) did the same, it was a reflection of his spirituality. Seeing the inner motives and spirituality of others are hidden to us, we must be very careful not to judge by outward appearances; and we must resign all ultimate judgment to God, not least because of our total inability to make it.

2:16 Zeruiah was a sister of David, and David laments how her sons were very "hard" (2 Sam. 3:39; 16:10; 19:22). The fact that the hardness of those three men seems to be associated with their mother would lead us to conclude that David's sister Zeruiah was an extremely hard woman. Inevitably there must have been strands of hardness in David too (consider his treatment of Uriah, his intended massacre of Nabal's encampment, torturing the Ammonites etc.); and yet more often than not, we get the impression that David was a real softy. His experience of life made him progressively more soft, whilst his sister and nephews went the other way. Truly could he comment towards the end of it all that God's gentleness had made him great (2 Sam. 22:36).

2:18 It's unusual for the name of the wives or mothers to be recorded as we have here and in :24; perhaps the idea is to show the significance of women in Caleb's family.

2:22 Some Jews reject our belief that Jesus is the promised seed of Abraham and David by claiming that Hebrew genealogy wasn't reckoned through women in Biblical times. But that isn't the case. We see here that Jair's father was of the tribe of Judah, yet in Num.32:41 he is described as "the son of Manasseh", showing that his mother must have been of the tribe of Manasseh. His descent was reckoned through his mother rather than his father. Likewise :34 records that Sheshan "had no sons, but daughters". According to the objection that genealogy cannot be reckoned through the woman, Sheshan would have no subsequent genealogy. However, he is described in :31 as having a son, presumably from the fact that he gave his daughter in marriage to his Egyptian servant (:34). Thus his seed was still reckoned through a woman. Note that Hiram is described as "the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan" (2 Chron.2:14).

2:46 Some of the names given to children seem to hint at a weakness in the parents. One wonders why Caleb called his illegitimate son "Haran", after the city which Abraham left behind in order to attain God's promises.

2:48 *Caleb's concubine*- The genealogies seem to stress the weakness and occasional strength of the people of God. Occasionally the list of names is interrupted by a piece of information which indicates God's awareness of their spirituality. For example, the fact some men had more than one wife or a wife from a nation other than Israel is often recorded (as here and also in 1:32; 2:3,26,35; 4:18; 5:1; 7:14; 8:8). The way these interruptions occur in the lists of names stands out. This is surely to indicate two things: that many faithful men made mistakes in this area of life, and secondly that all down the centuries God has not forgotten that they married out of the faith, or that they allowed



the pressures of their surrounding world to influence them to break away from the ideal one man: one woman standard of Eden. These two facts provide us with both warning and comfort, in that although God is sensitive to failure, He is still able to justify men, to count them as if they are righteous for the sake of their covenant relationship with Him, even though (e.g.) their married life was not completely in order.

2:54 Bethlehem clearly refers to the city rather than a person of that name. Chronicling which Israelite families came from which towns in Judah confirms the suggestion made on 1:1 that these records were written up in the context of the return from exile clarifying who came from which town (see too 4:28-34).

3:3 Solomon wished to imitate his father David in every sense; his own real personality only came out in the Ecclesiastes years, when he took to alcohol, materialism, women and idolatry. It took the influence of his parents many years to wear off. David had weaknesses for horses (2 Sam. 8:4) and many wives; and Solomon followed in these steps too. Note here that David had six sons in seven years by six different women, including Gentiles. And in addition to these, David had children by "the concubines" (:9). Doubtless Solomon reasoned, albeit deep within his psyche, that such behaviour was legitimate because David his father had done it.

3:9 The repeated reference to the possession of concubines can be read as an indication of Israel's weakness in abandoning the ideal standards of God regarding marriage. Yet we read that even David had concubines (3:9)- as if to show the extent of Israel's weakness in the area of marriage.

4:10 This is an example of spiritual ambition, requesting that their border be enlarged, at the expense of driving out neighbouring Canaanite tribes. Jesus uses Jabez's phrase "Keep me from evil" and inserts it into His model prayer, "deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13).

4:24 *The sons of Simeon were Nemuel, Jamin... and Shaul-* But Gen. 46:10 shows that Shaul was Simeon's son by a wrong, casual relationship. Yet this is not recorded in Chronicles, even though so many other weaknesses are. Perhaps this is to demonstrate how if God imputes righteousness for a repented of sin, there really is no record of this kept by Him.

4:32 See on 6:61.

5:4 Gog is mentioned in Ez. 38 as leading a latter day invasion of Israel. The background to 'Gog' given here is that he was an apostate Jew who went away from the God of Israel, attracted by the grazing grounds to the north east of Israel, and who eventually ended up living permanently in the land of Israel's enemies, the land of the Hagarines (sons of Hagar) and Assyria. The Gog of Ez. 38 may well be an apostate Jew (after the pattern of Rabshakeh) who leads an invasion of his ancient homeland. He attacks because he loves cattle (Ez. 38:11,12)- which was a characteristic of the Gog of 1 Chron. 5.

5:26 *God... stirred up the spirit of Pul-* God is able to work directly on the mind or spirit of people, even of unbelievers. What we are desperate for is spiritual mindedness, strength of mind / spirit against the flesh; and surely God is willing to give this to us if we ask Him.

*To this day-* This implies the Chronicles were written whilst Judah were in captivity; the genealogical records therefore had primary relevance to the exiles returning to Judah.

6:57,58 The cities of refuge represented Christ as the ultimate place of refuge for those like us who have sinned, deserve to die, and yet didn't wilfully sin (Heb. 6:18). It should be noted that these cities were generally in areas which required some effort to get to- in the wilderness, in the mountains (:67) etc. This teaches that there must be some conscious effort on our side in fleeing to Christ; repentance and entry into Christ aren't momentary actions, they are highly deliberate and conscious acts from us.

6:61 *Ten cities*- The parable of the pounds describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities (Lk. 19:17). This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs here and in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26, all in the context of the priests receiving their cities, and "five cities" in 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the New Testament is alluding to this Old Testament background of the land being prepared by the Angels for each person amongst God's people to specifically inherit (Ex. 15:17; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10). Our promised inheritance is not *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is simply eternal life; it is the nature of that life which is of the essence.

7:14 *His concubine the Aramitess*- Here and so often in the genealogies we have evidence that from earliest times, the Jews weren't ethnically pure. And intermarriage with Gentiles has continued to be a feature of the community throughout the millennia. Jewishness is therefore cultural more than genetic; which provides another perspective on Paul's argument that fleshly descent from Abraham counts for nothing. There has been so much intermarriage over the generations that the Jews are in no way a purebred race.

7:15 Zelophehad had only daughters; usually, in his context, a man would have taken concubines in order to produce sons. The record of his only having daughters is presented in the context of genealogies which show that many Israelite men had more than one wife. But Zelophehad wasn't dragged down by this; God inspired him to maintain the higher level which he had chosen to live by. We too must seek to do what is ultimately right before God and not be influenced by the standards of our brethren who surround us in the body of believers.

7:24 One feature of these genealogies is that they mention the significance of women as mothers and wives by naming them; and the achievements of women like Sherah, who built Beth-Horon. This sharply contrasts with contemporary king lists of the time, which mention only the males and their exploits. This indicates that the Bible isn't as it were anti-women, as has been ignorantly claimed, but rather God's perception of the value and meaning of the human person is such that His word is very positive about women.

8:8 It would seem that the genealogies of the books of Chronicles, with all their emphasis on the priesthood and temple service under Solomon, were produced at the time of the restoration- in order to encourage the people to restore the Kingdom of God as it had been, and thereby bring in the Kingdom. References to "Jeconiah the captive" (3:17) make sense in the context of the records being written up in the captivity. And we can understand why the story of Shaharaim is mentioned

here- a Jewish refugee in Moab, who sent away his two Gentile wives [cp. what was done in Ezra 10:44] but ended up being blessed with more children. “Seven sons” would’ve been understood as a completeness of blessing. Note that God still recognized his later wife as just that- his wife, even though he had been married previously. No sin or failure leads to a position whereby someone is intrinsically unable to be accepted by God.

8:30-34 When a passage is repeated twice, surely God wishes us to perceive something. 1 Chron. 8:30-34 is repeated in 9:36-40. The reason may be that the name 'Baal' was used by the leaders of Israel. Gibeon's children included Kish and *Baal*, Kish's son was king Saul, Saul had a son called *Eshbaal* as well as Jonathan, David's beloved friend; and Jonathan had a son called Merib *Baal*. These are not the names as recorded elsewhere; evidently the Chronicles record is highlighting the fact that there was a strand of weakness for idols in the family of Saul, including in faithful Jonathan. We note that his love of God, of David, his appreciation of David's righteousness, his belief that David would have the future Kingdom, struggled against the fact that the worldly influence of his father and great-grandfather still rubbed off upon him. We find ourselves so often in similar situations.

8:33 In all close friendships there are some aspects which just could not have been contrived by human arrangement, and which add to the closeness and sense of specialness which those relationships have. There were such aspects with David and Jonathan, intensifying the love of David for Jonathan. For example, it was a beautiful coincidence that they both happened to have a brother called Abinadab (1 Sam. 16:8).

9:17-19 The genealogy of the sons of Korah is significant in that Korah was the ringleader of the rebellion against Moses which led to his destruction. His children however obeyed the command to leave the tents of their father Korah when he was consumed in the earthquake. Num. 16:27 mentions Dathan and Abiram's children standing outside their tents at this time, but there is the pointed omission of Korah's children; they had left the tents, in recognition of Korah's sin and dissociation from it. The descendants of Korah wrote at least 11 of the Psalms and protected the purity of temple worship. Conscious dissociation from sin is required of us; and it's often very hard, especially when it concerns family members. We also learn from this family that the spiritual failure of a father figure doesn't have to mean that the rest of the family likewise fail; in fact, they can learn from the tragedy and become strengthened spiritually by responding to God's judgment of sin as He intends.

9:22 *Their office of trust*- As any employer soon learns, delegation is a risk. We have been “entrusted with the Gospel” (Tit. 1:3), the world God so wants to love, the world God is appealing to, do not directly see Him; for He makes His appeal through us. We are all that many people will ever see of Christ; for we are His body. God has trusted us with representing Him, and put His work into our hands. Those who did God's work in the Old Testament temple were similarly given a “trust”, they were entrusted with God's work. -

9:40 There are clear connections between Jonathan and Gideon; compare 1 Sam.14:10-20 with Jud.7:3,10,11,14,22. Jonathan's son was called Merib Baal, meaning 'rebellion against Baal', an epithet for 'Gideon'. It's not wrong to have Biblical heroes, and to be inspired by their examples in the life decisions we make, even to the naming of our children.

10:4 Although the armour bearer was one of Saul's men, in the anti-David camp, yet David's example of not killing Saul must have deeply influenced him. We do make a difference. We have more

influence upon others than we may think. It can be that an illiterate sister in a male dominated society can think that her attendance at church meetings cannot encourage anyone. It can be that the Christian stockbroker feels that it is impossible for him to influence those he works with. But we do have influence. We have become so humiliated by a shame based society that we can underestimate the value and power of our own personhood.

10:13 *Against Yahweh, against the word of Yahweh*- God and His word are here paralleled; for "the word was [and is] God" (Jn. 1:1). Our attitude to God's word is our attitude to Him.

10:13,14 Just before his final fight with the Philistines, "Saul enquired of Yahweh (but) Yahweh answered him not" (1 Sam. 28:6), and therefore he went to a witch. But in God's final analysis of Saul, Yahweh says that He smote Saul because Saul sinned against God's word by *not* enquiring of God, but of a witch. But Saul *did* enquire of God (see 1 Sam. 14:27 s.w.; 28:6), but God didn't answer him (note how often in the records it is stated by contrast that David enquired successfully of Yahweh). The point is that although Saul prayed to God and enquired of His word on the surface, in his heart, he did nothing of the sort; and therefore his prayer and enquiry was reckoned never to have happened. And we must ask how much of our prayer and Bible study is seen by God as being only spoken and read on a surface level. This was exactly the problem of natural Israel. "They have not cried unto Me with their heart, when they howled (in prayer) upon their beds" (Hos. 7:14). "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt Him" (Hos. 11:7).

11:1 *We are your bone and your flesh*- An idiom meaning that they were in every sense his brethren. Here and in 2 Sam. 19:12 the phrase is used in the context of human beings wanting to have someone exactly like them, of their 'bone and flesh', as their leader. We find the same term used in Eph. 5:30, where we are told that those who are baptized into the body of Christ have in Him someone of their own bone and flesh; He urges His disciples to physically touch His bones and flesh after His resurrection to make the same point, that despite His changed nature, we can totally identify with Him and He with us because He too was totally human (Lk. 24:39). Hence Hebrews 2 labours the point that because Jesus was of our nature, therefore and thereby is He our inspiration and spiritual leader. In this we see the importance of understanding the nature of Christ properly, and the practical spiritual advantage of rejecting the Trinitarian view of Jesus.

11:18 David is a type of Christ; the loyalty he inspired amongst his men was a foretaste of the effect Christ should have upon us. See on :23.

11:19 That water came to represent the lives or blood of those men. We see here a basis for understanding the wine at the communion service; it represents life, the life of Christ; the water here was just water, and the wine we drink is just wine, but it represents the life of another.

11:22 Benaiah killed a lion in order to prepare him for killing two lionlike men. God often works like this, using one experience in life to prepare us for another one.

11:23 This act of bravery was clearly inspired by how David had killed Goliath, which speaks of Christ's victory over sin on the cross. This should be repeated in essence by us in our spiritual battles. See on :18.

12:1 Those who followed David in his wilderness years were remembered by God by name for millennia afterwards. They became leaders in David's Kingdom after the death of Saul. We who

follow Christ now, even though at times it may seem we are supporting a humanly hopeless case, will finally be rewarded in the future Kingdom.

12:14 This alludes to how one faithful man would chase one thousand unbelievers (Dt. 32:30). We could infer that those who followed David in the wilderness years came to faith in God although perhaps they initially came to him more because of their own dissatisfaction with life (1 Sam. 22:2; Ps. 57:4). Some start their spiritual journey with one motivation and yet become more spiritual over time, influenced by Godly examples like David.

12:17 *There is no wrong in my hands*- Saul had falsely accused David of many things, but he refused to take false guilt because of them. When we are under false accusation, we tend to become very self-justificatory and refuse to accept true guilt before God (as opposed to before men) for our real sins, for which we should feel guilty. David sets a great example to us here and in his Psalms about these matters; he refuses to accept he had done anything wrong to Saul, and yet openly confesses his real sins to God.

12:22 David's army increased, until it became "a great army, like the army of God". The parallel between David's men and the Angelic hosts is clear. Significantly, the Angelic armies that destroyed the Syrians are called 'a great army' in 2 Kings 7:6. Asa and his army defeated the Ethiopians- and it's described as them being "destroyed before Yahweh and before His army" (2 Chron. 14:13). Again, the hosts of Israel become the hosts of God. Significantly in this context, 11:9 speaks of David's God as Yahweh of Armies. As the cherubim visualized, we on earth are to be reflective of God's heavenly armies, and if we walk in step with them, victory is assured. See on 14:15.

12:23 Those who supported David at this time were very significant to God, and their numbers have been recorded for millennia in His word. Our support for Christ's cause in this world is highly significant to God, and He likewise remembers all the moments when we have in one way or another stood up for His cause in an unbelieving and spiritually hostile world.

13:2 *If it seems good to you, and if it is of Yahweh our God*- Alluded to in Acts 15:25,28, where the elders of the new Israel, the church, said that it 'seemed good unto them and to the Holy Spirit' to bring Gentiles into the church. We see that in both cases, decisions weren't taken just because it seemed right to a majority; they weren't pure democrats. They recognized another, Divine, element in decision making which was over and above the simple will of men, even if they were believers.

13:10 Uzza was a Levite but not a priest; and the Law clearly emphasized that the sons of Kohath were to carry the ark on staves on their shoulders, not on a cart as David was doing (Num. 4:15). David almost boasted in Ps. 119 that he studied God's law day and night, but he obviously didn't see the obvious; he blanked off those commands in his mind, assuming the spirit of serving God would make the details of God's requirements superfluous. Because of our inattention to God's word, others may die; and we also see that God's holiness is never to be simply disregarded because we in one sense love Him and are joyful before Him. See on 15:2.

14:2 Any exaltation we may receive in life is ultimately for the benefit of God's people, and not to be selfishly enjoyed just by ourselves.

14:14 God varied the pattern here as a test to David's obedience, rather like He did to Moses in asking Him to speak to the rock rather than striking it. And He does the same in our lives too. Often

God's battle plans involved an initial turning away from the face of enemies, and then giving victory. To turn away from enemies was an indication of unworthiness and suffering for sin (Dt. 28:25). God wished to teach that victory can only come if we accept our unworthiness of that victory, and how as sinners we deserve only defeat.

14:15 The "sound of marching" was of the Angel cherubim. David was being taught that victory only comes through walking in step with the armies of Heaven which are above; see on 12:22.

15:2 It took some time for David to repent over his failure in transporting the ark of God in disobedience to God's commands (see on 13:10). The lag time between sin and repentance ought to be as short as possible; we see a similar lag time in the gap between David's sin with Bathsheba and his repentance for it. God will work in our lives to bring us to repentance, but this often involves much suffering to ourselves and others; that can all be avoided if we have a sensitive conscience to God's word and the humility to repent immediately. Yet even here, David appears to shift the blame from himself onto others (:13). Repentance has various shades and degrees, and God seeks totality of repentance and acceptance of the fact we personally have sinned.

15:12 *The place that I have prepared for it-* David's bringing the ark to the place which he had prepared is the basis of Christ's words in Jn. 14:1-3. Clearly Christ saw David as Himself, and us as the ark. The 'bringing up' or 'lifting up' of the ark (Heb.) to a permanent dwelling place has evident reference to the resurrection. And when the ark was finally brought or lifted up to Zion, David / Jesus dealt bread and wine to the people (16:3). One practical encouragement from this typology is that the memorial feast is a celebration that in fact we, the ark, have in prospect already been brought or lifted up into the eternal place prepared for us in the Kingdom.

15:13 David's commission of good didn't outweigh his omission; we must take sins of omission seriously.

15:21 *Obed-Edom-* He was the one who had faithfully looked after the ark when others feared to have anything to do with it (13:14). He may have expected some great recognition for that, but he is listed along with many others as simply having a relatively small role in looking after it. If we are genuinely motivated by wishing to simply serve God's people and maintain His presence amongst His people, we will not seek for recognition or status for it.

15:29 *Despised him in her heart-* The feelings we have about our brethren and their service of God are recorded indelibly by God.

16:2,3 Here and in 15:27 David acts as a priest, even though he was from the tribe of Judah and not Levi. On one hand, our understanding of the spirit and essence of God frees us from the need for literalistic obedience; but as David experienced at the time of the breach upon Uzza (13:10) and his sin with Bathsheba, this can lead us to disregard His principles to a point where it is counted as sin. On the other hand, when Uzziah acted as a priest he was condemned for it (2 Chron. 26:19-21). The same actions can be righteousness for one person and sin for another. In this lies the impossibility of our ultimately judging the outward actions of others; we simply must leave it to God.

16:3 Raisins were made from grapes, so we have here a prefigurement of the bread and wine of the communion service. It is a celebration of the blessing we have received from our high priest, the Lord Jesus.

16:21 *He reproveth kings for their sakes-* This is a reference to the rebuking of Abimelech in Gen. 20; yet in this case Abimelech was in the right and is portrayed as the honourable one, and Abraham and

Sarah as less than honourable and in need of reproof (Gen. 20:16). David is therefore asking Israel to glory in God's undeserved kindness, His grace, towards them (:34,41).

16:26 The Truth of the Gospel is the only way to come to salvation. All other religions apart from true Christianity will not give salvation nor a relationship with God. Realising this, David pleads with his people to be a missionary nation (:8,25,26). The more we realise the pathetic fallacy of human religion, indeed the whole and utter vanity of life under this sun, the more we will preach Yahweh's Truth to a tragically wandering, aimless world.

16:33 The prospect of God 'coming' to judge the earth should be a source of joy to us rather than of endless fear.

17:2 Nathan replied too quickly, assuming that he knew God's will and what God's word ought to say in response to such a desire. But he was wrong. We see here a lesson in our need to base our response to situations strictly upon God's revealed word rather than our assumption of what He probably meant.

17:10 *I tell you that Yahweh will build you a house*- God's grace is reflected in all this; David wanted to build God a physical house, and God responds by saying He doesn't need that but rather He will build David an eternal house in the sense of a family, based around David's descendant who would be Yahweh's own Son (Lk. 1:31-35). God loves to do for us above all we can ask or imagine of asking (Eph. 3:20); He delights to lavish grace upon us and we should delight to do the same to others, thinking what we could do for them that would make them say "Wow!" to God's grace.

17:11 *Set up your seed*- The Greek LXX version of the Old Testament uses the word elsewhere translated 'resurrect' for "set up".

17:13 *I will be his father, and he shall be My son*- The only way for this to be fully fulfilled would be that a woman who was a direct descendant of David would have a child whose father was God. And the account of the virgin birth shows how it all came to pass. It's impossible therefore that Christ physically pre-existed before His birth. Notice the future tenses here. We note too that Jesus was therefore the direct descendant of David and the rightful king of Israel. Yet He lived as a poor, despised working man and died the death of a rejected criminal. We who are in Him by baptism into Him will likewise not be discerned for who we really are by the unbelieving society in which we live.

*Sure mercies*- "The sure mercies of David" result in the wicked man forsaking his way (Is. 55:3); they therefore inspire us in forsaking sinful thoughts and wicked ways (Is. 55:7).

17:16 *Who am I*- This should be our response also, for the covenants of promise have been made with us too in that we are in Christ and they therefore concern us (Gal. 3:27-29). It was because David was truly humble that he could immediately respond in genuine humility to God's promises to him; whereas Solomon became proud because of them. Note how "David *the king*... *sat* before Yahweh, and said, Who am I...?". Grace produces quite different responses in different people; some it humbles, others misinterpret it to justify continuing in sin.

17:17 *Respected me according to the estate of a man of high degree*- This could be rendered: "You have seen me as a type of the man on high". David understood himself as a type of Christ.

18:1-3 After David received the promises about the future Messianic Kingdom, he went out and established his Kingdom, attacking Israel's enemies and driving them out of the land. Our response to the future Hope of the Kingdom, which we too have through the very same promises, should also be to try to live the Kingdom life now, as far as we can.

18:4 *But reserved of them for one hundred chariots*- The king of Israel was not supposed to multiply horses and chariots but rather trust in God (Dt. 17:16). David allowed himself a little weakness in this matter; and his son Solomon used it as an excuse to multiply so many horses and chariots that he had to build cities to store them in. The problem with allowing ourselves a 'little' sin is that sin by its nature spreads and multiplies, and is repeated in others for whom we are an example (like our children) to a far greater extent.

19:2 *I will show kindness to Hanun... because his father showed kindness to me*- Jesus in Lk. 6:32-34 may have this incident in mind when He taught that kindness to those who love us isn't at all the radical love and grace which He taught. Loving those who love us doesn't always work out well, as David's experience here shows.

19:4 Earlier in his life, David had had a similar experience with Nabal; he sent messengers to him, who were abused. But David at that time over-reacted, and was only saved from destruction by the wisdom of Nabal's wife Abigail (1 Sam. 25). There are times when God arranges for circumstances to repeat in our lives to test whether we have learnt a lesson, or to reinforce the lesson we learnt.

19:13 *May Yahweh do that which seems good to Him*- There is an element of predestination in our lives; but the fact that God will do His will shouldn't lead us to complacency nor resignation to fatalism, but rather to zeal to do His will as far as we can perceive it, knowing that He will bless the doing of His will. In Joab's case, understanding this led him to a zealous attempt to fight for the Lord, which God blessed with victory.

20:1 *But David stayed at Jerusalem*- 2 Sam. 11 fills in the significant detail that during this period, David had an affair with Bathsheba and arranged for her husband Uriah to be killed. Simple lesson: to properly understand the Bible we must read it all and compare it against itself in order to get the full picture.

20:3 This seems an unnecessarily cruel way of punishing enemies. This is the period in between David's sin with Bathsheba and his repentance. His own bad conscience with God led him to such excessive punishment of God's enemies. Psychologically, it's understandable; he realized he had sinned and deserved to be punished. But instead of confessing his sin and accepting the consequences as rightful and just, he psychologically transferred the sin onto others, and punished them instead of seeing himself punished. Judgmentalism and aggressive attitudes toward others often arise from a bad conscience within a person; the answer is to confess our sins to God, repent before Him and accept any consequences. We are thereby made free from the need to transfer sin and guilt onto others and judge them for our own sin.

20:5-8 These battles with giant Philistines have many similarities with David's victory over Goliath in 1 Sam. 17. His victory there inspired his men, just as Christ's victory on the cross ['Golgotha' = 'skull of Goliath'] should inspire us and be replicated by us in our spiritual struggles.

21:1 'Satan' is a Hebrew word meaning 'adversary'. It has no evil connotation of itself. The parallel 2 Sam. 24:1 says that God provoked David to number Israel. God therefore worked as a satan, an adversary, to David. Good people like Peter can be termed 'satan' (Mt. 16:21-23); the greatest adversary to us is our own internal tendency to sin. There's no sinful cosmic being called 'Satan'.



21:3 It wasn't a sin to take a census of the people, but each time they were numbered, they had to pay a tax to the tabernacle; if they refused, they would be plagued (Ex. 30:12-15). David's desire to know how many soldiers he had was a trusting in human strength. But it was also wrong in that Joab knew that the people likely wouldn't pay the tax, and therefore they would be plagued. David could've argued that this would be Israel's problem, not his, if they chose to be disobedient. But we ought to be sensitive to the likely spiritual failures of others and not lead them into sin by forcing them into positions where they have to take choices which they will probably fail in. God was angry with Israel and therefore He punished them (:7)- because they failed to pay the temple tax.

21:13 God is more merciful than people. This thought is a great encouragement when we at times worry as to whether God will be merciful to us at the last day. One factor in such fears is that we have only visibly known human mercy, but this is far inferior in quality and extent to God's grace.

21:15 *He relented*- God can change His planned judgments upon His people for the sake of the intercession of one faithful person who is willing to take their sin upon him; which is what David did in :16-:27. David pointed forward to Christ at this time.

21:17 David sinned only in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba (1 Kings 15:5); the people were punished by plague because they hadn't paid the tax required of them whenever a census was taken (Ex. 30:12-15). There are times when our conscience can smite us for things of which we are not fully guilty; but see on :3.

21:24 We shouldn't appear to make a sacrifice when actually it costs us nothing; e.g. to serve God in a way which naturally reinforces our natural interests and personality type. Sacrifice is to be after the pattern of Christ on the cross, and therefore has to involve real cost and pain for us; otherwise the concept of sacrifice loses any real meaning.

22:8 Solomon slightly spins this when he tells Hiram that his father David hadn't himself had the time to get around to the job of building the temple because of being busy fighting wars (1 Kings 5:3). He says nothing about David shedding blood; the moral aspect of it all is nicely ignored by Solomon. But David in his turn appears to be twisting the promises to him given in 1 Chron. 17 and 2 Sam. 7. The house referred to was God's Kingdom, God's family of people; and the great son referred to was prophetic of Christ (Lk. 1:31-35). Indeed, God clarified that He didn't want man to build *Him* a temple, instead He wanted to build us up to be His house in Christ. One wonders therefore if God really did tell David that he couldn't build the temple because he had killed many people; and whether the building plans David claimed to have received from God were really from Him. All we have here is the record of David claiming God had told him that He did want a house built, but not by David because of his bloodshed. There are other Biblical examples of men assuming they know what God wants to the point of claiming that their word is in fact God's word (2 Sam. 7:3,4; 1 Kings 22:15-17).

23:4 *To oversee the work of the house of Yahweh*- This system of arrangements in God's house would've been practically experienced by Solomon. He twice uses the Hebrew word translated "oversee" in Proverbs. He says that ants are self-motivated; they need no "guide, overseer or ruler" (Prov. 6:6,7). This seems a critique of the complex system of overseers which Solomon had to place over Israel in order to build the temple and build up the Kingdom. Ideally, he seems to be saying, every Israelite ought to be a zealous worker. Prov. 12:24 says the same: "The hand of the diligent

[*whoever* he / she is] shall bear rule [in practice]" [s.w. Prov. 6:7 "ruler"]. And we must ask ourselves, whether for whatever reason the new Israel hasn't slumped into the same problem, of lack of self-motivation, waiting to be asked to do something before we do it, over-relying upon our "overseers". The ants aren't like this. They see the job to be done, and naturally get on with it.

*Sanctified, that he should sanctify-* This is alluded to in Jn. 17:17-19 where Jesus says that He sanctified Himself on the cross in order to sanctify us. Our sanctification is ultimately in order to do the same for others; because we are a Kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 2:5,6), the Levites are our pattern. Salvation and acceptance by God aren't given to us simply to personally enjoy, but so that we may serve others with them.

24:19 The 24 orders of priests are alluded to in the vision of the Heavenly court in Rev. 4:4; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4, where again there are 24 elders. God's people on earth are to reflect the system of their representative Angels in Heaven. But Israel tragically perverted this; in Ez. 8:16-18 we read of how the High Priest and the 24 elders worshipped idols within the temple. We on earth are not alone as we do God's work; we are part of a reflection on earth of the situation which is now in Heaven.

24:31 *These likewise-* Notice the stress on the equality of the priests and the irrelevance of their personal status (25:8; 26:12). We are the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,6). The greatness, urgency and very nature of the work before us as a community of believers ought to make worldly differences of status and age irrelevant.

25:2 The "sons" mentioned in these lists could include those who were taught by, e.g., Asaph; the students were understood as "sons" of the teacher (:8).

25:6 *The service of God's house-* The temple project became an obsession with Solomon; after his death, his people complained at the "grievous servitude" which Solomon had subjected them to (2 Chron. 10:4). But the Hebrew word "servitude" is that repeatedly used to describe the "service" of the temple by the people (here and 26:8,30; 27:26; 28:13-15,20,21; 29:7; 2 Chron. 8:14). Solomon became obsessed with making others 'serve God' when it was effectively serving him; he came to be abusive to God's people, when the initial idea of the temple was that it was to be built in order to help God's people serve Him. And such obsession, turning well motivated projects into means of personal ego tripping, with all the resultant abuse, has sadly not been unknown amongst the believers of our generation.

26:4 *Obed-Edom... God blessed him-* Obed-Edom bravely had the ark stay in his home, when at the time all others thought that it would lead to the death of his family (2 Sam. 6:11,12). God blessed him for this- by giving him many children and grandchildren, 62 in all (:8). And yet Obed-Edom wasn't highly rewarded for this in human terms; his many children were doorkeepers in the temple, which Ps. 84:10 implies was seen as the lowest and least honourable work. There are times when we have to do what is right and disregard the fears of others in the ecclesia, even those of the leaders [cp. David]. Reward and honour for such faithfulness will not necessarily come in this life, nor should we expect it now, if our focus is upon the future Kingdom of God on earth as the time and arena for our reward.

26:26 *David... had dedicated-* God swore to David "by My holiness" (Ps. 89:35). The Hebrew for "holiness" is the same word translated "dedication". David's response to God's dedication to him

was to dedicate [s.w.] all the silver and gold which he had won from this world, to the service of God's house (see too 1 Kings 7:51; 2 Chron. 5:1). Our response to God's dedication to us should be a like dedication of what we have to Him. Covenant relationship with God requires much of both Him and us. The case of David is a nice illustration of the meaning of grace. David wanted to *do* something for God- build Him a house, spending his wealth to do so. God replied that no, He wanted to build *David* a house. And He started to, in the promises He gave David. And David's response to that grace is to still *do* something- to dedicate his wealth to God's house, as God had dedicated Himself to David's house. This is just how grace and works should be related in our experience.

27:23 There would've been nothing morally wrong with taking a census of Israel's young people, the next generation; but David believed in the promise that Abraham's seed would be many, and so he didn't. We can count every penny of our resources if we wish, but the higher level is to live in faith that God will fulfil His promise to provide for His people on their journey towards His Kingdom.

28:3-6 These words of David appear to be his claims as to what God had told him; but what he says here appears to be a mixture of God's actual words with some wishful thinking on his own part. The reasons God gave for not wanting David to build a temple are different to what David here claims God said, and clearly David was obsessed with justifying Solomon as his heir, even claiming that God had commanded Solomon to be king and to build the temple. David had lost his Christ-centeredness in his zeal to see his son become the major fulfilment of the promises to him in 2 Sam. 7. This desire to declare Solomon right and as God's man at all costs was very damaging for Solomon, for it led him to a loss of conscience, chronic selfishness and loss of faith in the end. See on :19.

28:8 *Seek out all the commandments of Yahweh*- If we love God, we will not have a minimalistic attitude to serving Him, doing as little as we can get away with. We will eagerly seek out how to please Him, what principles we should live by, what we should and should not do or be in order to please Him.

28:19 *This, said David, I have been made to understand in writing from the hand of Yahweh*- The implication could be that David was only claiming to have been given the temple plans from Yahweh (see on 28:3-6). David like many today mixed God's word with his own wishes and speculations, and ended up assuming that what he wished to be true was in fact God's word.

29:1 *Whom alone God has chosen*- God hadn't said this, but David made his personal wishes and preferences to sound as if they were God's word; see on 28:3-6,19.

29:5 *To be made by the hands of artisans*- Solomon's temple is described as being made with hands. The word "made" is stressed in the record of Solomon's building the temple (2 Chron. 3:8,10,14-16; 4:1,2,6-9,14,18,19,21). The work of the temple was very much produced by men's *hands* (2 Chron. 2:7,8). 'Things made with hands' is a phrase referring to idols in several passages (e.g. Is. 2:8; 17:8; 31:7). And it may be significant that the words of Is. 66:1,2 concerning God not living in temples are quoted by Paul with reference to pagan temples in Acts 17:24, and concerning the temple in Jerusalem by Stephen. The building of the temple became an idol to Solomon, just as the service of God can be twisted by us into a form of self-worship.

29:6 David's generosity inspired his brethren to do the same; generosity to God's work is contagious.

29:14 *Of Your own have we given You-* We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him. The myth of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'. Connected to this is David's argument that we ought to be generous to God's work because of our mortality (:15)- seeing we can take nothing with us, we should give it all to God. This is one outcome of believing that man is mortal and that we have no immortal soul which consciously survives death.

29:19 David earnestly prayed in Psalm 72 for Solomon to be the Messianic King, and therefore David asked for Solomon to be given a truly wise heart. These prayers were answered in a very limited sense- in that Solomon was given great wisdom, and his Kingdom was one of the greatest types of Christ's future Kingdom. Thus our prayers for others really can have an effect upon them, otherwise there would be no point in the concept of praying for others. But each individual has an element of spiritual freewill; we can't force others to be spiritual by our prayers; yet on the other hand, our prayers can influence their spirituality. David's prayers for Solomon is an example of this. Those prayers were heard, in that God helped Solomon marvellously, giving him every opportunity to develop a superb spirituality; but he failed to have the genuine personal desire to be like this in his heart, in his heart he was back in Egypt, and therefore ultimately David's desire for Solomon to be the wondrous Messianic King of his dreams had to go unfulfilled.

29:23 *Solomon sat on the throne of Yahweh as king-* Note that the Kingdom of Israel was in fact God's Kingdom; the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth (Ez. 21:27; Acts 1:6) therefore requires that the arena of that Kingdom will likewise be here on earth- not in Heaven.

## 2 CHRONICLES

1:6 The Chronicles record is very positive compared to the accounts of Solomon in 1 Kings. But Solomon's many sacrifices must be compared with Mic. 6:7, which says that God isn't impressed by such "thousands" of sacrifices, but looks instead for humility, justice and kindness in a person. Solomon's father had likewise appreciated that the cattle on one thousand hills are God's and so we can't give Him anything materially which He doesn't have, but we can give Him our personalities and characters (Ps. 50:10). But Solomon thought that external generosity to God was what He wanted, and he ignored the spiritual sacrifices which are far more important to God.

1:10 'Going out and coming in' is an idiom for leadership. Solomon was asking for wisdom because he thought that he was the Messiah, and he saw wisdom as a Messianic characteristic. He failed to realize that the promises to Abraham and David were only being primarily fulfilled in him (e.g. 1 Kings 4:20); he thought that he was the ultimate fulfilment of them (1 Kings 8:20 states this in so many words). His lack of faith and vision of the future Kingdom lead him to this proud and arrogant conclusion (cp. building up our own 'Kingdom' in this life through our lack of vision of the future Kingdom which is to come at Christ's return).

1:11 We too can prefer wisdom over wealth when we decide to turn down a more demanding or a second job or course of education because we don't want to be left without time or heart for God's word.

1:16 *The king's merchants purchased them*- This was specific disobedience to Dt. 17:16, which taught that Israel's king shouldn't cause the people to go to Egypt to buy horses. And Solomon would have copied out this section of the law and memorized it (Dt. 17:18). This shows how we have a tendency to not only ignore God's word but actually to do exactly the opposite. Israel was strategically situated between Egypt and other nations, and so Solomon became a middleman for the horse and chariot trade (:17); but Israel were not to have horses and chariots themselves (Dt. 17:16). Inevitably, Solomon ended up keeping horses for himself because he was 'in the trade', and became obsessed with them. It's rather like a person dealing in alcohol becoming themselves an alcoholic; and in more subtle ways we too can fall for the goods of Egypt through wilful association with them and enabling others to enjoy them.

2:1 Solomon wanted to build two houses, one for God and another for himself. There was always a duality in Solomon's service, rather than a total commitment to God alone.

2:3-6 These words seem to smack of a false humility. He pompously informs Hiram of the magnificence of his project, lost in the manic obsession of the powerful architect, and then concludes: "Who am I then, that I should build (God) an house?". Confirmation of this is provided by the way in which Jer. 22:13-17 describes Jehoiakim's proud building of his own cedar house in the language of Solomon's building of the temple. We can serve God with pride, in which case it is an abomination. There's an obvious contradiction in Solomon's reasoning; if God is indeed so great that He doesn't dwell in human houses (Acts 7:48; 17:24), then why build Him a house? This was all false humility, draped, as it were, in out of context Biblical quotation and spiritual allusion.

2:5 *The house which I build is great*- The Hebrew word translated "great" is used again by Solomon at the end of his life when he lost his faith and looked back at how he had built "great" buildings

(Ecc. 2:4) in a vain search for self-fulfilment which he ultimately found to be vanity. The lesson of Solomon is that we can serve God on a surface level whilst our heart is far from Him, and the works we do for Him are in fact only a living out of our vain search for self-fulfilment, rather than a total devotion to Him and His causes.

3:1 This implies David assumed that the spot where the Angel appeared to him in 2 Sam. 24:17,18 was where he should build the temple. But this could be one of several examples of David wildly over-interpreting in order to justify his obsession with his son building a temple.

*Mount Moriah*- This was where Abraham offered Isaac (Gen. 22:2), and it was near Jerusalem- further strengthening the connections between that offering and the sacrifice of Christ on a hill outside Jerusalem.

3:3 A cubit was the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger.

3:12 *Joining to the wing of the other cherub*- The cherubim totally covered the ark. In the Psalms, David reflects that the righteous dwell under the shadow of God's wings (Ps. 17:8; 36:7), as if we are located on the atonement cover which was on top of the ark, where the blood of atonement was sprinkled, which represented Christ's blood. Our covering by God's Angelic cherubim protection is therefore total and complete. But the cherubim described here aren't those which covered the ark; these covered the entire Most Holy Place. Likewise the constant theme of cherubim everywhere in the temple suggests that Solomon wished to expand the concept of the holiness and protection of the atonement cover to the entire temple. The temple represents all God's people; for we are His temple. The New Testament expands the theme further- the person of each individual believer is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:17; 6:19). Each of us personally becomes as it were within the Most Holy Place and likewise constantly in God's most intense presence and covered by His wings.

4:1 Stephen says that David tried to find a *tabernacle* for God, "*But* Solomon built him an *house*. *Howbeit* the most High dwelleth *not* in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne... what house will ye build me?" (Acts 7:46-49 AV). This cannot mean 'God no longer dwells in the temple as He used to before Christ's death', because the reason given is that the prophet Isaiah says that God cannot live in houses. This reason was true in Isaiah's time, before the time of Christ. It would seem that Stephen is politely saying: 'Solomon made this mistake of thinking that God can be limited to a physical building. You're making just the same mistake'. And he goes on to make a comment which could well allude to this: "Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers (including Solomon) did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51 AV). Further evidence that Stephen saw Solomon's building of the temple in a negative light is provided by the link between Acts 7:41 and 48: "They made a calf... and rejoiced in *the works of their own hands*... howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples *made with hands*" (AV). The word "made" is stressed here in the record of Solomon's building the temple (3:8,10,14-16; 4:1,2,6-9,14,18,19,21). The work of the temple was very much produced by men's *hands* (2:7,8). Things made with hands refers to idols in several Old Testament passages (e.g. Is. 2:8; 17:8; 31:7). Significantly, Solomon's temple is described as being made with hands in 1 Chron. 29:5. The lesson ought to be clear: we can expend huge effort in apparently serving God when in fact we are only serving ourselves; and thus we can turn the supposed service of God into an idol.

*5:6 Sacrificing sheep and cattle, that could not be counted-* Whilst the record here isn't specifically critical of Solomon, he failed to understand his father David's reflection that all the cattle on every hill are God's (Ps. 50:10) and therefore God doesn't so much as seek animal sacrifice from us as desire faith and a broken casting of ourselves upon God. David came to that understanding because his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba deserved death and there was no animal sacrifice which could take away that guilt- he had to throw himself upon God's grace and learn that the real sacrifice God sought was that of a broken, penitent heart (Ps. 51:16,17). Solomon didn't recognize his sins as David did, he didn't mess up so publically as David did, and therefore he failed to appreciate this, focussing instead on the external rather than the internal. It's amazing how God uses human sin and failure to teach us; those like Solomon who don't sin publically and don't recognize the weight of their private sins are often lead into the shallow, empty spirituality and surface level service of God which we see in Solomon at this time. See on 7:5.

*5:8 The cherubim covered the ark-* See on 3:12.

*6:2 A place for You to dwell in forever-* This is one of several hints that Solomon felt that the full fulfilment of the Davidic promises was to be found in him (see on :10). He failed to look forward to the spirit of Christ, instead becoming obsessed with the achievement of his own works. He was largely encouraged in this by David, who seems to have felt that Solomon was the Messiah figure the promises spoke about. Thus Ps.72 is dedicated to Solomon, and yet it speaks clearly of the messianic Kingdom. David thus came to misquote and misapply the promises God made to him in his obsession about his own family, rather than the see the promises as concerning the great spiritual family which would be built by Messiah. Solomon repeated his father's error. God had told David that He did not want a physical house, because He had never commanded this to be done at any time in the past. Solomon misquotes this in :5,6 to mean that God had never asked for a physical house in the past, but now He had asked David's son to build such a house in Jerusalem. This is a lesson to us all against misquoting and misapplying Scripture to justify how we would like things to be for us and our immediate family.

6:6. Solomon claims that God said: "But I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name might be there". God had chosen no resting place, although it would have been politically convenient for Solomon if Jerusalem as a city was where God had chosen to dwell. And so he kept thinking that way until he persuaded himself that in fact this was what God had said, and misquoted God's word to that end.

*6:10 Yahweh has performed His word that He spoke-* The promise to David about his great son building God's house was a promise of Messiah building a house in the sense of a spiritual family (Lk. 1:31-35). The promise was given in response to David's desire to build a physical house for God. But Solomon was too eager to see the prophecy fulfilled in him and before his eyes, and this lack of Christ-centeredness and focus on the future, ultimate Kingdom of God on earth led him astray.

6:12,13 The record emphasizes how Solomon prayed in front of everyone and showed his apparent humility before all. Christ's teaching condemning such behaviour may well allude to Solomon's failures in these things (Mt. 6:6).

6:18 These fine words contradict what Solomon just said in :2, that he was building a house where God *would* dwell, and would do so, he claimed, “for ever”. This is all therefore false humility, which is something every spiritual person must ever be on their guard against.

6:20 *Pray toward this place*- Prayer should’ve been directed toward God, but Solomon gave in to the human tendency to want a buffer between God and man, just as Israel didn’t want to hear God speaking directly with them. Popular religion has pandered to this tendency through hierarchical systems of priesthood etc., but God has always revealed Himself as thirsting for relationship with man and therefore is eager for the most direct form of contact with us which our humanity permits. This is supremely enabled for those who are by status “in Christ” who can come directly to God because of Christ’s achievement for us.

6:24 *Turn again and confess Your name*- God’s Name refers to the declaration of His characteristics (Ex. 34:4-6). Repentance involves a recognition both of our wrongness, and God’s rightness. See on 12:6.

6:30 *Render to every man according to all his ways*- This will happen when Christ returns at the final day of judgment (Rev. 22:12). And yet it is said to happen in response to prayer now. When we pray, we come before God’s throne; the experience of prayer is therefore a foretaste of the day of judgment. As we feel toward the Lord now when we are in His presence in prayer, so we will then.

6:33 Solomon speaks as if the heavens where God lived were actually the temple; he bid men pray towards the temple where God lived, rather than to God in Heaven. Yet theoretically he recognized the magnitude of God (:18); yet the vastness of God, both in power and spirituality, meant little to him; it failed to humble him as it should have done. It is a feature of human nature to be able to perceive truth and yet act the very opposite. His enthusiasm for his own works lead him to lose a true relationship with God. The idea of salvation by grace became lost on him, loving response to God’s forgiveness was not on his agenda, he felt true humility was unnecessary for him, given his certainty that he was King as God intended.

6:35 *Uphold their case*- The crises encountered by God’s people on earth are as it were considered by the court of Heaven, with God acting as both the advocate and judge, upholding their case. But this is if we bring our case before Him in prayer. This is why simply telling God the situation we’re in, although He knows it in the sense that He knows all things, is so necessary.

6:36 Solomon is alluding in this verse to God’s threatened punishments for Israel if they totally rebelled against Him. But Solomon seems to minimize that sin by describing it as if it’s inevitable- “for there is no man who sins not”. God set before Israel the blessings for obedience and abiding in the covenant, and the curses for disobedience and breaking covenant with God, which included being scattered amongst the Gentiles and losing their land. And Solomon minimizes such serious rebellion as something ordinary. This minimizing of sin is what led him to spiritual self-destruction.

7:1 Although God had clearly told David that He didn’t want a physical house built for Him, He made a concession to Israel’s weakness as He did in allowing them to have a human king- and worked through that concession, that lower level of spiritual life which His people had chosen. Such is His thirst for relationship with us His people. Therefore His glory filled the temple as a sign that despite Solomon’s pompous prayer of chapter 6, He was willing to accept that system of temple presence.



7:5 These huge numbers of animal sacrifices weren't really what God was looking for; each animal represented the dedication of one person, and we cannot dedicate other people's devotion; they must themselves offer it. The fact Solomon's animal sacrifices were too many or too large to fit on the altar God had designed and specified the size of (:7) indicates that they weren't what God had intended. See on 5:6.

7:11 *The house of Yahweh, and in his own house*- Twice in this verse and often elsewhere we see God's house paralleled with Solomon's house. His dedication to God's house wasn't total and undivided.

7:12 2 God accepted the temple only as a place of sacrifice, i.e. a glorified altar (cp. 2 Sam. 24:17,18). And yet- God didn't really want sacrifice (Ps. 40:6; Heb. 10:5). It was a concession to weakness.

7:14 Solomon in his prayer had said that if Israel sinned and then prayed toward the temple, God would then forgive them. But God corrects this; He wants sinners to pray directly to Him, and He will forgive them- the temple was not to be seen as the instrument or mediatrix of forgiveness which Solomon envisaged. Likewise, Solomon's implication that prayer offered in the temple would be especially acceptable was not upheld by God's reply to him about this (6:24-26 cp. 7:12,13). Again and again we see that God thirsts for direct relationship with Him, rather than via any system of priesthood or human religion, even attending meetings because that's our social club and family background. Solomon says that God will hear the prayers of His people because *the temple* is called by God's Name; but God's response is that "My people who are called by My name" would pray to Him themselves and be heard, quite apart from the temple (6:33 cp. 7:14). He sees *them* as bearing His Name rather than the temple building, as Solomon perceived it. God goes on to parallel the temple and His people in :21,22, saying that if He punishes the temple He will punish the people. Solomon seems to have thought that the temple would still stand favourably in God's eyes even if the people were punished. The lesson is that it's individual people rather than religious structures, of whatever sort, which God is interested in.

7:16 This is a conditional promise, followed by five verses of conditions concerning Solomon's spirituality which he overlooked. Like Solomon, we too can fix upon promises without considering their conditionality. There is good reason to think that communally and individually we so easily shut our eyes to the possibility of our spiritual failure and disaster, the sense of the future we might miss. God constantly warned Solomon about the conditionality of the promises, before the building started (2 Sam. 7:14), during it (1 Kings 6:11-13) and immediately after completing it (1 Kings 9:2-9).

7:20 God here corrects Solomon's idea that if Israel were dispersed, then the temple would still stand and they could pray to it from their dispersion.

8:1 *Solomon had built the house of Yahweh and his own house*- Again Solomon's building of God's house is paralleled with building his own house, implying his dedication to God's house wasn't wholehearted, unlike David his father. This chapter goes on to use the word "built" many times. Solomon's building of God's house is set within the context of the way he liked building anyway. At the end of his life, he admits that he went through a phase of being obsessed with building, in some vain search to find self-fulfilment without God (Ecc. 2:4). In his apparently zealous building of the temple, Solomon was therefore only serving God in ways which he enjoyed, which reinforced his own personality type. Hence :6 speaks of how he "desired to build for *his* pleasure". On one hand, we must use our God-given

talents to serve Him; and yet on the other, we are asked to take up Christ's cross and follow Him, going right against the grain of how we would naturally like to be.

8:6 Solomon had so many horses and chariots that he needed to build cities to store them. This was a specific disobedience to the command that the king of Israel was not to multiply horses to himself (Dt. 17:16). Yet that was the very section of the Law which he had to copy out and remember (Dt. 17:19). He had the ability, like all of us, to know God's requirements and yet do the very opposite. He must've assumed that somehow he was an exception... but if we accept and love God's principles we will not wish to make ourselves any exception to them.

9:5 *No more spirit in her*— The Hebrew word translated "spirit" has a wide range of meaning. It can refer to the life force within people; or as here, it can refer to the mind.

9:6 People usually need to see intellectual truths lived out in practice before they will really believe them. This is why the Gospel is more powerfully taught by people, rather than through impersonal mediums like the internet or reading books.

9:8 *To be king for Yahweh your God*— Israel were God's Kingdom on earth, and their kings were reigning on God's behalf. The Kingdom was therefore overturned when the last king of Israel was deposed; but it will be re-established at Christ's return (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:6). The hope of the coming Kingdom of God on earth is therefore the hope of the re-establishment of God's Kingdom which once was upon earth. Again we see that the promised Kingdom will be on earth— this is the Biblical hope, not going to Heaven on death.

9:13 The reference to 666 cannot be coincidental; this is the number of a man who is the epitome of "the beast" (Rev. 13:18). There are many other similarities between the descriptions of the beast's kingdom and that of Solomon's kingdom. And yet his kingdom was clearly a type of Christ's kingdom. We see in this the terrible duality possible within human beings; and we see how what may appear very spiritual and wonderful on the surface can in fact be very sinful. This is true of both individuals and communities.

9:19 Solomon came to see his throne as the throne of God; he seemed to think that the promise to David that Messiah would sit on his throne could be fulfilled if he built the most amazing throne ever seen in the world. He made 12 lions to stand on either side of his throne, perhaps in imitation of how the Angels were perceived to be on either side of God's throne (1 Kings 22:19). He was indeed sitting on the throne of the Lord as king over Israel, but in the sense that he was reigning on God's behalf; for God was Israel's true king. Solomon seems to have thought that he himself was some kind of God over Israel. And the lesson for us is to perceive ourselves as God's servants and representatives, but not to take this to the extent that we think that all of our actions are thereby justified as somehow Divinely sanctioned. The end result was that Solomon lost sight of the future Kingdom— and we too will likewise lose our way if we *de facto* consider our little kingdoms to effectively be God's Kingdom.

9:23 Solomon had God's wisdom throughout his apostasy (Ecc. 2:9), as the Truth ever remains with us in intellectual terms. God put that wisdom in his heart in order for him to help others, both in Israel and in the world; yet Solomon failed to realize that he needed to apply it to himself. The more truth passes through our lips to others, the stronger we are tempted to not apply it to ourselves personally.

10:4 The temple project became an obsession with Solomon; after his death, his people complained at the “grievous service” which Solomon had subjected them to. But the Hebrew word translated “service” is that repeatedly used to describe the “service” of the temple by the people (1 Chron. 25:6; 26:8,30; 27:26; 28:13-15,20,21; 29:7; 2 Chron. 8:14). Solomon became obsessed with making others ‘serve God’ when it was effectively serving *him*; he came to be abusive to God’s people, when the initial idea of the temple was that it was to be built in order to help God’s people serve Him. And such obsession, turning well motivated projects into means of personal ego tripping, with all the resultant abuse, has sadly damaged so many within the body of Christ. Jesus invited people who were heavily burdened under a hard yoke to come to Him and have that yoke made lighter (Mt. 11:29,30). He was clearly alluding to this incident, where heavily burdened people ‘came’ seeking a lighter yoke.

10:10 Younger people are often harsher than older ones, and therefore make good soldiers in wars of aggression, both literal and figurative. As we grow older we ought to become softer and the more influenced by God’s grace, rather than growing hard and gnarled as some do.

10:15 *It was brought about of God-* Rehoboam’s response to the people seems obviously wrong and unwise. Yet this error of judgment was worked through by God to fulfil His prophetic word. Whilst we have freewill, God confirms us in the attitudes and choices which we make.

11:4 *So they listened to the words of Yahweh-* This is very commendable. When we’ve prepared to do something on a major scale, turning back from the project because we perceive God’s word to teach otherwise is a hard thing to do. But this must be the power of God’s word in our lives. Any war of aggression against our brethren just has to be wrong; and we as the Israel of God should bear this always in mind regardless of what provocation we receive from our brethren.

11:14 Despite Jeroboam being so apostate from the true God, the ten tribes are still called the “brothers” of Judah (:4). No matter how far some go from the Lord or His truth, once a brother always a brother. Once a person is within the family of God through baptism into Christ, it is not for us to ever say in this life that they are no longer in that family.

11:16 In times when the children of God turn away from Him, the faithful minority will go to great lengths to meet with others who are still faithful; and it may even require our geographical relocation, with all the economic costs associated with that (:13).

11:18 This implies that David married his own niece. There were many anomalies in David’s life, especially in his personal relationships; and yet God accepted him and spoke so highly of him. This isn’t to justify any sin or complacent attitude in ourselves personally; but to encourage us in the hard work of being patiently acceptive of those who have similar anomalies in their lives.

11:21 *Eighteen wives, and sixty concubines-* The weakness of Solomon his father was repeated in Solomon’s son. Justifying sin and worldly behaviour inevitably influences our children to think such behaviour is acceptable. And in their turn, Solomon’s son sought to lead *his* children into failure in this area of polygamy (:23).

12:1 *Made himself strong-* The Hebrew word translated “strong” is *hezek*. Good king Hezekiah had the same word within his name, but with ‘Yah’ added on the end- ‘the one

made strong by Yah'. Human strength and prowess is the very opposite to God's strength. We wonder why we don't always have all we want- wealth, health, acceptance, good relationships, praise of men, nice homes and vehicles... but it's not surprising really, because human strength nearly always leads us away from God.

12:6 *Yahweh is righteous*- Repentance involves not only a recognition of our wrongness, but of God's rightness. See on 6:24.

12:8 *They shall be his servants, that they may know My service*- Sometimes God teaches us how to relate to Him by putting us in situations where we simply have to be obedient to some human entity or person. In this way we can serve our worldly masters in our employment as if we are serving Christ (Col. 3:22-24; it seems Paul there is alluding to the LXX here).

13:7 *When Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them*- This was an exaggeration, because he was 41 when he became king (12:13). We can so easily justify the sins and weakness of others whom we perceive as being 'on our side', trying to reduce everything to a simplistic black and white view of the world, whereby people are either wonderfully good or totally bad (:11). Reality is far different- we only have to realistically analyze our own lives and personalities.

13:12 *Don't fight against Yahweh*- It seems Abijah was assuming that he was as it were in the place of God. He had picked a fight with Jeroboam (:3), but then realized he was outnumbered and wanted a way out- and so he starts claiming how righteous Judah are (:10-12) even though they were rebellious against God from the day He knew them (Is. 65:2; Ez. 16,20) and were worshipping idols (14:3). He also starts playing God, by assuming that his enemy is God's enemy. Therefore God brought Judah's strong men into a situation where they were about to be destroyed, and had to throw themselves upon His grace (:14).

13:13 This was exactly the situation which the Gentile people of Ai were in as described in Josh. 8:21,22. They were caught in an ambush and hemmed in on all sides. Judah who thought they were so superior spiritually were being taught they were no better than Gentiles who had to be cast out by God.

14:3 This shows that the previous king's claim to such great spirituality in Judah was hypocritical; see on 13:12.

14:11 *Him who has no strength*- All Asa's human strength he considered as non-existent. He had learnt the lesson of 12:3 [see note there]; that the *only* strength is in God. God brought Asa to this realization by putting him in a situation where he was hopelessly outnumbered, just as He tried to teach Abijah in 13:12. We see God working to a pattern in these men's lives, just as He does with us. He puts us in situations which are quite beyond our own strength- and then makes a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:8; 8:3). This not only strengthens our faith for the next crisis we face, but awes us into an appropriate humility.

15:8 *And put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah*- But 14:3 says that Asa did this at the start of his reign. Whenever we root out weakness from our lives, it tends to return. The records of Judah's kings are full of such accounts of purging out the idols- and then we read the same again soon afterwards. The tendency to idol worship was and is very strong.

15:9 The faithful in the 10 tribes relocated to be near the believers in Judah. We should make every effort to fellowship with other believers, even if it may mean relocating.

15:15 *All Judah rejoiced at the oath-* Joy comes from full dedication to God; indeed true joy can come from nothing else.

*Sought Him... and He was found-* Christ's invitation to seek knowing that we shall find is in the context of His teaching that whatever we ask for in prayer will be given; if we knock, the door will be opened (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:9). However, this isn't a blank cheque offer to give us whatever we wish; rather is it teaching that if we pray to find God, if we really seek relationship with Him- we will find it, and thereby all other requests and needs in our lives will appear far less significant.

16:2 By giving the wealth of the temple to Ben Hadad, Asa was acting as if it was his personal wealth, to spend as he wished. But those things had been given or dedicated to God; if you give somebody something, it's theirs and no longer yours. Although God was invisible to Asa, it's as if He was sitting there in that temple with His silver and gold- which had been given to Him in thanks for what He had done for His people. And then Asa walks up to God and takes that silver and gold right from His presence and gives it to a pagan idolater whom he considers a better defence against enemies than God. The more we sense the presence of God, the more we perceive His total ownership. What we dedicate to God is His, it's not for us 'play God' by then taking it back and acting as if it's ours. And we are asked to dedicate our whole lives to God.

16:3 *Let there be a covenant-* Asa's covenant or treaty with Yahweh in 15:12,13 demanded total dedication to Him; he should therefore have trusted in Yahweh rather than now making another covenant with a pagan king. Covenant relationship with God is all demanding, as Asa had said at the time; we can't be in covenant with more than one God.

16:8 God gave Asa a test of faith when He sent a huge army against him earlier; and Asa passed the test. But like any good teacher, God repeats the circumstances in our lives; and sometimes like Asa we may do well in one test, but fail when it is repeated. God gave Asa more such wars (:9)- not simply as a punishment, but so he would learn the lesson of trusting in God and not men against our enemies.

16:9 These "eyes of Yahweh" refer to the Angels. If we ask how, mechanically, as it were, God sees and knows all things, the answer is perhaps 'Through His Angels'. Their activity is amazing; because their work is invisible to us, we may get the impression at times that God is somehow silent and inactive. But the colossal network of Angelic work on earth is constantly humming with activity- for our sakes (Heb. 1:14).

16:10 *Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time-* In our deepest conscience, we know when we sin; even if we don't consciously recognize every sin. We also realize that sin must be punished. When we sin but don't confess that sin, or if we refuse to accept the punishment for sin, we have a tendency to subconsciously transfer that sin onto others and punish them for it. This is why religious people can be capable of the greatest hypocrisies and inconsistencies, punishing others for the very sins which they commit, or falsely accusing others of committing the sins they commit and then eagerly punishing them for them. Asa's bad conscience at this time is reflected in how he treated others.

17:3 *In the first ways of his father David*- Does this imply that David became less spiritually committed as he got older?

18:1 This chapter shows how Jehoshaphat was wrong to make this alliance with Ahab; our covenant with Yahweh precludes any other covenant. Ahab was one of God's people, but clearly his faith in Yahweh was weak and he had surrounded himself with false prophets who claimed that whatever Ahab wanted to be true was in fact the word of Yahweh (:4-7). Even within those who are externally the children of God, we must be careful whom we choose to closely associate with; for not all are seriously interested in following God's word.

18:14 Considering Micaiah had already seen the vision of :18-21, this was a significant failure of his. In some contexts, we all have a tendency to quickly perceive and then say what we think the other person wants us to say. The fact we know God's word means that we are now bound not to do that, but to speak according to how His word has influenced us.

18:18-21 We have here a unique insight into how the court of Heaven operates. God states His plan, but the Angels discuss how they will operationalize it. The "spirit" in :20 refers to an Angel- for God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). One Angel had the idea that Ahab's false prophets could be moved to prophesy to him a false prophesy about going to Ramoth Gilead, where he would die. God liked that idea, perhaps because it was an appropriate way to punish Ahab for his rejection of the true prophets. And that Angel was empowered to bring that about, and went out from the court of Heaven to do it. God confirms people in the way they wish to go, and He can do this through leading them into mindsets and theological understandings which are false (2 Thess. 2:11). The amazing thing is that God is holding case conferences about us in Heaven, with Angels discussing how best to bring about God's will in our lives.

19:2 *Love those who hate Yahweh*- We can imagine how Jehoshaphat would've justified the alliance he made with Ahab in 18:1,2- 'We both serve the same God... believe more or less the same things... face a common enemy...'. But God's wrath was upon Jehoshaphat for saying this. Ahab's refusal to hear Yahweh's word in 18:4-17 was counted as hating Yahweh.

19:3 *Nevertheless*- God didn't reject Jehoshaphat because of his failure in one area in one period of life; He saw the bigger picture. When one aspect of another believer's failure is extremely difficult for us to tolerate, we too need to see this bigger picture and think of the other areas of their lives where they are spiritual.

19:10 *Between blood and blood*- Perhaps a reference to controversies about revenging bloodshed, alluding to Dt. 17:8.

20:2 A great multitude is coming- Jehoshaphat was expected to have learnt the lesson from Asa's experience when hugely outnumbered (16:8), and it seems he did. The whole purpose of Biblical history is for *our* sakes, that we might learn from the experiences of others who in essence were in our situation- and be strengthened, warned and encouraged (Rom. 15:4).

20:12 *God, will You not judge them?*- Jehoshaphat like David in the Psalms saw the crises of life as a foretaste of the final judgment; he stated the situation before God in detail (:10) and felt his prayer was a coming before God's throne of judgment. Our prayers likewise come before the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16); our feelings toward God in prayer now are as they will be in essence at the final judgment.

20:21 There is a strong theme of praise; and praise is something one does to their God *after* a victory, not *before* it. Humanly, they must have feared that they were being asked to trust in mere words. Yet Jehoshaphat praised God for the assurance of victory as if it had already happened; and his battle plan was hardly humanly wise. He sent out ahead of his troops a group of priests who were praising God for the victory. Such faith is all about adopting God's perspective, who speaks of things which are not yet as if they are, so sure is His word of promise of fulfilment (Rom. 4:17).

20:35 *Jehoshaphat king of Judah joined himself with Ahaziah king of Israel*- When he earlier joined himself with a king of Israel, he nearly lost his life and was rebuked for it severely in 19:2. We too can deal with a situation in the wrong way, repent for doing so, and then the essence of the situation is repeated in another context- and again we fail. And yet although at the end of his life, Jehoshaphat failed in this matter, he was on balance reckoned as righteous (:32). This shouldn't lead us to think that some aspects of human behaviour don't matter and we can 'get away' with them. But it helps us in not rejecting brothers or sisters who clearly have weakness in one point of their lives at some period of their spiritual journey, even if as with Jehoshaphat it's right at the end of their lives when we might expect more spiritual maturity from them. We will all come to the end of our journeys with some incomplete spirituality, and we should show others the same grace God shows us.

21:6 Jehoshaphat his father had been rebuked for his alliance with Ahab (19:2) and had continued to fail in making alliances with the rulers of Israel (see on 20:35). The result of this was that although he himself was righteous, his son committed failure in the same area but went much further to the point of becoming totally sinful and being rejected by God. The problem with sin and permitting ourselves weaknesses is that our children and others will likely commit the same weaknesses but take them much further; the mother who gets drunk once a year on her birthday shouldn't be surprised if her son becomes alcoholic.

*For he had the daughter of Ahab as wife*- The history of the kings often stresses the huge influence of women upon a man, especially his wife or mother. Women at that time were considered mere chattels, but the Biblical record grants them human dignity and significance, and stresses their huge influence especially in spiritual matters.

21:12 This incident is well after the time when Elijah had ascended into the sky at the close of his public ministry. It seems that Elijah was simply taken up into the sky and put down somewhere else, which is why his servants went out looking for him; it was done in this dramatic public manner to indicate to all that his public ministry had come to an end. But it seems that he returned to earth and continued a more discrete ministry, as this incident demonstrates. The Bible doesn't teach that we go to Heaven at death; Jesus was the first person to be raised from the dead and given eternal life, and all the faithful will receive eternity together at the day of judgment when Christ returns.

21:16 God is able to work directly on the mind or "spirit" of people, according to His will. We should therefore eagerly ask Him to work on our spirit / mind to make it holy; for the human mind is the ultimate arena of our spiritual warfare.

22:3 *His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly*- Again we see the influence of women on the spiritual lives of their children; see on 21:6. Her 'counsel' to him likely refers to the way she raised him in his youth. His grandfather, righteous king Jehoshaphat, had a weakness with respect to his friendship with the Ahab family (19:2). Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram even

more so (see on 21:6), and the grandson likewise. The failure of a righteous man had disastrous spiritual consequence even for his grandchild. Grandfather Jehoshaphat nearly lost his life by going to war in tandem with Ahab king of Israel; and the grandson failed in exactly the same way (:5), at the very same place, Ramoth Gilead (18:11). He didn't learn the lesson of his grandfather's failure but rather repeated it.

22:6 Ahaziah was severely punished because he didn't learn the lesson from spiritual history. Jehoshaphat had been nearly killed because of his union with Ahab the king of Israel; we really are intended to learn from Biblical history and take concrete action based upon what we perceive within it, rather than let these records drift over us without taking a grip upon our lives in practice.

23:1 *Took... into covenant with him*- Note how at this same time they made a covenant with God (:3). Our covenant with God is often connected with our covenant with each other; covenant relationship isn't just a deal between God and us, rather does our relationship with Him involve us in relationship with the rest of His true people. We can't be in relationship with God and isolate ourselves from His people.

23:11 *Jehoiada and his sons anointed him*- One of these sons was Zechariah, whom Joash was later to ungratefully murder for daring to criticize him (24:20-22). Indeed, 24:25 says that Joash killed all these sons. Ingratitude is a sin because the kindness we were shown is a reflection of *God's* grace to us through a human channel, and to be ungrateful for it is thereby a rejection of God's grace.

23:16 The parallel record in 2 Kings 11:17 says this covenant was between Yahweh and the people, but here we read that it was between Jehoiada and the people. Jehoiada as the priest was God's representative, and therefore what he did was on God's behalf. God's representatives can be spoken of as if they are God, even though they aren't God Himself in person. This principle, which is found throughout the Old Testament, should prepare us to accept that God's Son, Jesus, as His Father's total representative, isn't God Himself but can be spoken of as God, as Jehoiada was, because He functions so completely on God's behalf.

23:21 *The people of the land rejoiced*- In the same way as "all the people" destroyed the temple of Baal (:17) and "all the people" rejoiced at the idea of Joash being made king (:13). Although the people were spiritually weak at this time, there was deep within them a desire to do the right thing- they just lacked the strength to do it, and needed someone like Jehoiada to present it clearly to them. We may consider those around us to be totally disinterested in spiritual things, but if we present them with the right way, we will be surprised how this is passively and unconsciously what a lot of apparently 'worldly' people are in fact looking for. See on 24:10.

24:10 People do respond generously when someone gives them firm leadership and explains the need; see on 23:21.

24:14 *All the days of Jehoiada*- Joash's zeal for restoring the temple appears to have been all on his own initiative. But clearly his zeal for God was all the result of Jehoiada's influence upon him, and as soon as Jehoiada was dead, he turned to other gods (:17,18). People can serve God, even in a very zealous way, purely as the result of others' influence upon them. This is why how we end our spiritual journey is so important- when those who influenced our youth are no longer with us, and we serve God with no possibility of the motivation of



pleasing those we respect. It seems Joash was grateful to Jehoiada for saving his life and organizing the coup which led to his having the kingdom at seven years old- when his gratitude should've been to *God*, who used Jehoiada merely as a human channel. If we don't see our spiritual elders as *channels* used by God, but glorify them in themselves, then we will tend to do spiritual things just to please those elders. And when they are no more, we are left with no real relationship with God Himself. This would explain how *immediately* on the death of Jehoiada, Joash turned to other gods.

24:17 *The king listened to them*- So often the history of the kings repeats itself. This was exactly the mistake of Rehoboam- listening to bad advisors and rejecting the Godly advice of older men (1 Kings 12:8,10). Our life situations likewise tend to repeat in essence the situations faced by Biblical characters; and we really are expected to learn the lessons. We have to ask how often it is that we base a life decision specifically upon a Biblical precedent... How much does Bible history really affect our life choices today?

24:21 *At the commandment of the king*- See on 23:11.

24:22 *May Yahweh look at it, and require it*- This is one of many Biblical indications that at the day of judgment, situations in this life will as it were be played back to the wicked, and be 'required' from them. All their sins will be mentioned unto them, whereas this will not be the case for the righteous, whose sins have been forgiven (Ez. 18:22; 33:16).

25:3 *When the kingdom was established to him, he killed his servants*- This sentence structure is common in the record of the kings; *when* they became strong, *once* they were set up in life, *then* they did wrong (11:17; 12:1; 17:1; 21:4; 26:8,16). Some people never get set up in life or become financially or domestically 'strong' as they would wish, and resent it. But remember this formula; perhaps if that had been granted them by God, they would turn away from Him. Amaziah repeated the pattern of Jehoram, who became strong in his kingdom, and then killed his brothers (21:4). Again we see how God intended Amaziah, as He intends all of us, to perceive how we should be and live on the basis of the examples in the history of His people. This is why reading the records of these kings is so valuable for us; and more than valuable, God intends us to be familiar with the history He has recorded and carefully preserved for so long, and learn from it, applying it specifically in our lives.

25:4 Despite committing murder after the pattern of wicked Jehoram (21:4), he was careful to be obedient to part of God's law. We so often justify wrong behaviour by mixing it with some element of legalistic obedience to God's word, just as we see in the account of the judgment and crucifixion of Jesus, with the Jews careful to obey parts of the Mosaic Law in detail- whilst totally missing the bigger picture

25:6 Jehoshaphat (19:2) and other kings of Judah had always gotten into trouble by making military alliances with Israel; but still the lesson wasn't learnt, spiritual history wasn't allowed by Amaziah to really have a practical impact upon him.

25:8 *But if you will go, go and take action, be strong for the battle*- A classic example of the downward spiral, whereby God pushes people along the road of self-destruction if this is the path they choose.

25:13 We might be surprised at this; Amaziah had paid money to hire this army, but in humility to God's word had dismissed them and as it were wasted his money, just because

God had told him not to use them but trust in Him. But then they do so much damage to Amaziah's kingdom. Perhaps this was because his obedience to God's word was only external, and not with a complete heart (:2). Likewise Amaziah won a great victory by faith in Yahweh, but immediately adopted pagan gods (:14,15).

25:17 Earlier Amaziah had wanted to make an alliance with Israel (:6,7); now he picks an argument with them and purposefully provokes a war with them. This unstable, inconsistent attitude arose from his incomplete devotion to God (:2). The instability and inconsistency evident in so many aspects of so many lives is reflective of a lack of steady, consistent devotion to the God who is eager to be our rock.

26:4 But Amaziah only did a few things right before God and turned to other gods in the end (25:20). God so thirsts for human response to Him that He writes these records so positively, in recognition of any spirituality which there was.

26:16 *But when he was strong-* He was strong only in his own self-perception, because his strength was only the result of God's help (:15). Again we see how human strength precedes spiritual failure, which is a common theme in these lives of the kings and indeed throughout history; see on 25:3.

26:18 Uzziah is here condemned for doing what only the priests could do. However, David also did what only the priests (of the tribe of Levi) could do; but he was of the tribe of Judah and therefore not a priest (1 Chron. 15:27; 16:3). So we conclude that the same action can be sinful for one person but a sign of spiritual maturity in another. We need to bear this in mind when considering the behaviour of others, and try not to legislate against it in a legalistic manner but treat each case on its merits. We also learn from this that motive and not external action nor appearance are of ultimate importance to God. All our works need careful analysis once we grasp this point. It could be that Uzziah was trying to imitate David in acting as a priest when he wasn't; for 2 Kings 14:3 emphasizes that Uzziah did *not* do his good deeds in the spirit of David. It was all just an attempt to externally mimic a righteous man when the heart is far from spirituality; and God judges such hypocrisy very hard.

26:17 Azariah was very brave to do this; for kings, especially like Uzziah at this time, considered themselves all powerful and beyond such criticism. We shouldn't fear to bring God's word to those who are 'senior' in rank, even if it criticizes them explicitly or implicitly; for compared to God's word, all men are as grass, of whatever rank they are in human society (Is. 40:6-8).

27:6 If a man prepares his way after God's principles (see too Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way he chooses to go.

28:5 *Therefore Yahweh his God-* Yahweh was still his God even through this very evil part of his life when Ahaz had forsaken God (:6); we too shouldn't give up on our brethren who clearly leave God's principles. Even if we disbelieve God, He still remains faithful to us (2 Tim. 2:13). God is still working with our lost brethren, and so should we, after the pattern of the shepherd who searches until he finds the lost sheep.

28:9 The "rage" of sinful Israel against sinful Judah was likely because they transferred their own sins onto their brethren, and then eagerly punished them for them. This psychological phenomenon explains why there is so much judgmentalism and anger against other members

within the church. To avoid it, we must face up to our own sins, and believe that the judgment for them has truly been laid upon Jesus. We will therefore know our guilt to have been lifted and will not feel the need to transfer it onto others.

28:11 *Fierce wrath*- This seems a stronger term to the ‘anger’ of God with Judah for their idolatry (:9). Hypocrisy and harshly judging our brethren when we too are sinners is something which makes God fiercely angry.

28:13 This kind of thing happens several times in the record of the kings; men had committed themselves already to a significant plan like hiring many soldiers and are then told to not go ahead with the plan (e.g. 25:9) at the risk of loss of face or money. This kind of thing ought to be a regular aspect of our lives- stopping in our tracks and turning back from a course of action because of God’s word.

28:15 Clothing the naked, putting them on donkeys and taking them to Jericho is all the basis of the good Samaritan parable (Lk. 10). We can therefore understand that parable in terms of our having compassion upon those within the ecclesia who are suffering for their sins; we are to take care of them, considering our own sins deserve the same judgment (:10).

28:27 *They didn’t bring him into the tombs of the kings*- This is mentioned several times about the sinful kings. Although the people were themselves sinful and rebellious, they recognized that the kings who hadn’t followed the spirit of king David shouldn’t be buried together with him. There is in society a basic sense of right and wrong, which is reflected in such decisions as this. It’s not the case, therefore, that people are totally disinterested in spirituality and have no sense of right or wrong. There is interest in spirituality in people; it’s just connecting with it in an appropriate way which is our challenge.

29:2 We of course wonder how it could be that such an evil man as Ahaz had such a righteous son as Hezekiah. Perhaps the extreme sinfulness of Ahaz made Hezekiah reflect upon the wrongness of sin; perhaps Hezekiah was angry with his father for killing his brothers and sisters in sacrifice to stupid idols (28:3) and so he went the other way, as it were. Whatever, we learn that bad background doesn’t force people into sin; Hezekiah had an awful spiritual background but he was righteous. We can’t blame our sin on anything, including bad background.

*In the eyes of Yahweh*- These “eyes of Yahweh” refer to the Angels (16:9). If we ask how, mechanically, as it were, God sees and knows all things, the answer is perhaps ‘Through His Angels’. Their activity is amazing; because their work is invisible to us, we may get the impression at times that God is somehow silent and unobservant. But His “eyes” are constantly informing Him of our situations and indeed forming an opinion about them.

29:3 There is a frequent cycle in the record of the kings of mass apostasy by the people, reformation by a faithful king and then quick descent into apostasy again. This mirrors the cycle of sin, repentance, devotion and sin which is seen in so many personal lives. One of the greatest joys we can look forward to in the Kingdom of God is not just the eternity of the life, but the spiritual quality of it, never able to sin again. The cycle of the kings suggests, however, that much of the reformation was as a result of the personal leadership of the king; people go back to the easier way of the flesh very easily, and good leadership can only go so far in personal reformation; because our relationship with God is ultimately so very personal.

29:11 *My sons*- Hezekiah was only 25 years old when he said this (:1), but when others are spiritually weak and someone takes spiritual leadership, they become the elder- regardless of their age.

29:23 It would seem from :21 that the male goats were the sin offering. Jesus understood goats to represent those who would be rejected at the final judgment (Mt. 25:33). We are to put our hand as it were on the head of such goats, recognizing that we should come to judgment day and be condemned, treated as goats. Yes, we need to imagine how it would feel to be at the judgment and be sent to the left hand side. This is what we deserve, and we recognize that by placing our hand on the head of the goat, as it were. But we are saved by the blood of the lamb; we are identified with Him and will therefore be treated as Him, and moved to the right hand side where the sheep are. All these principles are brought together in baptism into Christ, whereby through that immersion in water we die the death of a sinner and yet rise again with Christ; and we are to continue living out the essence of baptism in an ongoing sense throughout our lives.

30:1 By doing so, Hezekiah was seeking to bring together the spiritually minded of both Israel and Judah (see too :5). Technical divisions between God's people are always ended 'on the ground' when like minded believers find they have so much in common, and the official divides between them only exist from a human viewpoint; God sees His people as one, whatever divisions between them there may be from human perspectives.

30:2 *The second month*- Passover was to be kept in the first month; but Hezekiah perceived the urgency which there is in serving God, and he rightly perceived it was better to technically infringe the Law in order to keep the spirit of it.

30:9 Note that if *they* turned to Yahweh, then their spiritually weak brethren currently in captivity would be blessed; to some extent, our spirituality can affect third parties.

30:12 God is capable of working directly on the human heart to make us obedient to His word; given the tragic weakness of our will, we should also ask Him to be with us in this way, as David often does in Ps. 119.

30:18 *They ate the Passover otherwise than it is written*- This needs to be ever remembered by those who fear they aren't worthy to participate in the breaking of bread service, which is the Christian equivalent of the Passover feast. Our desire for God and His thirst for relationship with us are between them more than enough to make our weaknesses no barrier to remembering the great salvation He achieved for us in Christ. However, the reference in :20 to God's healing of the people at this time suggests that although He agreed with their keeping of Passover in an unclean state (:12 "by the word of Yahweh"), He also made them recognize their sinfulness at this time.

30:23 If we truly love God, we will not be minimalists, doing the minimum required by His word; we will joyfully go beyond. For His commandments are but a springboard to more total dedication by us on our own initiative. We need to ask, when was the last time we decided to do something for God as it were "extra", on our own initiative?

31:3 *The king's portion of his substance*- Hezekiah led this reformation by his personal example- absolutely vital in any leadership role within God's people.

31:7 There are many 'small' details in the Biblical record which indicate that we are reading real history, inspired by God and infallible. The third month was at the end of the grain harvest, the time of the feast of Pentecost. The seventh month was at the end of the fruit and wine harvest, the time of the feast of tabernacles.

31:8 The Hebrew idea of 'blessing' carries more weight than a casual 'Bless you!' or 'Well done!'. It was loaded with the solemn belief that something actual would happen as a result of the blessing being pronounced (the same is true of the idea of 'cursing'). Passages like Ez. 44:30; Hag. 2:19 and Mal. 3:10,11 state that there would be material blessing in the homes of those who gave the tithe, and Hezekiah surely had this in mind. Our giving to God is responded to by Him; maybe not in cash terms (otherwise the concepts of giving and generosity lose their significance), but we can be assured that there will be a real blessing in response.

31:10 Several times in the record of Israel's history we have this feature- of response to a call for donations far over what was required (e.g. 24:10). And yet the prophets emphasize that Israel never really quit idol worship and were constantly rebellious against Yahweh. We observe from this that there was a conscience toward God amongst them, and people love and need to be given some concrete way of serving God; generally, people lack initiative and need to have a structure given to them within which they can serve God. But we also see that it's far easier to give material things at one point in time than to give our hearts to God for a lifetime.

32:1 *After these things, and this faithfulness-* This is clear enough evidence that devotion to God doesn't save us from trial, nor guarantee us an easy life in the flesh. Hezekiah's devotion was extraordinary- and now calamity came. Although it could be that his dedication wasn't matched by Israel's, and the Assyrian crisis came as a result of their unfaithfulness.

32:12 *His high places and His altars-* We see in this comment the nature of Israel's apostasy. They hadn't rejected Yahweh totally, become atheists; rather they had proclaimed the pagan high places and altars as actually being Yahweh's, thus justifying pagan idol worship as if it were a form of Yahweh worship. Something similar happened when the pagan feast of December 25<sup>th</sup> and the worship of the evergreen tree was declared a Christian festival, and the pagan tree turned into the "Christmas tree". But we make the same mistake countless times, in justifying fleshly behaviour (e.g. anger, judgmentalism, gossip, pride, exclusivity, character destruction etc.) as a form of serving Yahweh.

32:13 All this was true; but to the faithful mind, it was actually an encouragement, although a discouragement to the weak in faith. Truly the pagan gods had been powerless, and so too would be the Assyrian gods.

32:21 *Those who came forth from his own bowels-* The reference is to his sons. But children come forth from the "bowels" or inner parts of a woman, not a man. But husband and wife are seen as one in the production of children; 'they' become pregnant and jointly bring forth children. This was a radical perspective in a society where women existed basically to bear children and the fathers carried little responsibility for their children.

32:24 *In those days Hezekiah was sick even to death-* The Kings and Isaiah record show that Hezekiah reigned for 29 years, and the Assyrian invasion came in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. At the time of his sickness, God gave him another 15 years of life; hence his sickness and the

invasion were at the same time. When circumstances come together in such an awful way, we know this is the hand of God trying to develop us; not coincidence, nor any personal Satan being, of whom the Bible knows nothing.

32:25 We have all received grace; and the intended response to it is humility. It is because God so hugely values humility that He has arranged the whole concept of grace as the basis of our salvation. Those who deny grace and rather trust in works will therefore tend towards pride and away from humility.

33:2 Manasseh's father Hezekiah was a righteous man; his grandfather Ahaz a very wicked man. This just shows that spirituality isn't totally the result of our upbringing and background. We each stand as individuals before God and can overcome the influence of where we came from; and on the other hand, faithful parents are no guarantee of personal spirituality. It could be that Hezekiah in the last 15 years of his life was somewhat switched off from devotion to God, resting on his laurels and enjoying the good life in retirement. Whilst he didn't himself turn to other gods, this laid back attitude to the true God meant that his son turned away from Him.

33:12 *Yahweh his God*- God was still his God even in those years of revolt against Him; God never gives up with us so long as we live on this earth. Although Yahweh was *his* God, only on repentance years later did "Manasseh [know] that Yahweh was God" (:13), and we read of Yahweh as "*his* God" (:18). Thus in repentance, a man makes Yahweh's knowledge of him mutual; and in that meeting of God and man in repentance there is a huge synergy. Hence all the Angels of God rejoice when one person repents (Lk. 15:10). Hence the huge, cosmic joy at each repentant baptism into Christ.

*Humbled himself*- This shows that no matter how wicked a person is, there is always a way back to God; but the supreme requirement is of humility. We should therefore never give up on people as too far gone. Self humbling is spoken of in :19 as he same as repentance; this is what repentance is all about, not a passing recognition on a mental level of a small slip, but a deep humbling of self.

33:22 The consequence of sin, even if we ourselves repent of it, is in the bad pattern it sets to others. Our examples are more powerful than we think; sin is largely sin because of the effect it has upon others.

34:3 A 16 year old can significantly search after God; and a 20 year old isn't too young to do major things for God or take a leadership role if there are no others willing to do so.

34:14 *Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of Yahweh given by Moses*- Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16) says that when this book was found, it was to him the joy of his heart and he as it were ate it. Yet the part of the Law which was found listed the judgments for disobedience and the explanation of the terms of the covenant (:31). He didn't regard these things as some might-the boring droning on of God about sin. Jeremiah perceived in it God's requirements and the blessings for obedience, and rejoiced in it all, as only one who truly loves God can do. Note that in the generations that didn't have access to this book of the Law, there were still people who pleased God greatly, including Josiah. And yet they did so in ignorance of all His word. We who have the completed word of God so conveniently accessible can come to think that therefore anyone without a complete knowledge of God's word on every point cannot please Him or have a relationship with Him. But this is clearly not the case; for those at Josiah's

time and the generation before who were ignorant of parts of God's word could still please Him. However we who have God's completed word have a far higher level of responsibility before Him. It could also be argued that God revealed more of His word and requirements to Josiah in response to Josiah's zeal to do the right thing before God so far as he knew, after the pattern of Cornelius in the New Testament. Those who truly seek after God will have His true word revealed to them.

34:19 *He tore his clothes*- He realized that sins of ignorance are still sins; hence the Law of Moses required offerings for sin once the sin was recognized. "Great wrath" was from God because of this disobedience, albeit performed in ignorance (:21). The fact sins of ignorance are still felt by God should lead us to search His word the more diligently to know what exactly He requires and hopes for from us. Spare a thought for God in this; He feels sin, all sin, committed by whoever, even in ignorance. His sensitivity to sin should lead us to vow the more passionately to live pleasingly before Him.

34:22 *Huldah the prophetess*- The Hebrew word translated 'prophet' doesn't just refer to someone who predicts the future, but to one who spoke forth God's inspired word. It's significant that in such a male dominated society, God chose to relay His word at times through women.

34:31 Josiah didn't just accept the threatened judgment to come as inevitable. He believed that by repentance it could possibly be averted by God's grace, just as the people of Nineveh believed.

35:3 *Serve Yahweh your God and His people*- We serve God through serving His people; our attitude to them, our care for them, is effectively our attitude to the Lord, and will be the basis upon which we are judged at the last day (Mt. 25:40). We can't simply believe in God from the isolation of our own homes or computer screens, and not get involved with actively serving His people.

35:11 *Flayed them*- This seems to imply that the skin was flayed off the lambs, in uncanny prediction of Christ's whipping and scourging before His offering as the ultimate Passover lamb.

35:18 *Neither did any of the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept*- Kings like David and Solomon were more prosperous than Josiah was, and yet he was the more generous in his Passover celebration. Seeing that God isn't impressed by numbers of sacrifices, this may not necessarily be an indication of Josiah's spirituality; he should've learnt the lesson from the success of David and the failure of Solomon, that God seeks a broken heart rather than physical sacrifice. In any case, the people of Judah were soon taken into captivity because of their wickedness; Josiah gave them sacrifices to offer, whereas ideally they should've brought their own. We simply can't give spirituality to others.

35:21 This spirit of seeking a fight was his destruction; he should've learnt the lessons from Abijah in 13:3 who made the same mistake. God's history is written so that we might learn from it; but whilst it remains in our minds as mere history for the sake of it and doesn't become a living word speaking to us personally, it won't fulfil its intention. Perhaps Josiah's zeal for God had lifted him up in pride, and he thought that he could show his zeal for God by aggression towards 'the world', represented as always by Egypt. But aggression for the sake of it is so displeasing to God; God gave His Son to die for this world, this Egypt, rather than

to try to destroy it for the sake of it. And it cost Josiah his life. Spiritual superiority, arrogance and aggression are simply so abhorrent to God.

35:22 *The words of Neco from the mouth of God*- The words of pagan Neco weren't inspired by God but were indirectly from Him, just as the words of Caiaphas were in Jn. 12:49-51. We mustn't think that unbelievers have nothing to teach us; God may be trying to communicate with us through them, although this doesn't make the channel of His communication righteous.

36:9 *Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign*- 2 Kings 24:8 says he was 18, and Ez. 19:5-9 speaks of him as a young lion who killed people- relevant to an 18 year old but not an 8 year old. The Septuagint- the Greek version of the Old Testament which the New Testament writers tend to quote rather than the Hebrew text- gives "eighteen" here. This is an example of where although the Bible text itself is inspired, there may be slight errors of copying in a few places as the manuscripts were transmitted over the centuries.

36:17 *King of the Chaldeans*- Assyria is here called 'Chaldea' perhaps to bring out the fact the people of Abraham, who had been called out of Ur in Chaldea, were now returning there. The call of the Gospel is a call to separation; if we don't want to be separate from this world, we shall be returned there. When Christ returns, those responsible to Him will come before His judgment, and the rejected will be sent back into the world to share the judgments coming upon it (1 Cor. 11:32). But that will be the last thing they want- seeing the eternity of God's new world stretching before them, to be sent back into this world which they so preferred in this their day of opportunity.

36:22 *Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus*- Although God can work directly on the mind / spirit of people, Dan. 10:13 says that the Angel who brought this about was initially resisted by the king of Persia for 21 days. This amazing proclamation by Cyrus, to allow the Jews to return to their land with his blessing and rebuild their temple, was genuinely from him; and yet the Angel had worked through various ways to stir him up to it. The amount of Angelic activity going on behind the scenes in our lives and in the geopolitics of the world is amazing; God isn't indifferent nor inactive, but is ceaselessly at work to bring about His Kingdom plans for us His people.



## EZRA

1:1 God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through. 1 Kings 8:47-50 had predicted that God would give the exiles compassion before their captors *if* they repented. They didn't repent, as passages like Ez. 18 make clear (they blamed everything on their fathers and protested their personal innocence)- and yet still God gave them compassion in the eyes of their captors, through the amazing decrees of Cyrus enabling them to return to their land and rebuild the temple at his expense.

2:1 The majority of Jews preferred to stay in Babylon. "*The province*" (singular) suggest that only a few Jews who lived in the province of Babylon returned (one out of 127 provinces; see 7:16 too), even though there were significant numbers of Jews in all the provinces, as the book of Esther makes clear (as also does Neh. 1:8, which says that the Babylonian captivity fulfilled God's prophecy to scatter Israel amongst all nations). Those who did return were very significant to God, and He has therefore recorded their names and numbers to the individual, even how many donkeys went with them- each one who returned was so special to Him, just as we will be if we respond to the call of the restored Kingdom and come out from 'Babylon'.

2:52 Comparing the list of names in the list of returnees in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, we find that a number of names recur in both lists, e.g. Bazluth (Ezra 2:52; Neh. 7:54). It could be that some went from Babylon to Judah with Ezra, then returned to Babylon, and returned with Nehemiah. This hardly sounds like the glorious, positive, confident return of the captives to Zion prophesied in the restoration prophecies. Many respond to the call to leave the good life in Babylon but then falter; the vision of the restored Kingdom on earth and our working with God's blessing to bring it about just doesn't motivate us as it should.

2:64 Haggai's criticism of the returnees is more understandable if we understand that most of them were the poor, who hadn't 'made it' in Babylon and who went to Judah hoping to get nice houses, great harvests and material blessings- rather than to rebuild *God's* house. It would be fair to infer that only the poor Jews returned from Babylon. The record here in :64-70 speaks of 42,360 people returning, along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers, making a total of 49,837. And yet only 8,100 animals went with them to transport them. This means that many would have walked. They carried 5,400 vessels for use in the temple- so the picture could be that their more wealthy brethren laded them with goods, but only the poor returned. Further, the list of towns of origin in Ezra 2 suggests it was mainly those who had originally lived in peripheral villages who returned, rather than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and larger cities. It's stressed twice that only "some" of the returned exiles supported the work of the temple (:68-70)- which was supposed to be the main reason for their return. We too can leave 'Babylon' by responding to the call of the Kingdom when actually our

motivation is simply a disillusion with our present life, with life in 'Babylon', rather than a serious desire to work for the establishment of *God's* Kingdom.

3:1 *As one man*- Unity amongst God's people comes from all being committed to a sacrificial life before God and a genuine desire to hear God's word and obey it (:2-4).

3:3 *Their fear*- The promises of the restoration from Babylon had repeatedly emphasized that they were not to fear nor be dismayed because God would be behind their return- if they were returning to rebuild God's house and Kingdom rather than seek their own houses and kingdom (Jer. 30:10; Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8; 51:7; 54:4). This is such strong emphasis that we have to conclude that their fear was because they didn't allow God's prophetic word to influence them as they should have done.

3:7 *According to the grant that they had from Cyrus King of Persia*- Hag. 1:8, a prophecy given 18 years after the decree of Cyrus, orders the people to go up into the hills of Judah and get wood with which to build the temple. And yet we read here that the decree of Cyrus 18 years earlier had resulted in cedar wood being brought from Tyre and Sidon, enough for the temple to be built. Where did that wood go? Is the implication not that the leadership had used it for their own wood ceiled houses (Hag. 1:4)? It all seems so petty minded. But this is what we are tempted to do, time and again- build up our own house and leave God's house desolate and in a very poor second place.

3:12 The young and old didn't rejoice together as required by the restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:12-13. Instead the old men wept, perhaps at how small the temple was compared even with Solomon's, at how Ezekiel's temple wasn't being rebuilt; whilst the younger ones rejoiced.

4:2 *We seek your God, as you do*- They didn't actually seek the God of Israel. The fact people have some belief in a 'god' and perform religious worship doesn't mean that the people of the true God have anything in common with them. The mantra of 'unity' has often been used in attempts to undermine the work of the true God. We live in a world of reductionism whereby the lowest common denominator is often used as a tool for manipulation. Yet the true God stands revealed in His word as He is and the core of the Gospel is in that sense non-negotiable.

4:24 This means that the work of rebuilding the temple was suspended for 21 years. This corresponds to the 21 days (a day representing a year) during which the Angel Gabriel worked on the prince of Persia to make him genuinely support the work of rebuilding, even though during that period the prince of Persia resisted him (Dan. 10:13). This was in response to Daniel's 21 days of prayer (Dan. 10:1,12). So although it may seem that God is distant and everything is in the hands of human rulers, in fact the Angels are actively at work, not forcing people to do what they don't want, but seeking to arrange circumstances so that they make the choices which favour God's work going forward. But because of this desire not to 'force' men, there are such delays. This is one way to explain the apparent silence of God at times in our lives, and the way that humanly, things can appear to 'go wrong'.

5:1 Ezra 4 says that the reason the temple was not further rebuilt was because of the decree of Artaxerxes suspending the building programme; then Haggai came and told Israel that the temple wasn't built because they had preferred to build their own ceiled houses (Hag. 1:4). So God had confirmed the people in the way they chose. They preferred to build their houses rather than His, so He stopped them from building His house altogether until they wholeheartedly recommitted

themselves to Him. God arranges circumstances in our lives to try to bring us toward total commitment rather than a surface level devotion which is made out of social necessity.

5:2 *With them were the prophets of God, helping them*- The prophets didn't merely speak God's word and think they had done their job by relaying it; they proactively worked to as it were bring about the fulfilment of the things they predicted. We should have the same spirit, living according to the good news of the Kingdom which we preach.

5:3,4 This is a situation very similar to that in Acts 4:18-21, where the early Christians were ordered not to preach about Christ and likewise threatened, but they felt they must do God's will above the will of man. And true believers often have this choice; we are to seek to live obediently in the societies within which we live, but we cannot obey any command (especially relating to military service) which causes us to disobey God's principles. God's word must come before the word of men.

6:3 *Sixty cubits*- The temple which Cyrus commanded the Jews to build in Jerusalem was of different (smaller) dimensions to that of Ezekiel. Two possibilities arise here. Either Israel chose to listen to the words of man rather than those of God through Ezekiel; or perhaps God reduced the dimensions, knowing that this was within the capability of Israel to achieve. In any case, Israel were encouraged by Divine prophesy in the work of building according to the pattern which Cyrus had given (:14). God is so eager to work with men that He will work with us on our lower level, even if it is a level lower than what we are capable of. And so we should treat our weaker brethren.

6:10 Paul exhorts us to pray for kings and governors, in the very language of the LXX here about the returnees praying in the new temple for the kings of Babylon (1 Tim. 2:1,2).

6:21 The account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similarly 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; 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. Our natures gravitate downwards, and any personal spiritual reformation we achieve has to be consciously maintained.

6:22 *Yahweh had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria*- Constantly we see evidence of God's ability to give people attitudes of mind, e.g. joy, and to affect how even unbelieving kings think about His people (Prov. 21:1). As believers in Christ, our greatest need is for spiritual mindedness, to think spiritually rather about worldly and fleshly things; and we can ask God to help us in this. For He surely has the power to change our hearts.

7:2 *Son of Zadok*- It could have been possible for the Messianic Kingdom to have been established at the time of the restoration, and Ezekiel's temple prophecies would then have been fulfilled. Ezekiel emphasised that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (Ez. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); Ezra, the leader of the initial restoration, was one of the sons of Zadok. He was in a position to fulfil those prophecies, although the bulk of his brethren seem to have precluded this. Ezra was enabled to 'beautify' the temple (:27), the very same word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would "glorify" [s.w.] His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire- all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. Ez. 40-48 stress the "gates" dozens of times; and

Nehemiah's account likewise stresses many times the attention he paid to setting up the "gates" [s.w.], as if he saw his work as fulfilling Ezekiel's words. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV "instruments"] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's 'Kingdom' passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). God's relationship with Israel has in a sense been one long story of Him working out amazingly detailed and extensive potentials, which human inattention and lack of faith and vision meant didn't come true. But still He endures, trying to work with us, and is so thrilled at our attempts to respond. What relief and rejoicing and fulfilment God will have when His Son finally fulfils all these potential scenarios in their essence at His return.

7:10 *For Ezra had set his heart*- Ezra went up to Jerusalem with his heart set on fulfilling God's word there; and this was exactly the attitude of Jesus. It was evident from His body language that His heart was set upon going to Jerusalem to die there (Lk. 9:51,53). Ezra's single-minded focus upon his objective should be our pattern too; not gaining worldly wealth or honour, but rather the building up of God's house and people, and the things of His Kingdom.

8:21 *A straight way for us*- God's people had been prophesied as returning, walking "by the rivers of waters in a *straight way*, wherein they shall *not stumble*" (Jer. 31:9). Ezra fasted for them to be given a "straight way", as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfil the prophecy Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim featured "straight" progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). They were to walk "each one straight before him" (Is. 57:2 Heb.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). We too are not alone in this world, we are being guided by the Angels above, and are to walk in step with them.

8:22 The returning exiles had been comforted by the prophetic word: "Fear not... I will *help* you" (Is. 41:10). Ezra was ashamed to ask for *help* against Judah's enemies, the implication being that he wanted that human help but was ashamed to ask for it from the King. He had initially believed those words of Isaiah, but found it hard to maintain that level of faith. We find ourselves so often in this situation as we struggle to believe God's promises in the midst of our secular lives.

9:1 The Levites in the restored Kingdom were not to marry divorcees or Gentiles (Ez. 44:22); but they did just this (see too Mal. 2:11-16). Time and again, they didn't have the Kingdom experience because they didn't want it. All who truly love the Kingdom and want it to ultimately be real for them will have it (2 Tim. 4:8).

9:2 *For they have taken of their daughters*- This was why they were following the idols of the Gentiles (:1). Marriage out of the faith is strongly associated with adopting the religion of the unbelieving partner. Whatever exceptions there are to this rule, that is the general pattern- be it the worship of Baal in those times, or agnosticism today. This is the spiritual danger of marriage to unbelievers.

9:3 *Plucked off the hair of my head*- The very punishment for marriage out of the faith at this time (Neh. 13:25). Ezra so identified with his weak brethren that he felt as if he himself had committed the sin; he even blushed before God because of the failure of His people with whom He was so closely identified (:6). This should be our response when we encounter

weakness in our brethren, rather than self-righteousness and mental or physical separation from them as persons. The Lord Jesus supremely identified with us as sinners in His time of dying; our similar identity with our sinful brethren is therefore one way of living out the spirit of the cross.

9:4 The sins of those who returned are called "the transgression of those that had been carried away". Yet those who returned to the land weren't mainly the generation who had been carried away. The intended confusion is surely to suggest that those who returned committed the same sins as had led Judah into captivity a generation earlier. Ezra comments on this fact in his subsequent prayer (:7). One sad thing about spiritual history is that so few learn the lessons from others' failures; the entire Bible is in one sense a history of spiritual failure, written for our learning (Rom. 15:4).

9:9 Ezra referred to the Jews in Babylon as those "bondservants... in bondage"- when historical records, as well as the book of Esther and the fact Nehemiah the Jew was the king's cupbearer, show that the Jews were very far from being servants in Babylonian society. Yet Ezra perceived the spiritual poverty and servanthood of remaining in that affluent society, compared to the freedom of giving it all up and going to rebuild the ruins of Zion.

9:13 Ezra said that God had punished them less than their iniquities deserved; yet he appears to have in mind Is. 40:2, where God said that at the time of Zion's restoration, He would admit to having punished her "double for all her sins". Yahweh in His love and pity felt that He had punished them twice as much as they deserved; but Ezra realized that it was less than what they deserved. His love is so abounding that He almost rushes to take guilt for having justly punished sin. Another example is 9:8: "And now *for a little moment* grace has been shown from Yahweh". This uses the same relatively rare Hebrew construction as in Is. 54:6-8, which likens Judah to a young wife who had been "refused" during the 70 years captivity: "For *a little moment* have I forsaken you... in a little wrath I hid My face from you *for a moment*". Here is Yahweh, likening Himself to a faithful husband feeling more guilty than He was, taking upon Himself the fault for it all, saying that for the "small moment" of the captivity, He had forsaken His people. But Ezra saw that "little moment" as a time when they received *grace*; what may appear to some as forsaking is in fact God's grace to us, when spiritually discerned- whether it be deep within our own lives, or in the state of affairs upon this planet.

9:14 The covenant was not to be broken in the restored Kingdom; the temple had been destroyed before because of breaking covenant with Yahweh (Ez. 44:7). But now, Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods.

9:15 *We cannot remain before You*- Ezra is recognizing that the prophecies of the restored Kingdom which speak of God's returned people standing or remaining [same Hebrew words] before Him for ever were not going to come true (Is. 66:20-22; Ez. 44:15).

10:3 The suggestion to divorce their Gentile wives and send them away to their Gentile families, even with the children they had had by them (:44), was on their initiative. When there was a similar repentance about marriage out of the faith in Nehemiah's time, this wasn't done. There are degrees to which we can repent; the word 'repent' literally means a change of mind. Repentance is a matter of the heart, hence we can't judge others' repentance. But it will be articulated to different levels by

different people. The fact there are different levels on which we can respond to God shouldn't encourage a spirit of minimalism within us, but rather a desire to serve Him on as high a level as we can.

10:9 In the context of the restoration, Is. 66:1,2 had stated that having a humble spirit which trembled at God's word was more important than building a physical house for Him. The Jews did tremble at the word at the beginning of the rebuilding. But it was a momentary thing; they came to see the building of the walls as more important than keeping a trembling spirit. Works eclipsed spirituality. Yet Isaiah had taught that the trembling at the word was more essentially important than building temples. But Judah paid no attention in the long term.

10:13 *We are not able to stand outside*- Literally, 'we are not strong enough to be outside'. The returned exiles were prophesied as having increased strength and energy for their task of rebuilding the temple and God's Kingdom; their strength would not fail (Is. 40:29-41:1), in contrast to how for the idolater, "his *strength fails*" (Is. 44:12). But the same word is used here about how the strength of the redeemed exiles *did* become weak; and again in Neh. 4:10 about how the Jewish builders didn't have strength to remove all the rubble to rebuild the walls. God will strengthen us in all our weakness- if we are truly committed to His work, His people, His house and His Kingdom. Resources will be provided and our personal weaknesses overcome- if these things are the true yearning of our hearts.

## NEHEMIAH

1:2 *Who had escaped*- The urgency of 'fleeing' from Babylon was understood by Nehemiah; he speaks of those who had returned to the land as those who has "escaped" from Babylon- even though they had returned with every blessing from the authorities. He perceived as few did the vital danger of remaining in the soft life of Babylon. The call to leave Babylon is used in the New Testament as the basis of the appeal to mentally leave this world and start a journey towards the restored Kingdom of God on earth at Christ's return.

1:10 When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come and save Israel from Babylon and make them 'come to Jerusalem' "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures. So much potential was set up- and wasted- at the time of the return from exile.

1:11 *Your servant*- It seems that Nehemiah could have been a Messiah figure. He 'came up' from Babylon, and was "the servant" who 'prospered' Yahweh's work (also 2:20), just as the servant prophecies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren (5:8). He encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfil the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion's gates in Messiah's Kingdom would be praise. He was "despised" as Messiah would be (2:19; Is. 53:3 s.w.). He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as Messiah would (2:12 cp. Zech. 9:9); and 2:16 sounds very much like "of the people there was none with me" (Is. 63:3). The Gentiles round about came to sit at Nehemiah's table to eat and drink (5:17), just as Isaiah had prophesied could happen on a grander scale at the restoration of the Kingdom. One wonders if the potential fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies was transferred to him? And yet Nehemiah returned to Babylon at least once, and there is no record that on his second visit to Judah he stayed on, but rather, the implication seems to be, he returned again to the service of Babylon. The total lack of Biblical information about his later life may reflect this disappointing decision. This train of thought enables us to appreciate the joy and pleasure which the Father had when finally His beloved Son lived up to all that He sought and expected. One of the great themes of the restoration is how much potential was wasted. It seems Nehemiah could have been a Messiah figure but failed, as did others, to live up to what was potentially possible for him. We must seek to perceive in our lives all those things which are potentially possible for us in God's strength.

2:2 The king's servants were supposed to be always happy and positive in his presence. But Nehemiah's very body language reflected the pain he felt for his impoverished and spiritually weak brethren in Judah. He didn't allow his own wealth and comfortable social standing somehow isolated himself from them, and as such is a valuable example to the more wealthy and comfortable members of the body of Christ today.

2:4 *So I prayed*- There are times when we need to pray in a half second, with eyes open and fully engaged in a situation. But the fact God welcomes and accepts this kind of prayer doesn't mean that we can reduce *all* our prayer life to this level; carefully prepared, prolonged prayer is also to feature.

2:6 *The queen was also sitting by him*- The implication seems to be that she influenced him to be positive towards Nehemiah and the Jews. She may have been Esther, or some other Jewess.

2:12 God put the idea of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls into Nehemiah's heart, and yet it's clear from 2:2 (see note there) that his own conscience had led him to this idea. God therefore confirms us in the desires of our hearts, positively or negatively.

2:16 We feel here and in :12; 5:7 ("consulted with myself") Nehemiah's loneliness in his mission; a feature of all God's true servants, no matter whether or not they like Nehemiah they are flanked by supporters and resources to perform their mission.

2:20 Gentiles didn't come and help the Jews in building. It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (see too Ezra 4:3), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6 and in Isaiah, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion.

3:5 *Their nobles didn't put their necks to the work of their Lord*- All these centuries later, God still has note of who amongst His people were true workers and who weren't (He noted too that some "earnestly" did the work, :20). Significantly it was the nobles, the lords and leaders of the people, who found it hard to submit beneath *the* Lord and Master. The higher our social standing and the more human respect we command in this world, in whatever context, the harder it will be for us to recognize that we are merely humble servants beneath the Lord of all creation.

3:8 Goldsmiths and perfumers were hardly civil engineers and building site labourers; neither were the wealthy daughters of a ruler (:12). But God's work at times requires us to do what is quite against the grain of our natural inclination; resulting as it did here in men and women of totally different backgrounds, social positions and specialisms working together to do His work. It should be the same in the ecclesia of today.

3:15 The emphasis in the record on bars, gates and locks was perhaps to highlight how the restoration prophecies of Ezekiel, of a people living confidently *without* those things, had actually not been fulfilled; and therefore the prophesied events of Ez. 38-40 didn't happen- i.e. an invasion of a restored Judah, dwelling without bars and gates, which would lead in to the rebuilding of the temple and establishment of the Kingdom.

3:31 Nehemiah did his best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. No fewer than 24 times in Ez. 40-48 are we told that the temple was to be built by 'measure' (e.g. Ez. 40:3,5,10,21,22,24,28,29); and the same word occurs frequently in describing how Nehemiah gave various groups of Jews their own "portion" [s.w. 'measure'] in the work of rebuilding Jerusalem (:11,19,20,22,24,27). He arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. He built *miphkad*, "the Muster Gate", the "appointed place" [s.w.] of Ez. 43:21. As he 'measured out' the work of rebuilding Jerusalem, he must have been conscious of the Kingdom prophecy of Jer. 31:38-40. It *could* have been fulfilled, this could have been the potential Kingdom of God, and he set about to seek to fulfil it; but those places were not kept "holy unto the Lord", and therefore the Jews were to be again plucked up and thrown down.



4:4 Is. 51:3-11 is clearly in a restoration context: "For Yahweh shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places... Hearken unto me, you that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law; fear not the reproach of men [s.w. Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 4:4; 5:9 re. the reproach of the Gentiles against the partially rebuilt Jerusalem], neither be afraid of their reviling". Insofar as Nehemiah and the Jews knew this prophecy, they would have taken great encouragement. But maybe they were unfamiliar with it, and yet still did the work, although lacking the encouragement which they could have had. Our familiarity with God's word becomes of great value when in a difficult situation we suddenly perceive how we are being spoken to directly by God's prophetic word.

5:1-5 The prophecies of the restored Kingdom emphasized that the princes would not then oppress the people (Ez. 45:8,9; 46:18); but we see here that they did (see too Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5). Jer. 7:3-7 made it clear that Judah's return to the land was to be conditional upon them not oppressing the poor- only "*then* will I cause you to dwell in this place". Yet in His grace and zeal for His people, it seems God overlooked that condition- for the returned exiles *did* oppress each other, and yet they returned to the land. And yet they would've dwelt in Zion "for ever and ever" (Jer. 7:7) if they had not been abusive to others and truly loved God. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all record social injustice as being the order of the day at the time of the restoration.

5:7 See on 2:16.

5:8 *We... have redeemed our brothers*- God redeemed the exiles from Babylon (Is. 48:20; 51:11; 52:9; 62:12), and our response to that redemption should be to redeem others and not abuse them.

5:15 Is. 58:1,2 is a criticism of Judah in exile and also of those who did return to the land- they sought God daily, and yet abused their brethren (Is. 58:6), just as recorded here. If they had ceased from their sins, "*Then* shall your light break forth as the morning", *if* they had fed the hungry etc, *then* would've been fulfilled the Messianic Kingdom prophecies of the light of Zion rising above the Gentiles etc (Is. 58:10,12 cp. Is. 60:1). These Kingdom predictions will ultimately come true at Christ's return to earth and the establishment of His Kingdom here, but we will only be there if we learn the lessons from Judah's failure and don't abuse our brethren.

6:1 *There was no breach left*- Amos 9:11-15 refers and the "remnant" of the ten tribes to the land under Ezra: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old". The passage goes on to prophecy a time of great fertility and victory over "Edom". "I will *raise up*" uses a Hebrew word commonly featured in the records of the restoration, when the people were exhorted to "arise up and build" (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 10:4,15; Neh. 2:18,20). The statement that they would "close up the breaches thereof" is exactly the language of Neh. 6:1, which records that the walls were rebuilt so that there was no breach [s.w.] therein. It was after the Babylonian invasion that Zion was "fallen" and 'ruined' (s.w. Jer. 31:18; 45:4; Lam. 2:2,17). "I will build it" is exactly the theme of the records of the return from Babylon (Ezra 1:2,3,5; 3:2,10; 4:1-4; Neh. 2:5,17,18,20; 3:1-3, 13-15; 4:1,3,5,6,10,17,18; 6:1,6; 7:1). Surely Amos 9 is saying that at the rebuilding at the time of the restoration, God's people could have ushered in the Kingdom age of agricultural plenty and victory over their Arab neighbours. But they intermarried with Edom, and suffered drought because they didn't fulfil the requirements to rebuild Zion correctly. But the words of Amos were still to come true in

some form- they are given an application in Acts 15:17 which may appear to be way out of context, i.e. to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Thus words which could have had a plain fulfilment at the restoration were given a delayed fulfilment; but they were not fulfilled in a literal sense, but in a spiritual one. And so it may be with many prophecies about us today; they *could be fulfilled* if God's people are more 'fulfilling' of them.

6:3 *Why should the work cease*- This should be our perspective in such times of conflict; cries of unity and reconciliation can be used as a mantra to make God's work cease, and we shouldn't be afraid to see them for what they are. The way the opponents of God's work created a false allegation- that Nehemiah was setting himself up as king- and then tried to blackmail him over it (:7,8) is typical of what happens in these situations. We can simply insist we are telling the truth and not be afraid to name false accusation for what it is (:8).

6:11 As eunuchs weren't allowed within the temple, this could suggest Nehemiah was a eunuch; for he says that for a man like him to enter the temple would be a sin (:13). He would likely have had to be made one in order to be the king's cupbearer (1:11), but he used the limitations which this world had unreasonably placed upon him in order to funnel his creative energy into God's work and the welfare of His people and the things of His Kingdom.

7:2 Nehemiah's brother Hanani was given "charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man"- not just because he was the boss's brother, which is how the nepotism of those times would have usually required (Neh. 7:2). It can be that human qualification, e.g. being a successful businessman, or the brother of a leading brother, is related to positions of eldership amongst us. Yet the Nehemiah passage shows that although sometimes there may be overlap between both spiritual and human qualification, it is the spiritual qualification which must be paramount.

7:5 Nehemiah made a special study of the genealogies in order to find an acceptable priesthood (:5), and perhaps this was the basis for the genealogies written up in the early chapters of 1 Chronicles. So there were Israel returning from captivity, led by a faithful remnant of the priests, looking back through their history, right back to Abraham and beyond, and seeing that their history was shot through with failure. Such self-examination extended even to considering the names parents gave their children.

7:6 Seeing that the majority of the Jews chose the soft life and remained in Babylon, God was especially sensitive to those who returned; and for over 2500 years these names have been recorded in His word. Such is His awareness of all those who respond to the call of the Kingdom and to forsake this world. Note how the numbers are recorded very exactly. God was sensitive to each and every one who returned.

7:7 This describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called "the people of Israel" (cp. Ezra 2:2). Whilst it was Judah who had been taken into captivity, it seems that some of the ten tribes [who had been taken into captivity in Assyria some time earlier] also returned with them; it was God's intention to create a new, unified Israel in the restored Kingdom. But most of God's people then as today chose not to participate in the unity plan He had desired for His people.

7:54 Comparing the list of names in the list of returnees in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, we find that a number of names recur in both lists, e.g. Bazluth (Ezra 2:52; Neh. 7:54). It could be that some went from Babylon to Judah with Ezra, then returned to Babylon, and returned

with Nehemiah. This hardly sounds like the glorious, positive, confident return of the captives to Zion prophesied in the restoration prophecies. Like us at times, God's people lost their nerve in quitting this world and dedicating themselves to the things of His Kingdom.

8:1 *As one man*- Genuine desire to accept God's word and repent for failure (:9) is what brings unity amongst His people.

8:10 *Send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared*- The receipt of forgiveness from God should lead to our being materially generous to others. Hence Paul urges the Corinthians to be materially generous to their poorer brethren because of God's grace to them, thus making a play on the fact that the Greek word translated "grace" essentially means a gift. God's gift of forgiveness to us leads to our giving to others.

*The joy of Yahweh*- In the context, this refers to His desire to forgive His people; He actually is joyful in forgiving us, as we should be in our forgiveness of others; not doing it from a sense of grudging necessity.

8:12 *Because they had understood the words*- The need for correct understanding of God's word is because it motivates to action in practice. See 10:28.

8:14-17 Ez. 45:25 had specifically prophesied that the feast of the seventh month would be strictly kept in the restored Kingdom. The fact they hadn't done so until now shows how they didn't want to fulfil the restoration prophecies because the immediate daily issues of life took them away from obedience to God's will. Note that Zech. 7:5 criticised the Jews for keeping this feast only externally, and not "unto me". Hag. 2:1 records how on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month- i.e. once the seven day feast that began on the 15<sup>th</sup> had finished- Haggai was sent to rebuke "the prince", Zerubbabel, for being so slack in fulfilling Ezekiel's vision. They subconsciously switched off to Ezekiel's words; just as we can all do. They reasoned that "the time" of which he spoke hadn't come- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Isaiah 45:13 "not for price nor reward"). Like us, they failed to see the personal reality of God's word to their situation.

9:2 The account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similarly 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 Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Nehemiah 9:2; 13:3. Our spiritual progress has too much of this kind of pseudo repentance associated with it.

9:6 *You are Yahweh, even You alone*- There is archaeological evidence that there was another god called 'Yahweh' worshipped by the Canaanites; hence the confession here that Yahweh God of Israel was the only true Yahweh. There are in our world many things which can appear as the true God when they are but fake imitations.

9:10 *Made a name for Yourself*- God's Name isn't simply a word, it is His entire personality as historically demonstrated and articulated in human history.

9:19 *Yet the pillar of cloud didn't depart from over them*- Even in periods of sin and failure, God still tries to lead His people towards the Kingdom rather than totally disassociating from them.

9:30 *Your Spirit through Your prophets*- The prophets, whose words we have in the Bible, were inspired by God through the process of Divine inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16). Their words which we read in the Bible are thereby God's words and a channel of His Spirit to us.

9:37 Faithful men like Nehemiah felt so identified with the sinful people that they could speak of "*our sins*". If we are true members of His people then we will feel the state of the community as being our state, rather than seeing ourselves as somehow separate from them. Nehemiah was therefore the first to seal the covenant of repentance (10:1).

10:28,29 The people "*separated themselves from the peoples of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters... they joined with their brothers*". Close fellowship with our brethren arises from having gone out *from* the surrounding world and being separated *unto* the things of God's word. The Hebrew idea of "*holiness*" carries the idea of being separated *from* the things of this world *unto* the things of God. We see that happening here; separation isn't a merely negative idea. The separation is positively *unto* other things.

*Each one who had knowledge, and understanding*- See on 8:12.

10:32,33 The Mosaic Law had required a half shekel temple tax, but this was reduced here, apparently with God's blessing- such was His desire to work with them and have them as His people (Ex. 30:11-16).

10:39 They divorced their Gentile wives, and then took more (in the times of Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi). They vowed not to forsake the house of their God, and yet Nehemiah concludes with the record that this is exactly what they did (13:11). They were slack paying the tithes, then they paid them, they slacked again, then they paid them, then Malachi records how they again didn't- several times this cycle is recorded. Likewise the withholding of agricultural blessing occurred several times- in 5:2,3 (as prophesied in Is. 51:19), in Haggai's time, and later in Malachi 3:10,12; when the restored Zion could have been as the garden of Eden, i.e. paradise restored on earth (Is. 51:3). Here we see frightening similarities with ourselves. We know, but often don't do. We sense this cycle of failure, crying out for mercy, receiving it, failing again, crying for mercy, receiving it, failing again...we see it in Israel, in our brethren and those around us, and in ourselves. We can expound it, lament it, feel the shame and tragedy of it all...and yet continue to have a part in it. Eventually, the people stayed in this groove so long that they degenerated into how they were at the time of Malachi- self-righteous, with no sense of failure any more, living self-centred lives of petty materialism, earning wages as they did in Haggai's time, to put into pockets with holes in, life without satisfaction, achieving nothing, passively angry. This is what Malachi clearly portrays. It's a terrible picture, and one which we at times can sail dangerously close to identifying with.

11:1 Neh. 7:4 obliquely comments on the tragedy- that the city was large and great, but the people who returned from Babylon were few who lived in it, and the houses weren't rebuilt there. When "*the time to favour Zion*" came, at the end of the 70 years, God's servants were to "*take pleasure in her stones, and favour [even] the dust thereof*"; and then, "*when the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in his glory*" (Ps. 102:13-16). But the few Jews who returned chose not to live in Jerusalem, preferring to carve out for themselves farmsteads in the countryside, and the strength of

those that shifted the rubble in Jerusalem decayed... they saw her dust and scattered stones as a nuisance, and didn't take pleasure in them (4:10). And so the Lord could not then appear in glory. Short term attitudes, satisfied with our little lives and homes, rather than the bigger picture of God's glory, a failure to perceive our potential as individuals and as a community- this is what limits so many possibilities which God has potentially enabled. God was therefore especially sensitive to those who had the faith to live in Jerusalem, and for millennia He has recorded their names and brought them before Bible readers- hence the detailed list of their names in this chapter. Note that the list of names of those who lived in the towns outside Jerusalem isn't so detailed (:25-33).

12:30 Those who purify others must firstly purify themselves. Whatever spiritual work we try to do for others must be based upon our first having achieved it in our own lives; otherwise our appeal to others will lack integrity and power of persuasion. In our context, our purification is through baptism into Christ.

12:39 Ez. 48:31-34 envisaged the 12 gates of Jerusalem being named after the 12 tribes of Israel. But it seems no accident that twelve separate gates of the city are mentioned in the restoration record- but they weren't renamed after the tribes of Israel. Here are the names of the city gates in Nehemiah: valley (3:13); horse (3:28); east (3:29); Miphkad / muster (3:31); water (8:16); dung (12:31); fountain (12:37); Ephraim, old, fish, sheep and prison gates (12:39). No wonder some wept when the rebuilt temple was finally dedicated- the pattern of Ezekiel's vision hadn't been followed, even on such basic matters as the names of the twelve gates of Jerusalem. They could have renamed them, but lacked the willingness to see God's prophetic word as relevant in detail to their lives, just as we can wish to constantly place a distance between God's word, the black print on white paper, and our lives today.

12:43 *They... rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy-* God is able and willing to confirm us in the mental attitudes we choose to have.

13:1 Their ignorance of God's word seems amazing (cp. 8:17). This may partly be because in an illiterate society, access to God's word depended upon the few literate ones reading it and faithfully explaining it to them. We note that despite ignorance of parts of God's word, and thereby disobedience to them (and sins of ignorance were still counted as sins), God still accepted them. This shouldn't lead us to personal complacency, but to tolerance and patience with those who are disobedient to and even ignorant of parts of God's word.

13:7-9 In the restored Kingdom, there were to be "holy chambers" in the temple for the Levites (Ez. 46:19 and very often in Ezekiel 40-48). The uncircumcised Gentiles were not to be brought into the sanctuary (Ez. 44:7). It was God's intention that when Judah returned from Babylon, the uncircumcised would not come into Zion (the temple), and the Kingdom would be established (Is. 52:1,11). There was to be no Canaanite in the house of Yahweh (Zech. 14:21). Yet Tobiah the Ammonite was given a chamber in the temple for him to use as an office for undermining God's people. All this wasted potential is so tragic; and if it is to us who read from such a great distance in time and understanding, how much more was it for God. We can therefore sense His eagerness to work with us who have vowed to be His new Israel and become the seed of Abraham through baptism (Gal. 3:27-29).

13:8 *It grieved me severely-* Hearts that bleed will feel not only for the world, but for our brethren too. His *grief* led him to discipline Tobiah. Grief should likewise be the motive for

ecclesial discipline today (as in 1 Cor. 5:2). The same word is translated "sad" in 2:3. The King observed that his "sorrow of heart" was written all over his face, even though he was trying to conceal it. His sadness for his weak people was engraven in his body language. Instead of being naggingly critical of our brethren, there should be this genuine grief.

13:17,18 The house of the restored Kingdom was not to be profaned (Ez. 44:7); but Judah profaned the Sabbath and profaned the temple by their marriage with Gentiles and their "weariness" with the temple ordinances (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11). They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, and so they had no part in it.

13:19 Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: "And the sons of strangers shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister unto you [as happened in the decree of Cyrus]...Therefore your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night"; and then as Ez. 43 had also described, "I will glorify the house of My glory" (Is. 60:7). But due to the Jews' abuse of the Sabbath and their refusal to believe Yahweh would be the promised wall of protecting fire to them, the gates could not be open continually, and had to be shut at night (see too 7:3). And Antiochus quite soon after Nehemiah's time destroyed them [which shows how the spirituality involved in what we do, e.g. the building of the wall, is the essential thing, rather than the achievement of anything in itself]. The implication of the prophecies about Zion's open gates was that whosoever wished could then come at any time to seek Yahweh. But men were potentially turned away from Him, and His Kingdom not realized... just because greedy, materialistic Jews wanted to have a few more coins in their pocket as a result of their trading on the Sabbath. And so with us, our meanness towards God's word, our selfishness, our desire to have more than we need to cover us in the case of any eventuality, all this effectively shuts up the Kingdom against men. If the Pharisees could do just this, it is possible for us to do it. The salvation of others has been delegated into our hands.

13:19,20 Ez. 46:3 had predicted that "The people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the Yahweh in the Sabbaths and in the new moons". But encouraged by the materialism of the Jews, "the people of the land" hung around the gates of the city on the Sabbath in order to do some trading of goods. Petty materialism was one factor which led even to Christ's betrayal; and it so easily does so time and again in the lives of God's children.

13:27 Nehemiah stridently criticized Israel for yet again marrying Gentiles. He described their action as "breaking covenant with our God in marrying strange wives"; the Levites likewise "defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood" (:29) by their marriages. Marriage out of the Faith is this serious; it is a breaking covenant with God.

## ESTHER

1:6 The language here is exactly that used about God's tabernacle and temple. The cups used in :7 may well have been those taken from Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem (Jer. 52:19; Dan. 5:2). The Persian empire is therefore being presented as a fake Kingdom of God on earth. God's people living there had to break from it and obey the command to return to the desolate land of Judah and rebuild God's true Kingdom there. We have the same call in responding to the Gospel today, in leaving this world, which appears to be God's Kingdom but isn't, and take the hard, self-sacrificial journey in life towards His true Kingdom which will be re-established on earth at Christ's return. "His glorious kingdom" (:4) uses the same two Hebrew words as in Ps. 145:11,12, where we read [in a Psalm that may well have been written or used by the righteous remnant in Babylon] that it is *Yahweh* God of Israel who has a Kingdom of glory, and who ultimately hears the cry of His people in distress, as Ahasuerus did. The Kingdom of Media and Persia had books in which the good and bad deeds of the citizens were written (10:2); and so in the one true Kingdom, there are 'books' from which the ultimate King will judge His people. Clearly, the Kingdom of Ahasuerus is being set up as an anti-Kingdom of God, with an antichrist figure ruling it, faking the Kingdom of God.

2:5 *Mordecai*- So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the Jewish captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about the overthrow of Babylon. The situation is analogous to how the New Testament is full of references to the Roman imperial cult of empire worship. So much of the Bible is like Isaiah and the New Testament- a radical, counter-cultural call to see our present world for what it is, and to perceive that the ways of God simply can't be mixed in, watered down or compromised with the way of this world.

2:7 'Esther' in Persian means 'star' and appears a reference to Ishtar or to the Persian *stara*, or 'star', the Babylonian goddess of love. Even her Hebrew name Hadassah means 'myrtle', a tree which is a native of Babylon, not Israel.

2:9- see on 4:1-3.

3:7- see on 4:1-3; 7:8. Haman decided on his plan to kill the Jews in the first month, Nisan, but his roll of the dice dictated that he execute it in the 12<sup>th</sup> month. This gave the Jews and Esther / Mordecai nearly a whole year to try to get out of the situation. The fact this plan was made around Jewish Passover time [hence the mention of the month Nisan] perhaps suggested to the thoughtful that God would work a similar Passover deliverance as He had from Egypt. Here we see providence, a Divine hand intervening (Prov. 16:33). And that Divine hand intervenes and works even through our own failure.

3:9 It's apparent that the Jews were no longer sitting weeping by the rivers of Babylon, but had become influential and wealthy throughout the empire- hence Haman's desire to kill and plunder them. The vast sum he offered to the King for permission to do this was presumably on the basis that a percentage of the plunder would be given to the King; for Herodotus estimated Haman's offer to approximate to two thirds of the annual income of the Persian empire. The only way he could realistically have offered this would've been on the basis that the Jews were wealthy and he would

totally plunder them. Hence when the whole plan was reversed, the Jews were allowed to plunder their enemies (8:11). They certainly didn't take any wealth with them into captivity; they must have experienced meteoric prosperity and success in all their business dealings. Hence their desire to materially support the exiles who wished to return, but most of them were too caught up in the good life to heed the call to come out from Babylon / Persia. And we, faced with that same call in these last days, must enquire whether we're not the same.

3:13 The decree was made to "destroy... and cause to perish" the Jews throughout the provinces of Persia / Babylon (3:13; 7:4). This phrase uses the two Hebrew words which we find together three times in the list of curses to be brought upon a disobedient Israel (Dt. 28:20,51,63). Yet by her wonderful self-sacrificial mediation, Esther brought about the deferment and even annulment of those justifiable curses. God's prophetic word was again changed- due to a mediator, who of course pointed both backwards to Moses, and forwards to the Lord Jesus. God is so eager to save us that He is willing to change His stated purpose about sinners.

4:1-3 The complete absence of God's Name in Esther indicates how they had forgotten the Name of their God in Babylon. It's also odd that there is no mention of prayer in the story- when prayer was the obvious recourse of God's people. The omission is so obvious- as if to point out that the Jews were not the prayerful community which they should've been. When we read of Mordecai rending his clothes and putting on sackcloth and ashes, we expect to read of him praying – for prayer accompanies those two things in 2 Kings 19:1-4 and Joel 1:14. Even Esther appears to accept her possible destruction in a fatalistic way rather than in faith- "If I perish, I perish" (:16). There's a contrast with Daniel, who gathered his friends and gave himself to prayer before going in to the King; she gathered her friends and asked them to fast, but there's no specific mention of prayer. What she did was brave, but it seems to be more human bravery than an act of spiritual faith. The omission of any mention of prayer seems intentional- to highlight that the Jewish community were simply not prayerful as they should've been. The book of Esther was surely to encourage the Jews that despite their weakness, God was prepared to work with them. Esther appears to have slept with ['went in unto'] the King before he married her; eaten unclean food (2:9; cp. Dan. 1:5, 8), and finally married a Gentile. And she didn't tell her husband that she was Jewish for the first 5 years of their marriage (2:16; 3:7). It's almost certain that she would've acted like a Persian woman religiously in order for this to be the case; she certainly wasn't an observant keeper of the Mosaic law. She's almost set up in contrast with Daniel, who refused to defile himself in these ways and maintained his conscience in the same environment at whatever cost. But the point of Esther is to show that God was eager to work with such as Esther, He hadn't quit on His people. And of course if Esther and Mordecai had done the right thing and returned to Judah as commanded, the whole situation would never have arisen, and there would've been no Jews left in Babylon to persecute. It seems that the history in the book of Esther is an example of how God sent 'fishers and hunters' to encourage the Jews to return as He commanded them (Jer. 16:16)- but even then, they didn't.

4:8 God had said that He would cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). Here we see God's pure grace to His weak people.

4:16 See on :1-3.



5:4 When Esther's nerve failed and she cops out of making her request by asking the King and Haman to come to a banquet, she finds herself saying: "Let the King come with Haman today". The Hebrew text reads: "Ybw' Hmlk Whmn Hywm"- the first letter of those four Hebrew words spells YHWH, the Name of God which never occurs in the book of Esther. Truly God's strength is made perfect in human weakness. In that very moment of failure, the cop out, God was revealed in His essence. And He proceeded to work through the element of suspense which her request created... to pique the King's desire to help, and to raise Haman's pride at having been invited, so that he would act even more foolishly, leading to his downfall. It could also be noted that Esther's entire intercession could so easily have been spoilt if Haman had suspected her machinations against him. But he didn't; he felt very honoured to have been invited by Esther to the banquet, and he boasted about it. In other words, Esther concealed her true feelings towards him. And where did she learn to do that? Surely in a lifetime of concealing her true Jewish identity and religious feelings, when actually she shouldn't have done so.

7:6 The Septuagint here calls the man Haman *ho diabolos*- the devil (with the definite article), referring to Haman, not to any supernatural being. The word simply means an enemy.

7:3 Esther made her request for "my life... my people" in parallel; and when her own safety was assured, she didn't just relax and mop her brow with relief, she went on to petition for them- with all the risks this involved for her (see too 8:3). We can't possibly just rejoice in our own salvation, that we have found the Lord and are secured in Him; if we have truly experienced this, we will wish to share it with others.

7:4 Esther, in an eloquent type of Christ's mediation for us, risked her life because she felt that "we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed". If she'd have kept her mouth shut, *she* wouldn't have been destroyed. But she fought and won the same battle as we have daily or weekly before us: to identify ourselves with our weaker and more suffering brethren.

7:8 Although Esther was weak spiritually, yet God worked through her to save His undeserving people. The story brings out a number of coincidences which on reflection could only have been from God. The way Haman collapses and it appears he's tried to rape Esther is one such. Another is the way that Mordecai isn't rewarded for revealing the plot to kill the King- the King seems to have forgotten about it, overlooked it, and therefore he was all the more inclined to do Esther and Mordecai a real favour when required. This is all especially remarkable when we read historian Herodotus' note that Ahasuerus [or Xerxes] was noted for rewarding loyalty. It was surely no mere human co-incidence that the very morning the King has had a bad night and remembered Mordecai and decides to honour him, that Haman arrives to request Mordecai's death. See on 3:7.

8:5- see on 4:8.

8:7 The God who has given us His Son will, through His mediation, surely "freely give us all things" in response to our prayers (Rom. 8:32-34). This passage is alluding to the LXX here: "If I have freely granted you all that was Haman's, because he laid his hand on the Jews, and hanged him on a gallows [cp. the cross], what do you further seek?"; and the King then gives Esther whatever she requests. Note the repetition of ideas: if death on a cross had been granted, then all other things would be freely granted to the mediator / intercessor, for the good of her / His people.

10 Ezekiel had prophesied that those who survived the famine and invasion of Judah would go into captivity, "and I will draw out a sword after them" (Ez. 5:2,12). We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God's intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power, and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes his long prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). We can only understand these things as pure grace. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what they deserved. And He does the same with us- He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we so easily can end up abusing His grace likewise. In this sense the book of Esther has a sad ending- the Jews are even more popular, even richer. Our loving Father gives us as His children what we beg Him for materially- but so often, it's not for our good spiritually. God must be so torn- between giving us what we want, what we whine for, what humanly we obviously need and would desperately like to have... and yet knowing that this is not for our spiritual good. We wonder what happened to Esther. Ahasuerus was slain soon after the events of the book of Esther- typically, the wife and supporters of the King would've been slain or persecuted. Was this not another prod from God for Esther and Mordecai to return to Judah?

## JOB

1:6 The common idea that Satan in Job was a sinful cosmic being who brought evil upon Job against God's will and tried to make him sin is wrong. "Satan" is only mentioned in the first two chapters of Job and nowhere in the book is he defined as a fallen angel. The word means 'adversary' and of itself has no negative connotation; it can be used about good people (Mt. 16:21-23). "Sons of God" can refer to believers (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 Jn. 3:7). Angels do not bring false accusations against believers "before the Lord" (2 Pet. 2:11). It cannot be conclusively proved that Satan was a son of God - he "came among them". Satan is described as "going to and fro in the earth". There is no implication that he was doing anything sinful. Zechariah 1:11 implies that this is a Hebraism for observing. How can Satan be in heaven and also on the earth in Job's time when, according to popular belief, he was thrown out at the time of Adam, or in 1914, according to the "Watchtower"? There cannot be sin or rebellion against God in heaven (Ps. 5:4-5; Hab. 1:13; Mt. 6:10; Ps. 103:19-21); Angels don't sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23). The major theme of the book of Job is that *God* brought the problems into Job's life and that eventually they made him a more righteous person (Job 2:10; 16:11; 19:21; 23:16; 42:11). Job did not believe that only good things came from God; he nowhere complains about Satan bringing the problems. Job realized that his sufferings had made him come to know God in practice rather than just in theory (42:5). Seeing that problems make us more righteous people if we respond correctly to them (Heb. 12:5-11), why would a sinful, wicked being, who wants to turn us away from God, bring these things into our lives, when actually they only make us more righteous and closer to God? The fact that Satan and the sons of God were in "the presence of the Lord" and presented themselves "before the Lord" (2:7; 1:6) does not necessarily mean that they were in heaven. The representatives of God carry the name of God, e.g. the angel which led Israel through the wilderness was called "the Lord" because it carried God's name (Ex. 23:20-21), but it was not God himself in person (Ex. 33:12,20). Similarly, priests represent God (2 Chron. 19:6) and to come before them was to come "before the Lord" (Dt. 19:17). Cain "went out from the presence of the Lord" (Gen. 4:16) - not out of heaven but probably away from the presence of the angel - cherubim. Jesus was presented as a baby "before the Lord" (Lk. 2:22)- i.e. before the priest. Satan had to get power from God (2:3-6); he had none in his own right, indeed, God brought Job to Satan's notice (1:8). Job often comments about God being the source of his sufferings (9:24). Job didn't believe anyone apart from God was responsible. There is no indication that anything Satan did was sinful. Satan never actually says or does anything wrong; he simply makes the observation that there may well be a relationship between Job's service of God and the material blessing which God has given him. He is then empowered by God to bring calamities into Job's life. Time and again it is stressed, that God brought the problems upon Job, not Satan independently (1:12,16; 2:3,10; 6:4; 8:4; 19:21; 42:18). Even if the "satan" (adversary) to Job was an angel, there is no reason to think it was sinful. An angel asked Abraham to offer Isaac to find out exactly how obedient Abraham would be (Gen. 22:12; see too Dt. 8:2). An evidently righteous angel was called a "satan" in Numbers 22:22. If we follow through the argument of the book, the logical answer of Job to the friends' allegations would have been "I'm suffering because Satan has it in for me! He's doing this, not God!". For the friends were reasoning that God was bringing such affliction into Job's life

because Job was a sinner. The fact Job doesn't make this obvious retort indicates that "the Satan" wasn't understood by either Job nor the friends as a personal supernatural being of evil. The "sons of God" - the believers at that time - presented themselves before a priest or angel, perhaps at a religious feast. Someone there, maybe one of the worshippers, reflected that it was not surprising that Job was such a strong believer, seeing that God had so richly blessed him. God gave that person the power to afflict Job, to demonstrate that Job's love of God was not proportionate to the blessings God had given him. Maybe the Satan was composed of Job's three "friends" - they are rebuked at the end of the book (notice that "satan" is not rebuked here by name). Their discussions with Job indicate that they had their doubts as to his integrity and suspected that his faith was now weak because God had taken away the blessings from him (4:5,7). The prologue to Job is a literary device to place theological problems before us, e.g. of the relationship between service of God and receipt of blessing, and sin and suffering. The friends insist that "the destroyer" [by which they surely meant an early equivalent to 'the devil' of popular belief today] had touched Job- whereas Job insists that it is *God* who had destroyed him (15:21 cp. 19:10; 13:21). In some ways the book of Job is a deconstruction of the popular Persian and Canaanite myths about a 'satan' figure. Job, both in the story of his sufferings and his specific words, seeks to demonstrate that the essential issues in life is being "just with God", and not whether or not we are touched by the hand of an evil being; for the hand of God which touched Job (19:21) is the hand of 'satan' into whom God delivered Job temporarily (Job 1:12). Job says that the attitude of the friends is wrong- they should be looking into themselves, rather than fantasizing about the action of some unseen evil being they imagined (19:28,29). The book of Job is a dialogue concerning evil and suffering, with three popular views being represented by the three friends. These views are examined and corrected by the personal history of Job, as well as by the epilogue and prologue to the book. Eliphaz seems to be representative of the idea that Job is being hit by supernaturally controlled evil- Eliphaz speaks of a force of darkness (22:10,11) and sinful or faulty Angels living in an unclean Heaven (4:18; 15:15). Yet the *answer* to all this is that the Satan figure is under God's control, all Job's misfortunes come from *God* and His Angels- one of whom may have been called 'the adversary' ('Satan')- are in fact perfectly obedient to Him and not disobedient. And finally, Eliphaz and the friends are rebuked for their various wrong understandings, with God declaring Himself supreme and ultimate sovereign. Bildad's view of Angels in 25:5 "The stars are not pure in God's eyes" is corrected by God in Job 38:7, when He says that "the morning stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy".

2:3 *To ruin him without cause*- Clearly enough we learn here that God can bring suffering into the lives of His children for reasons *other than* because they have sinned. There is no direct relationship between sin and suffering in this life; for the wicked often prosper. The day of judgment and reward for how life has been lived is ultimately at the final day of judgment when Christ returns. As Job struggles with the question of 'Why suffering?', he is progressively driven to a clearer understanding of the future day of judgment and resurrection of the dead to get their reward which God's justice requires. Thus he was driven by experience and reflection on life to the doctrinal truths which are made explicit in the New Testament. Job begins the book presented as a complete spiritual person and he ends the book presented the same way. The reason for suffering isn't always so that we personally may develop through it; in Job's case, it was so that others would learn principles, not least the

friends and the 'satan' character, and us the readers of subsequent generations. Some experiences and sufferings we have are perhaps more for the benefit of others who are observing, rather than for our own development.

3:3 Job's depressive lament and desire to die in this chapter is quoted and alluded to by Jeremiah when he too was in severe depression and struggling with suicidal tendencies (Jer. 15:10; 20:14). Depression happens to God's people; one simple lesson from all this is that depression itself isn't a sin. It's how we respond to it which can become a moral issue. Jeremiah's way of coping was to associate himself with the words of a depressed faithful believer like Job. Our familiarity with Bible characters will pay great dividends in our hard times, as we see that history- spiritual history, God's patterns of working with men- is repeating; and the sense of existential loneliness, utter aloneness, which is part of the nexus of depression will to some extent be alleviated. Note too that Job's suicidal tendencies here and bitterness that God wouldn't take away his life are not criticized by God; He comments at the end that Job spoke what was right (42:7,8). Yet Job says many hard things about God as the story proceeds; but by grace, God imputed righteousness to him; or made allowance for the pressures upon Job. This isn't to justify any kind of situational ethic- 'I did it because the situation forced me to and I had no choice'. Rather does it simply show God's compassionate, gracious appreciation of situational pressure; and we should bear the same in mind in our consideration of others' words and behaviour under pressure.

3:23 There are many connections between Isaiah 40 and the book of Job are especially marked. Is. 40:14 = Job 21:22; 40:17 = 6:18; 40:22 = 9:8; 40:23 = 12:21; 40:24 = 14:8; 40:26 = 25:3; 40:31 = 29:20. The link between Is.40:27 and Job 3:23 is most significant: "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God?". These are the words of Job here. Thus Job is the prototype of the suffering servant and represents Israel. Israel in captivity in Babylon (which is the context of Isaiah 40) are being bid look to Job, whose family and home were also destroyed by the Chaldeans (1:17) because of their sin. As Job sat in grief and perplexity, so did Judah by the rivers of Babylon. The message of the book of Job to the faithful remnant in captivity was therefore that God had ultimately brought this calamity, and finally He would restore the fortunes of His people. We too in our exiles can see in Job the essence of our own pain, and thereby the sure, ultimate hope of restoration. See on 4:7; 5:14; 21:7; 30:26; 33:27.

3:26 Job complains that although he didn't have a peaceful life anyway, now yet more trouble had come upon him. And yet the impression given by 1:14 is that the animals were quietly grazing and Job was at peace. The simple lesson is that those who appear to others to have a calm, quiet life often have issues going on which are very

4:7 *Whoever perished, being innocent*- The friends were reasoning from the position that suffering only comes as a punishment for sin; and therefore, they concluded, Job must have been a huge secret sinner. Therefore they laid false guilt upon him, and urged him to repent for things he hadn't done. We too live in a world which often loads us with false guilt. We must take guilt for our actual sins, and allow the reality of our personal relationship with God to free us from the false guilt others wish to place upon us. The righteous remnant in exile had struggled with the question of how the righteous had perished in the Babylonian invasion (Is. 57:1), and the book of Job was an answer to their struggle over this (see on 3:23).

4:8 *According to what I have seen*- Eliphaz appeals to personal experience and secular history and wisdom- hence he asks Job to "remember", to think back and realize, that only the

wicked perish (:7). One theme of the book of Job is that God's ways, as revealed in His word and in *His* history, contradict human wisdom and traditional conclusions.

4:18 *He charges His angels with folly*- These are Eliphaz's words, and God at the end says that he didn't speak what was right about God (42:7,8). There cannot be sin or rebellion against God in heaven (Ps. 5:4-5; Hab. 1:13; Mt. 6:10; Ps. 103:19-21); Angels don't sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23). The book of Job actually deconstructs such notions, revealing God as the ultimate source of suffering.

5:4 *His children are far from safety*- The friends often allude to Job's situation in describing the fate of the wicked. They assumed that because Job's children had been killed, therefore he was wicked. This kind of indirect hitting on a person is very hurtful; when we experience it, we can think of Job.

5:7 *The sons of Resheph*- Significantly, it is the friends who make allusion to the 'Satan' figures and gods as if they are real, whereas Job in his responses always denies their reality and sees God as the direct source of His sufferings. Eliphaz here blames Job's troubles upon the "sons of Resheph"; Bildad speaks of how Job's troubles are to be associated with "the king of terrors" (18:14); but Job's response is that the source of the evil in his life is ultimately from *God* and not any such being. Resheph was known as "the lord of the arrow" and the Ugaritic tablets associate him with archery. Job's response is that "The arrows of *the Almighty* are in me" (6:4), and he laments that God is an archer using him as His target for practice (7:20; 16:12,13). Job refuses to accept Eliphaz's explanation that Job is a victim of Resheph's arrows. For Job, if God is "the Almighty" then there is no space left for Resheph. Each blow he received, each arrow strike, was from God and not Resheph.

5:12,13 The New Testament references to Job suggest that he was seen as a symbol of the Jewish system of reliance on human status, self righteousness and works, which all has to be humbled and no longer trusted if we accept God's grace. Thus Paul quotes these verses in 1 Cor. 1:19: "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent". 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. "Has 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 (Mt.2:1; 1 Kings 4:30). Thus Job 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 seems 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 takes the wise in their own craftiness".

5:14 Darkness at noon was understood as Divine judgment; hence when this happened at Christ's death, we are invited to understand His death as being the judgment of this world (Jn. 12:31). To come before Christ on the cross is to come before our judgment; hence the connection between self-examination at the breaking of bread and at the last day. There are also links between Job and Deuteronomy 28, as if Job was the personification of Israel suffering for their sins (see on 3:23). Yet he was personally spotless to God (1:1,2). Thus he was a type of Christ, who although personally sinless was totally identified with sinful

humanity. Suffering darkness at noon and groping in the daytime as in the night = Dt. 28:29; Job's fits of blindness (22:10,11) = Dt. 29:29; boils from head to foot (2:7) = Dt. 28:35; made an astonishment (= Dt. 28:37) and a byword (17:6; 30:9) = Dt. 28:37; wishing for night in the morning and for the morning at night (7:4) = Dt. 28:67; Job's of children and cattle = Dt. 28:41,51.

6:3 *Therefore have my words been rash*- Job excuses himself by saying that his rash words were an inevitable result of the situational pressure upon him; he likens himself to a donkey who inevitably neighs when there is no grass (:5). Yet seeing the situations came from God, this was effectively blaming God for his failure. We must recognize that sin isn't inevitable. We can only blame ourselves, not the situations which we have caved in to.

6:4 See on 5:7.

6:25,26 Job seems to be saying that there is nothing tangible for him to be reproved over apart from some rash words (:3). Thus he minimizes poor speaking; whereas Christ taught that by our words we are justified or condemned, so important are they (Mt. 12:37).

7:17 *That You should set Your mind on him*- The Hebrew for 'to set the mind on' is also translated "consider" in 2:3, where God asks the 'satan' whether he has "considered My servant Job..?". Thus Job sees God as considering him, whilst we are told earlier that satan / the adversary was told to do this. Thus whoever the 'satan' or adversary figure was, Job saw this being as ultimately representing God.

7:18 *Test him every moment*- God's level of involvement in our lives is amazing, considering His greatness and our smallness.

7:20,21 Job makes several wrong statements here. In his depression, he wonders why God should be so worried about sin, seeing He is so great. But this is exactly the point- God despite His greatness is so highly sensitive to human behaviour. Job takes comfort in his idea that death will as it were hide him from God (:21), and as he doesn't want to live for ever (:16), therefore, Job thinks, he will not. But he totally underestimated God's grace, His desire for us, and to live eternally with us. These things were said by Job in depression and in the grip of suicidal desires (:15); yet at the end, God doesn't rebuke Job but rather justifies him (42:7). This shows the extent to which God does accept depression as a state which leads to a person saying things which aren't reflective of the real person, the one whom God sees, loves and judges. It also reflects the extent of the righteousness which God imputes to those He loves.

8:6 *If you were pure and upright*- The words of the friends suggest that their view was in fact that of the satan in the prologue; a case can be made that they are in fact the 'satan' / adversary figure. Satan quibbled with God's pronouncement of Job as perfect and upright (1:8). And here Bildad likewise seems to allude to this when he comments that if Job were indeed pure and upright, then God would help him.

8:8-10 Bildad emphasizes the view of traditional wisdom; and one theme of Job is that traditionally accepted ideas about God are shown by His word and by actual experience to be wrong. Bildad insists that Job must have sinned because traditional wisdom taught that calamity is always the result of sin. We see here how wrong understandings lead to damaged personal relationships and tragic misjudgements in practice.

9:16 *I wouldn't believe that He listened to my voice*- In times of depression, even clearly answered prayer fails to spiritually register with us. And the ending of the book of Job shows that God in His grace understands that.

9:21 See on 21:7.

9:24 The G.N.B. puts it: "If God didn't do it, who did?". This is a key verse in understanding the book of Job. After all the theories of 'Who's responsible for all this evil in Job's life?', Job concludes that the source simply has to be God- and not anyone else. If He truly is all powerful, then who else could ultimately be responsible? Job states that "the cohorts of Rahab [a Canaanite 'Satan' figure] shall stoop under [God]" (:13), clearly alluding to the helpers of Tiamat in the Babylonian myth. "God *alone* stretches out the heavens, and treads on the back of Yam" - the sea, or sea-monster (:8). Job believed that it was *God* who was seeking to swallow him up in death (10:8)- surely alluding to how Mot, the god of death, was thought to have jaws encompassing the earth and swallowing up people at their death into the underworld. But Job rejected that myth- he saw God as the swallower, and death as a return to the dust, albeit in hope of bodily resurrection at the last day (19:25-27).

9:28 *I know that You*- Note the change of pronoun. As Job talks about God as "He" in replying to Bildad, he moves on to address himself directly to God (see too 16:5-7). Dialogue with others about our faith and turmoils often leads to our direct approach to Him in a way which would never have happened if we'd not bothered to have that dialogue but stored all these things up internally.

9:32 *Come together in judgment*- The prologue opens with the court of Heaven. The 'Satan' figure is not in itself evil, but could refer to an Angel [a 'good' one, as there are no 'sinful' Angels], or an Angel representative of a fellow worshipper on earth. The debates in Heaven between the Angels are reflected and carried out on earth- rather like how in Daniel 1-6 we have events on earth described in historical terms, and then we are given an insight into what's been going on in Heaven in Daniel 7-12. Yet the court / legal language continues throughout the book- e.g. Job is "perfect", i.e. legally blameless. Job appeals for 'witnesses' (:33-35; 16:18-22; 19:20-27), an advocate in Heaven (:33), denies his guilt and demands a legal list of his sins (13:19), wishes for God to come to trial (:3), and thus Job is described as a man who has taken out a 'case' with God (23:4; 40:2). Job 29-31 is effectively Job's declaration of legal innocence and an appeal to God to hear his case more sympathetically (31:35). God pronounces a final legal verdict at the end (42:7). It's as if the whole experience of Job was [at least partly] in order to test out the Canaanite theories of 'Satan', suffering and evil in the court of Heaven. The friends represent the traditional views of evil, and often make reference to the myths of their day about 'Satan' figures. They speak as if *they* are the final court- Eliphaz speaks of how the judges and elders of their day, the "holy ones", had concluded Job was guilty, and that they, the friends, were right: "To which of the holy ones will you appeal [legal language]?... we have [legally] examined this, and it [Job's guilt] is true" (5:1,27). This is of great comfort to those who feel misjudged by man- above them in Heaven the ultimate Heavenly court is considering our case, and that is all that matters. Job perhaps perceived this, even though the vision of the court of Heaven in chapters 1 and 2 was presumably unknown to him as he endured his sufferings; for in response to the friends' wrong judgment of him, he comments that "God covers the faces of the judges of the earth" (Job 9:24). The final summing up speeches from both God and Job simply emphasize the omnipotence of God; how ultimately *He* has been the adversary to Job, and there is no room in the cosmos of His creation for any other power, especially any of the various personal 'Satan' figures believed in by the worlds of both Canaan and Babylon. The heavenly court of "sons of God" is paralleled with all the stars in 38:7. Bear in mind that the stars were understood as pagan deities. The whole pagan understanding of the cosmos is being



deconstructed. The stars are paralleled with the Angelic sons of God who are all totally under God's control; they are *His* Heavenly court.

9:33 *There is no umpire between us-* Job's sufferings and mental torments led him to perceive the need for a mediator; he was led through it all to understand his need for Christ. And our experiences are designed the same way. See on 10:4.

10:4 See on 9:33. Job through his sufferings came to so wish that God could fully appreciate things from a human perspective. Unknown to him at the time, Job was coming to long for the real, Biblical Christ- a man of our nature yet God's Son, our representative who could empathize with us and reveal the human face of God.

10:8 See on 9:24.

10:9 *Will You bring me into dust again-* Job had no belief in an 'immortal soul'; he believed the Biblical position, that we are made from dust and will return to dust again, with no inherent immortality. This is alluding to 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 bruises me...without cause" (9:17); the same word translated "bruise" in Gen.3:15, thus implying that he is receiving the result of the punishment in Eden for no reason. 27:2-4 also alludes 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. See on 13:20-22; 14:20. We too oscillate between accepting our sinfulness and yet considering our judgment for it as unfair. We are all brought like Job to the crushing and total acceptance of it in the end.

10:16 *Again You show Yourself wonderful to me-* Job felt as we sometimes do that one moment God is tender and gracious, but the next almost violent and rough with us. But this is only because we fail to perceive the full picture of God.

10:21 *I go where I shall not return from-* Job's faith in resurrection and ultimate salvation oscillated; for in 19:25-27 he is very clear about it. It could be, however, that Job was forced to a belief in resurrection, judgment and reward at the last day by his sustained reflection on the fact that he as a basically good man was so suffering, the wicked were prospering, and yet God is a God who [for all Job's doubts of the moment] must ultimately reward the righteous and the wicked.

11:10 *If He... convenes a court... who can oppose Him?-* Job disagreed. He felt as did Moses and others that we can enter dialogue with God, disagree with Him, ask Him to change His mind. Zophar is reasoning from the perspective that all we can do is to submit to God, in an almost Islamic sense. Yet God thirsts for relationship with us; and therefore we can reason with God, even in the court of Heaven.

12:3 *I am not inferior to you-* Job repeats this in 13:2. Job refused to take false guilt, nor to feel himself inferior to those who accused him of sinning and who insisted he take their advice and adopt their perspectives. He realized that those who were trying to push him down beneath them were mere men like him. We too at times have to consciously refuse to be psychologically pushed down beneath others.

12:19 See on 13:26-28.

13:15 *Even if He slays me, still I will trust in Him*- The language of 'slaying' takes us back to the Mosaic commands about how a 'slayer' of a man might be killed by the 'avenger of blood' (Dt. 19:6). Job saw God as slaying him; yet he also sees God as the 'witness' in the case (16:19), and the avenger of Job's blood (19:25). Job even asks God to not let the earth cover his blood, so that God as the avenger of Job's blood may avenge Job's death (16:18). Job does *not* see 'Satan' as his slayer, and God as the avenger of his blood. Instead Job- in a quite breathtaking set of associations- sees God in all these things: the slayer, the legal witness to the slayer, the avenger of blood, and the One who will enforce the doing of justice in this case, the One who will not let the earth cover Job's blood. If Job really believed in a superhuman Satan, in Satan as the bad guy and God as the avenger of the injustice, he surely would've expressed himself differently. As Job imagines God as it were taking vengeance on Himself, so he came to portray for all time the way that evil and good are indeed both ultimately from God.

13:20-22 This alludes to the fall of Adam in Eden. 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. See on 10:9; 14:20. In various but differing ways, we all madly struggle against the call to totally repent; whether by pure stubbornness, misinterpreting Scripture, or whatever twisted logic and sophistry. One lesson of the book of Job is the way God seeks to bring us to total and utter repentance.

13:27 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). As with the similarities with Adam (see on 10:9), Job complains that although he is associated with Cain, this is not really fair. "You set a mark on the soles of my feet" because, Job complains, God observes him with unnecessary detail. Zophar possibly recognized that Job was like Cain in that his face 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 his face and not fear" (11:15). See on 16:17,18. As noted on 13:20-22, all feelings we have that our suffering is unfair is all part of our stubborn refusal to face the enormity and just consequences of our sin.

14:4 *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?*- Job seems to be justifying his sins by arguing that sin is inevitable because of our nature. This is just a theological form of the stubborn refusal to face up to our sinfulness as noted on 13:20-22. The Lord Jesus had our nature and yet didn't sin; all that we say about human nature we say about Him. We aren't inevitable sinners, victims of a human nature which wasn't our fault as it were. See on 15:14,15.

14:12 *So man lies down and doesn't rise*- Job's faith in and desire for a future resurrection develops throughout the book; in 19:25-27 he is very clear about it and his earnest longing for it.

14:20 The reference to change and sending away refers to Adam being sent out of Eden, or also to Cain's countenance falling and then being sent away from God. Yet in :15 Job is alluding to God's

calling to Adam in the garden; and Job is full of reasons which he will give God of his own rightness and innocence. So at this stage, Job is torn between recognizing his sinfulness and yet justifying it, perhaps only seeing it in terms of being a victim of the consequences of Adam's sin in Eden. As the book progresses, he is brought to the total acceptance of personal sinfulness and the justness of Divine punishment which God seeks to bring us all to.

15:6 These words are alluded to by Jesus when He taught that our words will be the basis of our condemnation or acceptance (Mt. 12:37). He also picks up this verse in His words to the one-talent man in the parable: "Out of your own mouth will I judge you" (Lk. 19:22). The only ones to be rejected at the last day are those whose words in this life have asked for it. Our words will as it were be quoted back to us in that day. This is how important they are.

15:14,15 Eliphaz's view of both human beings and Angels was wrong. We aren't inevitable sinners just because of our nature; it's no sin to be human, to be alive, and the wrath of God isn't kindled upon every baby who is conceived and born just because they are humans. See on 14:4. God perhaps answers the wrong idea that Angels sin by commenting that *all* of them rejoiced in His creation (38:7).

15:21 Eliphaz says that Job's sudden problems amid his prosperity were what would happen to all the wicked. This seems to be alluded to in 1 Thess.5:3 concerning the sudden destruction of rich, spiritually self confident 'believers' at Christ's return.

15:35 *They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. Their heart prepares deceit*- Sin is often described as being conceived within the human heart (Acts 5:4; James 1:13-15). Sin is totally our fault; it proceeds out of the human heart (Mk. 7:15-23), not because of any cosmic 'Satan' being making us sin.

16:5-7 See on 9:28.

16:9 *My adversary sharpens His eyes on me*- The Hebrew word *satan* means 'adversary'. Although a different Hebrew word is used here, Job clearly saw God as his adversary and not any wicked cosmic being.

16:9-14 It was so hard for Job to accept that God and not any orthodox 'Satan' figure was his adversary. It's one thing to deduce from the Bible that both good and disaster comes from the Lord, as taught in Is. 45:5-7. It's of course quite another to accept it in real life, and Job is an inspiring example. The poetry here speaks of Job's awesome and even angry realization that *God* is in fact [in a sense] his enemy / adversary. See on 19:26.

16:17,18 Here Job associates himself with unfairly persecuted Abel; he likens his cry for justice to the crying of Abel's blood from the ground in Gen.4:10. He is trying to justify his refusal to recognize that he, a relatively righteous man, was in fact a serious sinner. It's perhaps easier for those the world considers sinners to come to repentance than it is for those whom the world considers 'normal' and even righteous. This includes many of us; hence the biting relevance of Job to us. See on 13:20-22.

17:9 *Shall grow stronger and stronger*- There is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and also a downward spiral, in which, e.g., God hides correct understanding from people (:4) in response to their not really wanting it. Thus He can even delude people to believe lies (2 Thess. 2:11).

18:14 *The king of terrors*- Bildad blamed Job's calamity upon pagan versions of the 'Satan' myth such as this supposed king, and the "firstborn of death" (:13). One intention of the book of Job is to deconstruct these ideas and to present God as the ultimate source of both good and disaster.

18:19 Bildad throughout this chapter is alluding to Job's loss of his home and family, and is certain that the next step is for Job himself to die without descendants- because, he assumes, Job has sinned. The restoration of Job's health and the gift of a new family at the end of the book proves Bildad so wrong. We need to learn the lesson not to assume things about others' relationship with God nor about the meaning of events in their lives.

19:2 *Crush me with words*- We should never assume that words are harmless. One lesson from the book of Job, as we see his mental agony progressing throughout his responses to the friends, is that words do indeed crush and hurt; they are often remembered for years after they have been spoken or written. God's law is unique amongst legal codes for criminalizing words and thoughts as much as actions.

19:4 *My error remains with myself*- A very true observation. It's often the case that when someone sins against one individual, others, or indeed a whole congregation, consider that the sin has been against them and that they somehow are called to forgive the sin and in demanding repentance towards them. By doing so they are making the same mistake as the friends. We are to forgive sin against ourselves, and not take upon ourselves other sins as if they were against us personally.

19:8 Num. 22:22 describes how an Angel of God stood in a narrow, walled path before Balaam, so that his donkey fell down beneath him. That Angel is described as a "satan", an adversary, to Balaam. Job comments how the sufferings which the 'satan' brought upon him were God 'walling up my way that I cannot pass'. The connection is clear- and may indicate that Job's satan was a satan- Angel, acting on God's behalf as an adversary to Job just as such an Angel did to Balaam. Job and Balaam have certain similarities- both were prophets (in Job's case see 4:4; 23:12; 29:4 cp. 15:8; Amos 3:7; James 5:10,11); both had genuine difficulty in understanding God's ways, but they to varying degrees consciously rebelled against what they did understand; both thus became angry with God, and were reprov'd by God through being brought to consider the Angel-controlled natural creation. Job should've learnt from Balaam- or *vice versa*- that God's walling us in is because He wants us to go His way, and we shouldn't try to force our way passed Him.

19:21 *The hand of God has touched me*- God put Job into the hand of the 'satan' (1:12). Job saw the satan as basically God in action, not as a cosmic being outside of God's control and not performing His bidding.

19:26 In 2:4-6 we have the 'Satan' commenting that Job's flesh and skin need to be harmed; but here we have Job stating his faith that even though *God* destroys his flesh and skin, yet God shall ultimately save him.

19:27 The light at the end of our tunnel is that we will personally see God, with our own eyes we will behold Him, and not through anyone else's eyes (see too Is. 33:17). Job understood God as a personal being.

20:19 Job denies doing these things; if he had, it's unlikely that God would describe his earlier life in such positive terms (1:2). Zophar was once Job's friend, but he now speaks with a seething anger against him and claims all kind of false things against Job- which as his "friend" he surely knew weren't true. This radical change was related to Zophar's false understanding that suffering always comes as a result of sin. He became convinced Job was a

sinner, and when he couldn't prove that, he simply fabricated things in his mind and then became persuaded they were true. If Zophar had to admit that Job was righteous, then he would have to revise his view of suffering; admit he had been wrong; and be prepared to accept that suffering may strike him too, despite his own apparent righteousness. And it would seem that his jealousy at Job's wealth was then vented out. He felt that if Job was a sinner, then he could treat him in a less than human way. Fear of revising ones' own understandings, admission of being wrong forced upon people by others' experiences, dashed expectations and false assumptions can lead to this kind of seething hatred and false accusation, and is the root of much relationship breakdown today.

*21:4 Why shouldn't I be impatient?*- Job falls into the trap of justifying poor behaviour because of the extremity of the circumstances. Eventually he is led to the final climax of chapter 42, where he stops making excuses, blaming his nature, his situation and the machinations of others- and accepts his sinfulness *in toto*. It was so hard for him to do this because relatively speaking he was righteous. But spiritually middle class believers who keep their noses clean publically and avoid major personal scandals have got to all the same radically repent; and this is the pointed relevance of Job to so many believers today.

*21:7* In 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 at the time of the restoration from exile (Mal. 3:14). Malachi is alluding to Job's words here and in 9:21. Note that Elihu also claimed that Job had said that serving God was of no profit (34:9). Job has much relevance to the returning exiles- see on 3:23. Job was ignoring the very fine sensitivity of God to human behaviour; the fact He is so high and we are so morally low doesn't mean that our behaviour is irrelevant. Job's problem was a refusal to repent, and he is here making the excuse that God's insensitivity to sin meant he didn't have to repent. We must learn the lesson- God's sensitivity to sin is the very reason we should repent of it.

*22:3 Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that you are righteous?*- See on 21:7.

*22:6 You have taken pledges from your brother for nothing, and stripped the naked*- This was absolutely not the case. But Eliphaz was so convinced that suffering comes as a result of sin that he concluded Job must have sinned and therefore imagined these things until he became convinced Job had done them. People who start imagining false things about others because of gut feelings about them end up genuinely believing those things are true. It all arises from an inability to accept we may be wrong in our worldview and therefore in our judgment of others.

*22:13 You say, 'What does God know?'*- The fact God sees and knows all things leads us to right behaviour. Eliphaz here is reasoning that because Job refused to accept that sin and suffering were related in his case, therefore this implied something about Job's view of God. We must be careful of extrapolating like this- if you believe X then you believe Y about God which means you think God is Z. Such false logic leads to a perilous path of reasoning which results in the breakdown of relationships, slander, misrepresentation and judgmentalism which in itself is so wrong before God. If Eliphaz had left judgment to God and focused instead upon practically helping Job, he wouldn't have slid into this path of false logic.

*22:22 Please receive instruction from His mouth*- Eliphaz is playing God here. What he means is, 'Please receive instruction from me'; he assumes too quickly that his views are God's. If we accept the Bible as God's word, then our own intuitions and life wisdom must

be seen by us as just that- and not God's word. The very specific existence of God's word means quite simply that our word isn't His.

23:10 *When He has tried me, I shall come forth like gold*- The allusion may be to a refiner of gold who heats the gold until the dross is purged and becomes so pure that he sees his own face reflected in the molten gold. This is what the heat of trial is intended to achieve in our lives. Job perceived God and not any evil 'satan' being as responsible for his trials, and he realized even in his depression that they had a purpose- to bring forth God's likeness in him.

23:12 *The words of His mouth more than my necessary food*- As eating is a regular necessity which we automatically find time for, so our feeding upon God's word each day should likewise be regular and natural. In our generation, it ought to be that we can't easily lay our head down each night unless we have read or heard His word some time during the day.

23:15 *I am terrified at His presence*- Job's speeches are full of contradictions. He feels he is in God's presence, right before His judgment seat; but at other times he feels he's desperately searching for God and trying to get an audience, but God is being elusive (:8,9). These oscillations in perception of God are part of depression and the bi-polar problems Job was obviously experiencing; hence he one moment eagerly looks ahead to the resurrection, at others he denies a resurrection can happen, or says he doesn't want to participate in it. Through it all, God loved and accepted him, so that at the end of the book He commends Job (42:7). In spiritual terms, we're all bi-polar. If we rejoice in God's gracious acceptance of us and His focus upon our better side, we urgently need to have this attitude to our brethren, whose weaker side is often right in our face.

24:1 Whilst God may work according to time periods, those periods aren't known by man. We don't know how long we nor anyone else shall live, nor the exact date of Christ's return. Any study of prophetic 'time periods' should bear this in mind; that God wishes us to live as it were in an eternal now, not pacing ourselves according to our expectations of time, but fully devoted to Him each moment.

24:2 Job in this chapter labours the point that the wicked prosper in this life, and yet because sin is significant to God, Job concluded that death is the punishment for their sin. This is stated explicitly in the New Testament (Rom. 6:23). We shouldn't miss the significance of death; it is in the end the answer as to why the wicked appear to prosper in this life. Again, by implication and inference, Job is driven towards hope in a resurrection from the dead and a recompense in this earth as the result of living righteously before God.

25:4 The argument here presented is that because God is so great, man can never be right with Him. Job who had lived a good life and been declared as righteous by God must therefore have been driven to wonder how he could be right with God when he was a sinner, whilst also accepting God's supreme moral height and the depth of human failure to be like Him. The answer he was surely driven to is that God would have to impute His very own righteousness to man. And this is what He does to those reckoned as "in" Christ. Again we see how the sufferings of Job's life and his struggle to understand them led him by inference to the essence of the Christian Gospel, even if it wasn't specifically revealed to him in so many words. For the Gospel of imputed righteousness in Christ had in essence been preached to Abraham (Rom. 4:9; Gal. 3:8).

26:6 Job is alluding to the myths about the supposed 'satan' figure Mot having the underworld open before him and pushing into it whoever he wishes. When he speaks of how "Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering" he is saying that God and not Mot has this power; and in that context speaks as if God is the real attacker, not, therefore, Mot or any other such being. Num. 16:31-35 likewise describes *God* as swallowing up Korah, Dathan and Abiram into death in the earth- as if to deconstruct the idea that Mot did things like this.

26:10 Job understands that it is *God* who sends the good and evil, the light and the darkness, into his life (30:26). Significantly, he states his faith that *God even marks out the boundary between light and darkness*- a similar idea in essence to the reassurance of Is. 45:5 that God creates both light and darkness. The 'darkness', however we experience and understand it, is framed and limited by God; it is not a power or being with independent existence outside the realm of God's power. God confirms Job's understanding later, when He says that it is He who can swaddle the sea [another figure for uncontrollable evil in pagan thought] in bands of darkness (38:9)- as if to say that it is God who gives things like darkness and the sea their sinister appearance and perception by men; but He is in control of them, using them in His hand. Job's idea that God fixes limits for the darkness is repeated by God saying that He sets limits for the raging sea (38:10). God controls evil, or human perception of it (e.g. of the sea as being evil), and He sets limits for it- which was exactly what He did to the power of 'Satan' in the prologue to Job. All these statements by God about His use of and power over things like darkness and sea, which were perceived as being independent forces of evil, are quite different to Canaanite and Babylonian worldviews. In them, gods like Baal had to fight Yam, the evil sea god, with clubs provided by other deities; in the Babylonian version, Marduk has to arm himself with various weapons in order to try to get supremacy over Tiamat. But Yahweh as revealed in the book of Job has utter and absolute power over the sea [monster] and the [supposed god of] darkness- for He created the sea and the darkness and uses them creatively for His purpose. That's the whole purpose of the many 'nature passages' in the book of Job.

26:11-14 Job understood God to be in control in Heaven; he rejects the idea of a cosmic conflict going on 'up there' which the friends seem to allude to. More specifically, Job speaks here of how God's hand forms and can pierce the "crooked serpent" and smite any monster. It's as if Job is mocking the idea that God has let him go into the hands of the cosmic monsters which the friends believed in. For Job so often stresses that it is the "hand of God" which has brought His affliction (19:21; 23:2). That Divine hand was far greater than any mythical 'Satan' figure. The theme of his speech in Job 28 is that Yahweh alone is to be feared throughout the entire cosmos. Nobody else- such as the 'Satan' figures alluded to by the friends- needed to be feared.

26:13 *His Spirit... His hand*- The Spirit of God isn't a person nor any part of a supposed 'Trinity'- a word which never occurs in the Bible. It refers as here to His 'hand', His power in practical operation.

26:14 *How small a whisper do we hear of Him!*- We must ever bear this in mind when speaking of 'the truth' and the need for correct Biblical interpretation. When in difference with other believers about Biblical interpretation, we must remember that we ourselves only know a fraction of God's truth. We mustn't assume that because we know the Gospel and have responded to it, therefore we know all the truth there is to know. We know just a whisper about the final fullness of God.

27:2-4 See on 10:9.

27:14 Job comments that if the children of the wicked "are multiplied, it is for the sword". 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. Job was a symbol of the suffering servant, Israel, struggling in Babylon to come to terms with their sinfulness and the rightness of God's judgments against them (see on 3:23). On a personal level, Job is here moving closer to the final total acceptance of sinfulness and personal guilt which brings his sufferings to a close in chapter 42.

28:28 This verse is the crunch line of this chapter's lengthy description of how wisdom cannot be found in any specific location or hidden part of the planet. The very length of the preamble is only to build up to the colossal significance of this verse: that wisdom isn't located anywhere, it is experienced in the life of the person who fears God and departs from evil. Especially in the age of over information in which we live, the idea is strongly felt in us all that wisdom is a set of facts, theological propositions, pithy sayings, located with somebody, in the care of some group of people, in some book. But the point is that wisdom isn't theoretical nor abstract, but intensely practical. We would all far rather make an academic study of something 'spiritual' than in practice root out evil from our lives; in this lies the attraction of intellectualizing spirituality. But wisdom as defined here is in experience; hence Job realizes that before his sufferings, he had only heard of God in the ear, but through practical experience he had as it were seen Him (42:5).

29:12 *I delivered the poor who cried*- False allegation leads us to self defence, and Job seems to fall into the trap of being so self-defensive, listing his good works in such detail, that he forgets his own sinfulness. False accusation, refusal to accept false guilt, not being understood and being rejected by others mustn't lead us to forget our real and actual sins. In the bigger picture, God used the false accusations to try to make Job take a serious inward look at his life in order to try to bring him to total repentance for what he actually had done wrong. But it seems Job didn't respond, he got caught up on the level of answering the false accusations and didn't allow the process of self-examination to go any further as God intended.

29:13 Job's words of 30:1 certainly smack of arrogance: "Whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs". 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; he thought that his charity towards the widow were thereby his righteousness, a clothing and diadem of glory and beauty. This has clear reference to the clothing of the Mosaic High Priest with his outward show of righteousness. God was trying to lead Job beyond this to a trust in the righteousness which God imputes and which isn't our own- see on 25:4. There are times when he realizes this, but the need he felt to clear himself before the friends led him to overlook it; it took God's final intervention to bring him to throw himself totally upon God's righteousness and not his own.

29:16 *The cause of him who I didn't know, I searched out*- Our goodness to others shouldn't be merely a positive response to their requests; rather should we like God think and plan how



we can show grace to others, and therefore 'search out' their situations and how we could be kind and gracious to them.

30:19 *I have become like dust and ashes*- But we are by nature "dust and ashes". Job came to realize his own humanity through his sufferings; God often teaches us those basic truths again and again because we like to see ourselves as more than we really are.

30:21 Job recognized that his trials came from the hand of God, but knew that His hand would not kill him (:24). This was exactly the brief given to 'satan' in the prologue- God put Job into Satan's 'hand' in order to try Job, but commanded 'satan': "preserve his life". Again we see that God was effectively the satan or adversary to Job. In similar vein God (in the Angel of the presence) "was turned to be (Israel's) enemy" because of their sin (Is. 63:10). Job complains that God through the satan-Angel has "turned to be cruel to me".

30:26 *When I looked for good, then evil came; when I waited for light, there came darkness*- Job is learning, slowly. He had previously thought that only good would come because of his righteousness. He even expected blessing from God; he believed as do many today who have swallowed the prosperity Gospel. But he learnt otherwise; and he learnt the truth which God tried to teach Judah in captivity, that good and evil, light and darkness, all come from God (Is. 45:5-7); see on 3:23.

31:4 *Doesn't He see my ways, and number all my steps?*- Job dismissed as monstrous the idea that he had committed adultery or even looked lustfully upon a woman because God sees and knows all things. We cannot passively accept that fact; it will mean that sexual sin, which for the most part is committed in 'secret', cannot be a serious option for us because nothing in our lives is secret before God.

31:33 See on 10:9.

31:34 *Because I feared the great multitude*- It's so often the fear of losing face and image, the fear of the multitude, which stops us from confessing sin. But seeing that all will be open to all our brethren eternally, we should have no need to be hypocritical in this life. God glories to forgive us, so we should have the same openness and zeal in repentance.

31:38 *If my land cries out against me*- Job was sensitive to the natural creation, even to his land, in the way he farmed it.

32:18 It's unclear whether Elihu refers to his own spirit, or the fact that he was inspired to speak by God's Spirit, and therefore like Jeremiah (Jer. 6:11) was weary at trying not to speak forth the words he was inspired to speak. If we accept Elihu as speaking on God's behalf, as the mediator which Job so begged for, then we have to take a somewhat negative view of Job- in that Elihu is critical of Job and accuses him of arrogant self-righteousness. Note that in God's final summing up, the friends and Job are criticized, but He says nothing against Elihu. In this case, God's final commendation of Job in 42:7 would be strictly within the context of Job's repentance. However, whilst Elihu often speaks in harmony with God's direct words later in the book, he remains somewhat enigmatic; for his fierce criticism of Job, mixed with what appears to be youthful arrogance and dogmatism, is hard to fully square with God's opening and closing statement that Job was spotless in His sight. Perhaps God didn't want to have to personally intervene in revealing Job's sinfulness to him; He always seeks to

work through people rather than by direct intervention. And so perhaps God sent this arrogant young man to Job as a final attempt to appeal to him.

33:13 All refusal to repent is a striving against God in that He is constantly working in our lives to bring us to repentance.

33:27 Job's decision to say "I have sinned...and it didn't profit me" connects with the prodigal son (Lk. 15:21), thus again associating Job with the Jews in their suffering, repentance and final return to God from exile in the Gentile world; see on 3:23.

34:8 *Goes in company with the workers of iniquity, and walks with wicked men*- This wasn't true of Job. Elihu may however be sarcastically referring to the three friends of Job as "wicked men".

34:9 See on 21:7.

34:14 *If He set His heart on Himself*- If God were selfish, He wouldn't have created nor maintain the world. We therefore see God's unselfishness and outgiving grace every microsecond of our existence.

*If He gathered to Himself His spirit and His breath*- The Spirit of God is His breath, His power by which He sustains all creation. It isn't a person, as the false doctrine of the Trinity supposes; although at times His Spirit, His power, can be personified as many abstract things are.

34:23 The day of judgment is therefore not in order for God to acquire knowledge or facts about us; He knows that already. The process of judgment day will be for our benefit. For if Christ came and we immediately entered the Kingdom without that necessary process, we would have so little appreciation of His grace nor of each other nor of ourselves. The purpose of judgment, even when it is received in part in this life as in Job's case, is to teach us, rather than provide God with information.

36:15 *He opens their ear in oppression*- Our sensitivity to and understanding of God's word is heightened during times of trial. Sadly we are such empirical learners that we have to suffer many things to make us open our ear to His word; and we needn't suffer them if we accepted with full meaning the simple foundation truth that the Bible is indeed God's word speaking to us. The wonder of the very existence of God's inspired word ought to of itself make us open our ears in sensitivity to it. But because we fail to believe it as we ought to in practice, we are sent tribulation to make us sensitive to it.

36:30,31 *He covers the bottom of the sea. For by these He judges the people*- The sea was seen by ancient peoples as the abode of 'satan' type gods of evil. God is showing that He is in full control of the sea, and any beings there which people might imagine would be in any case under His total control and not hidden from Him.

36:33 *The storm that comes up*- A thunderstorm was brewing as Elihu spoke. Lightning and thunderstorms were seen as the wrath of supposed gods of evil, who were similar to the 'satan' being many believe in today. The point of the thunderstorm was to demonstrate that it was God in control, it was from Him, and not from the 'satan' entities people generally believed in at that time. See on 37:2,15.

37:2 *Hear the noise of His voice*- See on 36:33. The crash of the thunder in the storm which came down upon them wasn't the voice of any radically independent god of evil, but *God's* voice.

37:7 *He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom He has made may know it*- Our hand or power is often limited by God through weakness, illness, dysfunction of ourselves or others, so that we may know the strength of *His* hand and power.

37:15 *Do you know how God controls them, and causes the lightning*- See on 36:33; the natural creation isn't just ticking on clockwork, God is actively in control of it all. We are therefore never far from evidence of God's active, passionate awareness and power.

38:7 See on 9:32.

*All the sons of God shouted for joy*- Note that *all* the Angels are obedient to God and on His side as it were. Angels don't sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23).

38:8-11 *Who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth from the womb*- The supposed sea gods of evil (see on 36:30,31) were under God's control and limitation even if they existed, just as He specified and limited the power of 'satan' in the prologue. There are several allusions in Job to Babylonian legends concerning Marduk- indicating that the book may have been re-written in Babylon with allusion to these legends in order to deconstruct them. Thus the *Enuma Elish* 4.139,140 speaks of how Marduk limited the waters of Tiamat, and set up a bar and watchmen so that the waters wouldn't go further than he permitted. But this very language is applied to God here and in 7:12. One of the purposes of Job was to urge Judah that Yahweh was greater than Marduk, He and not Marduk was to be Israel's God. The sea was understood to be the abode of evil monsters. Yet Job stresses how God is in control of the raging sea. Just look out for all the references to the sea in Job. God artlessly claims to have created the sea. In the Canaanite pantheon, Baal was seen as well matched in conflict by Yam, the sea god. But it's emphasized by God that He created the sea, shuts it up within bounds, brought it out from the womb. In Canaanite myth, Aquhat [another 'Satan' figure in their theology] could alone "count the months"- but the same phrase is used in 39:2 about how God alone has this power. As God 'shut up' Job (1:10 Heb.), so He could 'shut up' the sea, with all the evil associated with it in peoples' minds at the time (38:8). For at creation, He had commanded the waters where to go and they obeyed just one word from Him. God is using poetry to reframe these pagan myths in the context of His omnipotence, to show that His awesome power means that there's no room left for these supposed beings to exist. Often the Bible speaks of the power of God over raging seas- for the sea was so deeply associated with evil in the minds of Semitic peoples (e.g. Ps. 77:19; 93:4 and the fact that three of the Gospels emphasize how Jesus walked over raging sea- Mt. 8:23-27; Mk. 4:36-41; Lk. 8:22-25).

38:10 See on 26:10.

38:29 *Out of whose womb*- One of many places where God likens Himself to a woman.

40:8 *Will you condemn Me, that you may be justified?*- God is as it were placed in the dock by our allegation that we have not sinned as He claims, and that our sufferings are unjustified. Paul plays on this idea throughout the legal language of Romans 1-8.

41:1 God almost jokes with Job, that he had been trying to draw out Leviathan with a fish hook; this is a commentary upon so many human attempts to get a handle on the way God is the adversary / satan figure in our lives. Shrugging it off as chance and bad luck, believing in a personal Satan in the sea or in Heaven, thinking God is punishing us... all this is trying to capture Leviathan with a mere fishing rod. The book of Job isn't an explanation for specific human suffering- and many who turn to the book looking for that come away disappointed. Rather is it an account of God's sovereign power, putting meaning into the word "All-mighty" when applied to God. On a 'doctrinal' level it is indeed a deconstruction of the ideas of supernatural 'Satan' figures. But on a more personal level, it challenges us to follow in Job's faithful footsteps, as it challenged Judah in captivity. The monster figures of Leviathan and Behemoth appear at the end of the book of Job, forming a kind of *inclusio* with the opening reference to Satan; and they are clearly part of God's final answer to Job's "case". Behe-mot can be understood as a reference to Mot, the Canaanite god of death; and Leviathan appears to be the Canaanite version of the orthodox 'Satan' figure, perhaps a reference to the 'Lotan' of the Ugaritic myths. In great detail, these figures are deconstructed. They are shown to be *created* beings- created by the one almighty God of the Old Testament, to be completely under His control to the point that He can even tease them, so enormously greater is His power than theirs. These Canaanite 'Satan' figures are thereby shown to have no significant existence; and they certainly don't exist as opposed to God. They are totally under His control. 'Evil' in a form independent of Him, in radical opposition to Him, simply isn't there. It is He who not only created Behemoth, but can effortlessly control him in accord with His purpose (40:15). That's the comfort of the message. Indeed the descriptions of the natural world which lead up to the Leviathan / Behemoth passages are there to underline this point; and it's interesting that those passages zoom in upon the cruelties and even brutalities within nature. Yet these are all of God's ultimate design and creation, and under His providential control. Job had earlier perceived this; for he responds to the friends' allusions to an evil 'Satan' figure as the source of his suffering by observing: "Ask the animals... the birds of the air... [they show that] the hand of the Lord [and not any supernatural 'Satan'] has done this" (12:7-9). The same Hebrew words are used about God's binding and loosing of the stars [which were thought to control evil on earth] and His binding, loosing and opening of Leviathan's mouth (38:31 cp. 40:29). Whether or not Leviathan / a 'Satan' figure, or the bad stars, are for real... God is in utter control of them, and there is thus no conflict, no war in Heaven, no ultimate dualism at all in the cosmos. Which is just the message we would expect from a monotheistic Old Testament book. Israel's God is truly the Almighty. Just as Job is described as God's "servant" (1:8), so is Leviathan (40:28; 41:4). No evil power uncontrolled by God is at work in Job's life. We also need to give due weight to the fact that God speaks the Leviathan / Behemoth passages "out of the storm", which had been gathering since 37:2. This is significant because storms were seen as manifestations of evil powers. Yet here (and elsewhere in Scripture), the one true God speaks out of such storms, to demonstrate how far greater He is than any storm god; and showing by implication that such storm gods don't exist, and the 'evil' which supposedly came from them was in fact under His control. Much of the language used about Leviathan and Behemoth is also used about God's manifestation of Himself: Smoke from nostrils, flame from mouth (41:11,12) is said about God in Ps. 18:8; Strength before and dismay behind (Job 41:14) = Hab. 3:5; Strong ones and leaders cringe in fear (41:17 Heb.) = Ps. 18:7; Hab. 3:6; Deep sea stirred up (41:23,24 Heb.) = Ps. 18:5; terrible teeth = 16:9 about God; breath that carries men away = 15:30 about God; none his equal (41:33) = true about God. Leviathan is called the 'cruel one' (41:10)- and the very same word is used by Job about God in His afflicting Job in 30:21. Leviathan, the seemingly overbearing power of evil in the world, is in fact a manifestation of God to such an intense degree that effectively it 'is' God; God, ultimately, is the adversary / satan to Job. The

epilogue and prologue to Job are evidently related. Job begins sitting in dust and ashes and ends repenting in dust and ashes (2:8; 42:4). The silence of the friends at the opening of the book is matched by the silence after God has finally spoken (40:4). Job intercedes for his children (1:5) and ends up interceding for his friends. Job begins with the description of being the Lord's servant; and the book concludes on the same note (42:7,8). The question of course is: 'So what's the equivalent of the 'Satan' figure in the epilogue?'. The omission is intended and obvious. Ultimately the answer is the essence of the whole book: the 'satan', the adversary, is none other than God Himself, in His love.

41:3 *Will he speak soft words to you*- The emphasis is on *you*. The animals speak softly to God; He is in dialogue with them. All around us, God is in active communication.

42:2 Job came to realize the massive practical extent of what he had previously known in theory, what he had "by the hearing of the ear". Now his eye saw / perceived that truly no plan of God can be thwarted, by any of the various 'Satan' monsters imagined by men. We too may say that we believe in the omnipotence of God; but such a belief requires us to throw out all beliefs in supernatural satan figures. And that's not a merely intellectual exercise; to see the tragedies and cruelties of our lives as being ultimately from God and under His control is something which shakes us to the core.

42:5 *My eye sees You*- All the theory we may know about God must be transformed into personal relationship with God- and that is the purpose of the sufferings of our lives.

42:7 Although Job did not speak wrongly about God (see too 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's self righteousness. Elihu also severely rebukes him for this, and unlike the three friends he is not rebuked for anything in the final analysis by God in Job 42; not to mention the accusation of 'darkening counsel without knowledge' (38:2) by God 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 (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. Therefore the final comment that God had spoken of God "the thing that is right" could refer to his final repentance. To repent is to admit that God is right; to refuse to repent is to effectively declare Him wrong. And all his wrong understanding and hard words about God were overlooked because of that.

42:15 *Gave them an inheritance among their brothers*- Job's understanding of the value and meaning of the human person meant that he valued his daughters as much as his sons, and gave them equal inheritances- unusual, surely, for those days.

## PSALMS

*1:5 The wicked shall not stand in the judgment-* This may have a literal fulfilment at the day of judgment. We will all naturally fall before Jesus then (Rom. 14:11), but the righteous will be stood up (Lk. 21:36), perhaps by an Angel, in the same way as Daniel had a foretaste of the day of judgment and was stood on his feet and reassured of God's acceptance by an Angel (Dan. 10). Those who come to the judgment will be those who are responsible to God, who have known His ways; yet the wicked amongst them will be swept away like the chaff (:4), which is the judgment which will come upon the kingdoms of men, the Gentile world at large (Dan. 2:35,44). They will share the judgment of this world with which they chose to identify in this life of opportunity to serve God (1 Cor. 11:32).

*2:2 His Anointed-* The Greek word "Christ" means 'anointed'. This Psalm is quoted in the New Testament more than any other Scripture. It's applied in various contexts- e.g. to the Roman and Jewish rulers trying to destroy Christ at His death (Acts 4:26); to the resurrection of Christ (2:7 = Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5); to the opposition to Christ's people as they preached the Gospel (Acts 4:25) and to the situation soon after His return, when the rebellious nations will seek to overthrow Christ's rule (2:9 = Rev. 2:27). What this shows is that Old Testament scripture can have multiple interpretations, in the same way as different people at different times can find the same Scripture speaking personally to them; and as we can find a single Bible passage amazingly relevant to us in different contexts and various times of our lives.

*3:2 Selah-* The Psalms were originally sung, and this appears to be a musical instruction requiring a pause. For readers, it effectively means 'Pause and meditate on this'.

*4:4 Be angry, and don't sin-* This verse [from the Septuagint] is applied to us by Paul in Eph. 4:26. He interprets it as meaning that anger is not in itself wrong, but because it can so easily lead us to sin, it is better to not go to sleep whilst angry. This kind of daily self-discipline is vital in the spiritual life; the Psalms often comment upon the importance of how we start and end each day.

*5:4 Evil can't live with You-* There are therefore no sinful beings in Heaven, contrary to the popular belief of many.

*6:5 Even a righteous man like David didn't look forward to conscious survival of death.* He wanted to keep on living in this life because he wanted to praise God; and this should be our motivation for asking God for health and victory against illness. If the righteous immediately praise God in Heaven after death, then David's words and reasoning here make no sense. Instead he looked forward to the Biblical hope of resurrection at Christ's return and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. Note too that "sheol", the Hebrew word translated "hell" in some Bibles, is clearly understood as referring to death or the grave. As righteous David expected to go there after death, it isn't the place where sinners go after death.

*7 Concerning the words of Cush-* David's response to hurtful words and false accusation (:3) was to share his situation with God, rather than brood on the words.

*7:4 Him who without cause was my adversary-* A reference to Saul's senseless persecution of David.

7:8 *Judge me, Yahweh*- David didn't fear the day of judgment, but rather he eagerly looked forward to it, as we should. He was secure in his relationship with God, and so that day wasn't a day of terrible uncertainty ever before him- and neither need it be for us.

8:4 This verse is applied to Jesus as the "son of man" in Heb. 2:6-9 in order to prove that He was of human nature and was not an Angel, as some thought and still think.

8:5 *The Angels*- This translates the Hebrew word *elohim*, which is usually translated "God". This word can therefore be applied to those who manifest God, although they aren't God Himself. This is why Angels, men and God's Son, Jesus, can be called "God" without them being God Himself in person.

9:4 God's judgment is ongoing; it's not that God is somehow passive and not paying attention now and will open the books and consider everything when Christ returns. He is passionately involved in our issues and judges them as they happen.

9:8 *He will judge the world in righteousness*- Quoted in Acts 17:31 about how God will judge the world through Jesus when He returns to earth.

9:16 *Yahweh has made Himself known; He has executed judgment*- In observing how God has judged people and nations, we come to know Him better (see too :20). This is why the final judgment of individuals will be in a sense public; the whole purpose of the judgment seat will be for our collective as well as individual benefit, to teach us of the essence of God and prepare us to enter eternity. If we simply entered eternity at Christ's return without this educational process of participating in and observing the judgment process, we would simply not appreciate His grace as we should.

10:3 *Condemns Yahweh*- Not consciously, in so many words. But when we face God's principles and decide whether or not we will live by them or believe them, we effectively place God in the dock, and by doing so the wicked condemn Him. But when He is condemned by human judgment, God overcomes at the last (Rom. 3:4).

10:4 Pride is a sin because it pushes God out of our consciousness, replacing Him with self.

10:7,8 These verses are clearly about the "wicked" who rebel against God; and yet before we shake our heads too disapprovingly, remember that they are quoted about us all in Rom. 3:14. For at some times and in some ways, we are all this wicked- if we examine ourselves properly.

10:18 *Man who is of the dust*- One basic outcome of believing in man's mortality and origin from "dust" is that we won't fear people.

11:4 We are invited to see God enthroned in a Heavenly court which is sitting 24/7, judging multiple cases at once as they occur worldwide.

11:7 *Shall see His face*- This in a literal sense was the ultimate hope of David (17:5), Job (Job 19:27) and all the faithful (Rev. 22:4); for God exists in a personal, corporeal form, in whose image we are made.

12:3 This verse is alluded to in James 3:5 which speaks of the tongue being such a small part of the body and yet boasting great things, having spiritual effect far out of proportion to its size; James 1:8

and 4:8 also use the idea of double mindedness being reflected in our words. Note how the tongue is here put for the person- for God will cut off wicked speaking persons, rather than excise tongues from mouths. Our words really are to be identified with us; we needn't think that we can get away with being one person within and yet projecting a quite different image through carefully calculated words.

13:2,6 David could have sorrow in his heart and yet rejoice in his heart because he knew that God was listening to his prayers and would one day answer. This is the almost schizophrenic experience of all believers.

14:1 Atheism was almost unheard of in early Israel. Yet the fool who quietly within his heart thinks as if there is no God is effectively as atheistic as the most hardened scientific atheist of our times.

*There is none who does good-* This is the result of atheism. And yet, frighteningly for those of us who would insist we are not atheists, this is quoted about each of us in Rom. 3:12. We are all atheists at times, in practice, and must throw ourselves upon God's grace to save us.

15:4 *He who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and doesn't change-* This is very much the language the Bible often uses about how God keeps His covenant promises of grace to us. When we are tempted to go back on our word, we must remember how God doesn't do that to us.

16:3 *They are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight-* David often speaks of how he loves others who also love God, and he speaks of them in terms of great respect (15:4). We likewise should find ourselves naturally attracted to other believers, and should always be respectful towards them because of the fact they are loved by God. We cannot believe and keep ourselves in isolation from them, physically or mentally.

16:8-11 These verses are quoted about the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, of whom David was a type (Acts 2:27). Jesus is now at God's right hand offering our prayers to God (Rom. 8:34); and yet this is described here as His eternal pleasure (:11). Jesus takes great joy in offering our prayers to God, and this alone should inspire our prayer life.

17:2 We are invited to see our coming before God's throne in prayer as a foretaste of the judgment day, when we shall in reality come before His throne. The positive answer to our prayers now- the sentence going forth from the court of Heaven in response to God having as it were judged them- is therefore an encouragement of our final acceptance in that day.

17:4 *The word of Your lips I have kept myself-* Constant reflection upon God's word is the way to victory against temptation, as Jesus showed by continually quoting from Scripture during His wilderness temptations (Ps. 119:11).

17:8 *The apple of Your eye-* God is simply so sensitive to us.

*Hide me under the shadow of Your wings-* Alluding to the wings of the cherubim covering the ark, where the blood of atonement (representing Christ's blood) was sprinkled. David saw himself as living in the most holy presence of God wherever he was.

17:15 *Seeing Your form-* Another indication God exists in a literal tangible form, and we shall see Him.



18:5 'Sheol' is the Hebrew word translated "hell" in some Bibles; it is paralleled here with "death" (:4, "the cords of death" are "the cords of Sheol") and is elsewhere translated "the grave". It's not a place where the wicked go for eternal torment; David was a righteous man, and he too went to the grave, or *sheol*.

18:16 *He drew me out of many waters*- This is an allusion to the name 'Moses' which means just this (Ex. 2:10); :19 alludes to how Israel were brought out of Egypt to the large place of Canaan, and there are many other Moses / Exodus allusions in this Psalm. We like David are to see similarities between our lives and those of Bible characters, taking them as our warnings, inspiration and friends, as David evidently understood Moses. And of course we will one day eternally be united with our heroes and encouragers in faith.

18:22-24 David speaks like this of his own righteousness, although this Psalm was written in later life, after his sin with Bathsheba (:1 = 2 Sam. 22:1). He can only speak like this because he had learnt the lesson that God's righteousness really is imputed to us who are sinners; and he rejoices in this reality, believing it to the point that he really felt it and his self-perception reflected it.

18:30 *The word of Yahweh is tried in the furnace*- The experiences of our lives are like the intense fire of a furnace, and God's word like gold comes through those tests; it is proved not only true but wonderful and beautiful, time and again.

18:43 *You have made me the head of the nations*- But David speaks in :44 as if this had not yet happened. He imagined the things he prayed for as having already happened, just as Jesus taught we should too (Mt. 21:22 Gk.). God speaks of those things which don't exist as if they do, so certain are they of coming to pass (Rom. 4:17), and we are asked to have this same perspective when it comes to prayer.

18:49 *I will give thanks to You, Yahweh, among the nations*- God's intention was that Israel should be a missionary nation, the light of the Gentile world. But generally they failed to perceive this; David was one of the few who did, because his Psalms often speak of telling the Gentile nations how great God is. He came to this simply from the colossal desire he had to praise God as widely and far as possible because of what God had done for him personally by grace. We should be likewise motivated to take the Gospel to the world around us, on the basis of simply having to tell others the wonderful things which we personally have experienced from God.

19:4 This is quoted in Rom. 10:18 about the preaching of the Gospel into all the world. Thus in the same way as the sun and stars witness to God's existence worldwide, so the Gospel is to be taken world-wide. The Psalm therefore moves on to talk about the power of God's word (:7,8) which is being preached.

19:12 If we hope for forgiveness for sins of ignorance, we are accepting that we will be forgiven without specific repentance. As we forgive, according to the principles we apply to forgiving others, so we will be forgiven. If we hope ourselves for forgiveness for sins we've not specifically repented of, because we are unaware of them, we likewise must forgive others the sins they do against us without repentance. To insist that we will only forgive others if they repent would mean that we would be unable to pray this prayer.

20:7 Solomon speaks of “my father David” so often that it appears he was dominated by the need he felt to live out David’s parental expectations of him. But Solomon’s obsession with chariots and horses shows that he didn’t follow David in real spiritual terms, just externally. Those whose parents were believers and were raised to believe must ask themselves whether they too are merely living out parental expectation externally.

21:4 David felt that he had been given eternal life in the sense that the covenant blessings had an eternal quality to them (:6). And yet he often speaks about death as the end of conscious existence. We have here an Old Testament equivalent to Christ’s teaching that we can now have eternal life (Jn. 6:54); we will die, in hope of resurrection to eternal life, but we can live now the kind of life which we will eternally live. Hence the parables of the Kingdom of God teach about how life can be lived right now.

22:1 Quoted by Christ on the cross (Mt. 27:46). The way Christ calls God “my God” (see :10 also) and prays to Him is not only disproof of the Trinitarian view of Christ; it enables us to find in Christ true inspiration and comfort knowing that He was our representative, of our nature. We are also comforted that to have doubts, even a crisis of faith and understanding as to why God isn’t acting isn’t a sin; for Christ had these feelings and yet never sinned. Christ said these words “about the ninth hour” (Mt. 27:46), and yet He died at the ninth hour (Mk. 15:34). That He had some sense of crisis at the very end adds the ultimate in drama to the crucifixion account, and makes His final victory yet more glorious.

22:8 Quoted against Christ on the cross (Mt. 27:43). We are encouraged by the New Testament application of this Psalm to Christ to see the whole Psalm as giving a unique window into the thoughts of God’s Son in His time of dying.

22:14 *My bones are out of joint*- The Messianic Psalms often stress the pain Christ felt in His bones; crucifixion was designed to make the bones of the crucified suffer. We who are baptized into the body of Christ are described as His bones (Eph. 5:30); and yet not one of Christ’s bones was broken (Jn. 19:36). In all this we have profound encouragement. We are to suffer with Christ, sharing His cross; and yet ultimately we will not be broken, but rise again to eternity, just as His body and bones did. From the awkward and unnatural position of the crucified, Christ could look down upon His literal bones and feel they were as persons looking at Him (:17); thus it seems He had an awareness of us as He hung there.

22:18 Fulfilled in Mt. 27:35; Jn. 19:24.

22:22 This is quoted in Heb. 2:12 to demonstrate Christ’s identity with us, having had human nature. He was especially close to us in His death, and we likewise can look to Him there and feel close to Him and His closeness to us. The tone of the Psalm now becomes more positive, as Christ comes to think of us, the “congregation” [LXX *ecclesia*, the church] who would be brought into being on account of His suffering. It could be that He quoted the entire Psalm out loud; “He has finished it” (:31) in the LXX is “It is finished”, which were the very last words of Christ (Jn. 19:30).

23:5 *A table before me in the presence of my enemies*- Sometimes in the depths of despair God will provide an amazing grace to us; and He did this when David fled from his own son through the wilderness, and Barzillai unexpectedly laid out a feast table for David in the semi-desert (2 Sam.

17:27-29). This act of kindness transformed the dry terrain into “green meadows” for David (:2). Our thoughtful grace to others can do the same for them.

24:5 God’s blessing is defined here as His righteousness; the blessing of God promised to Abraham and his seed involves the blessing of forgiveness of sins (Acts 3:25,26). This is achieved by God counting us His righteousness to us, looking at us another way- and this becomes possible for us who are baptized into Christ, whereby His righteous character is counted to us.

25:8,9 *He will instruct sinners in the way... He will teach the humble His way-* The humble here therefore refer to repentant sinners. This is the frame of mind which makes us most teachable by God, and in this way God works through sin, in that repentance for it makes people more open to His teaching.

25:10 The more we live daily life in harmony with God’s will, the more we will perceive that all His ways, His workings, both over history and in our lives, reflect His grace. We will not see Him as hard and unreasonable.

25:22 *Redeem Israel, God-* Many of the Psalms are David’s personal pleas for mercy, but they merge towards the end of them into a request for God to show mercy to all His people. He looked out of His own sufferings to those of others, and took comfort in the fact that God’s ultimate plan is to have a redeemed people living eternally on earth.

26:1 *Without wavering-* This Psalm appears very self-righteous, with David considering himself separate from sinners (:9); it contrasts with the Psalms written after the sin with Bathsheba, which often talk of David’s desire to reach out to sinners rather than about separating from them.

26:3 God’s truth refers to a way of life and being rather than to a set of pure theologies. “Truth” is paralleled here with “grace”, which is the ultimate truth.

27:9 *Don’t abandon me-* Contrast this with the utter confidence expressed elsewhere in this Psalm. We can have the emotions of fear, even of panic, and yet at the same time feel deep faith in God. In this time of need, David reflected how God had earlier delivered him (:2), and this should feature in our response to crises.

27:10 The classic middle aged crisis of loneliness as parents die, the links with the past are cut, is here resolved in the feeling of God’s personal parenthood toward us.

27:14 *Wait-* So often the Psalms speak of the need to “wait” for God. We assume His response must be immediate, but the ‘gap’ between our prayer and His response is necessary, for the sake of the development of our faith. It maintains that appropriate distance which has to be between God and man at this stage.

28:2 *Hear the voice of my petitions-* Yet within the same prayer, David can rejoice that God “*has* heard the voice of my petitions” (:6). We are to pray for things believing and feeling that we have received them (Mk. 11:24); we are to have the perspective of God Himself, who speaks of things which currently aren’t as if they are (Rom. 4:17). Therefore David can conclude this prayer with praise that God has actually answered it already (:7).

28:8,9 Again David looks out of himself in his immediate need to others, rejoicing as he often does at the end of his Psalms that *his* positive experience of God will be that of all God's people. We can at least take the lesson that we are to look out of ourselves to others rather than be swamped by the immediacy of our own issues.

29:5 Here and in :8 we have "the voice of Yahweh" paralleled with Yahweh in person. God is His word- hence we read that "the word was God" (Jn. 1:1). Our attitude to God's word is our attitude to God; it's therefore not possible to claim to be in relationship with God if we ignore His word as we now have it in the Bible. There's much talk about "God" but unless this is based upon His word, we are believing in a 'God' of our own creation rather than the true God who is revealed in the Bible.

30:6 David seems to be reflecting upon some life threatening illness he suffered after his sin with Bathsheba (:2,3); the title of the Psalm shows he wrote this as he was preparing for his son Solomon to build the temple, towards the end of his life. He is reflecting how he had fallen into sin as a result of assuming that he could never fall from the spiritual place he felt he was at. Whilst we should be confident that if Christ returns today we shall be saved by grace, we cannot assume that we shall always be where we are now spiritually, and we should always maintain a keen sense of the eternity we may miss if we turn away.

30:7 *Mountain*- Used in Scripture to refer to a Kingdom or family; David's 'mountain' in this sense was "troubled" as a result of his sin with Bathsheba.

30:9 This request again indicates that David didn't go to Heaven on death (Acts 2:34), but understood death as total unconsciousness until Christ's return.

31:2,3 *Be to me a strong rock... for You are my rock*- David is asking God to be to him in practice what he accepted God to be theoretically. Time and again we seek to make this same conversion from theory to practical reality as we face life's situations.

31:5 *Into Your hand I commend my spirit*- Chosen by Jesus as His last words from the cross as He died (Lk. 23:46). Perhaps the next half of the sentence were His first thoughts on awaking in resurrection: "You have redeemed me, Yahweh, God of truth".

31:7 *You have known my soul in adversities*- God as it were gets to know us when He sees us in crises. Although He knows all things, we reveal ourselves to Him by how we feel and respond in those times.

31:15 *Redeem me*- But David has stated that God had already redeemed him (:5). So often in the Psalms we encounter this struggle to believe and feel as if our prayer has been heard before it actually is; and it is the same struggle we daily have in our prayer life.

31:21 *He has shown me His marvellous loving kindness in a fortified city*- David saw the similarities between himself and the spies who entered the fortified city of Jericho and found themselves trapped within it, with no human way of escape.

32:1,2 This is a soliloquy, David talking to himself as he meditated upon God's forgiveness of his sin with Bathsheba. But it is quoted in Rom. 4:7 with a subtle change of pronoun; "blessed is he" (:1) is changed to "blessed are *they*". Thus David's sin with Bathsheba and in murdering Uriah her husband

becomes representative of all our sins, and we have received the same amazing grace which David did, seeing that there was no legal way out of what he had done- he deserved only death. See on 38:4.

32:4 This refers to the period of time between the sin and the visit of Nathan which convicted David of his sin (2 Sam. 12).

32:6 *Let each one who is Godly pray to You*- David's experience of sin and utter forgiveness should inspire each sinner to repent; but the repentant sinner is here described as "Godly". Godliness doesn't mean we are sinless, but rather that we believe in God's forgiveness and are willing to repent.

32:8 David's experience of forgiveness became the motive for his preaching of it to others. Isaiah, Peter, the disciples and many others were given preaching commissions immediately after having been convicted of their own sinfulness. For this is the attitude of mind which makes preaching powerful and usable by God.

33:6 *By Yahweh's word the heavens were made*- This alludes to how the Genesis record of creation states that "God said" and things came into existence (:9). It explains how "all things" were made by God's word (Jn. 1:3). That same word which created all around us is likewise powerful to create a new creation within the formless darkness of our own lives and minds (2 Cor. 5:17). By reading and responding to God's word we expose ourselves to colossal and awesome creative power.

33:22 God's grace is realized and effective in our lives according to our belief in its extent. It is we and not God who are limiting what is possible. If Abraham had prayed for Sodom to be saved for the sake of just the one righteous man there (Lot), perhaps he would've been heard; the man who thought the Lord's ability to heal was limited by His power was taught that the opposite is true, in that all things are possible but are limited by human faith (Mk. 9:22,23).

34:7 This suggests that we have a guardian Angel permanently settled down (Heb.) around us; the early church believed this (Acts 12:15). The Angels minister to us in order to bring us towards salvation (Heb. 1:14). The reference to Yahweh's "eyes" (:15) may also refer to our guardian Angels.

34:17 *The righteous cry, and Yahweh hears*- This parallels David's statement that he had cried and Yahweh had heard him (:6). Again he looks out of his own issues and sees them in the wider context of God's people; He has delivered them historically, so He will deliver us; if He delivers us, He will deliver His people in the future, and so we can reason from our personal testimony to persuade them to trust Him as we have. The Psalms are songs, and David was using them to share his faith with others.

34:20 This was supremely fulfilled in the fact that no bone of Jesus was broken by the crucifixion process (Jn. 19:36). See on 22:14.

35:3 *Tell my soul, "I am Your salvation"*- David so often tells himself and us that God is indeed his salvation. But here he is asking God to speak directly to his heart and persuade him deeper of this truth. We too can ask God to directly increase our faith.

35:5,6 Threshing and winnowing the wheat from the chaff is a common Biblical metaphor for the final day of judgment. The rejected will be chased away from Christ by the Angels into darkness (:6). The Bible teaches that Jesus will return from Heaven to judge us with the Angels with Him; they will play a part in the judgment process, which will be appropriate as they have been our guardians and stood with us through every moment of our lives (see on 34:7). There are frequent Biblical descriptions of the punishment of the wicked, wallowing at least for some period in darkness, rejected from the Lord they so wish to now be with [hence they are chased away from Him, as Adam was out of Eden, again by Angels]. These aren't to scare us into obedience, but to bring constantly before us the sober importance of the eternal issues which we face (see 2 Cor. 5:11).

35:14 *I bowed down mourning, as one who mourns his mother*- David speaks in the context of his love for Saul despite the endless persecution he received from him, and here alludes to his famous lament over Saul at his death (2 Sam. 1). A man mourning for his mother, rather than a woman for her mother or a father for his son, is a carefully chosen similitude. For a man's mourning for his mother features the bitter regret that 'I didn't appreciate her as I should've done'. And this was how David felt for Saul at his end. In this we see a most unusual level of love and sensitivity. And yet even that is but a dim reflection of the colossal love of God and Jesus for us, and their sensitivity to us and appreciation of our feeble spirituality.

36:9 *In Your light shall we see light*- Our worldview is to be that of God; His perspective is to be ours.

36:12 *There the workers of iniquity are fallen*- The obvious question of the Bible student to the statement "there" is "Where?". And the context seems to provide no answer. But David was imagining in his own mind the final destruction of the wicked at judgment day, as he often does in the Psalms. "There", in his mind's eye, he sees them fallen and without resurrection to eternal life. And this gives him perspective on his sufferings at their hands. We too can usefully play 'Bible television' and try to imagine the scene at judgment day. Whether we get all the details correct or not isn't so important; the exercise provides huge perspective for us in our present life experiences.

37:4 *He will give you the desires of your heart*- This isn't a blank cheque promise that we will get whatever we ask from God. If we delight in Him, then our greatest desires will be forgiveness from Him, to see His glory extended, and to have a place in His eternal Kingdom. And it is this latter desire which this Psalm speaks of frequently, comforting us in the hope of eternity in God's Kingdom on earth; a hope which means that we will not be jealous of the wicked who are briefly prospering in this very short life (:1). See on 38:9.

37:21 *The righteous give generously*- The inspiration for generosity in this life is that we shall eternally inherit the Kingdom on earth (:22). If we really believe that we shall and do even now partake in this ultimate Divine generosity, we will naturally be generous in the few things God has entrusted to us in this life.

37:23 *He delights in his way*- God delights in our life path, even though that path includes stumbling (:24).

37:25,26 Just as Israel were provided with basic bread, water and clothing for their wilderness journey towards the promised land, so God has promised to provide us with such basic necessities. We can take colossal comfort from this, although it so easily becomes obscured by our materialistic

society bent as it is on acquisition. The fact that most of us are no longer agriculturally self-sufficient likewise tempts us to doubt this promise. Having this assurance, we can 'afford' to be generous (:26), not just rising to it occasionally, but as a characteristic of our lives, the very spirit by which we live ("all day long").

37:29 This is a clear proof text that the hope of the righteous is eternal life on earth, not in Heaven. The allusion is clearly to the promises to Abraham of eternal inheritance of the land, and these promises are the basis of the Christian Gospel to which we stand related by baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:8, 27-29).

38:4 *As a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me*- This is applied to all of us by Jesus when He invites we the heavy burdened to come to Him and find relief for that heavy load (Mt. 11:28). David is talking of his sins related to Bathsheba and Uriah; and again we find them being understood as typical of all our sins (see on 32:1,2).

38:9 *All my desire is before You*- All David's desire was for forgiveness; see on 37:4.

38:11 The consequence of sin is that it separates and isolates the sinner, as David found after his sin with Bathsheba, which resulted in the breakup of his family and his son conspiring to kill him and take over the kingdom. Some may sin and apparently not experience this isolation; but they feel it internally. That sin isolates the sinner, literally or psychologically, is designed by God; for it is in that isolation and self-analysis that the sinner has the opportunity to reconnect with God on a deeply personal level.

39:1 *Keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me*- We need to think ahead as to our likely weaknesses, recognizing that being in the presence of some people is going to provoke us to speak badly. In all our spiritual battles we should talk to ourselves like David did, and be aware of how upcoming situations are likely to lead us into temptation.

39:4-6 David reminded himself of man's mortality in order to steel himself against the temptation to talk wrongly; he realized that sinning with the tongue can lead to losing our hope of eternity, and so he reminded himself of this in the face of the upcoming meeting he was going to have with people who would tempt him to misuse his tongue. We can do the same.

39:13 David didn't go to Heaven at death (Acts 2:34); he understood death as total unconsciousness.

40:3 *Many shall see it*- David perceived the influence his spiritual victory or failure would influence others. Without encouraging posturing and posing, we should also be aware of this dimension to life and be motivated by it in our spiritual battles.

40:6 *You have digged my ears*- An allusion to the Law's provision for a servant to decide to permanently remain in his master's household and be adopted into the family- see Ex. 21:5,6.

40:6-8 Quoted in Heb. 10:5-8 about the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Notice how Jesus addressed God as "my God"- another difficulty for Trinitarian theology. Yet the initial context was David reflecting that his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah couldn't be atoned for by any sacrifice; for there was none prescribed for what he had done. He simply vowed to give himself completely to God and declare God's grace to all men (:9,10). Yet this was fulfilled by Jesus in the death of the cross, which

ended the need for animal sacrifices. Indeed many of the Bathsheba Psalms are applied to Jesus in His time of dying on the cross. He there knew fully the feelings of David and every desperate sinner; not that He sinned, but so identified was He with us there that He entered into the feelings of every sinner.

41:1 “The day of evil” ultimately refers to the day of judgment. In that day we will be as the poor who beg us for grace in this life; we should therefore be generous to them, even if their poverty, like our spiritual poverty, is ultimately the result of their own poor decision making and sin.

41:9 *My own familiar friend*- Quoted as Christ’s feelings about Judas in Jn. 13:18. Jesus called Judas his “friend” at the moment of betrayal (Mt. 26:50). The question of course is how could Jesus ‘trust’ Judas and feel hurt at the betrayal when He knew from the beginning who should betray Him (Jn. 6:70,71). One window on this is to remember that Jesus shared our human nature, and we have the possibility within that nature to know something very well about a person, and yet our love for them means that we still trust them. Samson’s love and trust in Delilah, when it was obvious she was going to betray him, is a parade example. The love of Christ was and is surpassing in its depth. Love isn’t cynical, but hopes all things; and He hoped for Judas, that somehow the humanly inevitable wouldn’t happen; just as God told prophets like Ezekiel from the start that Israel wouldn’t hear them, and yet He appeals for Israel to hear the words of those prophets. That same hopeful love is focused on us who are in Christ; that is the practical encouragement and comfort we can take from this insight into the Lord’s thinking about Judas.

42 Korah died in the wilderness and is often highlighted as the ringleader of the rebellion against Moses. But his sons were faithful, and they or their descendants wrote Psalms which are preserved within the book of Psalms. The lesson is that we can rise above our backgrounds and the influence of unbelieving parents, even when it seems that humanly speaking we are victims of our backgrounds. But in Christ we can be a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

42:9 Even in times of doubt and misunderstanding at God’s apparent silence, we are to still feel that God is our rock.

43:5 *Why are you in despair, my soul?*- We all talk to ourselves. It’s important that our self talk is positive, urging ourselves spiritually onwards, rather than reflecting on the empty things of life which lead nowhere. Note how these prayers recorded in the Psalms merge between addressing God and addressing ourselves; prayer is a time of reflection and openness before God, not simply a list of requests baldly presented to Him.

44:3 *They didn’t get the land in possession by their own sword*- This alludes to how Jacob’s final words were a claim that he had taken possession in the land by his own sword and bow (Gen. 48:22). Note how :4 says that it was God who gave Jacob his victories. Jacob was a faithful man who will be in the Kingdom, and yet he didn’t achieve perfection, and died with weakness and misunderstanding on his lips. Without encouraging complacency, we can take comfort that we will not of ourselves attain moral perfection and will die with some weaknesses and spiritual blind points; and yet still be saved by God’s grace if we abide faithful to Him in our hearts. But in this case it is for us to learn the lesson of Jacob’s failure- the Psalm goes on to teach us that our inheritance of the Kingdom will be by grace and not by our own sword and strength (:6).



44:22 *For Your sake we are killed all day long*- Quoted in Rom. 8:36 in the context of teaching that even though we are killed all day long, this cannot separate us from the saving love of Christ. The context of Ps. 44:22 is speaking of how Israel suffered for their sins in being slaughtered by their enemies. So Paul in Romans is comforting us that although we may suffer for our sins, even those sufferings do not separate us from the saving love of Christ who quite simply so earnestly wants to save us in the end.

45:6,7 Quoted in Heb. 1:8,9 to demonstrate the greatness and humanity of Christ. He is clearly not God Himself because God the Father is referred to as Christ's God ("your God"). Yet the term "God" is applied to Him in :6, in the sense that the Hebrew word here translated "God" means simply a "mighty one", a term which has just been used about Christ in :3. We are the "fellows" of Jesus (:7), and He was only exalted above us by God, not because He Himself was in nature above us. This exaltation was at the end of His mortal life, in which He had demonstrated His love for righteousness. He was "anointed" in that He was "made... Christ", which means 'anointed', by God, after His resurrection (Acts 2:36).

45:11 A spiritual man will perceive beauty in a woman in relation to how far she has separated from the things of the world (:10) and is separated unto God's things.

46:5 *God will help her at dawn*- The return of Christ to earth is likened to the rising of the sun at daybreak (Mal. 4:2). The final visible intervention of God in response to our prayers will be at this time. The earthquakes and tidal waves spoken of in :2,3 may refer to the time of trouble which will come on earth just prior to Christ's return.

47:4 *Jacob whom He loved. Selah*- We are to meditate ("Selah") upon the fact that God so loved Jacob, and was and is the God who was Jacob's God. There are so many references to Jacob in the Psalms. Jacob was spiritually weak for much of his life, and was led by God to a final spiritual maturity, although Jacob responded very slowly and weakly to this leading over the decades of his life. The Psalms encourage us that our God is the God who stuck with and dearly loved Jacob. Abraham showed more faith and spirituality than Jacob, but God is more frequently referred to as Jacob's God rather than Abraham's.

48:8 *God will establish it forever. Selah*- The point of meditation here ("Selah") is that Jerusalem will last forever- because God promised David that his great son, the Lord Jesus, would reign on his throne, i.e. in Jerusalem, forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16). For all the metaphor and symbology of the Bible, there are some basic literal realities we are to ever keep in mind; and one of these is that Christ shall literally reign for ever from Jerusalem over God's Kingdom on earth.

48:10 The content of our praise is to be the Name of God, which is His characteristics (Ex. 34:4-6).

49:8 It may seem obvious that money can't buy a place in God's Kingdom, but whilst everybody would agree to that statement, effectively those who trust in wealth to the exclusion of faith in God are saying just this. The price of redemption is far more than money- it was ultimately in the blood of God's dear Son.

49:11 We live under the illusion that we are somehow rational, logical and sensible in our decision making and attitudes. But in fact we are not. Human beings can be incredibly stupid and live in denial of the obvious. We shall die and in that sense lose whatever wealth or property we have

acquired on the earth. But the inward thought of people is that somehow, that wealth remains personally attached to them after their death. This is a penetrating psychological insight. It mocks at any desire to attain personal wealth which will endure after our death; now is the time to use whatever we have in the Lord's service.

49:12 *He is like the animals that perish*- A proof of man's mortal nature, disproving the myths of reincarnation and life in Heaven after death.

49:19,20 Those who don't understand God's ways and aren't therefore responsible to His judgment will remain dead for ever like the animals.

50:1 *Speaks, and calls the earth*- God created the world through the medium of His word, He spoke and it was done. But He hasn't as it were turned away from His creation; the cycles within the natural creation may appear to be on clockwork, but in a sense God consciously brings them forth again by the medium of His word. That word as manifest to us through the Bible is equally active and powerful in an ongoing and always creative way. The idea of our living in an active universe, in which all things are consciously within God's awareness and a result of the ongoing activity of His word, means that truly God is never far from us; we simply need to look out at the natural creation to feel again His active involvement in our world. See on 65:6.

50:5 When Christ returns, the faithful will be gathered to judgment (Mt. 24:31); and it is the gathering of the faithful which this Psalm has in view. But this is only part of the wider Biblical picture, which speaks of all those responsible to God being also gathered to judgment.

50:15 *Call on Me in the day of trouble*- This is the sacrifice which God wants. Rather than us giving things to God, He wants us to *trust* in Him, to turn to Him before turning to anything else.

50:21 The apparent silence of God can deceive the wicked into thinking they will not give account to Him. But there will be in some sense a going through with the wicked of all their deeds (Mt. 25:43). This will be such an awful experience for them that it will of itself be their punishment; for ultimately, they will return to the dust never to exist again, seeing that the wages for sin is ultimately death (Rom. 6:23).

51:6 *Truth in the inward parts*- The innermost truth we can come to know is that we really have sinned and been forgiven; this is the ultimate "wisdom" rather than any intellectual knowledge or theological purity.

51:10 God can act directly on our hearts and create mindsets and attitudes, in response to our desire for them.

51:13 David vowed to respond to God's gracious forgiveness of him by preaching to others. Our motivation for witness should be our own very personal awareness of having received forgiveness and grace which we never possibly deserved.

51:16 There was no sacrifice under the Mosaic law which could cleanse David from the sins he had committed.

52:4 *You deceitful tongue*- David is addressing Doeg (see the Psalm title), but he speaks of Doeg as if Doeg is his tongue. We are identified with our words, they are us, just as God's word is Him (Jn. 1:3).

We can't therefore excuse ourselves from bad speaking by reasoning that in our hearts we are not like that. Our words reflect us, and therefore by them we will be condemned or justified in the last judgment (Mt. 12:37).

52:8 *I am like a green olive tree in God's house*- But David at this time was on the run from Saul in the wilderness, and was not calmly sitting in the tabernacle; nor was he physically "in the presence of Your saints" (:9). And yet within his own heart, David felt identified with God's people and in His presence. This is a comfort for those who may be isolated from church life and from other believers; we can really be there in spirit, as David was in his wilderness years.

53:2 *Who understood, who seek after God*- To seek for God, thereby recognizing that we don't understand Him to perfection, is considered by Him to be understanding Him.

53:3 These verses speak of a category of people who in their heart are at times pure atheists (:1), and who are described as "filthy" and do no good. We are therefore shocked to find Paul quoting these words about every one of us (Rom. 3:12). There in Romans Paul is seeking to challenge the attitude that 'I may be a sinner, but I'm not like *them*'. He does so in order to convict us of our sin, and the just sentence of death which is upon us; in order to help us gasp with more wonder and gratitude at God's amazing grace in having counted us as righteous because we are baptized into Christ.

55:3 *Because of the words*- The mental suffering David describes in these verses was largely because of the words of his enemies; words really can make people feel like dying and lead them to suicidal thoughts. Words can never be treated as 'only words'; they have a real power, and therefore we have a deep responsibility for our words. We must remember this, living as we do in a society which judges behaviour far harder than it does 'mere' words. No threat in this sense is ever an 'empty threat', because words are of themselves so destructive.

55:9 *Confound their language*- Exactly what God did to those who built the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7). We like David need to see our abusers in Biblical terms, seeing how in essence our abusers are so similar to those in Biblical incidents.

55:13,14 This refers to David's betrayal by Ahithophel, Bathsheba's grandfather, and his own one time confidante (2 Sam. 15:31; 1 Chron. 27:33). It is clearly typical of Christ's betrayal by Judas, whom he also calls his "friend" (Mt. 26:50); as to why Christ in this sense trusted Judas so as to be so hurt by his betrayal, see on 41:9. The historical record simply states Ahithophel's betrayal of David, but here we see how David didn't just take it stoically, but was deeply hurt by it and poured out his soul to God in hurt and pain. We need to imagine the feelings of the Biblical characters as they went through the events which are historically recorded.

56:8 Tear bottles were kept by mourners at funerals; they put their tears in a bottle which they then kept in memory of the deceased. But David says that *his* tears are in *God's* bottle. The idea was that *your* tears went into *your* bottle. But David was so intimate with God that he perceived that *his* tears were in fact *God's*. The intimacy David achieved with God is absolutely possible for us too.

57:1 David didn't see the physical cave he was hiding in (see Psalm title) as his refuge, but rather perceived God as his refuge. We may use medicines, doctors and all kinds of human things in our

times of need, but we must perceive God as our true helper and final saviour rather than any of those things.

57:4 The vagabonds who supported David during his wilderness years were unspiritual men, and David so desperately longed for spiritual company. But David in his heart was ecstatic at God's presence, and must've composed these words whilst laying with those men in the cave. This is a parade example to us of spiritual mindedness in unspiritual company.

58:1 *Silent ones*- There is a time to keep silence, but if we don't speak out for the abused at times we are paralleled with those who are proactively abusive. So much evil happens because 'good' people do nothing.

58:10 Our natural unease at reading these kinds of things is a reflection of our underestimate of the seriousness of sin, and the desperate need which there is for justice to be done. If we have such a perspective, then we will rejoice to see it done at the last day.

59:14,15 This seems to speak of the rejected at the last day. Just as the rejected virgins knock at the door earnestly wanting Jesus to open to them (Mt. 25:11), as Cain dwelt at the east of Eden in the hope of being readmitted to Paradise (Gen. 4:16), so the wicked of David's time [who were Israelites, members of God's covenant people] will walk around the holy city wishing to be let in, howling like desperate dogs. Rev. 22:15 using the same figure for the rejected- dogs outside God's city. In that final day of eternal truth, nobody will be indifferent; all present there will desperately wish to be in God's Kingdom. If our final destiny is to stand before God desperately desiring to be in His Kingdom, we must live our lives today with the same passion; for we make the answer now. All too late the rejected will come to really believe in God's eternal Kingdom on earth (:13); but it will be too late to change anything, for the judgment is ongoing now.

60:3 *You have made us drink the wine*- Being given a cup of wine to drink is a double symbol; it speaks of either our eternal blessing (1 Cor. 10:16) or condemnation. The communion service is therefore designed to bring us up against the two possible futures which there are for us; blessing or condemnation. We therefore drink either to our blessing or to our condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29). It is therefore a powerful aid towards self-examination.

60:9 *Who has led me to Edom?*- The Psalm title shows that this was a song written in response to Israel's victory over Edom, but in it David continually emphasizes how their earlier attempt had failed because of their sin. Even when God does great things for us, we must be ever aware of our sins and unworthiness of any victory He gives us.

61:6,7 Although David clearly expected to die, as other Psalms indicate, he understood that he had been promised eternal life in that the promises to him were that he would see his great descendant, the Lord Jesus, reigning eternally in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:16). This necessitated a resurrection to eternal life. The idea of eternal life is found in the Old Testament because it is required by the promises to Abraham and David which were the basis of God's covenant; it didn't just arise in the New Testament. The life, death and resurrection of Christ was the basis upon which those earlier promises of eternity had been made, but the basic promise of eternal salvation had begun to be offered in Genesis.

62:1 *God alone*- The Hebrew word translated “alone” also means “one”. The fact that God is one isn’t merely a numerical statement. Because there is only one God, we are to trust Him alone. In life’s crises we are to turn to God alone, quite simply because there is only one God. Our belief in the unity of God isn’t merely a theological position, it has huge practical meaning- especially in a world where there are so many attempts to replace trust in God, be it through insurance policies, clever lawyers, smart doctors or roadside rescue services.

62:12 *You reward every man according to his work*- Quoted in Rev. 22:12 about what will happen at the judgment seat of Christ at His return. Because God has this principle, of judging according to behaviour, we thereby see His grace- for despite this, He will still save us. And that, therefore, must be by His grace alone.

63:11 *The mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped*- This is quoted about all of us in Rom. 3:19, where Paul reasons that because we’re all sinners, we’re all liars- for untruth is the essence of sin. By doing so we’re not being true to ourselves, to God, to His word, to our brethren... we profess covenant relationship with God, to be His people, and yet we fail to keep the terms of that covenant. In the context, Paul is teaching that the Law of Moses convicted all God’s people of this, and in this way led them to the need for Christ. Yet Is. 52:15 prophesied that the crucified Jesus would result in men shutting their mouths. The righteousness and perfection displayed there in one Man, the very human Lord Jesus, has the same effect upon us as the Law of Moses- we shut our mouths, convicted of sin.

64:9 *All mankind shall be in awe*- We naturally wonder how “all mankind” will be in awe at the judgment of some Israelites in David’s time who abused him. The fact is that they will be resurrected and judged, and the judgment will in some sense be public, before all (Rev. 16:15). It will be an amazing teaching mechanism, seeing the lives of billions of people played back and analyzed, and observing the condemnation of the wicked. It will prepare us for entry to God’s eternal Kingdom, understanding His principles and grace in a way which we have perhaps not risen to in this life- even though His judgments are in His word and are even now made manifest.

65:3 *You atoned for our transgressions*- The atonement for sin was achieved through the death of Christ, who hadn’t died at David’s time. But God forgave sin in Old Testament times on the basis that He foresaw the death of Christ, who as it were was slain from the beginning (Rev. 13:8). God speaks of things which don’t exist as though they do (Rom. 4:17), because He views from outside the limitations of human time. This is why He can speak of things and persons (not least His Son) as existing before they did. This doesn’t mean they pre-existed in any literal sense, but they existed in His plan and purpose.

65:6 *By His power forms the mountains*- God didn’t just form the mountains at the time of Genesis 1 and leave them, He is actively forming mountains to this day. A theme of this Psalm is that God is actively at work in the natural creation; the water cycle doesn’t as it were run on clockwork but rather as a result of God’s active, conscious and passionate involvement (:9-11)- see on 50:1.

66:1,2 Often the Psalms invite the Gentile world to join with Israel in their praise of God as their saviour (also :5). Israel were intended to be a light to the Gentiles around them, and to bring them to faith and covenant relationship with God. They failed in this, for the most part, despite these faithful Psalmists who sought to do so through the medium of producing songs which they hoped would

penetrate into the surrounding nations. The great commission bids each of us to take the same message into the Gentile darkness around us.

66:6 *We rejoiced in Him*- Often in the Psalms we are invited to consider ourselves as Israel in Egypt, subsequently rejoicing at the Red Sea deliverance; hence the Psalmist speaks of “us” as having gone through Israel’s experience of suffering and salvation (:11,12). The New Testament likewise invites us to see our baptism as a passing through the Red Sea, and our lives today as like their wilderness journey towards the Kingdom (1 Cor. 10:1-4). We are to as it were play ‘Bible television’, imagining the events as if we were there historically; for spiritually, it is all equally true for us in our salvation from this world of sin.

67:2 *Your salvation among all nations*- see on 66:1,2.

67:4 Applied in Acts 17:31 to the judgment of the world at Christ’s return.

68:6 *God sets the lonely in families*- He did this when He brought His prisoner people out from Egyptian bondage. The numbering of the tribes after they had crossed the Red Sea implies that every Israelite had a family group. Those who were alone were therefore placed within families. The community of God’s people today, who have likewise passed through the water of baptism as Israel crossed the Red Sea, should likewise be characterized by inclusiveness and a binding of individuals together in a new spiritual family in Christ. Cliques based around existing families or friendship groups mustn’t be allowed to stop this unique unity occurring- for it is this mysterious Christian unity which is powerful enough to convert the world if it is lived out as it should be (Jn. 17:21).

68:11 There is here and in :12,25 a strong emphasis on the participation of women in the spreading of the good news of God’s redemption of His people. The idea was quite radical in that conservative, male dominated world. The broad picture we are to take away is that absolutely all of us, men and women, whether or not others consider us appropriate witnesses, are to share the good news of God’s salvation with the entire world.

68:18 This is applied in Eph. 4:8 to the ascension of Christ in order to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit which He then gave to the first century church, in order to prepare it to be a place where God might dwell. Whilst the miraculous gifts were withdrawn once the church was established, Christ’s parables teach that we have each been given some gift by Him which we are to use to prepare for God’s Kingdom and to enable His dwelling amongst men on earth (Mt. 25:15). We have each been given something as a result of Christ’s sacrifice and victorious ascension to Heaven, and we are therefore to ensure that we use them.

69:9 *For the zeal of Your house consumes me*- Applied to Jesus in Jn. 2:17; so many verses in this Psalm are relevant to Him. Verse 8 refers to His estrangement from His half brothers and natural family (Jn. 7:5). “The reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” is referred to Christ in Rom. 15:3, and is therefore applied to us who are in Him- in that we are to be so concerned with others’ salvation and welfare that we can rise above the experience of personal reproach and insult rather than being obsessed by it and paralyzed from being of service.

69:14-16 The urgent desire for immediate deliverance is here in the context of a Psalm definitely speaking of Christ’s sufferings on the cross. There was certainly a sense of urgency, crisis and desire

for immediate deliverance which wasn't answered immediately (see too 22:1). He knew there the crisis of unanswered prayer; He there shared the quintessence of all our crises.

69:20 This looking for comforters and finding none must mean that these verses describe Christ at the very end of the hours of crucifixion, when John and Mary had walked away. The reproaches shouted by mindless, small minded people in the crowd broke His heart, such was His amazing sensitivity to words, so eager was He to be accepted by Israel as their Messiah.

69:21 Clearly relevant to the offer of vinegar to Christ in response to His plea "I thirst" (Jn. 19:28,29).

69:22 Applied to the Jews who crucified Christ in Rom. 11:9.

69:25 The LXX of this verse is quoted in Acts 1:20 and applied to Judas for his betrayal of Christ.

69:27 God counts those who believe in Him as righteous because He imputes righteousness to them; but He also counts sinners as increasingly sinful. Thus there is both an upward and downward spiral in life; we are always moving one way or the other, and never static.

71:15 *I don't know its full measure*- Like us, David preached of things which he believed and yet openly admitted he didn't fully understand. This humility and recognition of our own limited understanding will make our witness the more compelling, rather than if we arrogantly give the impression of total knowledge.

71:11 *God has forsaken him* – David did indeed feel that God had forsaken him (22:1). David, like all of us, was very sensitive to what others said about him- for his many complaints at his being slandered reflect how significant it was for him. We must be secure in our relationship with God, so that others' discounting of our relationship with Him don't influence us.

71:18 David wanted to remain alive so that he could continue his work of teaching and preaching God's grace and salvation to others. This too should be our purpose of living.

71:20 *Bring us up again from the depths of the earth*- David's hope was clearly in the resurrection of the body, which he may have deduced as necessary on reflection that he would see with his own eyes his Messiah son reigning for ever on his throne (2 Sam. 7:16).

71:22 *I will praise you... I sing praise to You*- David imagines how after the resurrection at his future glorification, he *will*, at that future time, praise God; and yet he says he praises God *now*. We have here an example of living the Kingdom life now. In New Testament terms, this is how we can "have eternal life" now, even though we shall die; for we can live now the kind of life which we will eternally live, the Kingdom life.

72 *A Psalm for Solomon*- These are David's prophetic desires for his son, and yet clearly they have reference to the Kingdom of Christ rather than Solomon, even though the Psalm has a limited fulfilment in Solomon. The promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:12-16 stated that the son of David would also be son of God, and David would eternally live in the presence of his great descendant, who would reign eternally from David's throne. It seems that David came to see these promises as having hope of fulfilment in his son Solomon, although the New Testament is clear that their main fulfilment is in Christ (Lk. 1:31-35). Thus David lost his focus upon the future Messiah because of his obsession with his son Solomon; and Solomon was damaged by this in that his spirituality and works

for God were a living out of parental expectation, but at the end of his life he turned away to other gods and according to Ecclesiastes, lost all hope of a future Kingdom of God on earth. This Psalm however remains a wonderful prophecy of Christ's future Kingdom, based around the land of Israel and His rulership in Jerusalem.

72:8 In Solomon's time, the territory of Israel was larger than at any other time.

72:10 Fulfilled by the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon (1 Kings 10).

72:13,14 Solomon perhaps consciously tried to fulfil this in his gracious judgment between the two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-28); but later in his reign, his bitterness and selfishness led him to abuse his people (1 Kings 12:4). Thus Solomon by his own behaviour disallowed himself from fulfilling this Kingdom prophecy.

72:17 *Men shall be blessed in him*- Fulfilled in how those baptized "in Christ" become Abraham's seed and receive the blessing of God's grace and forgiveness (Acts 3:25,26; Gal. 3:27-29).

73:17 Asaph as a temple servant would have had access to the altar, which was plated with the censers of those sinners who had rebelled against God in the desert (Num. 16:38). There the earth suddenly opened and swallowed them up- alluded to in :18,19. Looking at those plates, he saw that finally judgment does come to the wicked, and even those who appear to die in peace will ultimately be judged. The apparent prosperity of the wicked and the way that they don't always receive judgment in this life simply deepens our faith in the reality of a judgment to come, at which the wicked will be resurrected and judged for their actions in this life. Seeing that God judges sin, and yet sinners don't always get judged in this life, forces us to this understanding- which is in any case presented specifically in the Bible. Asaph admits throughout the Psalm that his jealousy of the wealthy and prosperous sinners had eaten him up to the point of obsession and spiritual destruction; but he came to his senses by realizing the reality of future judgment. That basic doctrine should mean the same for us too.

74:9 This statement is strange seeing that there were prophets at the time when the temple was burnt by the Babylonians (:7)- not least Jeremiah, who had prophesied that Judah would be in captivity for 70 years (Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10). Daniel too appears not to have been immediately aware of Jeremiah's prophecies (Dan. 9:2). There are times when God's people seem not to have been in much contact with each other even though they lived near each other- Melchizedek and Abraham are an example. The dysfunction and division we see within the church is lamentable and wrong, but these things happen, and the divided parties still remain God's people- just as Asaph and Jeremiah were.

74:12 This Psalm is a record of how Asaph reasoned with himself. The destruction of the temple by the Babylonians meant that he felt God had totally and permanently rejected His people; and yet he takes comfort in the wonders God has done for His people in the past (:13-15). As a member of God's people he felt that those historical wonders had in a sense been done to him too- hence he reflects that "Yet God is my King of old". In times when the apparent distance and silence of God is so unbearable, we have to remember what He has done for us and for His people in the past. We can also reflect that the ongoing wonders of creation, the sun's rising and setting, is a sign that God is in fact constantly active (:16,17), even if He's not active for us in the ways we desperately want.



75:7 *God is the judge. He puts down one, and lifts up another-* We shouldn't think that God isn't watching this world, and will only open the books and consider everything when Christ returns. The judgment is ongoing, right now we are standing before Him and He is judging; the future judgment day will be the revelation of the judgments He has already reached as He watched our faith and behaviour in this life.

75:8 *A cup-* See on 60:3.

76:1 Judah and Israel are often paralleled. Judah refers to the two tribe kingdom based around the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and the half tribe of Manasseh; which Israel refers to the ten tribe kingdom. This division of God's people was a tragedy; and yet from God's perspective they were one, hence His frequent parallel of them. All divisions within the body of Christ are likewise only real from an earthly perspective; God sees His people as one, as we should.

76:3 This reference to a dramatic military victory by God in the Jerusalem area and the subsequent plundering of the invaders, resulting in the neighbouring kings bringing presents to Jerusalem (:11) is all relevant to the situation when the Assyrians were destroyed by God at the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 32:23).

77:10 *I will appeal to this-* The faithful have always known God as a God open to dialogue. Asaph feels that God has as it were forgotten His graciousness (:9), and so He appeals to God to remember how in the past He saved His people at the Red Sea, even though they were spiritually weak at the time. He thus appeals to God's consistent love for His people as a basis for requesting God to act again in gracious salvation. If God has acted with His right hand over history, why not now? There was no unquestioning submission to the Almighty God as required by Islam and some legalistic forms of Christianity; rather do God's people respectfully engage Him in dialogue and struggle with Him in prayer.

78:9,10 Israel turned back in the day of battle, they lost their confidence and nerve, because "they didn't keep God's covenant". Keeping the covenant had an effect upon the crises of life. And keeping it was not a matter of mere outward obedience, it was rather a state of the heart. Thus "their heart was not right with him, neither were they faithful in His covenant" (:37). The covenants / promises made to Abraham and David above all take a grip upon the heart- and we have to keep remembering that those same covenants are made with all who are in Christ as they are the basis of the Gospel (Gal. 3:8).

78:18,19 Their attitudes to God in their hearts became verbalized in words. How we think about God is so important; we could say that spiritual mindedness is the essence of what Christianity is about.

78:22 *They didn't believe in God-* Israel weren't atheists; but by not trusting that He will ultimately save us, we are effectively atheistic.

78:28 *Around their dwelling places-* We see here the sensitivity of God, not only giving them food but bringing it right to their door. That they and so many others should have become bitter with a God of such gentle grace and kindness is indeed tragic.

78:30 Like a parent giving in to the unwise requests of a child just because they love the child, so God gave Israel the food they craved. Yet giving in to lust or wrong desire doesn't make it go away; Israel were given their desire (:29) but their craving remained. In our battles with temptation, let us never reason that if we give in, the lust will go away. It's simply not true. The very experience of sin makes the next sin even easier and the voice of conscience yet weaker.

78:31 *Killed some of their fattest*- It was the fat ones who were complaining they were perishing from hunger and that God was somehow unreasonable to His children. God had obviously provided very well for them with the manna; but this wasn't enough to satisfy their endless craving to tickle their taste buds and ever be titillating their fancy with something new.

78:49 *Angels of evil*- God's Angels don't sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23). They are *all* doing His work (103:19-21; Heb. 1:14); there is no sin before God's presence in Heaven (Hab. 1:13). The text here in 78:49 doesn't speak of 'sinful Angels', but rather Angels responsible for bringing "evil" in the sense of calamity or disaster. We are often reminded that God brings the good and also creates "evil" in this sense (Is. 45:5-7). And He does it through His Angels. The reference in the context here is to the plagues God brought on Egypt; the work of the "Angels of evil" refers to the killing of the firstborn sons of Egypt by the Lord's Angel.

78:54 *Had purchased*- It had as it were cost God something to give Israel the Kingdom or "mountain". The same Hebrew word occurs in 74:2 and Gen. 14:22. The cost of our redemption, our place in the Kingdom, was the precious blood of Christ with which we were "bought" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18,19). God who knows the future is outside of our kind of time, and so in a sense, Christ was as it were the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). His pain and sacrifice started right from the beginning, and when He offered Israel the forgiveness and Kingdom which He did, this offer was not without pain and immense cost to Him. Their rejection of it was therefore even more tragic and painful for Him.

79:8 *Don't hold the iniquities of our forefathers against us*- Ez. 18 criticizes the Jews at the time of the destruction of the temple (:1) for complaining that their sufferings were because of their fathers' sins, and God rejoins that this wasn't the case, He was punishing that generation for their actual personal sins. But Asaph was under the impression that his generation were relatively innocent; likewise his complaint that he doesn't know "how long" the sufferings would last appears to reveal an ignorance of Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10. See on 74:9. We can get some things wrong, be wilfully ignorant of others in our self-justification; and yet still be counted by God as faithful, just as Asaph was. And we must remember this in managing our irritations with others' spiritual immaturity.

79:9 *Because* of how God is, as revealed in His Name of Yahweh, because mercy and forgiveness are paramount within the texture of His very personality which His Name reveals (Ex. 34:4-6)... therefore, we should repent. Reflection on the Name inspired Asaph's faith in forgiveness and thus helped his repentance. It did the same for David (25:11) and for Jeremiah (Jer. 14:7,21), and it can do so for us too. Because God's Name proclaims God as above all merciful and forgiving, therefore we should repent and ask for forgiveness.

80:9 *You cleared the land for it*- Potentially, God drove out all the nations in the land of Canaan so that the vine of Israel could grow there without contamination and be spiritually fruitful. But in fact Israel failed to drive out many of the tribes and they remained to be a spiritual thorn to Israel's

spirituality. In potential, so much was made possible, just as it is for God's people today; but it requires us to go and realize that potential in faith.

80:12 *Why have You broken down its walls*- Surely Asaph knew that the nations around the borders of Israel had been allowed by God to invade because of Judah's sinfulness. Asaph in several Psalms appears to underestimate the seriousness of Judah's sin and the rightness and necessity of God's judgment, despite the prophets of his time making these things crystal clear. Yet for all his misunderstanding and wilful ignorance, he still displays faith and God worked with him and inspired the recording of his Psalms. For all *our* ignorance and misunderstandings [and those of others amongst God's people], God still hears our prayers.

81:5 *I heard a language that I didn't know*- God of course understands every language and thought of man, including Egyptian. Yet He so identifies with His people that He speaks from their limited perspective. He has the ability to see and feel life from our viewpoint here on earth. He isn't therefore distant from us.

81:11 God ("me") is paralleled with His voice; if we disregard His word, this is our attitude to Him. We can't divorce our relationship with Him from our relationship with His word. True believers can therefore be nothing but Bible lovers and searchers.

81:14 *I would quickly have*- We have in these verses the amazing fact that God knows all possible futures; He knew all the things that would have happened if they had been obedient- and He often mentions this in the prophets. In this we have another window into the pain and tragedy of God. We mourn more for those who die young than for those who die in fulfilled old age, because we think of all that might have been. And so it is for God, to an infinitely greater extent. He planned even to give Israel fine wheat as well as manna, and honey as well as water out of the smitten rock (:16); but Israel would not. And yet God continues to plan all kinds of intricate and wonderful possible futures for each of us; and individually and collectively we as His beloved people so often don't enable them to happen because of our short term, faithless attitudes.

82:6 *You are gods*- The Hebrew word *elohim* means 'mighty ones'; sometimes it is translated "God", other times it refers to men, in this case the sinful judges of Israel (:1,7). When the Jews falsely accused Jesus of making Himself God, He denied it by quoting this verse. His point was 'In the Old Testament, men are called God; I'm only saying I'm the *Son* of God, so what's your problem?' (Jn. 10:34,35). He not only denied being God Himself in any Trinitarian sense; He thus demonstrated that the term "God" can be applied to men, and even if it is used about Him, it doesn't make Him God Himself in person.

83:13 *Like chaff before the wind*- The language of Dan. 2:35,44 about the destruction of the ten toes of the image, representing Israel's latter day enemies, at Christ's return. Psalm 83 likewise features ten nations who will be bound together against Israel and then be dramatically destroyed by direct Divine intervention. It is tempting to equate these ten nations with the ten toes of the image of Dan. 2, and the ten horns of the latter day beast which we meet in Daniel and Revelation. These ten nations are geographically located in the peoples which currently surround the state of Israel, and the rhetoric they are prophesied as using is exactly the same as that used by the Palestinians and Israel's Arab enemies. The situation around Israel is therefore a sure sign that Christ will soon return.

83:16 *That they may seek Your name*- The latter day judgments against Israel's enemies, like all God's judgments, are so that those nations may repent and come to relationship with God; they aren't a mere outbreak of anger from an exasperated God.

84:10 Just one day in God's presence would be better than thousands of days lived in this present world; and yet the wonder of it all is that we shall live eternally with God in His Kingdom. 2 Pet. 3:8 alludes here.

85:4 Although God had potentially turned from His anger (:3), Israel still had to turn to God to make this come true in their personal experience.

85:10 *Mercy and truth*- Somehow it seems that both individually and collectively we cannot achieve this fusion. We are either too soft and compromise and lose the Faith, or we are too hard and lose the spirit of Christ, without which we are "none of His" (Rom. 8:9). The result of this is that whenever God's Truth is revived, that community is in a sense born to roll downhill; after two or three generations the Truth is lost. Either they destroy themselves through bitter subdivision, or they compromise with error and lose the Faith. Perhaps it is God's plan that no one community should hold the Faith through many generations. But the challenge of showing "grace and truth" in our thinking and judging, even though we cannot fully achieve it; and in the process we are led to appreciate more the beauty and wonder of the way in which these two concepts are linked together in the Father and His Son, and to yearn more to perceive and enter into the glory of God's Name, which totally incorporates these two humanly opposed aspects (Ex. 34:6,7; Rom. 11:22).

86:3 There are verses which speak of many daily prayers as being just one prayer (86:3,6; 88:1,2); prayer is a way / spirit of life, not just something specific which occurs for a matter of minutes each day. The commands to "pray without ceasing" simply can't be literally obeyed (1 Thess. 5:17). "Watch and pray *always*" (Lk. 21:36) in the last days likewise connects prayer with *watchfulness*, which is an attitude of mind rather than something done on specific occasions. This is not to say that prayer *in no sense* refers to formal, specific prayer. Evidently it does, but it is only a verbal crystallization of our general spirit of life.

86:14 God of course knew all this, but part of the healing therapy of prayer is that we verbalize our situations and tell God about them.

87:5 This verse and the whole Psalm may refer to the way that the judgment throne of Christ will be established in Jerusalem, and therefore all those who will live eternally will have in that sense been born again there, in that they began the physical experience of immortal life in that city.

88:2 It's an amazing thought that the words of our prayers enter into God's personal presence. This was symbolized by the way the incense (representing prayer, Rev. 8:3,4) burnt in the holy place permeated into the Most Holy Place.

88:9 *I have spread out my hands to You*- This is a good physical posture to adopt in our prayers, signifying as it does our openness to God's answer, whatever it may be; and the openness of our heart to Him.

88:10 The faithful Psalmist knew that death was unconsciousness; he wanted to remain alive so as to keep on praising God. And this should also be our very reason for being alive.

88:13 *In the morning*- Starting each day in prayer is a vital spiritual habit of the spiritually successful person. How we start the day affects how that day proceeds spiritually.

89:2 We often doubt God's love and whether He will really keep His covenant with us. Yet the very existence of creation, that it's not been destroyed despite human sin, should be a constant reminder to us of God's faithfulness- if we let ourselves perceive it.

89:12 This shows how God reckons the points of the compass with reference to Jerusalem; He is believer-centric, so central are we to His thinking. We are never forgotten by Him.

89:20 *I have found David My servant*- God is in search of man; this is a repeated theme of the prophets (Hos. 9:10; Dt. 32:1; Is. 50:2; 65:1,2; 66:4). So it's not us as it were reaching out to God; He is fervently reaching out to us, and we have to come to realize that. We don't so much as find God, as realize that He already is earnestly with us. And yet we of course feel that we are or have been searching for God, for the ultimate Truth. Yet God is searching for us; in conversion to Christ, God and man meet in a profound way; for there, in Christ, God finds us and we find Him.

89:26-32 This is clearly a commentary on the promises to David concerning his great descendant, who was also to be God's Son (2 Sam. 7:12-16). They were fulfilled in Christ (Lk. 1:31-35). The fact Christ called God "my God" and God was His salvation, His saviour from death through resurrection, is all more evidence that the Trinitarian understanding of Jesus is wrong. Jesus wasn't God Himself in person.

89:35 The promises God makes involve a solemn commitment by Him to us- the serious, binding nature of His oath to us is easy to forget. God swore to David "by My holiness". The Hebrew for "holiness" is the same word translated "dedication". David's response to God's dedication to him was to dedicate [s.w.] all the silver and gold which he had won from this world, to the service of God's house (1 Kings 7:51; 1 Chron. 26:26; 2 Chron. 5:1). Our response to God's dedication to us should be a like dedication of what we have to Him. Covenant relationship with God requires much of both Him and us.

89:52 *Blessed be Yahweh forever*- Despite all the doubts about God expressed in this Psalm, the faithful writer is still committed to thanking and praising God. His apparent silence in specific areas of our lives shouldn't ever stop us from praising Him for who He is.

90:1 There is a repeated Biblical theme that the believer's relationship with the God is essentially *mutual*. We dwell in God, and He dwells in us (1 Cor. 3:16). Thus "he that lives in love lives in God, and God in him " (1 Jn. 4:15,16).

90:10 This is one of many Biblical reasons for understanding the urgency of our need to devote our time to the Lord and not fritter it away. We must number our days, realize their number is only 70 years, and therefore apply our hearts unto wisdom (:10 cp. :12). "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom" (Prov. 4:7).

90:13 *Relent*- Moses several times persuaded God to change His stated purpose concerning Israel, and here once again he is trying to persuade God not to allow the rebellious generation of Israel to perish in the wilderness. The prayer wasn't answered, but it's a fine example of someone very intimate with God pleading with Him to change His mind.

91:1 This Psalm is connected with Ps. 90, and appears to also be part of that prayer of Moses. It's especially addressed to Joshua, who during the wilderness journey lived in the tabernacle (Ex. 33:11), and was one of the few who survived the judgment of the unfaithful generation dying in the wilderness. The situation in :3-7 describes how one by one, that generation died in the wilderness, but Joshua was preserved because he had believed that Israel could inherit the promised land.

91:11,12 Jesus was tempted to misinterpret these words as meaning that whatever He did from whatever motives, God would somehow preserve Him (Mt. 4:6). Temptation is very subtle; for the believer, misusing God's words in order to justify whatever we feel like doing in the heat of a moment is a common form of temptation. This Psalm was encouragement to Joshua (see on :1), the Hebrew form of 'Jesus'; so it's understandable that Jesus would've been especially aware of these words.

91:14 Joshua (see on :1) was preserved because he believed that God would really give His people the promised Kingdom; but this faith is here described as loving God and knowing His Name. Joshua wanted Israel to inherit the Kingdom because he loved God, not because he wanted any personal benefit for himself. We see here how the New Testament triad of faith, hope and love were all interwoven within the character of Joshua.

92:2 A regular regime of morning and evening 'quiet time' with God is so important; spiritual life is really all about having the right habits.

93:1 A proof that God will not destroy the earth but will be faithful to His covenant purpose to establish His eternal Kingdom here. Just as the earth stands firm for ever, so does God's word of promise (:5).

94:1 David sees Yahweh as the God of revenge, the one *alone* to whom vengeance belongs. Our response to this is to believe that truly vengeance is God's and therefore we will *not* avenge ourselves (Rom. 12:19). I take this to apply to all the micro-level 'takings of vengeance' which we so easily do in our words, body language, attitudes etc., in response to the hurt received from others.

94:9 One implication of believing that we were created by God as a special, purposefully designed creation is that we will believe that God sees and knows all things; the designer of the eyes and ears which we have 24/7 can surely see and hear everything going on in our lives.

94:12 True hearkening to the word is a chastening experience. It isn't easy; not as easy as reading a book called the Bible and going through the process of interpretation. Our sufferings make sense and are worked through by God insofar as we are open to and aware of His word; for they are designed to assist us in our being conformed to His word.

95:7 The urgency of hearing "today" applied to Israel in the wilderness, to the community at the time of Ps. 95, and to the first century believers to whom it is applied specifically in Heb. 3:7,15; 4:7. The urgency of the call continues to our "today". God's word has a unique way of speaking to us in a kind of eternal present; as if we were there in the wilderness, in the time of Ps. 95, and in the first century church.

96:6 Idols are characterized here as being ultimately unable to create anything. Whilst we may not be tempted to worship literal idols, we have many other potential idols in our lives which take us

away from God- endless surfing the internet, involvement in social networking, following sport and celebrities, making money, absorbing hobbies. These are uncreative, ultimately; serving God is the only truly creative thing we can do with our lives.

96:10 *Say among the nations*- The Psalmist was intent on preaching to the Gentiles. See on 18:49.

96:13 Applied to Christ's return in judgment in Acts 17:31.

97:7 *Worship Him, all you gods*- Here as often in the Psalms, the language presupposes that the gods / idols of the nations are real and living, but Yahweh's greatness is such that effectively they have no power or significance. Yet the Bible clearly teaches that these gods / idols had no real existence. The same principle is used in the way the New Testament speaks about demons, who were also associated with idols (1 Cor. 10:20,21). They are spoken of as if they have some real existence, but the evident power of God in Christ's miracles was such that they were effectively declared as having no real existence or at best being powerless and insignificant.

98:3 The "salvation" spoken of in :1-3 isn't God's saving of Himself, but His salvation of His people through Jesus [the Hebrew form of 'Jesus' means 'Yah's salvation']. It is our personal experience of that salvation which should be the witness which persuades the Gentile world to praise Him. It was God's intention that His salvation of His people from Egypt would have this effect; but Israel despised that salvation, in their hearts reversed it by constantly wanting to return to Egypt, and so they didn't declare His salvation and so the Gentiles didn't hear. We can't keep our experience of salvation to ourselves; we will declare it to the whole world if we really grasp the wonder of it all.

99:4 *You execute justice and righteousness*- This is the language of judgment, whereby a judge 'establishes' principles. The fact God is enthroned means that He is our constant judge and we are always living our lives before His ongoing judgment. His throne is a throne of judgment, so whenever man is before God- which is always- He is our insistent judge, right now.

99:7 *They kept His testimonies*- This is in the context of the time when Israel were in the wilderness and God spoke to them in the cloud. They didn't keep His law then, as the prophets and historical record make clear. The Psalmist is reflecting how God imputed righteousness to His people at this time (Num. 23:21), just as He does for us who cross the Red Sea of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

100:3 The fact that God Himself created us, as His sheep, "and not we ourselves" (a comment applicable, in essence, to theories of atheistic evolution) should lead us to ecstatic singing of praise before Him. Likewise 96:2,5, and so many other examples, invite us to enthusiastically praise God, simply because "the Lord made the heavens". God as creator results in joy and praise amongst those of His creation who recognize Him as creator.

101:3 *I will set no vile thing before my eyes*- The context is David speaking of how he strove to be spiritually minded, and he realized that our thoughts are influenced by what we see or watch. These ancient words are so relevant to us who live in the internet generation, where we can privately view many 'vile things' with our eyes. If we want to be spiritually minded, then what we allow ourselves to view must be consciously controlled.

102:13 *The set time has come*- The Psalmist is writing maybe in captivity in Babylon as the predicted 70 years of Judah's captivity there came to a close, and he looks forward to the promised restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

102:16 *Yahweh has built up Zion*- He had not then done so (:13)- the earlier part of the Psalm laments this. But the Psalmist believed in God's prophecies of doing so, and considered them as good as already fulfilled. Faith is all about adopting God's perspective, seeing future promises as if they have already been fulfilled, thereby enabling us to live the Kingdom life now in its essence.

102:25 The language of laying foundations is nearly always used about the laying of the foundations of the new, rebuilt temple at the time of return from exile (Ezra 3:10-12; 5:16; Is. 44:28; Hag. 2:18; Zech. 4:9; 8:9); and this is the context of this Psalm (see on :13 and :16). The 'heavens and earth' refer to Israel (Is. 1:2) and the temple. Although they had 'perished' in the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the first temple, God remained and would, the Psalmist believed, install a new temple system (as outlined in Ez. 40-48). However, this never quite happened as God intended due to Judah's weakness, and so these prophecies were reapplied to how the entire Jewish system based around the temple and Law of Moses would 'perish' and God's new temple system based around the exalted Lord Jesus would come into existence (Heb. 1:10 and context).

103:2 The Hebrew translated "benefits" is also translated "praise". The things God gives us are therefore imperatives in themselves to praise Him. Giving thanks before meals is a wonderful habit to get into. As we receive His gifts, or more to the point, *perceive* the receipt of them, the heart breaks forth into a deep thankfulness. This is the true praise.

103:20,21 The emphasis is that *all* the Angels are obedient to God and do His will (Heb. 1:14). There aren't two groups of Angels, some good and some sinful. God tolerates no sin in His presence in Heaven (Hab. 1:13). Sin brings death and yet the Angels cannot die, therefore they cannot sin; our hope is to be made like them in this sense after the resurrection at Christ's return (Lk. 20:35,36). See 148:2.

103:22 *Praise Yahweh, my soul*- David sees himself as in league with the Angels, who likewise are all praising God (:20,21).

104:4 *His Angels winds*- The Hebrew word translated "wind" is that translated "spirit". God's Spirit works in many ways, but one of those ways is through His Angels. If we were to ask how, mechanically as it were, God's Spirit operates, how He is everywhere present, how He does things- the answer to some extent is that He achieves all these things through His armies of Angels.

104:20 *You make darkness*- The rising and setting of the sun is a conscious expenditure of energy by God, rather than happening by some clockwork mechanism which God set up and then withdrew from. He consciously makes the grass grow (:14), and consciously feeds the animals (:28). Likewise the water cycle is not mere clockwork, unstoppable natural law; the rivers are sent forth consciously by God as they bubble over the rocks (:10). This view of creation means that it's easier to believe that the God who consciously does these things every moment can intervene in them at any time in any way; we aren't the helpless victims of a nature which has a life and will of her own.

104:29 *You take away their breath: they die, and return to the dust*- The Hebrew words for "breath" and "spirit" are the same. God made man from the dust and put into him the breath or spirit of life



(Gen. 2:7). When we die, that spirit, that life force, returns to God and our bodies to the dust. There is no conscious survival of death, no inherent immortality within man. Life and immortality have only been revealed to some men through the Gospel of Christ and the hope of resurrection to immortality which there is in Him (Rom. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:10). All theories or hopes of reincarnation are disallowed by Bible teaching about the nature of man.

105:17-23 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. Just as God had delivered Joseph, so God's people are to take comfort that when the right time comes, we too will be delivered from our present oppression.

105:18 This highlights the mental aspects of Joseph's suffering. The Hebrew for "hurt" means 'to browbeat or depress'; thus his soul was in iron, trapped, oppressively boxed in as he lay in the darkness. Joseph was in this situation until the determined time came for God to suddenly deliver him thanks to the unexpected word from a king; and so Judah, depressed in Babylon, were being comforted that when the predicted 70 years captivity were ended, they too would be likewise delivered- which came true in the decree of king Cyrus for them to return to their land with his every blessing.

105:19 God has arranged our lives according to a pattern; we have specific times in our lives for various situations. Looking back at the Biblical record of Joseph and Moses, whose life was divided clearly into three periods of 40 years, we see this clearly; but it's of course harder to discern in our own lives as we are still living through it. But God is in control and has a plan for us, desiring only our eternal good in our latter end.

105:37 *There was not one feeble person among His tribes*- Amazingly, there was nobody sick amongst the three million or so who left Egypt that night. At our exodus from this world through our Red Sea baptism into Christ, we are made spiritually strong- and must abide in that strength.

105:45 *That they might keep His statutes*- The whole purpose of being in the Kingdom is so that we might be perpetually obedient to God's word; this is the core reason for our wanting to be there.

106:3 *At all times*- Consistency is most important in spiritual life rather than occasional flashes of devotion and obedience.

106:5 *That I may see the prosperity of Your chosen*- The Psalmist's desire for salvation wasn't merely because he or she wanted to live eternally. There was a desire to see all God's people glorying in salvation. Salvation is made possible in that God's people as a whole have been redeemed; there is such a thing as spiritual selfishness, desiring the Kingdom merely for what it means to us. But if we have the perspective of God's glory, we will desire the coming of salvation because all of us will be glorified. Hence Paul could say that the joy he would have in the Kingdom would be related to his joy that his brethren were also there (1 Thess. 2:19).

106:6 Continuing the thought of :5, the Psalmist felt that he personally was somehow involved in the sin of God's people ("we have sinned"). We aren't called to smug self righteousness, but rather we are to feel a personal involvement in the failures and successes of God's people as a whole.

106:7 *Even at the Red Sea*- Even at the very moment of their salvation they were rebellious. God didn't save them because they had reached a certain level of righteousness, but because of His grace. The Red Sea crossing represents our baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2); God has saved us by His grace, not because of our righteousness.

106:15 *But sent leanness into their soul*- If we fulfil our fleshly craving, we will become internally and spiritually hungry. Giving in to our cravings isn't the way to happiness.

106:37 Demons refer to idols (:36). Demons or idols have no real existence (1 Cor. 8:4; 10:20). Therefore when we read of demons being cast out in the Gospel records, this is the language of the day used for healing various illnesses rather than any evidence that demons actually exist.

107:4 *They found no city to live in*- The LXX of this phrase is quoted about us in Heb. 13:14. We too are on a wilderness journey after our Red Sea baptism, and find no place we can call home in that journey. Our place of rest and settling down isn't in this life, but in the Kingdom which is to come at Christ's return. The implication could be that Israel wanted to settle in the wilderness. They didn't want to return to Egypt (although they did at times), they didn't really desire the unknown promised land... so, they wanted to just settle down there in the wilderness. And so it can be with us. We can be happy with the way to the Kingdom, it can be that the social aspect of the Christian life suites us... we are content with it, and yet it can be that for all that, we lack a real sense of direction towards the Kingdom. We are going some place. The Christian life is but a path leading towards an end, and the end destination is the Kingdom. If we believe surely that we will be there, we will live lives which reflect this sense of concrete direction and aim.

107:9 Mary quoted this verse about how she had been filled with good things (Lk. 1:53); but Zacharias quoted the next verse, :10, shortly afterwards (Lk. 1:79). Surely Mary had gotten him thinking in the same paths as she did. Our spirituality can influence others positively, consciously and unconsciously. This is why it's important to mix in spiritual company.

107:11 *Condemned the counsel of the Most High*- This is one of a number of Biblical verses which suggest that we as it were stand in judgment upon God when we encounter His word. He overcomes every claim that His word is untrue and therefore He is condemned (Rom. 3:4). That we mere humans should judge God the judge of all is an arresting concept; but this is what we are in effect doing when we consider His claims, His promises of saving us which are throughout His word.

107:30 The idea of God stilling a storm and getting terrified sailors immediately to their port clearly had fulfilment in how Christ stilled the storm on the lake of Galilee (Jn. 6:18-21). This doesn't mean that He is God Himself, but rather that Old Testament statements about God were fulfilled in His Son, who manifested the Father to perfection.

108:13 The structure of the Psalm is significant in that it begins with praise and then goes on to desperately plead for God's action. There is an intentional double meaning in the Hebrew word translated "hear"; it is also translated "answer". There should be real comfort for us in knowing that prayer really is 'heard'; the hearing is, in a sense, the answer / response, with which a man should be

content. Therefore David desired to praise God even before the answer was received; the knowledge God was really hearing him gave such confidence (see too 109:30). We aren't to hide behind the excuse that unanswered prayer just means that God has heard but not answered.

109:6 *An adversary*- The Hebrew word translated "adversary" here is *satan*. 'Satan' is simply a Hebrew word meaning an adversary, totally neutral in meaning; it doesn't of itself refer to any sinful being.

109:8 This is quoted about Judas in Acts 1:20. The disciples saw the similarities with Judas and then decided to concretely take action according to those similarities- they proactively decided to find someone to take his place as this verse requires. We need to use the Bible in this same way- see the similarities between our situations and Biblical precedents, and then act on them accordingly.

109:30 See on 108:13.

110:1 This verse is quoted in Mt. 22:44 and Acts 2:34,35 with the understanding that David's "lord" or master was Jesus, who was bidden sit in Heaven at His right hand after His resurrection, declared a priest for us in the order of Melchizedek, until He returns to earth to be King in Jerusalem ("Zion") and destroy all God's enemies.

110:2 *Rule in the midst of your enemies*- This supports the impression we get from Psalm 2, that when Christ returns He will establish His Kingdom but there will initially be opposition to Him, and the nations will gather together against Him, surrounding Jerusalem (cp. Rev. 20:9). It's amazing how much humanity wants to carry on as it is, with all their religions, and not be disturbed by the intervention of God in their lives. And this feature of our world will be revealed in their attitudes to Christ at His return.

110:3 The exhortation of Ps. 110 is powerful: because Jesus is now seated at the Father's right hand, His people offer themselves as freewill offerings in this, the day of His power. They are arrayed in "holy attire" because *He* has been made the Priest after the order of Melchizedek- they share in the work which His exaltation has enabled.

110:4 This is repeatedly applied to Christ (Heb. 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17,21). The priests were from the tribe of Levi, whereas Christ was from Judah. Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and yet also a priest; but he wasn't a Levite. He is therefore chosen as an appropriate type of Christ, the ultimate king-priest. This argument is deployed in Hebrews to answer the Jewish objection that Christ can't be a priest because He wasn't a Levite.

111:5 God is thinking about the covenant made with us *all* the time! And yet how often in daily life do we reflect upon the fact that we really are in covenant relationship with God... how often do we recollect the part we share in the promises to Abraham, how frequently do we feel that we really are in a personal covenant with God Almighty?

111:10 *Those who do His work have a good understanding*- There is an upward spiral in spirituality. The more we do God's work, the more we will come to understand Him. The very process of working with Him reveals more of Him to us.

112:5 *The man who deals graciously and lends*- Our generosity must reflect that of God, because “He has dispersed, He has given to the poor” (:9). His generosity to us is largely over matters in which we are responsible for the problem we end up in, and the deeper we realize this the less we will be tempted to be mean to others because we consider their poverty to be ‘their fault’.

112:9 *He has given to the poor*- Quoted in 2 Cor. 9:9 about how God has given His grace of forgiveness and salvation to us the spiritually poor. The Greek word for “grace” also means “gift”. In the context, Paul is urging the early Christians to be materially generous to their poorer brethren because of the grace they have received from God. His spiritual generosity to us is to be reflected in our material generosity to others (see on :5).

114:2 *Israel His kingdom*- Israel were declared God’s Kingdom on earth with Him as their King, exercising total sovereignty over them (Ex. 19:5,6). But they wanted a human king and worshipped other gods, so that God overturned that Kingdom with the intention to re-establish it on earth at Christ’s return to eternally reign on David’s throne in Jerusalem (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:6). The future Kingdom of God on earth will strictly speaking be a re-establishment of the Kingdom that once was, again inviting us to understand it as an entity to be literally established on *earth*. The Bible doesn’t teach that the righteous go to Heaven at death to enjoy their salvation there.

115:8 *Those who make them will be like them*- We become like what we worship. The Gentile idols are often described in the Bible as “vanities”; we may not worship literal idols but we can easily give our hearts over to obsession with the many vain things which crowd this world and the internet. If we do so, we will become as lost and lacking in direction as they are.

115:11 *Who fear Yahweh, trust in Yahweh*- The implication is that some believed in and feared Yahweh, but had yet to trust Him. We need likewise to convert our acceptance of God’s existence into practical faith in Him.

116:2 *Because He has turned His ear to me, therefore*- The experience of answered prayer is an upward spiral; because prayer is answered, we are inspired to pray the more.

116:11 *I said in my haste, “All men are liars”*- This verse likely strikes a chord with most of us; we have all likewise at times felt that relationships in this world are useless, nobody is to be trusted.

116:13 *I will take the cup of salvation*- This cup was an allusion to one of the cups used at the Passover. In response to all God has done for us, we likewise respond by taking the cup at the communion service. Although our feelings and situations vary each time we take that cup, one strand of motivation within us for doing it should be our desire to do so in gratitude for all the Lord has done for us spiritually and physically.

116:14 *In the presence of all His people*- As in :18, our devotion to God is to be expressed within the context of other believers. Out of church Christianity is a contradiction in terms; we cannot retreat into our own homes and consider we are Christians in the privacy of our hearts. Difficult as it often is, and notwithstanding all the dysfunctions of the church, the community of believers is to be the arena in which we make our response to God’s grace. Of course there may be multiple reasons why physical attendance at a literal gathering isn’t possible, all of which are appreciated by God, but so far as we can, we should in whatever way seek to be “in the presence of all His people”.

118:22 *The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner*- Quoted by Jesus about Himself in Mt. 21:42. The Jews were the “builders” (Acts 4:11) who rejected Christ by crucifying Him, but He resurrected to become the corner stone of the new spiritual temple which is being built (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6,7). Non-Christian religions cannot be the way to God because the foundation and critical point of our spiritual building can only be the resurrected Christ.

118:25 *Save us now*- ‘Hosanna’ is the Greek word for ‘Save now!’. This and :26 “Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh!” were quoted by the crowds in Mt. 21:9. They perceived Jesus as Messiah in the terms of this Psalm, but that same crowd were screaming “Crucify Him!” just days later. This is how fickle our nature is.

119:1 *Yahweh’s law*- Every verse in this Psalm contains some reference to God’s law. It is arranged according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, perhaps to indicate how *our* words, our alphabet, our whole formulation of thought and verbalization, should be dominated by *God’s* word. It was also done in this way to aid memorization; for in illiterate societies, the Psalms would’ve been memorized. It’s a good thing for us to personally memorize parts of God’s word.

119:5 *Oh that my ways were steadfast to obey Your statutes*- This is one of many places in this Psalm (:136) where David laments his own failure to obey God’s word completely at all times. And yet the Psalm also speaks of the faithful as being totally obedient to God’s word, e.g. “they do nothing wrong” (:3). One resolution of this is that David believed in imputed righteousness, whereby God counts His people as totally obedient to His word even though they are not; Ps. 32:2 cp. Rom. 4:8 indicates David understood this principle well.

119:6 *Then I wouldn’t be ashamed when I obey all of Your commandments*- The result of moments or periods of obedience to God is that we become ashamed of all the times we are *not* obedient. Spiritual maturity thus involves an ever increasing awareness of our past sins; it doesn’t lead to self-righteousness but the very opposite.

119:11 *That I might not sin*- The presence of God’s word within our hearts gives strength against temptation, as demonstrated by Christ’s overcoming of the wilderness temptations by quoting from God’s word.

119:14 *As much as in all riches*- The Psalm often contrasts material wealth with the love of God’s law (:36, 72, 127). So many sell their souls to employers, taking demanding jobs or second jobs so as to get more money than they need. And inevitably they have little time or mental energy for the things of God’s word. Others lament their lack of wealth; but the simple truth is that the true riches are those of God’s word.

119:18 *Open my eyes*- In his search for spiritual mindedness, so often David in this Psalm asks God to directly work on his heart so that he might correctly understand God’s word and be obedient to it (:29 “Keep me”, :36 “Turn my heart”, :133 “establish my footsteps”). God hasn’t merely given us the Bible and left us to get on with the job of understanding and obeying it; He is eager to help us in those things.

119:27 David often makes this link between appreciation of God’s ways and the inevitable witness this will result in. The community of believers is not to simply amass intellectual, theological purity by Bible reading- it must be told forth to others.

119:33 *Teach me, Yahweh, the way of Your statutes; I will keep them*- The better we understand God's word, the more empowered we are to obey it. Understanding and correct interpretation aren't therefore merely of academic interest, or just for those interested in that kind of thing. By the same token, true understanding isn't simply academic, it issues in practical obedience.

119:37 *Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things*- A prayer for our internet, entertainment mad, screen transfixed generation.

119:46 *Before kings*- This is one of several indications that parts of this Psalm reflects David's feelings whilst at the court of Saul as a young man (:100, :161), whereby speaking up for God's word could result in a javelin being thrown at him to kill him if he just happened to touch the conscience of the manic king Saul (1 Sam. 18:11).

119:48 David didn't groan at the number of God's commandments, struggling with a steel will to obey some of them; he so loved God that he asked God to show him more and more of those commandments. Often the verses of this Psalm imply that David sought to know more of God's requirements because they are designed to help us be more obedient to all of them *in toto*.

119:63 Even within the people of God, we must chose our friends well.

119:64 David didn't see grace and law as opposed; rather he understood those commandments as ultimately reflective of God's grace.

119:73 David realized that because he had been made in God's physical image he had a duty to be spiritually reformed in His moral image; and thus he sought strength to be obedient to God's will.

119:88 The whole purpose of our lives, and of our eternal living in God's Kingdom, is to be obedient to God's word. We should have that spirit in our lives now, therefore.

119:96 God's law isn't therefore a limitation which we resentfully have to accept, but rather the way to ultimate freedom. In New Testament terms, we changed masters at baptism; from sin to Christ, and through our bondage to Him we paradoxically find ultimate freedom.

119:105 *My feet... my path*- God's word directs both our short term immediate decisions ("my feet") and also our general direction in life ("my path").

119:120 God is again paralleled with His word; our attitude to His word is our attitude to Him.

119:128 Accepting the truths of God's word leads us to perceive and proactively reject that which is false, rather than simply accepting truth and being ambivalent to error.

119:130 There is no 'light within' us, our exposure to ultimate truth comes from God's word.

119:140 Because the word is so pure, *therefore* we love it. Our acceptance of the Bible as Divinely inspired rather than a human document therefore encourages our obedience to it; if we continually doubt and question its truth, we will hardly be motivated to obedience.

119:143 So often David says that he refuses life's crises to take him away from his meditation on God's word.

119:160 In God's word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. The final day of judgement shouldn't therefore be a worrying mystery to us; we know how God will judge, for we have in the Bible His word, His judgments.

119:169 *Come near before You*- Prayer is described here as coming near to God- and yet God "is" near already (75:1). Prayer, therefore, is a way of making us realize the presence of the God who is always present.

120 *Song of Ascents*- These Psalms (120-134) were recited as the Israelite worshippers went 'up' to the temple to keep the feasts (122:2,3). However the word translated "Ascents" also means "Degrees", and may well have been written by Hezekiah when the shadow on the sundial went ten degrees backward as a sign that God had healed him (2 Kings 20:11). In response to this, Hezekiah composed or rearranged songs for the temple worship (Is. 38:20). His sickness was at the same time as the Assyrian invasion, and therefore many of these songs allude to the situation at that time.

121:2 Belief in God as creator (rather than in atheistic evolution) inspires our faith in His ability to likewise creatively deliver us from the crises of our lives.

121:5 *Yahweh is your shade*- Alluding to how on the wilderness journey, God provided the pillar of cloud as a shade to Israel (105:39). Our lives are repeatedly described in the Bible as being like the wilderness journey towards the promised land. The allusion is also to how God was a shade or shadow to Hezekiah when the shadow on the sundial went backward (Is. 38:8); what He did for Hezekiah He can in essence do for all His people.

122:6 Jerusalem's peace will only be when Christ reigns there on David's throne over God's Kingdom on earth; this is the day the faithful should daily plead for.

123:4 This scoffing likely referred to that of Rabshakeh outside the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Hezekiah's illness and Judah's invasion (2 Kings 18:19-25).

125:3 This is amazing encouragement, echoed in 1 Cor. 10:13, that we will never be tested so hard that our sinning is inevitable. In the heat of temptation we persuade ourselves that our situations are too hard for us to endure and that we have no option given our humanity but to sin. But God here promises that He will never allow circumstances to be too great for our spiritual strength; we are left with no option but to accept full, total responsibility for our sins, with nobody and nothing to blame them on apart from ourselves.

130:3 God doesn't keep a record or legal list of sins in the sense that He doesn't hold them against us; it's not that He as it were erases those parts of His 'memory', for His word is full of the memory of human sin which He has forgiven. The LXX is applied to each of us in 1 Cor. 13:5- we too are not to keep a record of others' wrongs against us. God's forgiveness of us is to be the template for our forgiveness of others. It's not possible to forget them, in the sense that we have no power over our brain's mechanism of forgetting; but we can forgive them in the sense that we do not count them any longer against the person.

132 The mutuality possible between God and man is brought out by the structure of several of the Psalms, in which God and David are shown to be involved in a dynamic, two way

relationship. Consider this Psalm: A (:1,2) David swears to God; B (:3-5) What David swore; C (:6,7) Search for a dwelling place; D (:8) Prayer to enter into rest; E (:9) Prayer for priests; F (:9) Prayer for saints / holy ones; G (:10) Prayer for Messiah. This was responded to by God: A1 (:11) God swears to David; B1 (:11,12) What God swore; C1 (:13) Designation of the dwelling place; D1 (:14,15) Answer to prayer in D; 1 (:16) Answer to prayer in E; F1 (:16) Answer to prayer in F; G1 (:17,18) Answer to prayer in G.

135:13 God's Name refers to His essential character, which is distinguished firstly by His grace and forgiveness (Ex. 34:4-6). This is unchanging; God isn't going to turn around and show us another face as it were. His Name is paralleled here with His renown, the reputation He has developed throughout Biblical history by acting consistently with His essential character. The Name of God isn't therefore simply the word Yahweh or Jehovah. That is far too simplistic; the pronunciation and transliteration of Hebrew letters one way or another is irrelevant compared to the essence of the Name itself.

135:14 This parallels the Lord judging His people with His feeling sorry for them. In this sense judgment to come is a comfort not a threat.

135:19,20 This parallels all Israel with the priestly family. As it was God's intention that Israel were to develop into an entire nation of priests to the rest of the world, so the new Israel likewise are to *all* discharge the priestly functions of teaching their brethren (Ex. 19:6 cp. 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:9,10). Under the new covenant, we should *all* teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16), rather than just leave it to specialists.

136:8 In this hard and graceless world, we have only to look at the sun and moon, indeed at all of creation, to see God's sensitive grace constantly active.

136:10 The death of the Egyptian firstborn and their army (:15) was a reflection of God's grace to Israel. We may struggle with this but ultimately it is a challenge to our perceptions and understanding rather than any bad reflection against God (see 143:12). We are reminded of how the flood was brought to destroy the world of Noah's day in order to save him (2 Pet. 2:5) so that he was as it were saved by that water just as the water of baptism saves us (1 Pet. 3:19-21).

136:23,24 Understood by Mary as having fulfilment in the birth of Christ as our ultimate deliverer (Lk. 1:48).

137:8,9 This extreme language may seem hard to square with the spirit of grace in the New Testament. However, vengeance upon God's enemies is also taught in the New Testament, especially in Revelation. These words are applied in Rev. 18:8,21 to what will finally happen to Babylon. Her spiritual children will be dashed against the rock of Christ, the stone of Dan. 2:44, at His return. Another perspective to explore is that it may also be that the Psalmist's attitude was simply wrong, even though the recording of these words was inspired. David likewise spoke words of great grace and also of bitter vengeance against his enemies; the experience of trauma and real evil in life usually makes the sufferer give vent to such extreme feelings.

138:8 *That which concerns me*- God has a specific plan for each of us, in the same way as He has given each of us specific talents (Mt. 25:15) and has specified "good works" for us to achieve in our lives (Eph. 2:10). On His part, God will likewise fulfil what He has planned



uniquely and individually for each of us- in accordance with our response to the possibilities He has potentially enabled.

139:2 We are *now* in God's presence, and can't escape from it; and the presence of God is judgment language (Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10). He not only sees and knows everything in our lives but is judging it too.

139:7-9 Jonah knew the Psalms; his prayer from inside the fish is packed with allusion to them. And yet he thought he could flee from God's presence (Jonah 1:3)- even though these verses almost prophesy of Jonah, that nobody can flee from God's presence; neither the sea itself nor geographical distance can hide from God. Jonah knew this. But he simply acted in a way diametrically opposed to that knowledge. We read the same words he did, and are faced with the same choice as to whether we truly believe them or merely know them.

139:15,16 If this is the level of intention and planning which God put into us, we at least can draw the certain conclusion: life is not aimless. God has a purpose for us and we therefore ought to be living a purposeful life, not just drifting from experience to experience as in a half-conscious dream. God is focused upon us and we should be upon Him.

139:24 *Wicked way*- The Hebrew translated "wicked" also means 'sorrow' or 'pain'. The way of sin, the path to quick pleasure, is in fact the way of pain and sorrow.

140:11 *An evil tongue*- The reference is not to the small piece of flesh within our mouths, but to an evil speaking *person*, paralleled with "the violent *man*". But the tongue is put for the person because our words really are a reflection of who we are, in that our words ultimately reflect our hearts (Lk. 6:45) despite our best efforts to insist there's a distance between our real self and our words. Ultimately there isn't, for all our occasional posturing and hypocrisy. How we really think comes out in our words in the end, and so we are our tongue.

141:2 Prayer is likened to carefully prepared sacrifice, to painstakingly composed incense, beaten small, mixed in just the right proportions. The penalty for not making the incense properly was death. The lesson is that forethought will precede real prayer; it is an offering to God.

142:2 *I tell Him my troubles*- It's therapeutic to tell God our life situation, saying it out loud or writing it down as David did. We know that He already knows, but this exercise is good because it enables *us* to feel we have opened up before Him. The chronic, existential loneliness of people today could be solved by this opening up to God.

142:4 *No one cares for my soul*- This was indeed how David felt and perhaps it was really so; and yet he recognized that there were a group of people in existence called "the righteous" (:7). Even if we feel none of God's people are helping us as they should, it doesn't mean they aren't God's people or that nobody at all is righteous apart from us.

143:10 *Your Spirit is good; lead me*- David felt very strongly that he was being led, and he was confident that although he didn't understand exactly where he was going in the short term, God is fundamentally good and wishes us only good in our latter end. The "spirit" here may refer to an Angel (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7), whom David felt was leading him in his wilderness life under persecution from Saul (:3) just as an Angel led Israel in the wilderness.

143:12 The death of David's enemies was seen by him as God's "kindness". See on 136:10.

144:1,2 *My rock... my fortress, my high tower*- There are references in the historical record to how David took refuge from Saul (:3) and other enemies in these things (1 Sam. 23:29; 2 Sam. 5:7,9). But David saw that the essence of his safety was not in them but in God. We may use medicines, doctors, insurance, emergency phone numbers... but the essence is that God is our saviour, even if He works through those things.

144:12 David must have shocked many by singing of how our sons shall be as plants and our daughters as corner stones. For the corner stones of a family were perceived to be the male head of the family. The Biblical view of women always sharply contrasted with that of the surrounding world at the time; such is God's valuing of each of His children regardless of their gender or perception within society.

145:1 *You my God as the King*- David was king of Israel, but that meant little to him compared to the greatness of God's sovereign Kingship. It may be that we are exalted a little bit in life, in career, social standing or even respect amongst God's people. An awareness of God's greatness will keep this in perspective for us; we will see it as nothing compared to God's exaltation and our subsequent smallness.

145:5 *Of Your wondrous works, I will meditate*- The rest of this Psalm speaks of David enthusiastically telling others about these things. But the motivation for preaching, the impetus for overcoming the inertia we often face in raising spiritual subjects in conversation, is our personal meditation of these things, of telling ourselves within our own self-talk of God's greatness and the things of His Kingdom. The more public expression of these things to others will then come naturally without needing to be forced.

145:19 This isn't a blank cheque promise to give us whatever we pray for; the "desire" of God's people is paralleled here with salvation. "I want to live forever in God's Kingdom more than anything else in the world" should be our credo; and if this is really the case in our hearts, we shall receive it (2 Tim. 4:8).

146:4 This clearly teaches that death is unconsciousness; we have no 'immortal soul' which consciously exists after death. The allusion is to how God made man from the dust and put into him the breath or spirit of life (Gen. 2:7). When we die, this spirit or life force returns to God, and we return to dust. The practical implication of correctly understanding human mortality is that we won't trust in people, but rather in God; for we will realize their weakness and ultimate inability to save.

147:2 The Jews returned from Babylon to the land of their own volition; but it was Yahweh who *gathered* them back, as if He called them almost of *His* volition rather than theirs. They rebuilt Jerusalem; but actually, Yahweh did, through His confirmation of all the freewill effort of men like Ezra and Nehemiah. In our exodus from this world and journey to the Kingdom, God is willing and able to confirm every freewill effort we make in every aspect of our lives. The returning exiles had to strengthen the bars of Jerusalem's gates as is emphasized throughout Neh. 3; but God worked through them (:13).

148:2 *All the Angels are obedient to God*; there are no sinful Angels in Heaven; see on 103:20,21.

148:6 God will never destroy the earth and heavens; it is His declared purpose to establish His eternal Kingdom on earth at Christ's return (Dan. 2:44). Any references to the destruction of 'heavens and earth' are using this term in a symbolic sense to describe a system of things on earth (Is. 1:2).

148:14 *Saints* refers to all God's people, not just a few very righteous people.

149:2 *Be joyful in their King*- This Psalm would've been written and used when Israel had a human king. But the Psalmist, perhaps king David, wanted them to understand that whatever system of human leadership there is amongst God's people, He is their ultimate King and His Kingship was to be personally felt by every one of His people, so that they might eternally be His Kingdom, the entity of persons over which He extends rulership and sovereign authority.

150:3-5 The idea is that everything using all methods should praise God. We should never therefore limit the way others praise God, nor be critical of it because it's not our method.

## PROVERBS

1:5 *That the wise man may be obedient*- There is an upward spiral in spiritual life, whereby God's commandments are designed to lead the wise to yet more obedience if they are obeyed; wisdom leads to more wisdom.

1:12 Sheol is the Hebrew word translated "hell" in some Bibles; it is also translated "the grave", and is here parallel with "the pit". It refers simply to the grave and not to any place of eternal torment.

1:23 *My spirit... my words*- The Bible is written by inspiration of God. God's words are a vehicle by which His Spirit works in the lives of His children (Jn. 6:63).

1:26 *Mock... laugh*- God will mock and laugh at the Gentile nations who come against Him in the last day (Ps. 2:4), and yet He will do just the same to those of His people who refuse wisdom's voice. If we are not separate from this world now, we will not be separated from them when the judgments fall. We will be "Condemned with the world..." (1 Cor. 11:32). If we don't come out from Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4).

1:28 *Then will they call on me, but I will not answer*- In the day of judgment, everybody will desperately want to be in God's Kingdom, to live eternally in the way of wisdom. The rejected will urgently seek acceptance, but it will be too late (Mt. 25:11; Lk. 13:25).

1:29 *Hated knowledge*- They 'despise' wisdom (:30); but they likely never said so in those words. In their lives they lived in "careless ease" (:32), but this is tantamount to proactively hating spiritual knowledge.

2:3 Wisdom cries out loud to be heard (8:1), and yet the righteous man cries after wisdom, and lifts up his voice for understanding; there is thus a sense of mutuality here between God's wisdom and the sincere seeker. Every genuine believer will have felt this; we urgently cry for wisdom, and yet God's word is crying out to teach us. If this is our attitude, the things of God's word will be our life (4:13). As Israel were to talk about the word as they went out and came in and as they walked along the way, so should the new Israel (7:2,3).

2:16,17 Solomon was inspired to write the Proverbs in his youth, and yet he did the very things he warns others against. Here he teaches that wisdom would save a man from the Gentile woman who made a covenant with the God of Israel in her youth (in order to marry an Israelite, by implication), but soon forgot it. This was exactly the case of Solomon, who married Gentile women in his youth; yet he just couldn't see the personal relevance of his own wisdom to himself. The more spiritual knowledge we have, the more prone we are to make this same mistake.

3:4 This is alluded to in Lk. 2:52, where we read that Jesus grew in wisdom and in favour with God and man. The "my Son" spoken of in Proverbs can therefore be understood as *the* Son, the Lord Jesus. It could be that the various warnings to the son about not getting involved with Gentile women, not getting in with bad company in his youth etc. were all speaking directly to temptations the Lord Jesus encountered in His youth. In this case we could build up some picture of the experiences of the Lord's early life on the basis of the "my son" exhortations of Proverbs.

3:11 All Scripture is recorded for *our* learning and comfort (Rom. 15:4). The exhortation here in Prov. 3:11 “speaks unto *you* as unto children...” (Heb. 12:5). We are to constantly personalize Scripture and hear God speaking to *us* directly.

3:20 *And the skies drop down the dew* - The historical creation of all things by God’s word of command is ongoing, in that His word in an ongoing way commands the dew to fall just as His word re-arranged the waters as recorded in Genesis 1. The idea of :19,20 is that the same word which God used as the agency of physical creation- He said, and it was done- is ongoing in our lives if we respond to the word of wisdom, thereby becoming a new creation through that same word, centred as it is in the Lord Jesus as that word made flesh (2 Cor. 5:17; Jn. 1:14).

3:34 *He gives grace to the humble*- Quoted in James 4:5,6 in an appeal to us not to be envious but rather to be humble. The truly humble aren’t envious; God’s gift of grace to them in Christ is so wonderful that we have quite enough to personally glory in, and there will be no envy of others.

4:4-9 This is Solomon quoting to *his* children what his father David had taught him about wisdom. He was raising his children as he had been raised, which is what all parents inevitably tend to do by default. But Solomon himself lived without personally applying the wisdom to himself; all he says is true, but the lesson is that we can accept theoretical truth, pass it on to others with great conviction, and yet be unmoved by it ourselves.

4:16 Doing evil is defined as making another fall. The sinfulness of sin is especially in the negative effect we have upon others.

4:23 The heart is used in the Bible as a metaphor for the mind. To be spiritually minded is the essence of Christianity. How we think now will affect our eternal future.

4:26 *Make the path of your feet level*- Quoted in Heb. 12:13 about the need to do this so that *others* don’t stumble in the way of life. Our personal life path must be straight not only for ourselves to reach the Kingdom, but so that others can follow us there. Again we see that spirituality is never limited to ourselves; it always affects others.

5:5 Sheol is translated in some Bibles as “hell”, but the word refers simply to the grave, which is how it is often translated. Here it is parallel with “death”, as in 7:27. It doesn’t refer to any place of eternal conscious torment.

5:15 *Springing water out of your own spring*- The metaphor likens the man’s wife to a spring of ever fresh water which is personally for himself. A husband should find in his wife something ever fresh, and thus marriages blessed by God don’t default into the same old scene scenario, there’s always something fresh and new for us in each other if we perceive our partners as we should.

5:21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of Yahweh- Sexual unfaithfulness is precluded by the fact that God sees and knows all things; Job likewise answered a false accusation of marital infidelity by saying that this wasn’t possible for him, because he lived in the constant presence of the God who sees all things (Job 31:1-4).

6:7 *Having no chief, overseer or ruler*- We can learn from meditating upon the natural creation. Human beings tend to work best when overseen by a human leader; but in spiritual life, we are to

work for God from self motivation, regardless of whether or not we have good leadership within the family of God.

6:13 God is sensitive to the body language of people, and so should we be.

6:14 *Who always sows discord*- In terms of the sentence structure, this is the crowning characteristic of the wicked man introduced in :12. Division and fracture of human relationships is perceived by God as the end result of sinfulness- thus indicating the huge value He places upon unity amongst His children. Divisiveness is the very essence of sinfulness. Likewise the seven things which God hates culminate in the sin of sowing discord amongst brothers (:16-18). Indeed, :16 could imply that this seventh sin is the ultimate abomination to Him.

6:25 *Neither let her captivate you with her eyelids*- The blindness of Solomon is driven home time and again. He warned the young man about being captivated by the eyelids of the Gentile woman; yet it was the eyes of his Egyptian lover that he openly admitted stole his heart (Song 4:9; 6:5). The Gentile woman has words like a honeycomb ( 5:3); and yet this is exactly how Solomon found his woman's words (Song 4:11).

6:27 These verses powerfully pierce deeply into the psychology of sin, especially sexual sin. We reason that we can go so far into it, but not too far. But once we launch into sin, we will be damaged by it. The call of wisdom is to total abstinence from it, rather than spiritual brinkmanship.

7:2 The idea of keeping commandments in order to live is a reference back to the many Deuteronomy passages where Moses pleads with Israel to keep *God's* commands and live. But Solomon came to perceive his father David's commands as those of God, and in his generation he watered this down in his own mind until he assumed that *his* commands to his children were to be treated by them as the law of God- no matter how far he had strayed himself from God's law. It's a gripping, frightening psychology. "O my son, receive my sayings; and the years of your life shall be many" (Prov. 4:10) is alluding to the promise of long life for the obedient to *God's* laws; but never does Solomon make the admission that his laws are only a repetition of God's laws. He was playing God by implying that *his* words carried the weight of *God's* words. He taught his son obedience to him as a father, but not to God Himself.

7:14 *Sacrifices of peace offerings are with me*- It is the mixing of spirituality and sensuality which is such a powerful temptation; in the same way as Israel never totally rejected Yahweh, but mixed His worship with that of idols. Likewise many false doctrines contain a mixture of truth and error.

7:16 *With striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt*- Solomon perceived the association of Egypt with failure with women; and yet made the very same mistake which he so well perceived and eloquently preached against to others.

7:18 *Let's solace ourselves with loving*- The justification of any sin, but especially sexual sin, is that we have had hard lives and deserve some break, some solace, some human comfort.

8:11 Often Solomon's Proverbs bring out the tension between wealth and wisdom, and the need to choose wisdom (see too 16:16). But whilst he was inspired to write this, and true as it all was, it is inevitable that Solomon said all this with his mind on the way that he had rejected wealth for wisdom when in his youth he was asked by God for his wish (1 Kings 3:11,12). He thought that his

right choice in early life [cp. Christian baptism] justified him in later loving wealth rather than wisdom. He taught that wisdom filled the treasuries of the wise (:21)- just as his treasuries were filled with wealth. Yet in his old age in Ecclesiastes he says that he amassed wealth for himself to see if he could find fulfilment in it- and he seems to have done that because now in his younger days he thought that amassing wealth was justified because he loved the possession of wisdom. Many a middle aged businessman, baptized in his youth and knowing God's truths very well in theory, has made just the same tragic mistake.

8:32 *Now therefore, my sons, listen to me-* These are words attributed to wisdom, but they are the words Solomon uses about his own instruction of his sons in 5:7. Solomon came to assume that he personally was wisdom personified. He had been given wisdom, but the very possession of it led him to assume that he was somehow infallible and spiritually invincible. This was his downfall. The fact we may possess God's Truth doesn't mean that we personally are thereby infallible in every aspect of life. We hold those truths in clay, fallible vessels (2 Cor. 4:7).

9:1 In this chapter we have a classic example of where something abstract- like wisdom- is personified. Personification is widely used in the New Testament, where abstract things like sin and God's power, the Holy Spirit, are spoken of as persons even though they aren't.

9:5 An invitation to bread and wine represents fellowship together. The bread and wine of the communion service likewise speak of our fellowship with God and His Son, and our willingness to learn of them.

9:7-9 These verses appear to be the advice of wisdom to her young women who preach her message (:3). We begin the whole enterprise of sharing wisdom with the recognition that we are likely to be rejected and abused by some who hear our message. Wisdom is calling to everyone, it's not that she advises her preachers to ignore people they consider wicked. But she warns her representatives ahead of time that they can expect rejection and hurt as a result of their work.

9:8 An ability to take criticism is required if we are to become wise. But as people increasingly withdrawn within themselves in modern society, this is a characteristic increasingly rarely seen.

10:1 Solomon has himself in view here, for he was known internationally for his wisdom. Yet much of his apparent spirituality and zeal for God seems to have been a result of living out David's parental expectation. The emphasis he places in Proverbs upon pleasing fathers reflects Solomon's personal living out of parental hopes. Hence his collapse of faith later in life.

10:11 Our words really can be the water of life to others; this is why how we speak is so important.

10:12 *Love covers all wrongs-* The first and second halves of the verses in Proverbs are often related to each other. The way of love is not to turn a blind eye; but it covers wrongs in the sense that it doesn't 'stir up strife' in the sense of continually exposing the fault lines which there are in every relationship but rather covers them.

10:15,16 These verses speak of attitudes to wealth; the rich trust in their wealth and become isolated by it, like a man within a fortified city. The poor are soul destroyed because they are poor, and because they think that not having wealth means they are nothing. However, the righteous

labour for God with eternal life as their end in view (:16), thus making their economic status simply not an item in their self-perception.

10:20 Note the frequent parallel in Proverbs between the tongue and the heart. Our words reflect how we think; we can't think badly and never reflect it in our speech. Jesus understood, maybe from studying Proverbs, that our mouth speaks in reflection of our heart (Lk. 6:45).

11:4 *The day of wrath*- A reference to the final day of judgment at Christ's return. As we bow there naked before God's Son, it's bizarre to think that bank accounts, home ownership or wealth of any kind will be in the slightest bit relevant.

11:5 *Will direct his way* – If we live according to God's principles, we will not have the rudderless spirit which there is in this world. Somehow our life path becomes naturally clear to us.

11:7 *Hope perishes*- The Bible doesn't teach universal salvation nor some automatic reincarnation of the person after death. The wicked will ultimately remain dead without hope.

11:9 The tongue is more powerful than we think; people can be destroyed by others' words; even whole communities can be (:11). But the righteous will not be destroyed by such words, because their focus instead is on their knowledge or relationship with God.

11:26 A reference to Joseph's wisdom in selling grain to the starving.

11:30,31 We can be to others as the tree of life was in Eden. We can win people for eternal life; their eternity is delegated by God to us. Such is the power and importance of preaching. It is our fruit which becomes the fruit which gives eternal life. The fruit of the Spirit as seen in our characters is what will attract people to the eternal life, because we are living now how we will eternally live.

12:10 A gracious and sensitive spirit will be reflected in how we treat the natural creation.

12:14 The way we talk is here paralleled with our works, what we do with our hands. How we speak is really so important; good actions don't displace bad speaking.

12:15 *Right in his own eyes*- What seems right to us isn't necessarily so. We aren't born with any natural wisdom; unless we have a teachable spirit, open to God's teaching, then we will have only our very dysfunctional natural senses to guide us.

12:17 *He who is truthful testifies honestly*- This may seem to be obvious; but the idea is that the person who is truthful as a way of life, within their own heart, is going to also be truthful when it comes to having to testify in court.

12:25 *A kind word makes it glad*- Here and in :18 we see how powerful good words can be (Job 6:25). There's a positive power in words, even just one word, which we are prone to ignore, thinking that actions are so much more important than words.

12:28 *In its path there is no death*- We have here an Old Testament equivalent of the times when Jesus says we can have eternal life right now. It doesn't mean that the righteous don't die. They do, and will be resurrected to eternal life at Christ's return. But we can start living right now the kind of



Kingdom life which we will eternally live. In this sense we “have eternal life”, and there is “no death” in the way of life of the righteous.

13:3 *He who guards his mouth guards his soul*- In this sense as Jesus put it, we will be eternally justified or eternally condemned by our words (Mt. 12:37).

13:7 This last phrase is quoted about the Lord Jesus, who made Himself poor on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). And yet Solomon, who made himself rich, was the very anti-Christ. These words are also part quoted in Phil. 2:7, about how on the cross, the Lord Jesus made himself poor, of no reputation, and now has been so highly exalted. Our living out of the Lord’s cross is shown in our making of ourselves poor, in whatever sense. That is surely the unmistakable teaching of this allusion.

13:14 We have it within our power to disentangle people from the snare of eternal death. And we do this by teaching them. See on 14:27.

13:16 *A fool exposes folly*- The fact something is wrong or foolish doesn’t mean that we should therefore always expose it. The way of wisdom is to decide when to speak and when to be silent.

13:19 *Longing fulfilled*- The opposite of this is to “detest turning from evil”. The “longing” is therefore for spiritual growth, for victory against sin. And this is what is the sweetest thing in spiritual experience.

14:7 *Stay away from a foolish man*- This is typical of many such commands in Proverbs. But we should remember that Solomon was writing to Israelites living within the people of God. Just because someone is part of God’s people doesn’t make them wise; we still have to decide wisely as to with whom we will closely walk in life.

14:8 Folly is here parallel with a lack of serious self-examination. In our day, the breaking of bread service is designed to provoke self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28).

14:10 The way of wisdom isn’t to wear our heart on our sleeve, sharing our innermost thoughts with everyone and anyone.

14:11 Note the contrast between “the house” and “the tent”; the upright have the attitude that they are just passing through this life, with no permanent abode in this world in this present age (Heb. 13:14).

14:17 Quiet craftiness is as bad as hotheaded behaviour which is visible to everyone.

14:27 *Turning people from the snares of death*- But 13:14 says people are saved from the snares of death by our teaching them. The content of that teaching must therefore be the fear of God. His salvation is there in His word, but it becomes real for people by our teaching of it to them.

14:31 Therefore our attitude to the poor is our attitude to God. Hence Jesus teaches that He will judge us according to how we treated our poor brethren, because they represent Him (Mt. 25:40).

14:33 The fool perceives wisdom in his innermost conscience, but only in passing; it doesn’t remain within his consciousness as it does within the heart of the righteous. Passing interest in spirituality is very common in our world; but God’s truth must abide within our heart if we are to be truly wise.

15:3 *Yahweh's eyes are everywhere*- A reference to God's presence everywhere through His Angels. This reminder is given in the context of warning us about our words; if we believe that God is really aware of absolutely everything, this will influence our words.

15:4 People are psychologically crushed when they realize that words spoken to them lacked integrity. The importance of our words is therefore because of their influence upon others. Appropriate gentleness in speech can also lead people to eternal life.

15:7 Again we see how the heart and the tongue ("lips") are paralleled; what we think really issues in our words (Lk. 6:45).

15:8 Here and elsewhere in Scripture, prayer is seen as a sacrifice. It requires the same effort and careful preparation beforehand (Heb. 13:15). The altar of incense represented the offering of prayer as a sacrifice (Rev. 8:3,4).

15:12 The implication is that people don't mix with the wise because they subconsciously fear being criticized, directly or indirectly. Those who can bear criticism relax with the wise (:31).

15:14 *Fools feed on folly*- A relevant warning to us who live in an age of constant comedy and entertainment, where folly is presented as joy (:21).

15:26 God watches every thought of every person. Such knowledge is amazing. And we can please God Almighty in distant Heaven, just by how we are thinking. Such is the colossal significance of spiritual mindedness.

16:1 The implication is that there is an element to which God controls our thoughts and the words we come out with. This element which is beyond human effort is from God's grace through the operation of His Spirit. This same 'element' is alluded to in :4- God somehow overrules and uses even the failures of the sinful; and in :9 we have the same theme, that there is an element of Divine direction over and above what we ourselves will in our own minds. Otherwise, salvation would be by steel-willed human effort alone rather than God's grace. This same theme, of God playing a role over and above our own efforts, concludes this chapter in :33. See on 20:24.

16:2 *Yahweh weighs the motives*- Our justification isn't on the basis that we happen to feel good about ourselves (:25); God's judgment rather than our own gut feelings is all important. Although He is Almighty, God "weighs" our motives, expending some effort of analysis of our deepest heart processes.

16:10 Solomon writes inspired truth in Proverbs, but it seems that much of what he writes was written with an eye to his own self-justification, especially about the need to respect the man who has wisdom and the wise man's superiority over all others (:16). He even writes as if the king must be accepted as automatically infallible: "Inspired judgments are on the lips of the king" (see too 20:2). We too can teach God's truths whilst also motivated in doing so by a desire for our own self-justification rather than His glory.

16:20 We see here the connection between God's word and faith; faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17).

16:30 Negative body language may appear so insignificant, but it is judged by God as being “bent on evil”.

16:32 *One who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city*- A reference to Samson.

17:5 The poor are God manifest to us; how we treat our poor brethren is how we treat God, and is the basis of our final judgment (M 25:40). This is a common theme in Proverbs; and we need to remember it constantly, especially as we are often tempted to consider others’ poverty as the result of their own poor decision making and to think this excuses us from helping them.

17:9 *He who covers an offence*- This is paralleled in the second half of the verse with not gossiping about others’ failures. It doesn’t mean that we are to turn a blind eye to others’ sins, rather that we shouldn’t gossip about them to others.

17:14 Relationship breakdown needs to be bridged as soon as possible, as a matter of urgency; otherwise irreparable damage will be done and like water bursting from a dam, many others will be affected by it.

17:19 *One who builds a high gate seeks destruction*- Isolationism is actually a proactive seeking of destruction for others. In our age of retreat into ourselves, this needs to be considered carefully.

18:1 likewise exhorts against isolationism- it’s a form of selfishness.

17:24 *The eyes of a fool wander to the ends of the earth*- Those whose hearts aren’t focused upon God and His word are rudderless, looking worldwide for wisdom on the internet, but never finding true direction.

18:4 Words are important; yet they are so common, as we hear and speak millions of them each week, that we can easily forget their profound significance in our lives and those of others.

18:6 *His speech asks for beatings*- According to our words we will be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 12:47,48); our words now may actually be as it were requesting our punishment then. We must so speak as those who will be judged, knowing that he who showed no mercy in his words will receive none (James 2:12,13); our words of mercy or condemnation, and perhaps *the way we say them*, will be the basis upon which we will be accepted or rejected. In this sense death or life are in the power of our tongue (:21).

18:8 It’s attractive to us to hear gossip; the one who hears it will often not just ignore it but will take it deep within themselves.

18:9 Again we see passive behaviour- in this case, laziness- paralleled with proactive destructive behaviour.

18:10 This has relevance to us in that we can be baptized into the Lord’s Name.

18:11 One implication of this could be that those who trust in wealth isolate themselves from others.

18:18 The use of lots is seen positively here; they were used by the early church in Acts 1:26.

19:2 *Zeal without knowledge*- Applied by Paul to the Jews and all people who seek justification by works rather than faith in God's grace which is in Christ (Rom. 10:2), which is for us the ultimate "knowledge". This is like someone who walks earnestly but in the wrong direction, who has missed "the way", which is Christ (Jn. 14:6).

19:8 This verse is in the context of the preceding reflections that in human life, people who have wealth have friends but the poor have few friends. Whether or not we have popularity with others and human friendships, the wonder of finding the ultimate "understanding" of God, relationship with Him, makes that irrelevant.

19:11 We are not to take up every offence against us with others. There are times when our silence under provocation is in God's eyes our "glory". This verse alludes to the fact that God is slow to anger and overlooks offences without always demanding our specific repentance (Ps. 103:8; 145:8). We are to reflect our experience of this to others.

19:14 *A prudent wife is from Yahweh*- Marriage is in one sense a gamble, as we never really know our partner until we have been married some time to them. A good partnership is therefore a "grace" from God (18:22); whilst we can do our human best to have a good marriage, it is ultimately God who does the humanly impossible, of joining two different people together (Mt. 19:6); and marriage is therefore a grace from Him.

19:17 Our attitude to the poor is our attitude to God and will be the basis of our judgment (Mt. 25:40).

19:22 The implication is that the poor can still be kind; in our money-obsessed world, there's the wrong impression that generosity and kindness must involve financial giving.

19:25 *The simple will learn*- We are to learn by observing how sinners are punished even in this life.

20:1 *Beer is a brawler*- It is people and not liquid who brawl. The alcoholic drink is therefore put by metonymy for the alcoholic; they become identified with the substance of their addiction. Anything in human life with which we become totally identified, be it football teams or alcohol, is an addiction which takes us away from being the persons God intends us to be.

20:5 There is good wisdom within many faithful people which never becomes apparent until another person draws it out. This should be the result of good company and true spiritual fellowship- bringing out the best in each other which is often latent and would be otherwise unavailable for others' benefit.

20:6 There's much talk in the world about "love", but no word is more misunderstood. Love must be connected to faith and hope if it is to be love as God intends (1 Cor. 13:13); although faith and hope produce love in their ultimate term (Col. 3:14).

20:7 Integrity is what will most influence our children in practice.

20:16 *Hold him in pledge for a wayward woman*- An allusion to Judah's sin with Tamar (Gen. 38:25).

20:22 If we are wronged, the ultimate justice will be done when we are eternally saved at the time of Christ's return- and not in this life.

20:24 There is an element of Divine guidance in our lives over and above our own efforts; see on 16:1.

20:27 Our self-examination is what reveals us to the Lord. What we think about at the memorial meeting, as we are faced with the memory of the crucified Saviour, is therefore an epitome of what we really are. If all we are thinking of is the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the meeting, all the external things of our Christianity; or if we are sitting there taking bread and wine as a conscience salver, doing our little religious ritual to make us feel psychologically safe- then we simply don't know Him. We are surface level believers only. And this is the message we give Him. Our spirit / attitude is the candle of the Lord, with which He searches us. Our thoughts when confronted by the cross reveal us to Him who died on it. Likewise Joseph (one of the most detailed types of the Lord Jesus) knew / discerned his brethren by his cup (Gen. 44:5). 1 Cor. 11:31,32 suggests that our self-judgment at the breaking of bread is in fact the lord's judgment of us.

21:2 *He turns it wherever He desires*- See on 16:1.

21:4 The wicked see life within the light of their own pride; everything becomes subjected to their need to present themselves well.

21:13 We will all cry out for mercy and grace at the day of judgment. The mean may appear prosperous in this life, but we should live ever aware that we are spiritually poor, through our own bad decisions just as the poor are often poor because of their own weaknesses and poor decision making; and we will cry out to God for His mercy at the last day. We therefore ought to be responsive to the cries of the poor today.

21:16 *Remain in the assembly of the dead*- The punishment for the wicked, including those who once walked with God, is eternal death, and not eternal conscious torment.

21:19 Solomon often interjects some comment about the misery of living with an unspiritual woman, apparently out of context with what he is writing about (:9 also). Although he was inspired in his writing, this may reflect how always weighing on his mind was the fact that his 1000 wives and concubines never brought him happiness but only a desire for isolationism from everybody (1 Kings 11:3); and he therefore keeps on making this kind of comment. Intimacy between persons can only be achieved God's way, which is through lifelong stable relationships bound together by Him (Mt. 19:6).

22:2 One implication of believing that God is our personal creator is that we will not be envious of the rich; we will not see them as so fundamentally different from ourselves.

22:4 *Wealth, honour, and life*- The gift of "life" surely refers to eternal life; this will be given at Christ's return along with wealth and honour.

22:5 *Thorns and snares are in the path of the wicked*- The Proverbs often allude to the Law of Moses or earlier Israelite history. Here the reference is to the only other time that "thorns and snares"

occur together in the Bible, in Josh. 23:13, where Israel are warned that association and intermarriage with the pagan world around them will be as thorns and snares to them. The wicked therefore put these things in their own path; and again, Solomon makes this warning whilst failing spectacularly himself in this very thing.

22:6 God works with individuals and we are each independently judged regardless of whether we had believing or unbelieving parents, and so it cannot be that someone comes to the Kingdom simply because of faithful parents. And yet none of us will reach salvation purely by our own effort; there are other elements over and above that, and faithful parenting is one such element in the final algorithm which determines who is saved and who isn't. It's an endless motivation for parents, therefore, to raise their children in God's way.

22:16 *Come to poverty*- Considering that the wicked often prosper materially in this life, "poverty" must refer to poverty of spirit.

22:21 *To the ones who sent you*- People came to hear Solomon's wisdom from many nations (1 Kings 4:34), so the book of Proverbs was maybe first compiled as an answer to be sent back to them.

22:25 Bad company, even amongst the people of God, rubs off on us; we are more vulnerable to negative spiritual influences than we think.

23:5 He had all the right theory. Solomon was an active, industrious person by nature; and whilst all his many proverbs criticizing the lazy and glorifying the diligent are true as they stand, is there not in all this some element of self-justification, interpreting his own natural personality type as inherently righteous?

23:11 *He will plead their case*- God is here likened to the counsel for the defence in the final court of Divine justice. And yet He is also the judge of all. Each of the situations we find ourselves in is played out before the court of Heaven, and the judgment of the last day will be a statement of those judgments which are happening in our lives today. God hasn't as it were turned off from this world, to open the books at the end of history and see how we behaved; He is watching and passionately judging today.

23:17 Envy of others just isn't on our agenda if we are rejoicing in our relationship with God, and focused on the future hope we have of eternity in God's Kingdom at Christ's return (:18). These things eclipse any tendency to wish we were like the rich and powerful in this brief, fleeting life. See on 24:20.

23:26,27 Even when married to Gentile women, Solomon could charge his son to "observe my ways. For... a Gentile woman is a narrow well". The fact he himself had fallen into the pit of marriage to unbelievers just didn't seem to occur to him; he was sure that he was in fact an upright example. This passage reflects more than many the extent to which Solomon's conscience was so deeply damaged. For he wasn't saying 'Do as I say but not as I do'. He was beyond that- doing the very wrong that he warned others not to do, and confidently presenting himself to them as a good example. The death of conscience is something we have to watch against all our days.

24:12 As God keeps us from spiritual destruction, so we should to others. We aren't to say within ourselves that we didn't realize that they were going wrong. This is a piercing analysis of our

psychology; we hold back from the awkwardness of engagement with others about their life path because we kid ourselves that they are OK really.

24:16 The righteous fall, spiritually and materially- but rise up. This rising up again is one of the characteristics of the righteous, not being swamped by failure.

24:18 God is more angry with gloating over others' fall than over the fall itself.

24:20 Our hope of future, eternal reward at Christ's return means we will not be jealous of others (:19). See on 23:17.

24:25 The Proverbs give so much advice about judgment. At first sight it may appear directed to the tiny minority within Israel who were called to be judges; but whilst we cannot condemn others, we are to judge righteously, to have righteous opinions and draw spiritual conclusions about life situations. This is why we have so much advice about how to 'judge'.

24:29 *I will render to the man according to his work*- We are not to say this, because Christ is coming to judge and render to each person according to their work (Rev. 22:12). We can know great peace from resigning the need to render others their judgment.

25:3 When Solomon laments that a sinful land has many rulers, but stability comes from a wise ruler (28:2), he is stating an inspired truth; but it is inevitable that he framed it in such terms as justified his own dictatorial rule, as if his wisdom justified him in crushing any opposition leaders. It was really Solomon's self-justification. Solomon taught that the heart of kings is unsearchable, i.e., it cannot be examined, being as far above the earth as heaven is. Solomon thought that his possession of theoretical wisdom placed him in a God-like position above his people, and therefore they dare not even begin to question him or examine him; and none should therefore dare to 'exalt himself' in the King's presence (:6). Truly, "knowledge puffs up". And our very possession of 'the truth' of Christ and the word of God carries with it the same potential temptations, leading us to consider the world so far beneath us, that we can do what we wish with no accountability to anyone.

25:5 This was justifying the way Solomon killed Shimei at the establishment of his kingdom. His teaching of wisdom is constantly mixed with self-justification; our preaching must never be like this. See on 29:7.

25:7 Jesus says that this is exactly what will happen at the day of judgment (Lk. 14:10).

25:16 Solomon warns about only eating a limited amount of the honey you may find. Yet Ecclesiastes 1 and 2 show how Solomon found honey as it were, he had the opportunity to do and experience what he wanted- and he ate so much he became spiritually sick.

25:22 This is applied to each of us in Rom. 12:20.

26:4,5 These verses don't contradict, rather the intention is to teach us that we must treat people in different ways at different times; sometimes we should say something, others we should remain silent. It is wisdom which teaches us. It's too simplistic to respond to people the same way every time.

26:11 This verse is applied in 2 Pet. 2:22 to baptized Christian believers who return to their old way of life. The implication is that at our conversion we as it were vomited up our old way of life; to return to it is as vile as a dog returning to its own vomit.

26:13 Laziness is often justified as caution.

26:16 Just assuming that we are right and refusing to be self-critical, allowing discretion or wisdom to teach us, is a form of laziness.

26:22 We all naturally like to hear gossip, we find it tasty; let's not deceive ourselves that actually, we aren't like that; we are, and must make conscious effort not to listen to it.

26:26 *Exposed in the assembly*- Yet the wicked prosper in this life, and often go to their graves without their deceitful words having been revealed. Yet they shall be exposed "in the assembly". There is a theme in Bible teaching about the day of judgment, that our individual judgment will somehow be visible to all (Lk. 12:1-3; Rev. 16:15). All our secret words, thoughts and real intentions will then be made public to all; there's therefore no point to be hypocritical in this life, thinking we have cleverly hidden our real positions and feelings, because ultimately all will be public knowledge to everyone for eternity.

27:1 James 4:14,15 alludes to this verse, teaching that our speech should be characterized by frequent statements that our plans are "God willing" or "If the Lord will".

27:5 The implication is that if we love someone, we must show it- and that may require us to rebuke them at times, as a reflection of that love we have for them (:6).

27:7 *To a hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet*- The context of the surrounding verses speak of loving friends rebuking their friends in love. So the idea may be that we are all spiritually hungry, and the bitterness of receiving rebuke from our friends will therefore be sweet to us. It's the spiritually proud, who consider themselves full, who have no liking for rebuke.

27:10 This whole section teaches the importance of having faithful, spiritually minded friends. True fellowship within the family of God's people means that we can relate to each other as if we really are natural family. The idea of 'out of church Christians' is a contradiction in terms; we are designed to develop spiritually as a result of true fellowship with other believers. Poor church experiences shouldn't lead us to retreat within ourselves, because there is no path to growth within the body of God's people if we cut ourselves off from them (Jn. 15:5).

27:21 How we respond to praise is an indicator of who we really are spiritually, because our response will indicate whether we are proud or humble.

28:2- see on 25:3.

28:5 *Those who seek Yahweh understand it fully* – Note the paradox between 'seeking' and 'fully understanding'. The seeker recognizes he hasn't yet arrived at full understanding; but that process of humble seeking God is in fact reckoned as 'fully understanding'.

28:9 Our attitude to God's word is related to the effectiveness of our prayers; insofar as God's word abides in us, we will ask for things which God will grant (Jn. 15:7), and we will ask in faith, because



faith comes from hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). The various aspects of the believing life, e.g. prayer and Bible reading, mesh together to produce an upward spiritual of spiritual development.

28:11 The problem with wealth is the illusion it brings that everything can be bought for a price, including wisdom and spirituality. It's not surprising therefore that the majority of God's people have been kept poor by Him.

28:14 *Blessed is the man who always fears*- This is in designed contrast to the way :1 speaks of the righteous as bold as a lion, and the wicked as fearful. The 'fear' spoke of here must refer to a fear of God, of sinning against Him- and this, paradoxically, makes us not nervous, bold and positive in our life path.

28:21 People will betray others and do and say awful things to them just in the hope of a tiny material advantage to them. Judas' betrayal of Christ can be read as largely motivated by a love of money, and a relatively small sum too.

28:25 Seeking after wealth is contrasted with trusting in Yahweh- i.e. in His promise to provide our daily bread and clothing.

28:27 *One who closes his eyes*- This is the opposite to 'giving to the poor'. We often fail to be generous spirited (and we can give to the poor in many ways apart from financially) because we pretend we didn't notice human need, we close the eyes of our perception to the situations we encounter. Notice how deeply our psychology is penetrated by the Proverbs!

29:7 This sounds like a reference to the way Solomon judged the two prostitutes. See on 25:5.

29:14 Solomon is clearly referring to the promises to David, which he assumed were about him. He thought that because he had judged the poor harlots wisely, therefore he would be the promised Messiah. And this was just what David his father had hoped and expected of him. David had even asked Solomon to "do wisely" i.e. to show wisdom, in order that the promises to him about Messiah would be fulfilled (1 Kings 2:3). So *this* was surely one of Solomon's motives in giving them justice and being 'wise'; he sought to live out his father's expectations and to fulfil the requirements of the Messiah figure. Solomon uses language elsewhere used about Messiah's final judgment and applies it to himself in 20:26). He felt that his judgment must be that of God, therefore he had to be right, because he 'had wisdom', he 'had the truth'; he assumed that because he was the king, therefore his heart would inevitably be guided by the Lord (21:1). Those raised in wisdom's way often find it very hard to take criticism in later life. They find tolerance of others' views hard; they perceive themselves to be right to an intolerant extent. Is this not a little bit of the Solomon syndrome?

30:6 Although we may accept that the Bible is indeed inspired by God, we have a tendency to add to God's word in that we are tempted to look elsewhere for truth. Because God's word is true ("flawless", :5) any other word is relatively speaking untrue, a lie. Having stated that he himself is ignorant, Agur is directing his pupils to God's word; he recognized that wisdom cannot come from within a teacher, but only from God's word which is taught by the teacher.

30:8 Feed me with the food that is needful for me- Maybe Jesus was influenced by this in commanding us to ask God each day to give us the food necessary for the day (Mt. 6:11).

30:10 *Along with his master*- Household servants were considered as one with their master. But Agur is teaching that we shouldn't operate guilt by association, but instead recognize that even the humblest member of a community is still an individual and independent person both before God and ourselves.

30:10,11 *Curses... doesn't bless*- Note how sins of omission [to not bless, in this case] are parallel with sins of commission [to curse].

30:12 The fact we may feel no conscience for sin isn't any cleansing from it; the only effective washing from sin is through baptism into Christ, not playing mind games with ourselves whereby we don't feel bad about our sins.

30:20 There's a connection between the things of :18,19 and the adulterous woman who thinks she has done no wrong. Those things of :18,19 leave no visible trace. Because there is at times no trace of sins like adultery, they fade away as the path of a ship through the sea does, we aren't to think that God doesn't notice and that they will not be brought to judgment.

30:32,33 Just as the things of :30,31 are inexorable in their march and will not be deflected by anything, so just as surely judgment will come for sin, and we must repent rather than continuing to churn up Divine judgment against us.

31:1 *Lemuel*- An equivalent name for Solomon, having a similar meaning to Solomon's other name, Jedediah (2 Sam. 12:25). This chapter would therefore be the inspired words of his mother Bathsheba.

31:3 Bathsheba was warning Solomon not to make the mistake his father David had, who destroyed his family for the sake of his adultery with Bathsheba. The warning against sinning with women under the influence of alcohol, which would lead the king to forget God's law, could suggest that David sinned with Bathsheba whilst under the influence of alcohol.

31:8 There are those who whilst not physically mute are relatively voiceless; and we are to be a voice for them, to speak up for those who can't speak for themselves.

31:15 *Portions for her servant girls*- The wise woman is great because she serves those who are her servants; we see here the New Testament principle of servant leadership.

31:23 The implication is that the respect given her husband is thanks to her, for the surrounding verses are speaking of what *she* achieves for her family.

## ECCLESIASTES

1:4 *The earth remains forever*- It is God's promised plan to establish His eternal Kingdom on this earth; He will not destroy it. The Biblical descriptions of "heaven and earth" being destroyed are to be read as figurative of the destruction of the present world order, rather than literally.

1:12 This book appears to be the meditations of Solomon at the end of his life. He had been given Divine wisdom and retained it (2:9), but he rejected its claim upon him personally. He therefore says much which is true, and yet he speaks with the cynicism of the person who has rejected the true faith for himself whilst still offering it to others, especially the young. This explains the apparently contradictory strands of teaching within the book.

2:9 Solomon insists that throughout his life, his wisdom had remained with him. The theoretical wisdom which he had did not affect his life practically, and thus it was as if he lacked wisdom completely. Mere possession of truth leads to great temptations- for like Solomon, we can reason that this alone justifies us in any behaviour.

2:18,21 Solomon saw "wisdom" as something he had worked for [forgetting it was God's gracious gift to him], and he treated it as a material possession. Because he saw that he couldn't take it with him, he felt therefore it was useless- he didn't, it seems, want to leave it to his son because he felt it was only for him. This was the spirit of the man who buried his talent of Divine Truth in the ground and thought that would be enough- he wouldn't risk it with others or share it with them. And so Solomon ended up hating all his labour for wisdom because at the end of his life that mere knowledge and teaching of it to others hadn't transformed his personal life. The rejected at the day of judgment may well, tragically, feel the same. But *now* is the time to personally apply God's Truth to ourselves and to be *humbled* by the very possession of it.

3:19 *One and the same spirit*- The Hebrew word translated "spirit" has a wide range of meaning, but includes the idea of "breath". By nature, man and the animals are the same. The same thing happens when we die; and Solomon so wished that men would perceive this whilst they were alive (:18) so that they would give themselves to God the more fully. There's no difference in where the spirit goes after death, whether we are man, animal or plant (:21). We are made of dust and will return to dust; the spirit, or life force which animates us, returns to God, whether we are good or bad. Those who are responsible to God will be resurrected and judged; the wicked will die for ever, the second death, again returning to dust; and those counted righteous by God's grace will live for ever with immortal bodies in His eternal Kingdom on earth. There is no conscious survival of death taught in the Bible; we're not born with any 'immortal soul'. This is a non-Christian idea. Immortality is only revealed to those who are in Christ (2 Tim. 1:10).

4:8 The billionaire always wants another billion... "Hell and destruction are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied" (Prov. 27:20 RV), Solomon wrote in his youth; and then in old age, he came to basically the same conclusion, having spent his life working back to the truth that he had been taught in his youth (see too 1:8). And there are many men and women who have done the same. We all tend to be empirical learners; and yet this is the great power of God's word, that through it we don't have to learn everything through our failures; but we can receive His Truth, trust it, and simply live by it. Otherwise we shall be like Solomon...

5:2 *God is in heaven, and you on earth*- God is revealed as existing as a personal being in a specific location, Heaven. Although He is present everywhere by His Spirit, this doesn't mean that He has no personal existence.

5:6 *Don't protest before the messenger*- The Hebrew word 'malak' translated "messenger" is the usual word translated "angel". It can be used of men, e.g. priests, or anyone who is a 'messenger'. The Angels of God don't sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23), but the word 'malak' can be applied to ordinary men, who of course can sin. The Greek word 'aggelos', usually translated 'angel', is applied to the human messengers of John the Baptist (Lk. 7:24). This confusion has led to some misunderstanding the few Bible verses which speak (in some translations) of 'angels' sinning; but those 'angels' referred to are human beings, representatives, servants or messengers of others, and don't refer to 'angels' in the sense of spirit beings.

6:2 Prov. 6:26 warns the young man that the Gentile woman will take his money and leave him destitute at the end. These words seem to be alluded to by Solomon years later here, where he laments that despite his wealth and success, a Gentile would have it all after his death. He saw in later life that his warnings to the young men of Israel had been in the form of painting a picture of a typical young man who epitomized youthful folly; but now he saw that he had been making a detailed prophecy of himself. Likewise in 2:18,19 he laments that his labours will achieve nothing; doubtless alluding back to his words in Prov. 5:10, where he says that the Gentile wife will make the young Israelite's labours meaningless. Sin never satisfies. We can know truth on a theoretical level as Solomon did, and yet not live it out in practice.

7:2-4 The continual emphasis of society upon 'fun' and 'entertainment' doesn't lead to wisdom before God, but the very opposite.

7:23 Solomon recognized that although he had loved the idea of wisdom, the image of a spiritual life, the wisdom of God had never really impacted him personally: "I said, I will be wise (referring back to his request for wisdom in 1 Kings 3); but it was far from me". His request for wisdom had only been so that he could do the job of leading Israel, living out the parental expectation of his father, whom he admits in Proverbs 4 had taught him to ask for wisdom.

7:28 Solomon had all the instruction he could wish for; but he didn't allow it to really sink home one. He started out on the search for an ultimately satisfying woman, but out of the 1000 he had (1 Kings 11:3) he never found one, even when he sat down and analyzed each of them. And even politically, his marriages with all those Gentile women didn't seem to achieve him the support he desired from their home countries; Egypt gave refuge to Jeroboam, Solomon's main rival (1 Kings 11:40), even though he always acquiesced to his wives and even in his very old age he still didn't destroy the idol temples he built for them (2 Kings 23:13).

8:1 Solomon didn't see the relevance of his wisdom to his own personal family life. Yet he proudly insisted: "Who is like the wise man?", as if the possession of theoretical truth and wisdom was the ultimate possession; and he then goes on to say that this made him beyond criticism (:2-4). This is a danger for any community or individual who says they have "the truth" and who considers the possession of it to be of the utmost importance.

8:4 It is only God who cannot be questioned in this way. But Solomon felt that because he possessed God's wisdom, he could therefore act as God. :2 could suggest that he thought his commandments were in fact God's. So the possession of Truth, which we too have, can lead to an incredible arrogance, a lack of openness to others' comments upon us, and a certainty that we are right in all that we do and are beyond criticism in every area. The hardness of a man is changed by true wisdom (:1) but despite knowing this, Solomon became hard hearted and abused his people. He had the wisdom- but as he said, it was far from him personally.

9:5 *The dead don't know anything*- The Bible clearly teaches that death is unconsciousness. See on 3:19.

9:6 *Neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun*- Human theories of ghosts and reincarnation aren't compatible with the Bible. The Biblical hope for life after death is in the form of a bodily resurrection to stand before God's judgment and then by grace receive eternal life in His Kingdom on earth; and this is not for all, but for those who have consciously made a covenant with God in this life.

9:10 *Sheol, where you are going*- 'Sheol', translated "hell" in some Bibles and "the grave" in others, is simply death; all people, good and bad, go there. It's not a place of conscious punishment for the wicked, it refers simply to the grave.

10:1 Solomon had "honour" to an unprecedented extent (1 Kings 3:13). But in this same book he admits that he, the man famed world-wide for wisdom, gave himself to folly (2:3). He knew so well the error and folly of his ways, but he could only preach the lesson but not heed it. A true fool is one whose wisdom fails him in practice (when he "walks by the way", :3); and especially is this acute when this "error... proceeds from the ruler" (:5). It's all about Solomon himself. His self-analysis, like that of many an alcoholic and drug addict, was excellent. The very possession of truth and wisdom seems to be of itself a temptation to live the very opposite way, which is why believers who go wrong often end up behaving far worse than unbelievers.

10:16,17 Solomon was so confident that he was or would be the Messiah that he seems to have felt that he was beyond the possibility of sinning; real self-examination and the sense of the possibility of failure just didn't exist for him. He says that the land of Israel is happy or blessed because her king is the son of a noble, and she will be cursed if her ruler is a servant. Solomon proudly presented himself as the son of King David- and he makes a clear swipe at Jeroboam, the pretender to the throne who was a servant (1 Kings 11:26). By reasoning like this, Solomon sets himself in direct opposition to the spirit of Jesus, who declared that the servant is to be the King of all. Thus Solomon's self-justification, his self-defensiveness, his lack of focus on the future Messiah, led him to miss totally the spirit of Christ.

11:9 *For all these things there is a God who will bring you into judgment*- Solomon knows judgment will come, at least for the young people, but he reasons as if it won't- at least not for him. He knows, but he doesn't know on the personal, experiential level. This is why there are apparently contradictory statements in Ecclesiastes. For example, the wise dies as the fool, with no more eternal remembrance than the fool (2:15,16). This, Solomon, says, is what he himself believes in his own heart. But in 7:12 he says that wisdom gives life to those who have it. But then again in 9:16-18 he observes that although wisdom can help, its benefits are easily undone, so easily as to make it

useless. He knew and preached God's Truth, but for him personally, it meant nothing at all. And therefore in practice he advocated the life of self-enjoyment, acting *as if* all the other truth of wisdom was not operative in practice. His final recommendation in chapter 12 is for young people to go the way of wisdom, as this is their duty. He had evidently minimized the coming of judgment, as his obsession with himself being the Messiah had lead him to minimize the reality of the coming of Christ. How deeply do we struggle with our own humanity, and deeply long for the second coming? Has our materialism made the Hope of the Kingdom mean practically nothing? Solomon's complaint at the pointlessness of wisdom in 2:15-20 is liberally sprinkled with personal pronouns; his self-centredness was part of his materialism and lack of faith in the Kingdom. And for us too, familiarity with the glorious principles of Divine Truth with which we have been entrusted can lead us to the blasphemy of saying, in effect, that those principles are unimportant; they come to mean little to us personally, and thereby we effectively deny their value and worth.

11:10 The tragic brevity of life means that youth is vanity; we should quit the time wasting follies of youth or overgrown childhood (and the modern world is full of these), and therefore we too should remove anger from our hearts. Ecclesiastes uses the mortality of man not only as an appeal to work for our creator and quit anger, but to simply have faith in His existence (as 2 Cor. 1:9).

12:2 *And the clouds return after the rain*- Solomon's father, David, had in his old age rejoiced in the prospect of God's Kingdom coming on earth at Christ's return, which he imagined would be like the clear shining after the rain (2 Sam. 23:4). Solomon in his old age saw only negativity, the return of the clouds, whereas David in old age looked ahead with hope to the Kingdom. Whilst Solomon spoke so often of his father David, he failed to personally grasp the wonder of the hope of Christ and His Kingdom which his father had; for this cannot be passed on through the generations, that wonder has to be learnt from experience and years of spiritual devotion.

12:3-5 This is a picture of a man in old age, perhaps based upon Solomon himself, having lost his strength and his teeth ("the grinders"), with darkened eyesight, poor of hearing and jumpy, scared of heights having lost his balance, with white hair like the almond tree and having lost sexual desire. Solomon presents this picture of man at his last end to those yet young, with the appeal to therefore not waste life ingratiating the senses, but rather in serving God.

## SONG OF SOLOMON

The set of dialogues we have in this Song indicate that here we have a romance which went too far too quickly between Solomon and an Egyptian girl. He ought to have married an Israelite, one of the “daughters of Jerusalem”. The Song is full of tension between the girl and these “daughters”, whom she fears as being more attractive to Solomon than herself; and they speak to her sarcastically. Solomon in the Proverbs warned the Israelites about being attracted by pretty Gentile women who would lead them astray; and yet he does the very opposite of what he had taught to be true. The Song ends not with a wedding, as the genre of love poems might suggest, but with the couple parting in acrimony. Not running relationships God’s way doesn’t lead to satisfaction.

1:2 The Song begins by the daughters of Jerusalem and the Egyptian girl being in some kind of competition for Solomon; they both state their desire for him, and both of them compare his love to wine (:2, 4). Note how the Song doesn’t begin as a romance is supposed to- with the first meeting, love at first sight scene. As early as 1:2 she comments that “your lovemaking is more delightful than wine”. This is all a subversion of the whole genre of romance. It was all too far too fast. The Egyptian justifies her darker complexion to the Jerusalem girls, and praises her own beauty: “I am dark but lovely” (:5). She likewise yells at them not to sexually stimulate her lover, Solomon (2:7). “My beloved is *mine*” (2:16) to be the same catty kind of defensiveness. The girl is jealous of how the daughters of Jerusalem admire Solomon, not least because of his fame in Israelite circles (:3,4). And the Jerusalem girls respond with sarcasm as in 6:1.

1:9 Solomon should have admired neither the horses nor the women of Egypt; yet he begins his Song with an unashamed breach of the command not to desire either of these things. The unashamedness of Solomon coupled with his spirituality indicates that at this time he was genuinely convinced that what he was doing was deeply spiritual; when in fact it was completely carnal. He totally ignored his own advice in Proverbs about choosing a spiritual Israelite woman as a wife.

1:11 The Song is shot through with allusion to the Law and tabernacle rituals; he speaks of making her borders on her clothes, alluding to the borders of blue to be worn by the faithful Israelite. Solomon wanted her to be a spiritual woman, and he was going to make her one in his mind, to his eyes. He wanted to see her as a spiritual woman, and eventually he became persuaded that she was just this. This is often the psychology of marriage out of the faith.

2:1 The girl says she is merely a common “rose of Sharon”, but Solomon responds that in his eyes, she is like a lily among thorns, referring to the Jerusalem girls. Ironically enough, Num. 33:55 had warned that the Gentiles within the land promised to Abraham would be “thorns” to Israel if they married them. And yet Solomon sees the Israelite women as “thorns” and the Gentile as a lily amongst them. He likewise compares her to them in 6:8,9.

2:10-13 Solomon describes her in Jewish terms, likening her to many well-known places in Israel: the Heshbon fishpools, the tower of Lebanon etc. (see too 4:1,4). He wanted to see her as an Israelite girl, and so that was how she appeared to him. Such is the self-

deception we are capable of when we seek to justify ourselves. Solomon takes her on a tour of Israel (4:8), enthusing about the sights, speaking of them as the things of "*our* land". See on 4:16.

2:13,14 It was because of the impossible tension between the Egyptian girl and the Jerusalem maidens that there's the constant theme of needing to hold meetings in secrecy, often in the countryside or mountains around Jerusalem, and to "go away" in order to be together. They appear to have slept together in the open air, beneath the trees (1:16,17; 7:11). 2:17 and 4:6 suggest they spent a night together in the hills, and then before dawn Solomon got back to Jerusalem. Illicit relationships are powerfully attractive at the time, but doomed to ultimate failure.

3:4 She walked the streets of Jerusalem whilst he was confined in the palace (:2). Her mother moved to Jerusalem from Egypt, but it wasn't possible for Solomon and her to easily be together in that house (also 8:2). 3:4 is very similar to Solomon's own warnings against Gentile marriage in Prov. 7:13,27; 5:8). We have an amazing ability to do the very opposite of what we know is right.

3:4,11 This is her sarcastic comments to the Jerusalem girls, mocking the crown his mother Bathsheba had made for him, wishing instead that he would be under the influence of *her* mother

4:1 Parts of the Song are very sexually explicit once the fairly obvious allusions are figured out. He's describing the vaginal lips of his girlfriend, his intended spouse (4:1,3,8 ); and he has seen "behind your veil", the symbol of her virginity. And yet he glorifies all this in his song. Quite clearly, Solomon was guilty of fornication with the one whom he wished to marry, although the ending of the Song seems to imply the relationship somehow broke up. And this was all right at the beginning of his reign.

4:4 She loves him because of his ointment, and he loves her because of her jewellery (:4). He says that deep kissing with her gives the same after effect as drinking enough wine that you talk in your sleep afterwards (7:9). It's all very human and carnal; one lesson of the Song is that superficial attraction isn't the basis for true love.

4:15,6 Solomon saw her as a "paradise", a garden with rivers and exotic fruits, surrounded by a wall- the language of Eden. And she was a fount of "living waters", the language of Messiah. He saw her as the Kingdom / Eden personified. And yet her response to being described in this way is almost inappropriate- for she invites him to come and eat the fruit of the garden (:16), exactly after the pattern of Eve destroying Adam. Yet Solomon didn't want to see this connection; she was the Kingdom to him, just as so many have felt that having their new partner means that *nothing*, not even the Kingdom, is meaningful any more. See on 2:10-13.

5:1 Song 5 seems to give insight into the unworthy elements of the potential bride of Christ. Notice the sequence: While she sleeps at night, the bridegroom comes and knocks [unworthy virgins sleeping instead of being awake; the Lord Jesus comes; Lk. 12:36 uses the same figure, of the Lord's return being like a knock]. She replies that she's not dressed properly, makes excuses about her feet, she can't come and open [the unworthy don't respond immediately]. He tries to open the door from the outside, putting his hand through the latch-hole [by grace, after the pattern of Lot being encouraged to leave Sodom when he hesitated, the Lord will be patient even with sleepy virgins in His desire for their salvation]. Her heart is moved with desire for him [the rejected still call Jesus 'Lord, Lord'; they love Him emotionally]. She starts dressing herself up, and then is overtaken by desire and rushes to the



door, her hands dripping all kinds of perfume and make up over the lock as she opens it [cp. the virgins going to buy oil, the unworthy trying to prepare themselves all too late, not trusting that their Lord loves them as they are at the moment of His coming]. But he's gone, he *withdraws himself* [all too late, the door is shut, He never knew them]. Her soul fails [the shock of rejection]. She seeks him but doesn't find him, calls but he doesn't answer [Prov. 1:28; Hos. 5:6; the rejected call, but aren't answered; they seek the Lord early, but don't find Him]. She feels tired of her relationship with him ("sick of love"). She is persecuted by the world around her ["condemned with the world"]. If we don't immediately respond to the Lord's knock, we show ourselves to not love Him enough. If we don't open immediately, it's as if we didn't open at all. The Lord wants us as we are, bleary eyed and without our make up, but with a basic overriding love of Him, and faith in the depth of His love, which will lead us to immediately go out to meet Him. This will be the ultimate and crucial divide- between those who believe in the Lord's love for us; and those who think they need to make themselves good enough for Him. Solomon called to the girl through the keyhole: "...my undefiled...". But she doesn't want to immediately come to Him because she doesn't want to meet him with 'defiled' feet (:2,3). She couldn't believe his words, that in his eyes, she was *undefiled*. And the enormity of the passion of Christ for us is likewise so hard for us to accept. In 3:1 we find the girl again at night, dreaming of having Solomon with her. But when one night he does actually come, she doesn't go to meet him immediately. And there's a warning for us. Like Israel we may 'desire the day of the Lord', study prophecy about it, write about it, enthuse about it. But when He comes, to what end will it be to us? Will we *in a moment* drop everything and go to Him, believing that He loves us just as we are? Or will we run off to buy oil, slap make up on...? She finally realized that he had loved her for who she was, how she was. But it was tragically too late. He'd gone. We need to learn that lesson *now*, to know the love of Christ... so that in that moment when we know for sure 'He's back!', we will without hesitation *go to Him* with that perfect / mature love, that casts out fear.

6:13 Solomon boasts that he has many Jewish queens and concubines, but there is only one woman, the Egyptian, that he truly loves (6:8,9); he even calls her his "sister", associating himself thereby with Egypt. Perhaps this tension between the two groups- the Jerusalem women and the Egyptian girl and her family- is behind the enigmatic reference to "the company of two armies" or "the dance of the two camps" or lines. She suspects there may be two camps in Solomon's mind.

7:12 See on 8:1.

8:1 She deeply wished that Solomon was her brother, i.e. an Egyptian, because in that case their relationship could be much more open, they would not be despised because of their love, and Solomon could come and live in her mother's house back in Egypt. Clearly she was attracted to Solomon rather than to the God of Israel. In :2,3 she seems to be saying 'I'll have sex with you, as you offered in 7:12, *if you agree to be an Egyptian*' (and 4:16; 5:1,4-6 could imply they *did* have intercourse).

8:5 The daughters of Jerusalem mock her by saying this. We expect a romantic song to end with the wedding; but it doesn't. It ends with the couple parting; and this dream wedding is no more than the Egyptian girl fantasizing. The fact the wedding 'scene' or dream comes in the middle of the song rather than at the end is again a subversion of the whole genre of romance. The climax is in the wrong place. And this just indicates how unfulfilling are relationships which flout Divine principles.

8:12 She utters the final warning to the daughters of Jerusalem not to stimulate Solomon, and then breaks down with the lament that jealousy is cruel as death (:6) and unrequited love is impossible; Solomon's true love cannot be bought by her. The daughters of Jerusalem then speak of how they have a younger sister whose breasts aren't yet developed, but they will care for her until she is ready for Solomon (:8,9). The Egyptian girl then reminisces in the past tense: "I was a wall, and my breasts were like fortress towers; then I found acceptance in his eyes" (8:10). Solomon throughout the Songs has commented positively upon her breasts; and now she is left to lament that that is all just how it was, it's all over now. She then makes the enigmatic comment about how Solomon has a vineyard which he leases out, and yet she is a vineyard which belongs to her alone. The Songs have likened her to a vineyard (2:13,15), but Solomon's vineyard, she says, was associated with Baal-Hamon- Lord / husband of a multitude. She finally realized that he was a womanizer, who would go on to have over 1000 women in his life... Lord [or husband] of a multitude. Perhaps his 1000 wives and concubines lay behind her reference to the 1000 shekels that Solomon can have for his vineyard (:12). But now she was splitting up with him, her vineyard was hers alone, her grapes were now solely at her disposal and were not his any more. The final couplet of the Song is one of bitter sarcasm, typical of the worst order of romantic breakup. Solomon says that his "companions"- the daughters of Jerusalem whom she had so hated- are listening carefully to her, as he is. And she responds by telling him to run away, whilst still calling him her "beloved"- for although jealousy is cruel as the grave, her love for him was unquenchable by many waters. So the Song ends with Solomon in rather a bad light- off to his next women, whilst the Egyptian girl walks off the scene bitterly protesting her love for him and how she's a victim of circumstance and jealousy. Yet Solomon, presumably, authored the Song. We read it therefore in the same way as we do Ecclesiastes- his jaded statement of how life has been for him, how he sought fulfilment of his human lusts but it never worked out, leaving him with a tragic sense of unfulfilment because he had not gone God's way.

1:2 'Heaven and earth' are used here to describe a whole system of things; maybe the 'heavens' refer to the leaders of Judah, and the 'earth' the ordinary people. Verse 10 addresses the rulers and ordinary people separately in keeping with this. When we read in other Scriptures of the 'heavens and earth' being destroyed, we have to understand this figuratively, as referring to an entire system of things, human society- rather than the literal Heaven, which is God's dwelling place, and the earth, upon which He intends to establish His eternal Kingdom at Christ's return.

1:7 *Is desolate... are burned*- But this hadn't yet happened at the time Isaiah was prophesying. But so certain was God's word of fulfilment that he could speak in the present tense. We likewise should try to envisage prophesied future things as if they effectively are now- and live accordingly.

1:9 *We would have been as Sodom*- But v. 10 speaks to them as if they *are* Sodom. They were as Sodom to God, but for the sake of the faithful remnant, He wasn't judging them as Sodom. This shows how faithful third parties can have a huge effect upon the destiny of an unspiritual mass of God's people- so sensitive is God to the righteousness of even one man, as exemplified supremely in the achievement of Christ's work for us.

2:2 'Mountains' are used figuratively in the Bible to refer to kingdoms. Here we have a prophecy of the future establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, centred on Jerusalem. The Bible teaches the literal return of Christ to earth to establish God's Kingdom here, rather than the righteous going to Heaven at death.

2:5 In view of the great future hope of God's Kingdom, God's people should in this life live in the spirit of it, and walk in God's light now as they will eternally.

2:7 The reference to silver, gold, horses and chariots recalls God's forbidding of Israel to trade with other nations in order to get these things, lest they become proud and fear Yahweh alone (Dt. 17:16-20). They did exactly that- and became proud, which is the very reason God wanted to destroy them as this chapter explains in such a repeated manner. Wealth and human strength lead to pride and idolatry- that principle is just as true today. Yet we can so easily seek those things, and the worldly associations through which they can apparently be acquired... Yet humility is of the essence, and this comes from being forced to trust in God alone.

2:20 In the day of Christ's return, bank accounts, property, investments etc. will be totally irrelevant, indeed people will seek to dissociate themselves from such things. Yet we live in the presence of God's glory and majesty every day of this life, if only we would perceive it.

3:9 *The look of their faces testify against them. They parade their sin*- God's intense awareness of and sensitivity to human behaviour extends even to His noticing of their body language (see too :16). Out of all the many things for which He could have condemned His people, He focuses on pride. Pride is simply so extremely abhorrent to God. "Testify against them" is legal language- their own body language as it were stands up in court in the witness box and condemns them, and in this sense they "brought judgment upon themselves". It is they rather than God who ask for the sentence of condemnation. He as the final judge arises to proclaim the verdict (:13), but it is Judah who have asked for it. Judgment is in this sense ongoing; it's not that God will only open the books and consider our case at Christ's return. Our own behaviour right now is the statement of the witness in the box, with God right now making the judgment and assessing that witness (:13).

3:16 Again, God notices and condemns the body language of people, so closely does He analyze human behaviour and so hypersensitive is He to any human pride; see on :9.

4:5 The allusion is to the pillar of cloud and fire which led Israel through the wilderness. Israel's history, like our personal lives, is a wilderness journey, led by the Angel in the cloud and fire; but finally the pillar comes to rest, over Jerusalem.

5:3 *Please judge between Me and My vineyard*- At times, God invites us to judge Him (see Rom. 3:4). We may find this idea of putting God in the dock to be inappropriate and something we shy away from; but every time we doubt that in fact God has created an ideal environment for our bearing of spiritual fruit, this is in fact what we are doing.

5:4 God has done absolutely everything possible so that we His vineyard brings forth fruit. We need to remember this when we complain that if only this or that situation would be different in my life, then I could bring forth far more fruit to God. Jesus based His parable of the vineyard on this song (Mt. 21:33-41). But He concludes it rather differently. Instead of the vineyard being destroyed, the workers (the Jews) are destroyed in judgment and the vineyard is given to other workers (the body of Christ). But the same fruit is required of us as it was from them- justice and righteousness towards others (:7). In these very two things, we exalt God if we exalt the lowly by giving them justice (:16).

5:5,6 This describes how Judah was trampled by invaders and left waste for 70 years whilst Judah were in captivity in Babylon. God's hope was that the vineyard would again be fruitful at their return, but it wasn't.

5:9 *In my ears*- Isaiah spoke publically what God had spoken in his ears. The spirit of the prophets should be our spirit in our testimony for Jesus (Rev. 19:10). Jesus confirms this by telling us that what we (like Isaiah) hear in the ear, we are to openly proclaim (Mt. 10:27). It must've been hard and counter-instinctive for Isaiah to proclaim his message to a people who generally didn't want to hear nor have their comfort zones invaded- just as it is for us.

5:13 *For lack of knowledge*- This "lack" was a moral issue, not an intellectual one. To 'know' God doesn't mean to amass theory, but to not follow the selfish materialism criticized in the previous verses.

5:15,16 Humility exalts God; this paradox is found throughout the Bible, supremely in the exaltation of the supremely humble Jesus to the greatest height.

5:26 The Gentile nations situated at the end or borders of Judah came and attacked her from their own motives, but ultimately God was using them and had called them to come and do His work of judgment. Total unbelievers are in God's hand and are moved around the board of life by God in relation to His intentions for His people.

6:1 In Isaiah 6:1-4 we have a vision of "the Lord high and lifted up", enthroned in the temple, with an earthquake, the temple filled with smoke, the doorposts that held up the veil being shaken (with the implication that the veil falls; 6:4). Rev. 15:5-8, building on this passage, has the veil being removed, the Most Holy opened, and the temple filled with smoke. This sends the mind straight to the rending of the temple veil at the crucifixion and the earthquake (Mt. 27:51). The Lord "high and lifted up" is a phrase that occurs later in Isaiah (52:13), concerning the crucified Lord Jesus, lifted up and exalted "very high" by the cross. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a prophetic vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. When Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness, as we should be before the cross: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. The vision of the cross convicts men of their sin, and yet

inspires them to go forward in service. Rev. 4:9 alludes to the Isaiah 6 vision, and applies it to the future judgment. Yet silhouetted within the vision of the judgment throne is a slain lamb (Rev. 5:6), as if before the judgment, all will be aware of the Lord's sacrifice. The accepted will utter praise immediately after realising the wonderful verdict pronounced for them- in terms of praising the Lord Jesus for his sacrifice, and recognising their eternal debt to the blood of His cross (Rev. 5:9). The cross and the judgment and reward are connected. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, He Himself foretold that His death would be "the judgment of this world". Whenever we come before the cross we come before our judgment, and therefore self-examination at the breaking of bread service is natural.

7:12 False humility is as obnoxious to God as human pride.

7:14 This prophecy is applied to the Lord Jesus, the final "Emmanuel" ['God with us'] in Mt. 1:23. But clearly the prophecy had a primary fulfilment in the time of Isaiah (perhaps in 8:3,4). God's prophecies could be validated by those who first heard them, because they would have a fulfilment in their times (Dt. 18:22), but they also often had their major fulfilment in far distant times.

8:6 *This people have refused the waters of Shiloah*- Referring to how Isaiah had stood by the gentle waters in 7:3 and urged them not to fear the Syria-Ephraim confederacy but trust in God, who for all their sins was prepared to deliver them from that threat. Yet instead they tried to find salvation from it by human means. Because of this, God was going to go ahead and bring the Assyrians upon them as He had initially planned. Notice that although He had threatened to do this from the start of Isaiah's prophecy, He gave them a potential way out by asking them to trust in Him and not fear Ephraim's threatened invasion. But they failed that test.

8:18 *I and the children whom Yahweh has given me*- This applies not only to Isaiah's natural children but to his "disciples" who formed a school of prophets who also preached God's word to Judah (:16). Yet this is quoted in Heb. 2:13 as a proof that Christ is of the same nature as us. We are therefore invited to see Isaiah here as a type of Christ, and us as that small group of supporters who assisted him in teaching God's word to a generally unresponsive people. We too are to be people of sign to those around us.

8:20 This is to be our attitude too- we are to assess the claims of others by how far they are in harmony with God's word. By turning to His word in this way, we are 'consulting with our God' rather than men (:19).

9:2 Quoted in Mt. 4:13-16 about how Jesus began His ministry in the areas of northern Israel which were most despised by devout Jews for being associated with Gentiles. God loves working in this way- firstly revealing Himself to those despised by others.

9:6 For to us a child is born- This must have had some primary fulfilment in the promised son of sign who had been promised in Isaiah's time in previous chapters (7:14; 8:3). This son was to be known as 'God with us', 'Immanuel', but this didn't make him God Himself in person. The major fulfilment of the prophecy in Jesus likewise doesn't make Him to be God Himself. His *name* was to be called "Wonderful, Counsellor, Divine Warrior"; Jesus as God's Son carried God's Name (Jn. 5:43), and therefore all the titles of God can be applied to Him. The list of titles here seems borrowed from the traditional titles of the rulers of the surrounding nations. The point was that Messiah was to be Israel's true king, reigning on God's behalf and carrying His Name and authority.

9:7 Christ will rule “on the throne of David” in the sense that His Kingdom on earth will have a literal centre in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Lk. 1:31-35).

9:12 *With open mouth*- The nations surrounding Judah are here likened to a beast; when we later read of a dramatic beast in conflict with God’s people in the last days, this may also refer to a confederacy comprised of the nations which surround Israel.

10:7 *He doesn’t mean so*- Unbelieving people and entire nations can be controlled by God to do His purpose, but their hearts are far from consciously realizing the role they are playing. Assyria was used by God to punish various Gentile nations and also Judah to some extent, but when he went too far and thought he would destroy the Jerusalem temple because Yahweh was merely another idol who couldn’t withstand his strength (:11-13)- then God punished him. Truly all things are for our sakes as God’s people (2 Cor. 4:15), and God even watches and disciplines those unbelievers who play a role in our lives if they intend to go further than what God has intended. His level of involvement in human life is awesome. We need to remember that in those times when we may feel God to be distant and uninvolved.

10:20 *Will no more again lean on him who struck them*- God’s people had a bizarre habit of worshipping the very idols which their enemies worshipped. Any worship of this world’s idols is just as bizarre, but in the heat of our human situation, we don’t see the absurdity of it as we should.

10:22 This is quoted in Rom. 9:27 and the remnant is interpreted as the minority of Israel who would believe in Christ. Always God works with relatively small numbers. Israel were one of the smallest of the nations in their world, and yet God chose them; and yet out of them, He finally worked only with a remnant. In the context of Romans 9, Paul also appears to understand God’s definition of a remnant here as meaning that they were a remnant only by grace; as if even our correct belief and living before God is to some degree a result of His gracious calling.

10:25 *My anger will be directed to his destruction*- God’s anger isn’t emotion out of control. His anger was against Judah, and He was using Assyria to punish them; but He can assure His people that soon that anger will be redirected against the Assyrian, and He will save Jerusalem itself, although the rest of the land of Judah would be conquered- :28-30 describe the Assyrian advance through the other cities of Judah. Even whilst angry with Judah, God felt sorry for them- hence “You poor Anathoth!” (:30). In wrath He remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2).

11:1 Jesus was the branch whose root was in David, son of Jesse; He was a literal descendant of David through Mary (Acts 2:30). He therefore couldn’t have personally pre-existed before His birth of her.

11:2 These words were clearly true of Christ (Lk. 4:18).

11:4 The descriptions of how Christ in His life and future Kingdom would bring justice to the poor is set within the context of Isaiah’s repeated condemnation of Judah for not doing justice to the poor (3:14; 10:2). He would be an embodiment of all that God’s people ought to have been; had they followed God’s commandments, they could have been His Kingdom on earth. But they failed, as we do. Therefore Christ is presented as the essence of God’s Kingdom, it’s even one of His titles (Lk. 17:21). If we want to understand what the Kingdom of God will essentially be like, we must look at the character of Christ. If that’s not what we wish to be in ourselves 24/7, there will be no point in our being in His Kingdom. But if we long to be like that, and for the whole world to be as Him, then the coming Kingdom of God is truly good news for us.

11:9 A clear prophecy of God's future Kingdom to be established on earth under Christ's rulership- and not in Heaven.

12:6 *The Holy One of Israel is great in the midst of you*- God Himself personally, perhaps manifested through His Son but perhaps in person, will ultimately dwell literally in Jerusalem.

13:1 Prophesying like this against a city like Babylon would've been as bizarre as declaring that the world's great cities such as London, Moscow or New York will soon become deserted wasteland because God is angry with their pride (:19). Isaiah's faith, and that of his hearers, would've been sorely tested in preaching and believing this message; just as our proclamation of Christ's return is a challenge to our faith when we consider its' real implications for our current world.

13:12 *I will make people more valuable than fine gold*- The value and meaning of persons will be the principle which is to be enforced upon this earth by the destruction of all those systems which mean otherwise.

13:13 Heavens and earth are used figuratively here to describe a system of things- see on 1:2. There is nothing imperfect in Heaven which needs judgment or destruction.

13:20-22 Much has been made of the fact that the historical site of Babylon has been deserted for long periods. But there have been attempts to rebuild it at times and some dwelling there. This prophecy must therefore have its final fulfilment when Christ returns, which suggests there will be a literal Babylon in existence, persecuting God's people as did the historical Babylon. Perhaps the fall of Babylon at Christ's return which is described in Revelation has a literal element to it. Bible students therefore watch the situation in Iran and Iraq, the areas of historical Babylon and Assyria, with great interest.

14:12 It is assumed by some that Lucifer was once a powerful angel who sinned at Adam's time and was therefore cast down to earth. This isn't Biblical. The words "Devil", "Satan" and "angel" never occur in this chapter. This is the only place in Scripture where the word "Lucifer" occurs in some translations. There is no evidence that Isaiah 14 is describing anything that happened in the garden of Eden; if it is, then why are we left 3,000 years from the time of Genesis before being told what really happened there? Lucifer is described as being covered in maggots (:11) and mocked by men (:16) because he no longer has any power; so there is no justification for thinking that Lucifer is now on earth leading believers astray. Why is Lucifer punished for saying, "I will ascend into heaven" (:13), if he was already there? Lucifer is to rot in sheol [the grave] (:11). Seeing angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36), Lucifer therefore cannot be an angel; the language is more suited to a man. It wasn't until Milton's *Paradise Lost* that the term 'Lucifer' took on any connotation of 'Satan' or a force of evil in secular thinking. Isaiah 13-23 is a series of "burdens" on various nations, e.g. Babylon, Tyre, Egypt. 14:4, sets the context as being a parable against the king of Babylon. The prophecy is therefore about the human king of Babylon, who is described as the morning star. He is clearly defined as a man in :16, a king like any other king (:9,10). In the parable, this star proudly decides to "ascend (higher) into heaven...exalt my throne above the (other) stars of God" (:13). "The stars of God" can refer to the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9; Joel 3:15; Dan. 8:10). Because of this, the star is cast down to the earth. The star represents the king of Babylon. Daniel chapter 4 explains how Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon had a pride which reached unto heaven (Dan. 4:22). Because of this made as an animal (Dan. 4:33). This sudden humbling of one of the world's most powerful men to a deranged lunatic was such a dramatic event as to call for the parable about the falling of the morning star from heaven to earth. Stars are symbolic of powerful people (Gen. 37:9; Is. 13:10; Ez. 32:7). Ascending to heaven and falling from heaven are Biblical idioms often used for increasing in pride and

being humbled (Job 20:6; Jer. 51:53; Lam. 2:1; Mt. 11:23. Is. 14:8 records the relief that now the “Lucifer” figure would no longer cut down cedars in Lebanon and hew mountains. This is exactly the language used by Nebuchadnezzar: “What no former king had done, I achieved: I cut through steep mountains, I split rocks, I opened passages and constructed a straight road for the transport of cedars... To Marduk, my king, mighty cedars... The abundant yield of the Lebanon”. Clearly the figure spoken of in Is. 14 was Nebuchadnezzar. 14:12 says that Lucifer was to be “cut down to the ground” – implying he was a tree. This provides a further link with Daniel 4:8–16, where Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are likened to a tree being cut down.

15:5 *My heart cries out for Moab!*- Isaiah was emotionally caught up in his message. Having prophesied how Moab, the enemy of his people, would weep and cry out, Isaiah starts crying for them. Like God, he had no joy in the death or judgment of his enemies. He grieved at any person who turns against God, even if they were his personal enemy. The message of Christ’s return is also a message of judgment on this earth, and we must ask ourselves whether we have ever cried tears for the lost? See on 16:7.

16:7 *Moab will wail for Moab*- And yet Isaiah the Jew wailed for Moab too, such was his identity with and grief for the lost; see on 15:5.

16:9 Therefore I will weep with the weeping of Jazer- Jazer was part of Moab, so Isaiah is saying that he wept as the Moabites did, so much did he identify with the tragedy of his enemies’ position. See on 15:5; 16:7; 21:3; 24:16.

16:10 *I have made the shouting stop*- Isaiah here recognizes the awesome power of the inspired words he was declaring, and felt identified with God to a very deep extent.

16:12 *He will not prevail*- Prayer is here likened to a struggle, as in Hos. 12:4. It’s not a mindless uttering of familiar words and phrases, but real, focused engagement with the mind and heart of God.

17:4 *The glory of Jacob will be made thin*- The context of this section has been a series of prophetic burdens condemning various Gentile nations. And now Isaiah turns to God’s people with a message of judgment, as if to make the point that they are no better than the sinful world around them.

17:13 *Chased like the chaff*- This is the language of Dan. 2:35,44 concerning what will happen to all Gentile nations at Christ’s return and the establishment of His Kingdom on the ruins of the kingdoms of men. The fearsome awfulness of that day (:14) must never cease to be part of our thinking; with the result that we beseech people to become part of God’s true Israel.

18:7 The intention of all God’s judgments is that some will repent, drop their pride and come to identify with Him and His people. His judgments aren’t therefore the outpouring of the uncontrolled anger of an irritated deity, but they are spiritually constructive in their ultimate intent. We see this too in the smaller experience we have of Divine judgment for our sins in this life.

19:2 God can give a community the spirit of division as a sign of His judgment (also in :14), and so a divided community is one which is displeasing to God. If we seek, create and glorify division, we are effectively making ourselves worthy of God’s condemnation.

19:3-13 This passage speaks of how Egyptian wisdom is in fact foolish, and will be declared as such in Egypt’s final judgment; and how God will thereby destroy the wisdom of this world, for Egypt is a symbol of the world. Paul surely had his mind on this passage in 1 Cor. 1:19,20, where he speaks of just the same principles; that God will bring down the wisdom of this world, and that worldly wisdom is foolishness with Him (as in Rom. 1:22). What the world will learn only when it’s too late, we are to learn now. This is not an appeal to any spirit of anti-intellectualism in itself, but rather the simple teaching that what is worldly wise and smart is foolishness with God; and acts and attitudes of faith which may appear foolish in the eyes of the world, are in fact the true wisdom.

19:21 This prediction that the Egyptians will finally turn to Israel’s God hasn’t yet been fulfilled; it therefore awaits its’ fulfilment around the time of Christ’s return.



20:6 *The inhabitants of this coast land*- The people of Judah. God speaks in a very positive way of how He believes that His people will cease trusting in Egypt after seeing Isaiah's graphic portrayal of how the Egyptians were to be led captive. Yet as later Isaiah makes clear, His people didn't 'get it'; they continued trusting in Egypt rather than in God for salvation from their enemies. Yet God speaks as if they will positively respond. This reflects His hopefulness (as in Mt. 21:37). In this we see the hopefulness of God, and this should be our spirit in our witness to others, preaching with a sure hope in response, as the shepherd who goes looking for the lost sheep in the spirit of searching until it is found (Lk. 15:4).

21:3,4 Isaiah's emotional grief for those outside of God's people as he spoke of their judgment is really impressive- see on 16:9.

21:4 What would have been pleasure for Isaiah- that the great enemy of His people was to be judged- became awful for him as he realized the tragic human destruction it involved. Strangely, he achieved identity with Belshazzar king of Babylon, who likewise had his evening of pleasure broken up by fear- see on :5. Unconsciously, we too can achieve identity with the objects of our witness if we have a true heart for people as Isaiah did.

21:5 This is exactly the situation of Daniel 5, where Belshazzar has a feast, sees the writing on the wall, and then suddenly there was a cry that the Medes had attacked and taken the city.

21:12 "*What hour of the night will it come?*". "*Turn back again.*"- The exact timing of the fulfilment of God's prophecies is dependent to some extent upon human response. The ending of the night of judgment for these people would be when they turned back, i.e. repented. The morning might come, or the night might continue- it depended upon their response. The same idea is found in Acts 1:7,8; Mk. 13:28-33, where the answer to the question 'When will Jesus return?' is basically: 'Preach to Israel; lead them to repentance. That's when the Lord Jesus will return'.

22:8 *He took away the covering of Judah*- God's judgment makes a person naked (Hos. 2:3; 7:1; Rev. 16:15). Now is the time to see ourselves as we really are before God, rather than have to be stripped of all appearances at the final day of truth.

22:10,11 This appears to refer to the preparations made by Hezekiah against the Assyrian invasion (2 Kings 20:20). Yet God perceived that the hearts of the people who did the work did it thinking that this piece of human ingenuity would save them rather than their faith in God. Hezekiah, whose initiative it was, appears to have acted with faith in God. We see therefore how within a group of people apparently doing the Lord's work, God perceives some may do it in faith in God, seeing the work as merely a means to an end, of His deliverance; whereas others trust in the work itself with no faithful heart.

22:13 *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die*- Quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:32 as the attitude we may as well have if we have no hope of resurrection to eternal life. Exactly because we will *not* die eternally, we are to *not* live merely for today, like the Jews in Isaiah's time, shrugging at the prospect of future judgment. Paul is saying that he for one *would* live like that if he had no hope of eternity. Our belief in future salvation has profound effect upon our lives today.

22:22 Applied by Jesus to Himself in Rev. 3:7. Eliakim could perhaps have been the Messiah figure of his time, but it seems he failed to live up to the potential, and so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to Jesus. God sets up so many potentials for individuals and for His people as a whole; it's so tragic for Him and for us all that so much potential is unfulfilled.

23:9 *To stain the pride of all glory*- All the various prophecies of judgment could have chosen many sinful aspects of the peoples' behaviour as the reason for them. But repeatedly, pride is the sin which God focuses upon. God is so sensitive to human pride that He even notices it amongst

those not in relationship with Him, and takes the trouble to punish it and bring it down. It is quite simply so important to be humble. God gave Judah all this information about the impending fall of the surrounding nations so that His people would perceive the principles He works according to, and therefore humble themselves lest the same inevitable judgment for pride come upon them. We are intended to reflect upon the people who form the environment God has surrounded us with, and to learn from their rises and falls.

23:15 God's prophesied 70 year silencing of Tyre was perhaps to encourage Judah to believe that the prophecies of their 70 year captivity in Babylon and subsequent revival would likewise be fulfilled (Jer. 25:12; 29:10). God may make situations occur in the unbelieving world around us which parallel our own, in order that we may be encouraged that His word will come true in our lives and that His principles will be upheld in the end.

24:1 The earth, moon and sun (:23) are clearly spoken of figuratively, to describe the system of things in Judah- see on 1:2. However, often in this chapter we must remember that the Hebrew *eret* translated "earth" can mean both the earth as in the whole planet, and also "the land", as specifically the land of Israel or the land promised to Abraham.

*Empty... waste* is an allusion to how the earth was originally empty and waste in Gen. 1:2 (the same Hebrew words are used). The implication is that God was going to make a new creation with Judah out of the emptiness which His judgments would create. Again we see that God even has a creative purpose in the destruction of the wicked and judgment of our sins- hence to make something empty and waste is in fact to *create* something. Yet even this intended new creation of Judah after the 70 years captivity didn't work out; the concept has been reapplied to how by baptism in Christ, we become a new creation once we have allowed God to make empty and waste our old personality (2 Cor. 5:17).

24:4 *The world languishes... the proud people of the earth languish*- We could probably understand "the world" here and often in the prophets as referring to people, i.e. society, rather than any reference to the physical planet.

24:16 Isaiah's sorrow to the extent of wanting to pine away is purposefully juxtaposed alongside the reference to the fact that there would be a righteous remnant out of all the destruction. This is to show how pained he was at the fact that so many would be lost. We noted his extreme compassion for those who left or never knew God's ways in the note on 16:9.

25:6 A reference to the marriage supper of the Lord Jesus being held in Jerusalem, on the temple mount, at His return (Rev. 19:9).

25:8 *He has swallowed up death forever*- Quoted in 1 Cor. 15:54 about how death will be no more after Christ has returned, we have been resurrected and immortalized.

The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces- Quoted in Rev. 7:17; 21:4 as being done by God at Christ's return when the righteous are given eternal life.

25:9 These will be our feelings after Christ has returned, and we stand immortalized before His judgment seat. Our faith in God's final, visible intervention on this earth and in our own lives will have finally come to realization.

26:1 *In that day*- See notes on 25:6,8,9. This day is the day of Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

26:10 This seems to be saying that it would be pointless to allow wicked people into God's Kingdom because even there they would not wish to be righteous. If we wish above all things to be eternally righteous, then the Kingdom of God will be for us.

26:14 The Gentile nations not in saving covenant relationship with God will not be resurrected. Human beings have no inherent 'immortal soul'; immortality is revealed only to God's people (2 Tim. 1:10). Those who don't know the Gospel will not be resurrected to judgment, nor will they be

punished after death; they return to dust as the animals (Ps. 49:20). Knowledge is the basis of responsibility to God (Lk. 12:47,48).

26:20,21 These verses are speaking of the situation around the time of the resurrection at Christ's return (:19). It seems God's people will be somehow hidden from the effects of the final judgments which will come upon the earth, in the same way as the Israelites in Egypt were untouched by the plagues which came on the rest of their surrounding world.

27:3 The vineyard owner in this simile is almost obsessive- he waters it continually, and day and night watches its borders. This unusual level care of God for the vineyard of His people (5:7) is so that the vineyard has no excuse for not bringing forth fruit. God has done all that He can so that we should bring forth fruit (5:4). We cannot therefore excuse our lack of fruitfulness by saying that if we had a better or different situation, we would then be fruitful. God has given us exactly the required environment in order to be fruitful, and the level of His care should never be doubted.

27:9 *This is all the fruit of taking away his sin-* God isn't saying that if Israel destroyed their altars, then He would forgive them. Instead His way of grace is to take away sin and then hope that we will make response to that, in this case, by destroying the altars.

28:1 Here we see again God's persistent hatred of pride; He condemned drunkenness because it made people proud (see too :3).

28:13 *Therefore the word of Yahweh will be to them precept after precept... line on line-* This is declared as a judgment upon Judah, with the result that it would make them fall. Israel throughout their Biblical history always claimed to be believers in Yahweh and to be obedient to His word; their sin was in that they additionally did other things and worshipped other gods which were quite contrary to God's word. The problem was in their attitude to the word of God, which they claimed to study and be aware of. They saw it as merely a series of disjointed, unrelated commands; they didn't perceive the overall spirit behind it. Our Bible reading can be the same, indeed it is often like this for unbelievers who start reading the Bible for the first time. This is why we must pray for God to guide and assist our Bible reading so that we make the connections and join the dots, until we hear the voice of God Himself speaking to us through those lines and precepts.

28:15 *Because you have said-* it's unlikely these people actually openly said these words. But this was how they thought in their hearts, and God reads our quiet thoughts as if we have spoken them out loud. To be spiritually minded is the essence of Christian living.

28:16 Quoted in 1 Pet. 2:6-8 about Jesus, who is either a stone to be stumbled over (8:14), or to be built upon as the foundation of our lives. Those who encounter Christ cannot be passive to Him or unaffected by that encounter; knowledge brings responsibility.

28:24-28 Although the trial and judgments God brings into our lives may appear pointlessly repetitious, they aren't. They are for a limited time and to a specific end.

29:3 *I will encamp against you... and will lay siege against you-* It was understood that each city had its god, who was supposed to protect it from invaders. But here the God of Israel says that He Himself will camp with Jerusalem's enemies, and enable and support their campaign against His own people. This was more radical a concept of God at that time than we can likely realize. Yet it's all very hard for us to understand that the God of all grace can allow and bring about the most awful suffering in the lives of His children- with the aim of developing us even through our weaknesses so that we shall enter His Kingdom.

29:10 *Yahweh has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep-* Quoted in Rom. 11:8 about what God has done to all Israel, in closing their eyes to perceiving Jesus as their Messiah- in response to the fact that they had already closed their eyes to Him. There were many similarities between the Jews of Isaiah's time and those of Christ's (see on :13).

29:13 These words are quoted in Mt. 15:7,8 and interpreted by Jesus as a specific prophecy of the hypocrites who confronted Him in the first century. But the context of Isaiah 29 clearly requires that they had relevance to the Jews of Isaiah's day. In this we see the uniquely living, constantly relevant nature of God's word. It can speak to different generations in different contexts with perfect and Divinely designed relevance. This is the result of the Bible being written by the inspiration process of God's Spirit; it isn't, therefore, like the black print and white paper of any human book.

30:1 This must have been very hard for Isaiah to tell Judah, because for three years he had walked barefoot amongst his people to try to persuade them how Egypt would go into captivity, and Judah should hope only in God (20:1-4). Our tendency too is to treat God as a kind of extra insurance policy; to turn firstly to human strength, and only to Him if all else fails. His desire is that we should trust totally in Him, and however we might use 'Egypt', it should never be our strength and trust.

30:6 *They carry their rich gifts*- This is a picture of the people of Judah braving wild animals in the desert (Dt. 8:15) as they carried their wealth down into Egypt, reversing their exodus, in order to buy Egyptian support against Assyria. People will go to huge efforts and expense to obtain human strength; when the answer is ultimately in God and not man.

30:9 *Lying children*- Yet when He brought them out of Egypt, God had been certain that "Surely they are My people, children that will *not* lie: so He was their saviour" (63:8). The God who can know the end from the beginning was so in love with His people, as He is with us, that He felt the very best about them. Hence the bitter disappointment when those positive hopes were dashed by their fickleness. God has great hopes for each of us.

30:18 *Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you*- There's similar reasoning in 2 Pet. 3:14,15; the reason why the return of Christ is delayed is so that God may be gracious to even more people than He had otherwise planned. God's delay is often because He is seeking a way to be yet more gracious. Hence "Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

30:26 This could be a poetic way of saying that the meaning of time [as defined by sun and moon] will be changed around the time of Christ's return. This would enable the various predicted events to happen with no problem of chronology.

30:33 This language of fire and sulphur ["brimstone"] is clearly figurative and not literal- it speaks of the anger of God in destroying His enemies. This verse clearly describes the death of the Assyrian invaders, as fulfilled in 37:36. There was no literal place of sulphur with an angry God stirring it up with His breath. Likewise the Lord Jesus used the language of Gehenna in a figurative manner- constant fire, brimstone etc. are symbols of total destruction, and shouldn't be forced into a literal reading.

31:3 The implication is that God also has horses and chariots- His invisible Angelic cherubim. Although Judah preferred to believe in the visible horses of Egypt, yet in His amazing grace, God still used His Angelic cherubim to destroy the Assyrians (37:36). This is grace itself.

31:4 *Yahweh of Armies*- God uses this title of Himself in this context to remind Judah that He has armies of Angels at His disposal. Judah were running to Egypt to enlist the help of their human armies; and by doing so were disbelieving that Yahweh really is the Yahweh of Armies of Angels.

31:7 This means that at the time of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time (which is the context of the chapter), the people were still worshipping idols. Yet Hezekiah had supposedly purged Judah of idols. This just shows that true faith is sometimes only found in a minority of God's people; they may go along with the guidance of faithful leadership externally, but even good leaders cannot reform the hearts of individuals. It also shows how the Angelic deliverance of Jerusalem was due to the prayers and faith of a very small remnant, centred around Isaiah and Hezekiah.

32:6 Attitudes to the poor amongst Israel were interpreted by God as blasphemy against Him. In our age, all those baptized into the Name manifest God, and our attitude to them is our attitude to God, and will be the basis of our judgment at the last day (Mt. 25:40).

32:10 It seems Isaiah was making this prophecy a year before it would be fulfilled. His request for the women to wear sackcloth (:12) was a call for them repent- so that the promised judgments might be averted. We note God's granting of full significance and spiritual meaning to women, making an appeal specifically to them- at a time when religion in the surrounding world considered women largely irrelevant in religious decisions, and would never have considered that the repentance of a group of women could have changed the destiny of an entire nation, far beyond whatever their male leaders might decide.

32:14 The threatened judgments against "the city" (also in :19) presumably refers to Jerusalem. It seems that on one hand, it was God's intention to allow the Assyrians to destroy Jerusalem as well as Judah, and yet He saved it for the sake of the faithful minority who were there, based around Isaiah and Hezekiah. God is so sensitive to His people that He is willing to change His stated purpose if He hears powerful prayer and genuine spirituality amongst even a minority.

33:11 *Your breath is a fire that will devour you*- This is a common theme, that the rejected are those who condemn and destroy themselves, often by their own words ("breath").

33:15 *Shuts his eyes from looking at evil*- Very relevant to us in the age when all manner of evil can be viewed without others knowing. This verse teaches that our hands, eyes and ears really can come under our control. There is the impression given that human behaviour is somehow automatic; and yet we clearly can take control of our senses and responses to them.

33:18 This refers to the Assyrian military personnel outside Jerusalem, wisely analyzing the situation as they besieged the city. But Paul alludes to the LXX of this verse in 1 Cor. 1:20, where he says that we too are surrounded by the wise and powerful of this world, but 'Where are they...?' compared to the power of the Gospel of Christ, which declares their wisdom and human strength as nothing. Paul therefore understands each of us as being as it were in essence in the same position as the Jews of Isaiah's time, tempted to rely upon Egypt rather than God, and likely to be awed by the human strength of those things which are against us. And yet we are to see them in the perspective of faith as nothing, as foolish and weak.

33:24 There is a connection between sin and sickness, as made also by Jesus (Mt. 9:5). It doesn't mean that sickness always comes as a result of sin, but rather that because of our fallen state as a result of sin we are generally prone to sickness and death. The ultimate answer to sickness, therefore, is the complete removal of our sin, being counted righteous by God, and therefore being related (by His grace) to eternal life. In our age this is possible through baptism into Christ.

34:8 In human terms, this seems rather unjust. God had called the nations to attack and destroy Judah because of her sins, and yet now He takes vengeance for Zion (as in 35:4) as if she has been unfairly treated, and those nations require punishment for what they did. The final algorithm of God's justice is far beyond our total comprehension, but perhaps we are to perceive in this the passionate love God has for His sinful people- in that He so loved them that even when they were justly punished, He punished those by whom they were punished with great fury. This was in a sense just because they were also sinners. But whoever touches God's people, even when they are in rebellion against Him, has touched Him at a highly sensitive spot. In these things we see the depth of God's love for us, and how He counts us as His very own, and feels to us that way, even when we are in rebellion against Him.

34:10 *Smoke will go up forever; from generation to generation, it will lie waste*- Eternal fire and smoke is again used figuratively, as a symbol of total, permanent destruction. It can't be literal, for the 'eternal' smoke is paralleled with laying calm and desolate for ever. We need to remember this in considering Christ's use of the image of 'eternal fire' as a symbol for complete destruction, rather than forcing his words into any literal interpretation.

35:4 *Vengeance... retribution*- see on 34:8.

35:10 Whatever possible application this may have had to Hezekiah's time (e.g. the return of those who had fled Zion in fear) and what might have been after the destruction of the Assyrian invaders, or at the return of the exiles from Babylon, it is clearly a prophecy of God's future Kingdom on earth when Christ returns. Our joy will be "everlasting", whereas all joy in this life is tinged by the sense that it shall come to an end, the emotion has to subside, with the prospect of death ever before us. The joy we will then have shall have no fading away from a crescendo back into normality, but will have this 'eternal' aspect to it.

36:1 The Assyrian invasion was in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah's reign. He reigned twenty nine years (2 Kings 14:2). His sickness unto death from which he was miraculously healed gave him another 15 years to live (38:5); his serious illness was therefore in the same year in which Judah was invaded. So often, several things go seriously wrong in our lives all at the same time. The chance of that happening is negligible; clearly such negative coincidences are all under God's controlling hand [not that of any cosmic 'Satan' being]. The coincidences would be too great to write off as merely chance. Note also that Hezekiah had lived a good life and acted in faith despite being surrounded by many of weak or weaker faith- and then, double tragedy struck him. Good living is no guarantee of a charmed life now, indeed, given all the Biblical examples of good people like Hezekiah suffering bad things, we should be surprised if we don't receive them.

36:10 The way Rabshakeh uses the term "Yahweh", speaks Hebrew (:11) and is aware of Isaiah's prophecies about Assyria being sent to punish Judah, and the fact that Judah had trusted on Egypt when Yahweh had told them not to (:6), would all suggest that Rabshakeh was an apostate Jew who had gone over to the Assyrian side.

36:16,17 This is a parody of Micah's prophecy of what God's future Kingdom on earth would be like (Mic. 4:4). The allusion is so strong that it would seem Rabshakeh knew that prophecy, confirming the suggestion made under :10 that he was an apostate Jew. The kingdoms of this world offer us a fake kingdom of God in this life- if we submit to them and reject the vision of *God's* Kingdom. Going the way of the world may appear to give all that God's Kingdom offers- but the kingdoms of men shall come to an end, all is not what it seems, they will not last eternally as God's Kingdom will; and it is for us to have the wisdom to see that we face a choice between the Kingdom of God, and the kingdoms of men which are a poor imitation of it.

37:1 In times of crisis, our response should be the same- to turn to God, to His house (the ecclesia), to His word and to His faithful people, asking them to pray for us. Maybe there are times when we can literally place a letter or hospital report on a table and pray to God over it, bringing it as it were in a special sense before Him (:14).

37:7 *A spirit*- Can refer to an attitude of mind. God is quite capable of giving people mindsets, over and above their own thinking. There are many situations in life where we realize that we simply cannot change another's mind. But God can.

37:16 *Yahweh of Armies*- Hezekiah uses that title for God in recognition of the fact that God has armies of invisible Angels far mightier than the armies of the Assyrians which surrounded him.

*You have made heaven and earth*- The Psalms record many other prayers where believers in extremity have been inspired in their faith by the fact that God is creator. As He has created all things that are, it follows that to change one small thing within that creation on the face of one of the smallest planets of the cosmos... is in fact nothing at all difficult for Him. Such inspiration to faith is not present for those who believe the myth that all things evolved without God's creative input.

37:20 *That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are Yahweh*- A common reason given by faithful believers when begging God to hear their prayer. It should be most important to us to see His glory worked out through the answer to our requests, rather than merely personal benefit to us. This approach will also influence what we pray for, as well as how we pray for it.

37:22 *The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and ridiculed you*- This “daughter” refers to the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. But God speaks of them as being far more confident and full of faith than they really were; they feared the Assyrians and didn’t exactly laugh at them. But we see here one of many examples of how God is so thrilled with the faith of His children that He counts what faith and spirituality they have as far more than it actually is, so thrilled by it is He.

37:23 *Against whom have you exalted your voice?*- Rabshakeh spoke with an exalted, loud voice to all the Jews guarding Jerusalem (36:13). But God says that effectively, he had been shouting against the most holy God. God in all His holiness was manifest in those spiritually weak members of His people who were then in Jerusalem. His identity with His people is simply amazing; and it doesn’t end when they become weak or are in double mind about Him, just as it doesn’t in a natural family.

38:1 *In those days*- His sickness was at the same time as the invasion. See on 36:1.

38:3 Hezekiah simply puts his situation before God, he doesn’t actually specifically ask for healing. But God saw the essence of his heart, and read this as a prayer requesting healing and the extension of life. At times, typically during illness, we find it hard to verbalize prayer; and yet God sees to the core of our hearts, and understands what are really our heart’s desires, and understands these as requests to Him.

38:5 *I have heard your prayer, I have seen*- Hezekiah had just been begging God to *hear* and *see* the behaviour of the Assyrians (37:17). God teaches us how to pray through some desperate experience, and then gives us another crisis in which we can as it were practice the style and intensity of prayer which we learnt in the previous experience.

38:19 Hezekiah didn’t want to die because he understood that after death he couldn’t praise God. His understanding of death was as a state of total unconsciousness, where he would meet with neither God nor man (:11). There was no ‘immortal soul’ or conscious survival of death in his theology, these were pagan ideas of the time which he clearly rejected- as should we. The devotional point is that life is for praising God; and given the brevity of it, every minute must be harnessed into His praise, rather than frittered away.

39:8 The Hezekiah story has a spiritually sad ending, with Hezekiah appearing selfishly content that he himself won’t suffer too much for his prideful friendship with the world and indeed, with those who were God’s especial enemies. We inevitably wonder whether in spiritual terms it wouldn’t have been better for him to die when God first offered him the chance to, as it were. We need to consider relatively ‘premature’ deaths in this light; maybe they are a case of ‘die young stay pretty’ in spiritual terms. For it is far better to die in youth and rise again to live eternally, than live a ‘long’ human life to in middle or older age turn away from faith and the hope of the Kingdom.

40:3 Quoted about John the Baptist preaching the Gospel of Christ (Mt. 3:3). Before the final coming of the Lord, there will be a proclamation of this by His people: “Prepare *you* [plural] the way”. As the King’s servants went ahead of him to make the path he had to travel smooth and plain [remember there were no motorways then!], so we go ahead of the returning Lord of all the earth, to prepare the way / road for Him. The fulfilment of this commission by John the Baptist in the first century is therefore a great pattern for our fulfilment of it before the Lord’s *second* coming in our age. And yet *God* prepares His *own* way (43:19; 49:11). The element of unreality here, the ‘new thing’, is that the King Himself prepares His own way or road. The connection with Is. 40:3 is that in the work of preparing the Lord’s way, in the last great preaching appeal of all time in the lead up to the second coming, the Lord Himself will work with us to make that way plain and clear. We are to “cry” unto Zion that “her iniquity is pardoned” (:2), but we are also to ‘cry’ for her to repent, to be “made straight” (:2-4; 58:1). It’s exactly because we have in prospect been forgiven that we are called to repent. The forgiveness has already been granted; iniquity has been pardoned. We are to ‘cry’ out this

fact; and also to 'cry out' for repentance. But we have to respond to that. The world's redemption was achieved through the cross; but we have to appeal to the world to accept it. The same Hebrew word translated 'cry' occurs in the same context in 40:26; 43:1; 45:3,4; 48:12; 54:6, where we read that it is God Himself who calls every one of Israel back to Him, just as He calls every star by its own personal name. And so in our personal calling of men and women, in our crying out to them in these last days to be prepared for the Lord's coming, we are workers together with God. He is crying out to them, through our feeble, shy, embarrassed, uncertain words of witness. Likewise it is God Himself who makes the crooked places straight in 42:16 and 45:2- whereas Is. 40:3, it is we the preachers who are to do this. 40:4 In the prospect of Christ's coming and our meeting with Him, those with a too low self esteem are lifted up, and the proud brought down to their level; so that between them, the prepared people of God are the road over which God's glory in Christ shall advance. "Made low" uses the same word as in Is. 2:11, which predicts that in the day of judgment, the proud looks of man shall be *humbled* [s.w. 'made low']".

40:8 *The word of our God*- Interpreted in 1 Pet. 1:24,25 as the Gospel of Christ.

40:10 Applied by Christ to His second coming in Rev. 22:12. The reward is brought to us from Heaven to earth at His return; we don't go to Heaven after death to receive it. Statements about God are fulfilled in Christ, as His Son who has been given by God all authority to act in His Name; but this doesn't make Jesus God Himself in person.

40:15 *The nations are like a drop in a bucket*- This was said in the context of Judah being tempted to trust in the nations around them rather than in God. Reflection on the extent of His power as seen in the natural creation (:12-14) is intended to inspire faith in practice.

40:17 *Regarded by Him as less than nothing*- This is not to say that God considers human beings as irrelevant; the significance of the human person is ever before us in the Bible. The context of these statements about the smallness of man is the appeal not to trust in human strength but in God, compared to whose strength humanity is nothing.

40:22 *The circle of the earth*- Although people at the time generally believed the earth was flat, God's word doesn't contradict true scientific fact, even though at times He speaks to people in the unscientific language which they can cope with.

40:27 *The justice due me*- The pain of injustice afflicts people in so many ways; but the answer given here is to look to the future day of God's Kingdom, whilst meanwhile remembering God's amazing knowledge and sensitivity to the nuances of every human situation, better than we ourselves know them. His present knowledge and future revelation of judgment is the answer presented to our search for justice today.

41:8 The servant of Isaiah's prophecies is "the seed of Abraham", but Gal. 3:16 interprets this seed as a singular person, the Lord Jesus. The "servant" is therefore both Israel and Jesus. He is their (our) representative, the One to whom every one of God's people should aspire. Wherein Israel failed to fulfil these servant prophecies, the Lord Jesus did. We can now become God's "servant" people, Israel of the Spirit, by baptism into Christ- so that all that is true of Him becomes true of us.

41:22 *Declare the former things*- Not only is God's prediction of future events a sign of His supremacy as God, but we must consider too that He is the only ultimate historian; He alone can attach meaning to the events of history, interpreting in a way so unique that we are persuaded that surely, He alone is God. This is why so much of the Bible is in one sense history, and God's interpretation of it. This of itself ought to persuade us of Him and His word, quite apart from His predictions of future things.



41:25 *He shall come on rulers as on mortar, and as the potter treads clay*- This connects with the prophecy of Dan. 2:44, that Christ's second coming will be like a stone hitting the feet of clay of human kingdoms.

42:3 Quoted about the preaching of Jesus in Mt. 12:18-20. He didn't turn away from human weakness, but rather tried to fan what spiritual fire there was into a greater flame; we should have the same attitude to people. Isaiah prophesied in the context of the Assyrian invasion, at which time Judah were tempted to trust in the "broken reed" of Egypt (2 Kings 18:21). This is the only other time the phrase is used. God was even unwilling to break Egypt, but rather sought even their salvation (Is. 19:24).

42:4 *He will not fail nor be discouraged*- This is a prophecy of Jesus. He had so much to discourage Him, and yet it seems He never felt totally discouraged even once- because He looked at the short term ups and downs of His ministry from a Kingdom perspective, knowing that *ultimately* all would work out. We need to look at the down cycles of our own experience the same way.

42:14 God likens Himself here to a woman; characteristics of both male and female are found in Him, in whose image both male and female were created (Gen. 1:27; 5:1,2).

42:16- see on 40:3.

42:22 *No one says, 'Restore them!'*- Nobody at that time was saying that, but God had prophesied so many times that His people would be restored at the end of 70 years, and Cyrus did indeed make the amazing call to restore Judah then (see Ezra 1). The challenge at Isaiah's time was to view the discouragement of the moment in the context of God's prophetic word- to suffer the apparent silence of God "bearing in mind the time to come" (:23) when one *would* say "Restore them!".

43:4 That God should 'honour' His weak people is amazing. But this is what it means to be loved by God; for the object of love is thereby respected and honoured in the eyes of the lover. And this is how God also sees us today.

43:7 *Each one*- Every single Jew in captivity was created potentially for God's glory. At the end of the 70 years captivity He did indeed command the Persian empire to allow the Jews to return; but the majority chose to stay where they were rather than return to the ruined, hard land of Judah- to glorify God. The frequent emphasis on how "each one" would be gathered shows the colossal significance of the individual human person to God, and how He sees us as individuals rather than merely His people *en masse*.

43:15 *The Creator of Israel- your King* - Because Yahweh God was Israel's creator, therefore He ought to have been their King. If we really believe His creative authority over us, then He will rule in every aspect of our lives; this is an implication of our belief that God created us and we didn't create ourselves by fluke chance.

43:17 *They shall not rise*- Another proof that those who don't know God will die and remain dead. Hence the urgent importance of spreading the knowledge of God to those who have not yet heard.

43:24 *You have wearied Me with your iniquities*- God speaks here of being burdened by Israel's sins- and yet this is a prelude to the passages which speak of the Lord Jesus bearing our sins on the cross (53:4,11,12). He was wearied by Israel's sins even though God does not "grow weary" (40:28) by nature; in His full entering into His people's situation, in His extreme sensitivity to our behavior, He does allow Himself to grow weary with the sins of those with whom He is in covenant relationship. It was this kind of capacity which God has which was supremely revealed in His 'sharing in' the crucifixion of His Son.

44:14-18 The *folly* of sin is only *fully* evident to God. We may go along with the text here, poking fun at the idiocy of idolatry- and yet we all have a tendency to this kind of thing, because every sin is in essence a form of idolatry.

44:22 God appeals for Israel to respond by pointing out that in prospect, He has already forgiven them. This not only inspires our personal repentance, but can be the basis upon which we appeal to others to repent- that for the sake of Christ, God has forgiven them, but they need to claim that and identify with it. Isaiah urged the Jews to return to the land by saying that God had forgiven them, and on this basis He appealed for them to both 'repent' and 'return' to the land. The two terms are related. Thus He showed His grace; forgiveness preceded, not followed, repentance. As Paul put it, the goodness of God leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). And we are asked to show that same "goodness" of God to others, being "kind [s.w. 'goodness'] one to another... forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). We too are to show this grace of forgiveness-before-repentance; but perhaps in no other area has formalized, institutionalized Christianity failed worse. The Greek word translated "goodness" is rendered "gracious" in 1 Pet. 2:3- newly converted babes in Christ taste of this gracious goodness, and it leads to repentance.

44:26 *Who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers-* The singular servant is equated with His "messengers", whose "counsel" to others is the word which is Jesus, the true servant. If we are "in Christ" then we are His witnesses, and He is especially with us in our witness for Him.

44:28 The command of Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to Judah and rebuild their temple at his expense as recorded in Ezra 1 was clearly a result of God working on the hearts of unbelievers to make them do things which otherwise have little sense or human wisdom. The tragedy is that most of the Jews preferred the soft life in Babylon and didn't return.

45:5-7 Of especially significant influence upon Judaism were the Persian views of Zoroastrianism. This was a philosophy which began in Persia about 600 B.C., and was growing in popularity when Judah went to Babylon / Persia in captivity. This philosophy taught that there was a good god of light (Mazda) and an evil god of darkness (Ahriman). Is. 45:5-7 is a clear warning to the Jews in captivity not to buy into this – Israel's God *alone* made the light and the darkness, the good and the calamity or "evil". The Jews were influenced by the Zoroastrian idea that somehow God Himself would never cause evil in our lives – and therefore, God is to be seen as somehow distanced from all good or evil actions, as these are under the control of the good and evil gods. The fact is, God personally is passionately involved with this world and with our lives; and so it *is* He who brings about the dark and the light, good and evil. "In pre-exilic Hebrew religion, Yahweh made all that was in heaven and earth, both of good and of evil. The Devil did not exist". During their captivity in Babylon, the Jews shifted towards understanding that there was actually a separate entity responsible for disaster. Hence Isaiah 45:5-8 warns them not to adopt the views of Babylon in this area, but to remain firm in their faith that God, their God, the God of Israel, the one and only Yahweh, was the ultimate source of all things, both positive and negative, having no equal or competitor in Heaven. This becomes a frequent theme of Isaiah and other prophets who wrote in the context of Israel in captivity. The Jews of course were monotheists, and these ideas were developed in order to allow them to believe in both one God, and yet also the dualistic, god of evil / god of good idea of the Persians. It was in this period that the Jews fell in love with the idea of sinful Angels, even though the Old Testament knows nothing of them. They didn't want to compromise their monotheism by saying there was more than one God; and so they set up the 'evil god' as in fact a very powerful, sinful Angel. And this wrong notion was picked up by early Christians equally eager to accommodate the surrounding pagan ideas about evil.

45:18 This verse is proof enough that God won't allow the world to be destroyed- He has a glorious purpose with it.

45:20-24 These words are quoted in Phil. 2:9-11 in description of the believer's response to the suffering Saviour. And yet they are quoted again in Rom. 14:10-12 regarding our confession of sin before the Lord at judgment day. The connections mean simply this: before the Lord's cross, we bow our knee and confess our failures, knowing the imputation of His

righteousness, in anticipation of how we will bow before Him and give our miserable account at the judgment. And both processes are wonderfully natural. We must simply allow the power of a true faith in His cross to work out its own way in us. At the judgment, no flesh will glory in himself, but only in the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 1:29). And even now, we glory in His cross (Gal. 6:14).

46:3,4 God is likening Himself to a woman who carries a child in her womb, then bears it, and then carries it as a baby, but *still* carries it when the child is an old man. The God of all knowledge is aware of a fundamental psychological phenomena in all men; the fear, however passive and buried, of being without their mother; the fear of loneliness, the fear of eternal separation from the woman who bore and carried them. From the president to the happy village grandfather, this sense is there. Perhaps David appreciated this when he referred to a man weeping at his mother's funeral (not his *father's*) as the ultimate cameo of grieving and desolation of soul (Ps. 35:14). And yet God says that He is in some ways the eternal mother, the one who bore and carried us in babyhood, but the One who will yet carry us when we are gray headed and once again unable to walk. Yet He is also the everlasting Father to us, through His Son (9:6). It's a picture of exquisite beauty. Our relationship with God as the One who will *never* leave us is the *only* answer to what philosophers call 'the existential problem'; the awareness that has come to every thoughtful soul, the terror of being so alone as we get older, the dread of being without our human roots, of becoming the one to whom others (e.g. our children) look to as their background and root, whilst we ourselves have no tangible link with *our* past. This horror of existential loneliness can *only* be met by our sure knowledge that we have a very personal relationship in the Kingdom of God with our Heavenly Father, who will never ever leave us, and will preserve us unto His eternal Kingdom.

47:8 *I am and there is none else*- We bear the Name of Yahweh / Jehovah, by reason of our baptism into it. His Name is declared as His character- merciful, truthful, judging sin, patient etc (Ex. 34:5-7). He who will be who He will be, manifesting His characteristics as He does so, must have His way in us too. Babylon and Nineveh were condemned for having the attitude that "I am, and there is none beside me" (Zeph. 2:15). Their self-perception was a parody on the Name and being of Yahweh: He alone can say "I am, and there is none else" (43:11; 44:6; 45:6,21) and seek to be who He is. He alone can seek to articulate the characteristics that make up His Name onto the lives of others, and onto the things that comprise His Kingdom. We are not to be who we are in a fleshly sense; to 'just be yourself'; to 'just do it', as foolish slogans and adverts encourage us. We are here to show forth His mercy, truth, judgment of sin, patient saving of the weak etc., not our own human agenda. We are, in the very end, Yahweh manifested to this world, through our participation in His Name in Christ.

48:3 *Suddenly I did them, and they happened*- Another of Isaiah's allusions to creation. All that happens in our lives is a creation from God's word of command; even the bad things in our experience have ultimately a creative, positive intent from God.

48:6 *And you, will you not declare it?*- God is the One who 'declared' things in advance (:5), and we in our turn are to declare to the world what He has declared. In our work of witness there is a mutuality between God and us.

48:18 The fact God knows all possible futures must make His experience with us His people so tragic. For sorrow is largely related to our awareness of what could have been; and God knows that so much could have been. 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 to them (:22). For all their wealth in Babylon, they had no peace with God.

48:20 *Flee from the Chaldeans*- Judah were comfortable and prosperous in Babylon, as the conclusion to the book of Esther shows. Jews were senior in commerce and politics (as witness the

book of Daniel). Yet they were to “flee” from this situation because of its huge spiritual danger. Generally they didn’t perceive the spiritual danger of the world in which they lived, and most Jews remained in Babylon, to their spiritual destruction.

49:2 The Lord Jesus is described as having a sharp sword going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15); this is a prophecy of Him personally.

49:8 2 Cor. 6:2 interprets this time of salvation and acceptance as “now”. The window of opportunity which there was for Judah to return from exile and inherit the restored Kingdom of God is “now” in that we should likewise be appealing to men and women to quit this world of “Babylon” and journey towards God’s Kingdom. The spiritual opportunities which there are “now” are amazing; but there is an urgency to our appeal in that the time of acceptance is “now” and the amazing opportunity must be grasped “now”.

49:10 Quoted about how we shall be led by Jesus in the future Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 7:16,17).

49:16 Judah in captivity must’ve thought that God had forgotten them and His land as it lay there desolated. We too at times feel the apparent silence of God means that He is somehow there but too far away. But He assures them and us that His silence is only apparent. They were engraven upon His palms, perhaps alluding to the fact that it seems that to this day the Lord Jesus has on His hands the marks from the nails with which He was crucified (Zech. 13:6; Jn. 20:25-27; Rev. 1:7).

49:24 Despite having enabled their exit from Babylon, they complained: “Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us” (59:9). This was an awful spurning of the great salvation enabled for them. They remonstrated against God’s message of deliverance from captivity: “Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued?” (:24). They thought their salvation was too hard even for God. They made the same mistake as all who reason that their situation or personality is too far gone for God to redeem. For the ‘salvation’ of the exiles in Babylon is alluded to in the New Testament as a prototype of our salvation in Christ. The good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21).

50:1 God was angry with their sins, but kept no record of them- hence He could comfort Judah that there was actually no documentary evidence for their divorce and therefore she could return to Him.

50:6,7 *I gave... I didn't hide my face... set my face like a flint*- The body language of Jesus as He endured His sufferings is worth trying to imagine. His spirit of self-sacrifice and willing suffering with and for us would’ve shone through it. Lk. 9:51,53 notes how He set His face to go to Jerusalem and die there, His determination and conscious self-dedication were visible in how His face was set. We are asked to carry His cross with the same devotion.

51:8 God’s salvation is paralleled with His righteousness; He saves people by counting them as if they are righteous on account of their relationship with Him. In our times our baptism into Christ means that His righteousness is counted to us, and on this basis we shall be saved.

51:14 This sounds as if they were all willing and eager to leave that spiritually dreadful place. But the reality was that Judah didn’t hasten to be loosed, they preferred the Babylon life, and didn’t perceive it for the spiritual pit that was killing them which it was. Most of them chose to remain there. So this passage is therefore a prophecy, a command, about how God *wanted* Judah to respond.

51:17 God ‘stirred up’ the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel’s saviour would be “raised up”- 41:2,25; 45:13. Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- 51:17; 52:1 appeal to Zion to “Awake!”- the same word translated “stirred up”. But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so

few who would 'stir up themselves' (64:7). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond.

51:22 To be given a cup of wine to drink from the Lord is a double symbol; of condemnation, as it is here; or of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16). When we take the cup of the Lord at the breaking of bread service, we are drinking either to our eternal blessing or condemnation- hence the need for self-examination, so that we drink to our blessing and not our condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29).

52:2 The Jews didn't perceive the soft life of Babylon as chains around their necks, and so they didn't loose themselves and leave.

52:7 *The feet of him*- A prophecy of Christ's preaching of the Gospel. But it is quoted in Rom. 10:15 with a significant change of pronoun- "the feet of *them*". We who are baptized into Christ are His witnesses; His preaching is ours and vice versa. We will experience His especial identity with us in our efforts to preach the Gospel.

52:7-10- see on 49:24.

52:13 From here to the end of chapter 53 we have the 'Servant song' which speaks most clearly of the death and work of Christ for us. Many phrases in it are applied to Jesus in the New Testament (Mt. 8:17; 20:28; Mk. 15:28; Jn. 1:29; 12:38; Rom. 4:25; 10:16; 1 Cor. 15:3; Phil. 2:4-8; Col. 1:20; 1 Pet. 2:22,24).

52:14 There was something especially awful about the physical appearance of Christ on the cross, a reflection of the huge mental struggle there was within His holy mind as He finally overcame sin in all its forms.

53:1 *Who has believed our message?* was fulfilled both in the final, friendless rejection of the crucifixion, and also in the failure of Israel to really believe as a result of the Lord's miracles done during His life (Jn. 12:38). "He has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering" is how :4 described the cross; but these words are quoted in Mt. 8:16,17 about the Lord's healing of people. The miracles therefore were performed in the spirit of the cross- personally identifying with the sick and healing them through that identification. His whole life was a being acquainted with disease (Heb. "grief") (:3); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. "He bore the sin of many" (:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, Jesus bore the sin of the world. All this shows that the cross wasn't an unusual, one time act of supreme devotion; the spirit of it was lived out in the Lord's daily life. We who are to carry His cross must see it the same way.

53:2 *As a root out of dry ground*- There was nothing around Jesus in His environment which encouraged spirituality. He grew as we do, as a tender green plant in a desert.

53:6 *All we like sheep have gone astray*- We tend to sin as a result of group mentality; and yet this influences us individually to each turn to our own personal, unique way of sinning.

53:7 *As a sheep that before its shearers is mute*- A sheep is dumb in this situation from total fear. Jesus was human and in His time of dying went through all the usual human emotions in the face of death.

53:9 A detailed prophecy of how Jesus died with the wicked but was buried in the tomb of the rich Joseph of Arimathea.

53:10 *He shall see his seed*- Did Jesus have a vision of us the ones He would redeem, which inspired Him at the end, at the very time He was making an offering for sin?

54:4 *Your widowhood*- The implication is that God as their husband (:5) had died- and somehow returned to life to remarry them. This doesn't mean that Jesus is God, for God by nature cannot die; rather does it speak of the intensity to which God was manifest in Christ and went through the pain of death as it were because of what Israel's unfaithfulness and rejection felt like to Him.

54:6 In this language God as it were takes false guilt over His divorce with Israel; such is His gushing love for His unfaithful people who now return to Him.

54:7 God clearly has emotions of a kind which are not unrelated to the emotions we experience, as beings made in His image. But those emotions involve a time factor in order to be emotions. We read of the anger of God "for a moment" (:7,8; Ps. 30:5), and of His wrath coming and going, leaving Him "calm" and no longer angry (Ez. 16:42). When we sin, we provoke God to anger- i.e. at a point in time, God sees our sin, and becomes angry. This is attested many times in Scripture. But it's meaningless if God is somehow outside of our time and emotions.

54:17 *Their righteousness which is of Me*- Again we meet the New Testament idea of imputed righteousness, for Isaiah makes clear enough elsewhere that Israel had no righteousness of their own. We too have God's righteousness imputed to us by being in Christ.

55:1 Whilst we don't have to actually pay money for God's blessings, we are expected to go through the feelings of having paid, given something, in response to what He has already given us so as to take them to ourselves.

55:3 *The sure mercies of David* result in the wicked man forsaking his way (:3,7). The description of the promises to David as "sure mercies" (1 Chron. 17:13) may perhaps be with a reference to his sin with Bathsheba; his forgiveness in that incident is typical of that which we all receive (Rom. 4:6-8). The very existence of the "mercies of / to David" therefore inspire us in forsaking sinful thoughts and wicked ways (:7).

55:11 The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (:11). The apparent dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Or is this only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man's rejection? Thus the word of God was 'made void' by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV- a conscious allusion to Is. 55:11?). One possible explanation is that "the word" which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God's intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the 'prospering' of the Servant in His work: 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: "...until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished". Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God's word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 Heb., where we read that "the man clothed with linen"- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- "returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me". The word 'returned' in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren't.

56:7 *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*- Quoted by Jesus in Mt 21:13 as a demand for God's house *now* to not be a forum for personal financial gain. If we are living the Kingdom life now, then whatever is said of the future Kingdom must in essence be the rule of our lives today.

56:11 *Each turned to their own way*- This phrase connects clearly with 53:6, which says that although we have *each* done this, Christ's death was for us, to save us from that situation. The group in view in 56:11 were obsessed with money and personal pleasure, whilst claiming faith in God. Those types may seem the hardest to convert; but we are each in essence the same, and the connection with 53:6 shows that the cross is powerful enough to shake even them, even us, from such complacency.

57:11 One thing that works against truthfulness is the neuroses that come from fear, the fearful tensions that arise between our real self and the false self. Fear and truth are opposed. This isn't merely psychobabble. Consider God's words about this in Is. 57:11: "*Of whom have you been afraid and in fear, that you lie, and have not remembered Me?*". The life of brave faith, the life that is lived in the overcoming of fears, the fearless breaking out of our comfort zones... this is the true life, the life in which we have no need to lie nor believe in lies. But of course it's hard, because we think that the truth, the reality, is what we see around us; whereas faith is believing in what is not seen. Yet actually what is *not* seen is the reality, and what *is* seen is very often a lie. And the true life is a life of faith in those things which are not yet visibly seen.

57:14 *Stumbling block*- The ultimate rock of stumbling for the Jewish people is accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ (Rom. 9:32,33; 1 Pet. 2:8). The preparation of the highway for Christ's return involves Israel accepting Jesus as Christ. This is why we should preach to Israel in the last days, for the sooner they accept Christ, the quicker He will return.

57:15 *I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a broken and humble spirit*- This purposeful juxtaposition brings out the great paradox- that the God who is so high above humanity dwells together with the very lowest and most broken of humanity. Humility and broken spiritedness are of the highest value to God. The "high and holy place" of God's dwelling contrasts with the "high and lofty mountain" where the humanly wise of Israel offered sacrifice to idols (:7). The ultimately humble man was the Lord Jesus. God doesn't live in physical houses built by people, but in the humble heart of a man; and supremely, within the person of Christ. If we are in Him, God dwells in us.

57:19 *Peace, to him who is far off and to him who is near* - Eph. 2:13,14 alludes here, interpreting the "peace" as peace with God, offered to both Jews ("him who is near") and the Gentiles "far off". Acts 2:39 also has this passage in mind, when Peter offers the Spirit gift of salvation to those who are "far off".

58:2 Again we see that Judah weren't atheists, nor did they formally reject Yahweh- rather the opposite. But they ignored His commandments in practice, and those they kept they used as a means for spiritual pride. In all this we have a highly relevant message to ourselves.

58:3 *In the day of your fast you find pleasure*- Sacrifice to God must be sacrifice, contrite repentance means just that, rather than using these concepts as a channel for our own self-fulfilment.

58:5 *Bow down his head as a rush*- To quickly spring back again to pride. Our talk of humility mustn't be just a temporary, tokenistic acceptance of it as a nice idea.

58:6 Consider how Jesus brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the good tidings to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord*". This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach / proclaim the acceptable year" in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming

the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off... and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them.

58:6-13 This seems to be a reference to an insincerely kept day of atonement in Ezra or Nehemiah's time. The Jewish nobles were oppressing the poor and thereby keeping the feast with no meaning. If they had properly kept the feast, *then* the promised Kingdom conditions would have burst forth to the world around them. But they were too caught up with their own self-benefit to be bothered to show true care for their brethren. If they had, *then* the glory of Yahweh would have entered the temple, just as Ezekiel 43 had prophesied would happen, if the Kingdom was rebuilt as commanded.

59:1,2 If we feel that God is somehow limited, we must ask whether it is in fact our sins which are limiting His action; because He Himself is totally unlimited in His possibilities.

59:7,8 These verses are quoted in Rom. 3:17 about all of us. We aren't to look at Judah at this time and shake our heads in disgust at them; the essence of their failures is to be found in each one of us.

59:9- see on 49:24.

59:13 *Conceiving and uttering from the heart*- Sin is conceived within the human heart, not placed there by some cosmic Satan being (Mk. 7:15-23; James 1:13-15). Our own heart is the arena of our spiritual battles; we are responsible for our sins, because they begin within our own minds.

59:20 The Redeemer is interpreted as Christ in Rom. 11:26. We could understand this verse as meaning that Christ shall come to Zion when there are in her those who have turned away from their transgression- which in the context of Israel is their rejection of Jesus as Christ. This would suggest a repentance of some Jews is required before Christ's return; and this should motivate our preaching to them.

59:21 *My Spirit... My words*- There is a common parallel of God's words and His Spirit (notably in Jn. 6:63). The Bible is written by inspiration of God, and is therefore the work and vehicle of His Spirit. One way in which the Spirit works in our lives today is therefore through God's word the Bible.

60:5 Note how the sea is used as a symbol for the nations- this is common in the Bible.

60:6 *They shall bring gold and frankincense*- What was potentially possible for Judah at the time of the restoration, or perhaps at the time of Hezekiah, didn't come true because of their disobedience. But this doesn't mean the prophecy was falsified- it was reapplied to Jesus, the true "servant of the Lord", and this was fulfilled when the wise men brought Him these presents at His birth. God will not be defeated by human failure, but somehow His word comes true.

60:11 The reality was that the walls were built from a motive not of glorifying Zion in fulfilment of prophecy, but for defence *against* the Gentiles. But the gates had to be shut to keep the Gentiles out (Neh. 13:19), lest they yet further corrupted the Jews who were eager to trade with them on the Sabbath rather than convert them to the God of Israel. Instead of bringing their goods through the gates to lay before Yahweh, they brought in their goods to sell to His people in trade. But returned Judah didn't act as a nation of priests, the food the Gentiles brought in to Zion was to be sold for



profit to the Jews. They failed to be a missionary nation, and rather were mere trading / economic partners on an equal footing [cp. the church today?].

60:13 But Haggai lamented that instead, Judah dwelt in their own beautifully ceilinged houses", they used the exotic trees of the land for their own homes, whilst the house of Yahweh lay desolate. The prophecy of :14 started to come true after Haman's demise; but Judah didn't do their part in fulfilling the rest of that prophecy, which speaks of a rebuilt Zion. Note that the language of wood from Lebanon being used to build the temple is alluding to what happened when the first temple was planned and built under David and Solomon. The future Kingdom of God on earth will be a restoration of the Kingdom of God as it historically was on earth previously (Acts 1:6; see on Ez. 21:25-27).

61:1,2- see on 49:24; 58:6. This prophecy was fulfilled in the preaching of Jesus (Lk. 4:17-21). It could have come true at the return of the exiles from Babylon, when they could have rebuilt Jerusalem to Kingdom specifications (:4). But they became obsessed with building their own houses and trying to build up their own kingdom rather than God's, and so the prophecy was rescheduled and given a more spiritual fulfilment in the preaching of Jesus to people like us who are held captive by sin and human weakness.

61:6 Again we see God's intention that all Israel should have graduated to become priests (Ex. 19:5,6); this became true in the new Israel, the ecclesia, where we are all to have the spirit of priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9).

61:8 Entry into covenant relationship with God requires first of all that we recognize our sinfulness, as was the case with Israel.

62:1 Although God may appear inactive, there is a restlessness in Him, willing all things towards their appointed end- the establishment of His Kingdom on earth based around Jerusalem. This restlessness of God is inspired by His people continually begging Him to intervene on earth, to reveal Himself and establish His Kingdom (:6,7).

62:6 *I have set watchmen on your walls*- These watchmen refer to we who pray continually to God to establish His Kingdom (:7), but God has as it were set us up to pray like this. There are times when we feel we have been moved by God to pray about things; in this phenomenon we perceive God's grace, that it's not all simply up to us, but God to some extent works in our spirituality and inspires us to pray as we should, as if He wants as it were an excuse to act.

62:11 Applied by Jesus to His second coming in Rev. 22:12.

63:3 Here and in :5 we have a window into the loneliness of Jesus on the cross, where His clothing was made red with His own blood.

63:8 Israel did deal falsely with God, but His hope- a blind hope which was born of the extent of His love for them- was that they would not deal falsely with Him. This positive hopefulness of God for His people should be seen in us too.

63:10 *His holy Spirit*- God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7), and the reference here and in :11 is to the Angel who went with Israel on their wilderness journey as the special manifestation of Yahweh, the "Angel of His presence" (:9). The New Testament promises of "the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit" are full of allusion to this part of Isaiah 63. The Comforter would teach (Jn. 14:26), guide (Jn. 16:13), be a judge (16:8) and prophesy (16:13); the Angel guided Israel through the wilderness, taught them God's ways, judged Egypt and the Canaanites, gave prophecies, and represented God to Israel as the Comforter represented Jesus to His people. As the church began a new Exodus and was constituted God's Kingdom in prospect as Israel were at Sinai, it was fitting that it should also have an Angel leading them, representing God to them. As Israel were led by a special Angel through the wilderness, whom Isaiah 63 associates with God's Holy Spirit, so the new Israel were led by a Holy Spirit Angel, the Comforter, who was sent to the church by Jesus after His assuming of all power over the Angels on His ascension. The Jewish fathers resisted

the Angel of the presence which went with them; and so the Jews of the first century did just the same (Acts 7:51). The Holy Spirit is the power of God, not a person, but it is sometimes personified; one reason for that may be that it worked in the first century through this Comforter Angel of the Lord's presence.

63:16 *Israel does not acknowledge us*- We have here the heart cry of the righteous remnant, rejected by the majority of God's people and feeling God too is somehow distant from them. This has been a common experience amongst the righteous over history.

64:4 This is quoted in 1 Cor. 2:9; the things prepared for those who wait for God are the things of redemption and forgiveness in Christ. But Paul interprets "him who waits for Him" as "them that love Him". To love God is in one sense to wait in patient faith for Him to act and send His Son to establish His Kingdom. But the waiting game is harder than it seems, because we expect immediate response from God, whereas the intention of His apparent inaction is to focus us instead upon the return of Christ and the coming of His Kingdom as the ultimate resolution of all things. Is. 64:4 says that only God alone knows these things He has prepared for us in Christ. But Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:10 that they are also known by us, through God's Spirit. So through our association with the one Spirit, the one Name of Yahweh, what is true of God Himself on a personal level becomes true of us. Such is the wonder of the way in which His fullness dwells in us.

64:7- see on 51:17. The destruction of the wicked is "by means of [their] iniquities"; sin is its own judgment.

65:1 God's experience with the Jews in exile was tragic. He set them up with the possibility to return to Judah, to establish there a Messianic-style Kingdom, giving them the commands in Ez. 40-47 for a glorious temple; but most of them preferred the soft life in Babylon, and those who did return proved small minded, selfish and disinterested in the vision of God's glory. In this context, Isaiah ends his restoration prophecies on a tragic note from God: "I was ready to be sought... I was ready to be found" by the unspiritual exiles in Babylon. But Israel would not. He pictures Himself standing there crying "Here am I, here am I!"- to be rejected by a people more interested in climbing the endless economic and social ladder in Babylon and Persia, and caught up in finding petty religious fault with their brethren (:5).

65:17 *New heavens and a new earth*- The close of Isaiah's prophecy is related to how it opens in 1:2; and there, the heavens and earth are figurative for the system of things which was in Judah (see note there). This verse is quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13 as having had a fulfilment in the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70; yet then the literal Heaven and earth weren't destroyed.

65:24 *Before they call, I will answer*- This is found in the context of a prophecy about the future Kingdom of God on earth. But Jesus applies this phrase to our experience in prayer now, when He says that God knows our needs before we ask Him in prayer (Mt. 6:8). Answered prayer is a foretaste of the Kingdom life. The essence of how we will eternally live in the Kingdom can be experienced in our spiritual life today. In this sense Jesus said that we "have eternal life", in the sense that we can begin to live now the type of life we will eternally live.

66:2 The Jews did tremble at the word at the beginning of the rebuilding (Ezra 10:9). But it was a momentary thing; they came to see the building of the walls as more important than keeping a trembling spirit. Works eclipsed spirituality. Yet Isaiah had taught that the trembling at the word was more essentially important than building temples. But Judah paid no attention in the long term. Perhaps God was saying that His plan for the glorious rebuilding of the temple at the time of the return from exile in Babylon wasn't going to work out, and instead He was going to focus on dwelling with humble, broken individuals who loved His word.

66:3,4 God does not just disregard those who turn away from Him. He deceives them, and leads them into a downward spiral of moral and doctrinal declension. The idea of "the God of Truth" deceiving people may seem strange at first. But consider how He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer them; see too 1 Kings 22:20-22; Ez. 3:20; 14:9; 2 Thess. 2:9-11.

**66:16 Plead judgement-** The Hebrew word translated “judgment” here is also translated “plead”. God’s judgments aren’t the anger of an irritated deity, rather are they constructive, designed to plead with those who observe them to repent.

**66:19** Paul’s desire to go to Spain (Rom. 15:24) indicates a commitment to taking the Gospel to the very ends of the world he then knew. He may well have been motivated in this by wishing to fulfill in spirit this Kingdom prophecy of :18,19, which describes how Tarshish (which he would have understood as Spain) and other places which “have not heard My fame, neither have seen My glory” will be witnessed to by those who *have* seen His glory and have “escaped” from God’s just condemnation by grace. Paul sees this as referring to himself. For he speaks in Rom. 15:19 of his ambition to take the Gospel to Spain; and in that same context, of how he will bring the Gentile brethren’s offering up to Jerusalem. This is precisely the context of Is. 66- the offerings of the Gentiles are to be brought up to Jerusalem, as a result of how the Lord’s glory will be spoken of to all nations. So Paul read Isaiah 66 and did something about his Old Testament Bible study; he dedicated his life to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he encouraged them to send their offerings to Jerusalem. He was no mere theologian. His study and exposition of Old Testament Scripture led to a life lived out in practice, to hardship, risk of life, persecution, loneliness, even rejection by his brethren. It is also significant that :19 speaks of nations which occur in the list of nations we have in Genesis 10, in the context of the effect of Babel. It is as if Paul sees the spreading of the Gospel as an undoing of the curse of Babel and the establishment of the Kingdom conditions described in Is. 66. By his preaching of God’s Kingdom and the reign of Christ, he brought about a foretaste of the future Kingdom in the lives of his converts. And we can do likewise.

## JEREMIAH

1:5 Jeremiah is spoken of as having existed before birth. This wasn't literally the case, but because God is outside time as we know it, He can speak of things which don't exist as if they do, so total is His knowledge of the future (Rom. 4:17). All the believers and also Jesus are spoken of with this language (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20), but it doesn't mean that He nor we personally pre-existed.

1:6 So many called to preach God's word feel unworthy or unqualified to do so; but God delights to work through those who feel this way.

1:10 This reflects the power which there is in God's word, which we also can speak forth to this world.

1:17 *Don't be dismayed at them, lest I dismay you*- This appears to be the basis of Christ's warning to His preachers, that if we are ashamed of His words in this generation, He will be ashamed of us in the last day and we will walk before all men with the shame of the rejected (Lk. 9:26; Rev. 16:15). We are to therefore see Jeremiah as in some sense representative of us in our witness to the world.

1:18 The prophets required this psychological strengthening to do their work; because seeing the world from God's perspective, perceiving the tragedy of a humanity who refuse to accept His salvation, realizing the depth of His pain- is all too much. And God will strengthen us too, to be His witnesses in a similar world.

2:5 *Walked after vanity, and are become vain*- We become like what we worship (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). The prophets emphasize that the idols are empty and vain. Whilst we may not be tempted to worship pieces of stone or wood, we are surrounded by the vain things of the modern world which can become our gods; sport, endless surfing the internet, frivolous obsession with tickling our taste buds, these and so much else are mere vanity. And as we worship them, we become vain and empty too, with no real substance to our personality. Whilst the richness and depth of Yahweh is thereby ignored by us. See on 2:11.

2:6 The wilderness is described as an awful place, just as Moses likewise spoke of it when reflecting on the journeys of Israel in Deuteronomy. Israel crossing the Red Sea represents our baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2), and their wilderness journey afterwards equates with our lives now as we walk toward the promised land of God's Kingdom. The world is a terrifying place spiritually; in spiritual terms it isn't the nice safe place it can appear.

2:8 *Those who handle the law didn't come to know Me*- We can be faithful Bible readers, familiar with the text, and yet not know God in the sense of having a personal relationship with Him; rather like the rejected of the last day who will call Jesus "Lord" and have been associated with Him in their lives, but who never knew Him (Mt. 7:22,23; 25:12; Lk. 13:25).

2:11 Israel never officially changed their gods; they never rejected Yahweh nor were they atheists. But worshipping any other god *in addition* to the one true God as they did is effectively doing this. See on 2:5.

2:19 God has a wonderful way of not turning away in disgust from sinful people, but rather working through their sin to try to bring them to repentance. The traditional understanding of Satan is unable

to explain this; for if a personal, sinful entity called 'satan' makes people sin, then how come that sin actually results in some becoming righteous? Sin comes from within (James 1:13-15), it is solely our fault that we sin; but God in His grace often works through human failure in order to bring sinners to Himself. Our real 'satan' or adversary is ourselves, and not any external, cosmic being.

2:26 Worshipping other gods is likened here to stealing. Not giving God our entire worship is in fact robbing Him; even though the analogy seems extreme at first sight, if we really accept that we are created by Him and are His, then to not give Him all of ourselves is to rob Him (Mal. 3:8).

Significantly, the people are mentioned as punishing innocent people for the crime of stealing when they hadn't committed it (:34). Those who robbed God knew subconsciously what they were doing; and so unconsciously, they transferred their guilt onto others, falsely accusing them of the very kind of sin *they* had committed, and then strictly condemning and punishing those innocent people for it, exercising the judgment against themselves which was their due on others, onto whom they had transferred their guilt. This is why people gossip, malign, falsely accuse and judge harshly. If we face up to our sins in the first place and accept God's forgiveness, then we will show grace to others rather than act in this way.

2:30 It's tragic that people can suffer so much, as Israel have throughout their history, and yet not respond to it as God intended.

3:1 God's own law had forbidden a man to do this, calling it an abomination (Dt. 24:4). And yet God was willing to do so. Thus He demonstrates that His grace and love for His people goes even beyond the limits of His own word, and may even in a way contradict it; such is the greatness of His grace. He isn't indifferently waiting for us to return to Him; He is willing to debase Himself and commit what He considers abomination in order to be back together with us. In similar vein, God speaks as if His expectation that Israel would return to Him had been as it were proved wrong (:7). Again, He speaks as if His foreknowledge was as it were limited compared to the power of the hopefulness of His love and grace; for we are made after God's image, and true love has the quality of desperate hopefulness against our better knowledge. Such is God's passion for us His people.

3:14 *I am a husband to you*- Although divorced from Israel (:8), God still considered Himself her husband. These contradictory feelings within God are expressed in His word, in that some passages protest His eternal love and relationship with Israel whatever, whilst others declare them no longer His people.

3:19,20 Although God presents Himself to us as having a memory which functions not unlike our memories, who are made in His image, there is with God the capacity for total recall of history; and hence His pain is far greater than ours, not least because He knows, with all the power of infinite analysis of possibilities, 'what might have been'. And it is the 'what might have been' syndrome which is one of the greatest sources of our emotional pain. His pain and hurt is therefore and thereby so much greater than ours. Hence the pain, the pain which comes from understanding and the potential of total recall, behind these words which reflect how Israel *could have been* sons which made Him proud. Because of His capacity to imagine, to see possible futures to some extent, God feels rejected both by His children and by His wife at the same time. It's as if He could see the potentially happy future which they could've had stretching out before Him. Yet now He has chosen *us* as His wife and children; and we are to do our uttermost to be His faithful woman, loyal children.

3:22-25 This was God's fantasy about Israel, how one day they would say such words of repentance and return to Him. True love includes fantasy, imagining the object of our love speaking or acting in the way we dream of. And God's passionate love for His people is no different. True repentance is such a thrill to God; it fulfils what He has dreamt of for us. Hence all the Angels rejoice when one sinner repents.

4:3 *Break up your fallow ground*- Like us, they were to realize their spiritual potential in order to bring forth fruit to God.

4:4 The wrath of God can be turned away or 'quenched' by the actions of those He is angry with (see too Num. 25:4; Dt. 13:15-17; Ezra 10:14; Jonah 3:7,10; 2 Chron. 12:7; Jer. 21:12). And yet that wrath can also be turned away by the prayers of a third party (see 18:20; Ps. 106:23; Job 42:7). This means that in some cases, our prayers for others can be counted as if they have repented. We can gain our brother for God's Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7).

4:13 Clouds, chariots and whirlwind are associated with Yahweh's appearances in theophanies and as the cherubim. Yet here this language is applied to the Babylonian invaders- for they were manifesting God. Their chariots were as it were the wheels on earth of the Angel cherubim above who were directing them. At times unbelievers can be used by God as His form of manifestation, as we will experience in our lives too.

4:19 Jeremiah interjects here. He didn't just output the words God had given him like a printer or piece of computer hardware. He saw the reality of it all, that it would really all come to pass. We too must be moved by the reality of the message we teach about the future; it is all very well telling others of a time of trouble coming upon this earth, but we should feel deeply for the human tragedy of it, to the point of being almost broken down because of it. The message we give cannot pass through our hands or lips without eliciting response from us.

4:20 Jeremiah felt that the future things he was prophesying had already come to pass; he shared God's perspective (Rom. 4:17), as we should, that the Biblically predicted future is effectively now- so certain is God's word of fulfilment.

4:31 *The anguish*- Jeremiah felt "anguish" right then (:19) because he identified with the future "anguish" of the people which he prophesied. We also should identify with the audience we preach to; the tragedy of their situation should touch us deeply and be the basis of our passionate, persuasive appeal to them.

5:1 All of Jerusalem would have been forgiven if there was even one that truly executed justice. This is the colossal significance to God of the individual. Abraham ceased at 10 people when interceding for Sodom, but if he had gone down to asking for the city to be spared for just one righteous person, likely he would've been heard. See on 26:13.

*Who does justice*- The Hebrew Bible very often demands "justice" from individuals within Israel and almost considers this to be the epitome of righteousness. We may consider that because we're not judges nor part of the judicial apparatus of society, therefore this doesn't apply to us. But daily if not hourly, we're confronted with situations which demand our correct response, our fairness, our application of Divine principle when dealing with others, often to our own cost; and in our own

minds, we do have to judge, not in the sense of condemning but in forming opinions. Thus "justice" is required from each of us, daily.

5:5 We see here Jeremiah's naivety, assuming that the leaders of God's people must surely be spiritual people. The disciples were the same, initially. We too easily tend to confuse status or seniority amongst God's people with spirituality, and so often this assumption is wrong.

5:7 *When I had fed them to the full*- So often we find that comment that God's kind material blessings to His people led them into unfaithfulness to Him (Dt. 32:15). It's not surprising, therefore, that the requests of the new Israel for material blessing are so often unanswered; for God seeks relationship with us above all, and earnestly desires our eternal good.

*How can I pardon you?*- This opens a window on the self-questioning which is associated with God- e.g. "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?" (Hos. 6:4; 11:8; see too Jer. 9:7,9). These aren't purely rhetorical questions- they reflect the actual and real self-questioning of Almighty God, reflective as it is of the turbulence of emotion which is part and parcel of being in a relationship which has gone painfully wrong. There even seems at times a difficulty on God's part to understand why the people He had loved could hate Him so much (2:14,31; 8:5,19; 30:6; Is. 5:4; 50:2). "What more could I have done for my vineyard... why did it yield wild grapes?" (Is. 5:1-7). This is so much the anguished cry of bewildered middle age parents as they reflect upon a wayward child. This Divine struggle to understand reflects the extraordinary depth of His love for them; and it warns us in chilling terms as to the pain we can cause God if we spurn His amazing love. 8:4-7 records God reflecting that even the stork 'returns' predictably; but His people have inexplicably not returned to Him. This reveals a powerful thing- that our rejection of God's love is inexplicable even to God Himself. And yet humanity persists in this utter madness. For all our education, business sense, scientific knowledge- we are revealed as inexplicably foolish in rejecting God's love and not 'returning' [repenting] to Him.

5:11 *It is not He*- A denial of the meaning of 'Yahweh'- I am that I am. Yet they weren't atheists. But by denying the reality of judgment to come and the constant, insistent presence of God in our lives and His continual claim upon every part of our lives, they were denying the essence of God- He is, who He is, and shall be who He shall be in our lives.

6:8 Here and in Ez. 23:18, God's soul "departed" from His people- but the same word is translated to hang / crucify (Num. 25:4; 2 Sam. 21:6,9,13). It's as if God was crucified in His pain for Israel. And in the death of His Son He went through that pain. And so never, ever, ever... can we nor Israel complain that our pain is greater than God's. Never. The pain of God at Israel's sin leads Him to exclaim (almost in the language of piercing and crucifixion): "Before Me continually is grief and woundedness" (Jer. 6:7). We can wound God by our sin, so sensitive is He to us. In the end, we read that God's "soul" departed from them, because He "rejected" them (:30). This is the same language used about Saul- God rejected him, and so His spirit departed from him (1 Sam. 15:23; 16:14). The implication was that God's very soul / spirit is "with" us, and therefore He can be so terribly wounded by us in His heart by the rebellions of those in covenant relationship with Him. For His heart / soul / spirit is so close to us His beloved people.

6:11 We may assume that it is the leaders of a corrupt society, the opinion formers, who should be punished. But God seems to emphasize here that it's the apparently innocent members of society also who shall be punished- the children and the wives of the men who were the decision makers.

The modern liberal mindset struggles with this kind of thing. But the picture is all the same of God holding an entire society culpable to judgment, as He did in punishing Egypt. It's not that the individual doesn't matter to God, nor that the righteous must perish with the wicked; but rather than the apparently insignificant individuals have more significance than we may imagine. Passive support of a corrupt regime is sinful and culpable for judgment; for holocausts happen when good people do nothing. There is in this sense no such person as the innocent bystander.

6:20 Israel weren't atheists, and they still sacrificed to Yahweh; but Jeremiah makes it clear that external religion and mere intellectual assent isn't enough. Effectively they had rejected Him for other gods.

6:21 *I will lay stumbling blocks*- There is a downward as well as an upward spiral in spiritual life; God at times deceives people so that they believe a lie, because they don't love truth (2 Thess. 2:11). Note that it is a serious sin for *us* to be stumbling blocks to others; but God can morally do what we can't. What *He* does at times, e.g. slaying the wicked, doesn't always mean that *we* can do the same.

6:23 *Against you, daughter of Zion*- Yahweh was Israel's God, and Zion, the temple built on Mount Zion, was His dwelling place. The pagan gods were intended to keep their temples and people safe from invaders; but the true God was quite different. He sent enemies against His own house to destroy it. The people of Judah would've had the same struggle to understand Him as those today who expect only good from their God.

6:26,27 Jeremiah was so merged with God that it's hard to work out to whom the pronouns ["He", "My"] refer- to God or Jeremiah. "Come upon *us*" may reflect how even in punishing His people for their sin, God was united with them.

7:10 The false 'once saved always saved' mentality leads to this kind of moral slackness. Only by enduring to the end will we be saved (Mt. 10:22).

7:13 *Rising up early*- Before the days of alarm clocks, rising before dawn required a great conscious mental effort. The words of the prophets weren't effortlessly given by God and mindlessly relayed by them. They involved real conscious expenditure of effort by both God and the prophets.

7:16 *Don't pray for this people* - only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them. Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel up to a certain point, but they were so hardened in sin at Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. Jeremiah did however pray for his people even after this command; He knew God well enough to know that He is open to reason. At times, God reveals His intentions regarding Israel, but then the prophets make a case against this and are heard. This seems to be almost a pattern with God- to devise His purpose, and then in the 'gap' until its fulfilment, be open to the persuasion of His people to change or amend those plans (Am. 3:7). It's as if He reveals His plans to the prophets *so that* they can then comment upon them in prayer. But in this case, God tells Jeremiah *not* to pray to Him to change His stated plans against Israel (cp. 11:14; 14:11; 15:1), as He had asked Moses to 'leave Me alone' and not try to persuade Him to change His mind (Ex. 32:10). He didn't want, in these cases, His stated plans to



be interrupted by the appeals of His people to change them. Interestingly, in both these examples, Moses and Jeremiah know God well enough, the relationship is intimate enough, for them to *still* speak with Him- and change His mind. Those who've prayed to God in cases of terminal illness [and countless other situations] will have sensed this 'battle', this 'struggle' almost, between God and His friends, His covenant people, and the element of 'persuasion' which there is going on *both* ways in the dialogue between God and ourselves. The simple fact that God really can change- there are over 40 references to His 'repentance' in Scripture- is vital to understand- for this is the basis of the prayer that changes things, that as it were wrestles with God.

8:4 *Shall one turn the wrong way, and not return?*- We all know how when we miss the way in finding an unfamiliar address, there's a tendency to keep on going along the wrong road- because turning back is so psychologically difficult. Pride often stops us turning back; we were so convinced we were right, and what will people think as they see us retracing our steps... And this is the image that God uses here- to appeal to Israel, and ourselves, not to foolishly 'backslide', keep on turning away from Him- just because that's the course we're set upon and we lack humility. Pride is the greatest barrier to repentance; pride is indeed the essence of sin.

8:4-7 See on 5:7.

8:5 The Hebrew word for "sliding back" is that translated "return". The image is of a man on a muddy slope; he slides back either into sin, or into the way of the Lord. We must 'slide' one way or the other; every micro decision which makes up the stream of daily life is confirmed by God one way or the other. We are never passive in our spiritual path; we are either sliding back, or returning nearer to the Lord.

8:7 *But My people don't know Yahweh's law*- In the context, God is amazed that Israel won't return- because usually there is a pattern of repentance in people, and even the birds return from where they migrated to. We expect to read 'But My people don't return to Me'; instead we read that they don't know Yahweh's law. The impact of God's word, our sensitive Bible reading, should be that we return / repent.

8:11 Peace often refers to peace with God. One of the worst sins we can commit is to tell others that their sin is not sin and that they can have peace with God about it.

8:21,22 These could be Jeremiah's words, or Yahweh's; Jeremiah's worldview merged very intensely with God's, just as ours should. They felt for Judah even when Judah were suffering "hurt" for their sins, just as parents share the hurt of the punishment they may give their child.

9:1,2 Jeremiah's feelings here are contradictory. On the one hand, he so loved the wayward children of God that he wished he could find more tears to weep for them; on the other, he wished to go right away from them and live in total isolation, like a lonely shepherd who has a booth in which he sleeps in the desert. All God's true servants will have had these contradictory feelings; Jeremiah sets the example of ultimately sticking with God's people, indeed at the end of the book we find him going down to Egypt with them, despite God warning them not to- when he could have had a respectable retirement in the wealth of Babylon. But we can too easily assume that these are the thoughts of Jeremiah. The references to "my people" in the passage point us toward God as the person expressing these feelings. And then in:3 we have the speaker defined as God. So these were

also *God's* thoughts. He wished He had human tear ducts to weep with... this was how He felt for them.

9:7 Jeremiah was told to "know and try" Israel's way, just as God said that He did (Jer. 6:27 cp. 9:7; 17:10). Our 'judging' of others, as well as ourselves, must be according to God's judgments of them.

9:9 *Such a nation as this*- Our world's devaluing and misunderstanding of sin has likely affected all of us. We see the rich abusing the poor, manipulation of all sorts going on, petty injustices, hypocrisy in the ecclesia, falsehood, cheating in business, white lies, unkindness to ones' brethren... and we shrug and think that it's just normal, part of life as it is. And yet for the prophets, these things were a catastrophe. Saying one thing to someone whilst feeling differently about them in the heart was the reason for God passionately wishing to take vengeance "on a nation such as this"- note that the whole nation are counted as guilty, in that society just shrugged at hypocritical words. What to us are the daily minor sins and injustices of life are to God issues of cosmic proportion. Nobody in our current society would consider what you *think* to be a criminal act; and nobody did in early Israel, either. But time and again, Jeremiah passionately calls down judgment for "evil thoughts" and "evil hearts" (3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 14:14; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).

9:18 *A wailing for us*- As God had lamented that the destroyer would come "upon us" (6:22,26). The "us" is God and Israel. The tragedy is awful, beyond words. All commentary is bathos. His love is wondrous. God delicately speaks as if He is married to Israel, and that even in their sufferings, He would suffer with them, as a husband suffers with his wife. "The destroyer will come upon us" even sounds as if God let Himself in a way be 'destroyed' in Israel's destruction; for each of us dies a little in the death of those we love. The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (Lam. 1:1; Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question- if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of God is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God's feelings at His peoples' destruction. This is the almost unbelievable extent of God's pain and hurt for His people. Truly did it hurt God more than His children knew to punish them.

10:2 *The signs of the sky*- A reference to astrology. Our lives are totally in God's hands.

10:19,20 This interjection by Jeremiah could equally be from God; both of them identified with the hurt and pain of those who were to be punished. We can understand why God says He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked- He finds it simply so painful (Ez. 18:32; 33:11). This alone is reason to reject the unBiblical myth of God allowing eternal punishment of the wicked in 'hell'.

10:23 Wisdom must come from outside a person, from God's word. There is no natural spiritual wisdom within human beings.

11:2 At times of Israel's apostasy, God reconfirmed Israel's covenant relationship with Him. Note how God calls them "My beloved" even whilst listing their sins and His future rejection of them (:15). His grace is so counter-instinctive. The height of the demand, the extent of the implication of being in covenant with God ought to preclude the possibility of worshipping anything else. The covenant we have entered has constant and binding claims upon our loyalty (Dt. 29:14-18). By reminding them of the nature of their covenant relationship at a time of their moral weakness, they were being led to realize that the life of sin was not for them. And so there should be a like awareness in us when at

least weekly we are reminded of our covenant bond in the communion service, celebrating the blood of the covenant made with us.

11:13 Each street of Jerusalem was named after an idol, just as was the case in Babylon (Jer. 11:13)- and thus Jerusalem shared Babylon's judgment. Zion lost her children and also her husband whilst still a young woman (Is. 49:21; 54:6), just as Babylon would (Is. 47:9). If we act like Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4).

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

11:18 *You showed me their evil deeds*- Ezekiel was likewise shown "what the house of Israel is doing in the dark" (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity to the amount of sin around them must've been so hard, as it is for us. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would've been awful. Hence the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and "iron pillar" to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn't be "dismayed at [the] looks" of those who watched them with anger and consternation (1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too; for the spirit of the prophets is what our testimony to Jesus is all about (Rev. 19:10).

12:1 Any doubts we have about the justice and ethics of God's ways must begin with the acceptance that God is right; therefore the difficulties we have are a result of our limitations rather than any ultimate fault with Him.

12:7 *I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies*- This is how difficult it was for God to punish His beloved people. He doesn't do it from spite nor from the pleasure of retribution. The way God calls Judah His "beloved" (also 11:15; Is. 5:1) at the time of punishing her is reflected by the way in which Jesus calls Judas "friend" in the very moment of betrayal (Mt. 26:50). In wrath He remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2).

12:14-17 Here we have another potential prophecy- Judah could have completely returned from captivity in Babylon, and their captors could have accepted Israel's God and returned with them to a blessed life in a restored kingdom. But neither the Jews nor Babylonians / Persians really wanted it.

13:7 The whole point of Judah's exile in Babylon was to make them "ruined, unfit for use" like the cloth which Jeremiah buried by Euphrates (Jer. 13:7). And yet the second half of Isaiah is full of expressions of God's desire to use Israel after their experience in Babylon as His witness to the nations. Israel's preparation for their mission was through being made "unfit for use". And so God prepares His missionaries and ambassadors today likewise.

13:15-17 For all the issues which the prophets could have condemned people for, pride was high on their list. "I hate the pride of Jacob", Amos cried out in dismay (Am. 6:8). Jeremiah wept in secret, his eyes running with tears, "for your pride". Do we weep privately, just to ourselves, because people don't respond to our message? Only those who have a heart that bleeds will do so. We can't have an indifferent, take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

13:22,26 The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel as His wife are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), and here, she is to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed. Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism. God paints Himself as acting with the anger of a very angry husband, whose anger is rooted in the profoundness of His love for His wife. There is a dark side to intimacy. It's why families, lovers, both spiritual and natural, experience the heights of both love and frustration / anger with each other. With a love like God's, it's inevitable that there is a strong element of jealousy and potential hurt over us. It has to be so. And yet the story of the prophets never ends with the angry judgment- amazingly, given this level of anger and judgment / retribution, there is always the passionate appeal for Israel to return, to recover love, romance and intimacy in the relationship. But the shocking sexual language and imagery of the prophets was in order to help Israel see that this was how far they had outraged God. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences. Just as for a woman to have her skirt ripped above her head and her nakedness displayed was ultimately humiliating for her, so Israel had humiliated God by their sin (Jer. 13:25-27); their actions were just as shocking and obscene. And yet we so minimize sin. Just a bit of injustice, a little touch of selfishness, a moment of hypocrisy... but all this is obscene treatment of our God. We all know the downward spiral into sin... how once we start, we can't stop. But when Israel were like this, they are likened to a female camel in insatiable heat (Jer. 2:23-25; 5:7-9). We'd just rather not read that, or retranslate the words to make it seem somehow different. But we're dealing with serious matters here. Sin is serious to God.

14:8,9 God is presented as a tragic figure here, desolated by the loss of His people, left as a mighty man that cannot save, as a wayfaring man wandering through His own deserted land; as Israel wandered amongst the nations (:10), so God as it were wanders too, so identified

with them is He. This is how difficult it is for God to punish His people; for He so suffers in their suffering. It is in a sense therefore 'easier' for Him to forgive and save us.

14:17 *The virgin daughter of my people*- Yet Israel are elsewhere in Jeremiah described as a sexually addicted prostitute, and the rape hinted at here is understood in 13:22,26 as the deserved punishment she received from the Babylonians. We have here a reflection of God's own divided mind about His sinful people; on one hand loving them and seeing them as innocent, on the other, recognizing their sin and who they really were.

14:20 *We have sinned*- Again we see Jeremiah's identity with His people, not considering himself somehow uninvolved with their failures.

15:1 The implication is that when an individual or group of God's people have a modicum of spirituality, then one individual like Moses is able to make Him feel positively toward them. The power of third party intercession for others means that we should constantly be in prayer for our brethren. But 'the power of one' works the other way, too; for :4 speaks as if all Judah suffered because of the *sins* of one man.

15:15 Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and in :18 accuses God of deceiving him. God's response is to ask him to repent of this, so that he can resume his prophetic work: "If you [Jeremiah] return, then I will restore you, and you shall stand before Me [prophetic language]. If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as My mouth" (:19). Perhaps Jeremiah had this incident in mind when he commented: "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against His word" (Lam. 1:18). This indicates that at least in Jeremiah's case, he was not irresistibly carried along by the Spirit in some kind of ecstasy, having no option but to speak God's word. His speaking of God's word required that he shared the essentially loving and gracious spirit / disposition of his God. This incident is also another example of how God's preachers so often don't want to do the work; God tends to use those who are weak and feel inadequate to share His word with others, not the fluent and self-assured.

15:16 Jeremiah had found God's word and eaten it, and as a result, "I am called by Your name"- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his "joy [and] delight"- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was "full of the wrath / passion of God" (6:11). No wonder these prophets felt alone amongst men. They had a relationship with God which others couldn't enter into, which totally affected their lives and beings. The preacher / testifier of Jesus knows something of this spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10).

15:17 Jeremiah "sat alone". Not only was the prophets' perspective on human sinfulness so very different to that of their audience. They preached a message which was counter-cultural and attacked the very bases of the assumptions which lay at the core of individual and social life in Israel. They appeared to back Israel's enemies. They and their message was therefore rejected.

15:19 Jeremiah often makes a play upon the Hebrew word *shub*- it can mean to turn away (from God), and also to 'turn back' or repent (e.g. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). If Jeremiah and Judah turned in repentance, then God would return / restore them to their land; if they turned away from Him, He

would turn them out into the Gentile world. Our lives are a twisting and turning, either to or away from God; and God is waiting to confirm us in those twists and turns.

16:7 The communion meal is in one sense designed to be for our comfort as we mourn the death of Jesus.

16:13 The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, “where I will not show you favour”. But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there (s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5). God was gracious [s.w. ‘to show favour’] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jeremiah goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would “cause them to know My hand... and they shall now that My name is Yahweh” (:21).

16:18 *I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double*- But God punished Israel *less* than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13). He surely said this :18 in anger, and later relented. He is revealed as an emotional, passionate God.

17:1 The simple interpretation of this would be that sin has permanent consequences upon our heart or mind.

17:9 In the context, this is a description of the state of Judah’s heart at Jeremiah’s time (18:12). Our hearts are indeed deceitful, but God judges us according to what is in our heart (:10). It’s not the case that we are born with a sinful heart and so we will inevitably be condemned for having one. The Lord Jesus was of our human nature and yet He never sinned; whatever we say about human nature we say about Him.

17:10 God searches our heart in order to judge our works; because how we think is how we act- in the end.

17:13 The first half of the verse is Jeremiah praying to God; God responds in the second half of the verse; and the prayer resumes in :14. Prayer isn’t simply requests, it involves meditation, reflections and thinking of God’s response.

17:25 If Judah had been obedient, it’s possible that God’s Kingdom as it was in the form of Israel could have developed into His full Kingdom on earth. He has set up all kinds of potential situations throughout history, which tragically have been unfulfilled because of human weakness.

17:27 This eternal fire is paralleled with God’s eternal wrath (:4). The punishment for the wicked is eternal death (Rom. 6:23); not conscious existence in fire. Fire consumes back to dust. The eternity of God’s anger will be in the sense that sinners will be punished by eternal death; but death is unconsciousness.

18:4-8 The clay clearly represents people, made as we are from dust. God's purpose is in some sense open-ended, in that He has intentions for us which can be ruined by how we poorly respond to the potter's hand. This doesn't mean that God's words of judgment or promise are unreliable; but rather that His sensitivity to human behaviour is such that He will change His intention in accordance with their response to His statement of those intentions. God's statement that He would destroy Nineveh in 40 days is maybe the clearest example; He added no conditions, just stated this would happen. And yet they repented; and He changed and didn't fulfil His specific word of judgment.

18:8 Due to Moses' prayer, "the Lord repented of the evil which He had said He would do unto His people" (Ex. 32:14 RV). Yet these are the very words of 18:8- if a *nation* repents, then God will repent. But in this case, God accepted the singular prayer of Moses as if it were the prayer of the whole community. We can influence God positively for others' blessing.

18:20 Jeremiah said that God's wrath was his wrath, "I am full of the wrath of God" (Jer. 6:11), and yet he stood before God "to turn away Your wrath from them". Jeremiah like us was as it were a bridge between God and man; as a prophet he saw the world through the eyes of God, and yet he was himself a man.

19:9 This verse in the LXX seems to be alluded to by Paul when he says that we today can bite and devour one another in gossip and slander (Gal. 5:15). By doing so, we will be living out our condemnation, acting as if we are Judah under Divine judgment at the hands of the Babylonians.

19:11 The world will be broken to shivers, "as the vessels of a potter" (Rev. 2:26). But this is in fact quoting Jeremiah's words concerning the breaking of the individual believer who is rejected at the last day (cp. 18:4-6). The point of the Lord's quotation is surely that those He rejects will share the world's condemnation.

19:15 *I will bring on this city and on all its towns all the evil that I have pronounced*- This may appear to be stating the obvious, until we appreciate that God pronounced the evil whilst being fully open to changing His mind about it- see on 18:4-8. God is therefore saying here that the time of His openness to persuasion against His intention to destroy them is now closing. Every moment we live, we live within the frames of amazing possibilities in terms of dialogue with our gracious, open-ended God.

20:6 Publically, Jeremiah appears bold and undeflected by opposition and persecution. But :7-10 show how internally, he was so sensitive to it all. When we feel the same, we can remember Jeremiah.

20:7 Despite the unity of spirit between God and Jeremiah, the prophets weren't always forced to say the words. Jeremiah didn't want to say them at times, the weariness of it all got on top of him; and yet he felt unable to walk away, just as God felt with Israel. But there were times when he outright rebelled. Here Jeremiah complains: "Yahweh, You have seduced me [s.w. Ex. 22:16 of a man seducing a woman], and I was seduced; You are stronger than me [s.w. Dt. 22:15] and I am overcome" (Abraham Heschel's translation understands "stronger than" to imply rape; most translations are too embarrassed to render the words as they really are). The extreme language isn't surprising given that Jeremiah was suicidal (:14-18) and likely bi-polar- consider how he oscillates between praise in :13 and a death wish in :14. So here in :7 Jeremiah is saying that he was attracted

by God, he was seduced by Him, but then the whole thing became too much- he felt his soul had been inappropriately taken over. And yet in 15:16 he says that he had found God's word and eaten it of his own freewill, and as a result, "I am called by Your name"- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). But here, Jeremiah felt he had been forcibly used and not married. He resented the complete takeover of his heart. But he reasons himself through it, until in :13 he can come to again praise Yahweh in ecstasy, and recognize that he had simply revealed to God how he felt in that moment, which God knew anyway because He sees and knows all things (:12).

20:14 Here Jeremiah quotes Job's words; even in his depression, he perceived the similarities between himself and other depressed Biblical heroes.

21:6 *They shall die of a great plague*- There seems no record of this happening, indeed the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem wasn't as awful as it could have been; because God in His love and grace for a faithless people reduced the judgment threatened? Likewise the threat that none would be spared (:7) must be compared against the fact that many Jews were saved alive and taken into captivity in Babylon.

21:9 By surrendering to the Babylonians they would be expressing their recognition that they had indeed sinned, and should rightfully be placed in the hands of their enemies.

21:12 Even at this very late stage, with Jerusalem surrounded (:2,4), God was prepared to relent and not fulfil all the prophetic words of destruction; His wrath was still capable of being quenched. Unquenchable or eternal fire therefore refers to the wrath of God which has reached such a point that it can no longer be extinguished; but once the objects of that wrath are 'burnt', as the metaphor requires, they will not exist eternally in that burning process. Notice that the one thing He so wished to see was "justice"- because this is the epitome of so much spirituality and right behaviour. This is how very sensitive He is to how we treat each other.

22:2 Jeremiah must've been so nervous when he learnt to whom he must preach. He's have had to take a deep breath to say these things, just as we have to when trying to swing a conversation around to witnessing to Christ to those we feel awed by or would far rather not witness to.

22:3 In giving Israel the reasons for their destruction, God parallels their breaking covenant with Him, with their injustice (21:12; 22:3,9,13). Mal. 2:8,10,14 speaks of how a broken covenant with God is related to a broken covenant with our brethren and our partner. The nature of our covenant relationship with God is reflected in our relationships with each other. If we sense the grace of God shown to us in covenant relationship, we will respond by having justice and integrity toward others in all our ways, awed as we will be by the certainty and reliability of His grace to us through His covenant with us.

22:6 Note the dramatic contrast within this verse. God so loved Judah, He saw them as beautiful, and yet with those feelings in mind He was going to destroy them. They were so wicked and rebellious against them, but truly He loved them with a father's love. His punishment of them wasn't the offended wrath of a capricious deity. If God has such love for the condemned and rebellious just because they are His children; how much more confident can we be of His grace toward us who are in Christ.



22:13-19 This is a passionate condemnation of Jehoiakim for building an extension to his house, using his neighbours as workmen and not giving them the agreed wages. We see this sort of thing all the time. And shrug and think it good fortune it didn't happen to us. But that's not the spirit of prophecy; God and the prophets were so sensitive to that kind of abuse of power. No matter how poor we may be, we each have power in some form over others in the context of our relationships with them, and we are not to misuse it.

22:16 To know God means to have an active relationship with Him, which will involve showing care and justice towards the poor.

22:22 *Surely then you will be ashamed* - God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him. But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence My son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him. It's an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us.

22:24 God's knowledge of possible futures is brought out several times in Jeremiah. He considered how even if Coniah were the signet upon His right hand, yet He would still have to uproot Israel. He fantasized about how if the prophets had been faithful and if Israel had heard them, then Israel would have repented (23:22). This reveals the extent of His passion for us; and it's this knowledge which must make His experience of us so tragic and sad, more than we can ever know. He knows all the infinite numbers of possible futures there could have been if we were more faithful. This thought alone should inspire us to try to live up more to our potentials, to trade our talents, and thus to experience His working with us.

23:2 Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having 'driven out' Israel from their land (:2,3,8); the pastors' sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken. There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin.

23:5 Jesus was the final fulfilment of this "branch"; He was a branch of David in the sense that He had David as His ancestor (Lk. 1:31-35). He therefore didn't pre-exist as a person before the time of David.

23:6 *Yahweh our righteousness*- Jesus never sinned, He was as righteous as God in His character. By baptism into Him, that righteousness is counted to us; and thereby He is for us the means to God's righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30).

23:10 Human "might is not right"; human power is fiercely criticized by the prophets. One of the most striking features of the prophets is their denunciation of human power. Judah were doing what was humanly sensible and smart. To trust in politics, in what seems the usual human response to an issue rather than trust in God, is in fact something which breaks God's heart. The life of faith in God is simply the very opposite of what seems humanly sensible. To give money we'd surely be better saving; risk our lives and health for another; neglect our business or career for the sake of the Lord's work. These ought to be the *normal* decisions we make, if we are walking in step with the spirit; and yet it would appear that they are the exceptions to the rule of far too many of our lives. And the point is, God's heart broke because His people were and are like this (:9).

23:12 *They shall be driven on, and fall*- God confirms people in the downward spiral they choose.

23:18 It is indeed hard to see the world from God's perspective; but this is what the spirit of prophecy was and is all about. The prophets stood in the presence of God, and partook in His "council" (:22), i.e. His inner circle of trusted friends (see too 15:19). The way God speaks of the prophets as being His "council" suggests He is open to dialogue and even 'advice' from men; such is His humility and desire to work with us rather than merely demand our submission.

23:36 The false prophets were judged according to their words; each man's word was to be his burden at the day of Babylonian judgment . Gal. 6:5 alludes here in saying that at the judgment, every man shall bear his own burden- i.e., that of his own words. Wrong speech will be condemned at the day of judgment (Tit. 2:8), out of our own mouths we will be judged (Lk. 19:22). The implication seems to be that our words will be quoted back to us during the judgment process. By our words we really will be justified or condemned (Mt. 12:37). How we speak, especially if we claim to bear God's Name as baptized believers, will be the basis of our judgment.

24:3 It was obvious what Jeremiah had seen; but God asked him to verbalize it. By putting things into words out loud, we become the more conscious of them. It's no bad idea to pray our private prayers out loud, to recount out loud to God our situations so that we perceive them more accurately rather than just assuming that we have internally assessed the situation correctly.

24:8 The spiritually weakest were those who remained in the land and went down into Egypt. Yet when given the choice of going to Babylon or remaining with these people, Jeremiah chose to remain with them, knowing they were the weakest. If we truly seek God's glory in people, it may be that we in some ways make the choice to be with the weak so that by all means we may save some; when the nicer thing to do is to associate only with the spiritually stronger.

25:3 *Rising up early and speaking*- Just as God also did (:4). In our witness to the world, we are especially united with God. He is speaking through us; our feelings of disappointment, discouragement and rejection are in a sense His feelings; our joy at converting another is His joy. In this sense Jesus says He will be personally with us as we obey the commission to take His message to all the world (Mt. 28:20).

25:8 *Because you have not heard My words*- Time and again, ignoring God's word is presented as the main reason for Judah's condemnation. The people would've heard Jeremiah teaching and preaching, and simply shrugged. They may have accepted him as a prophet, but they were not prepared to have their lives disrupted by his message; they were fine as they were, too busy (as they thought). The fact they didn't take seriously the emotional man from Anathoth was the basis of their condemnation. Yet they loyally went to the temple (26:2) and offered sacrifice. They weren't atheists. They simply didn't take God's word seriously. People are just the same today. We likewise should be aware that our easy access to God's word today makes us very much accountable. We ought to be reading it at least daily and seriously trying to conform our lives and thinking to it.

25:9 *And against all these nations around*- Judah's sin lead to other nations suffering. People suffer the effects of others' sin, as we see in the consequence of Adam's sin. This isn't because God punishes the righteous with the wicked, but because He allows people the freewill to sin; and the sinfulness of sin is in the harmful effect it has upon others.

25:15 Being given a cup of wine to drink from God is a double symbol- of condemnation, as here, or of blessing and salvation (1 Cor. 10:16). This is why our drinking of the cup of wine at the communion service is a step either to our eternal blessing or condemnation, and this is why we are powerfully helped by the symbol to examine ourselves at that meeting especially, knowing that we have only one of two possible destinies- eternal death or the blessing of eternal life (1 Cor. 11:29). And there is no way out by simply refusing to drink it- for if we refuse, we shall be made to drink it to our condemnation (:28).

25:18-26 We seem to have here a chronological prediction of the nations which Babylon attacked and destroyed, beginning with Jerusalem (:29); and finally Sheshach, a code name for Babylon, drinks the cup of destruction herself.

26:2 *Perhaps they will listen*- This leads in to the implications that God doesn't actually know for sure how His people will respond to His word. So great is the freewill we have been given as we in our generation read and hear the words of the Bible. God of course *could* know our response, but at times He limits His knowledge in the same way as He limits His power- in that He *could* do all things but He doesn't do all He'd like to do because of our limitation of Him. The limitation of God is shown by how He speaks about prayer: "The Lord's... ear [is not] dull, that it *cannot* hear... your sins have hid His face from you so that He *will not* hear" (Is. 59:1,2). In this sense God limits His possibilities. He *can* see all things, and yet in the time of Israel's apostasy He hides His face from them (Mic. 3:4 cp. Dt. 32:19,20). The Hebrew word *ulay*, 'perhaps', is significant in this connection. "Perhaps they will listen", God says, in reflection upon Ezekiel's preaching ministry to God's people (Ez. 12:1-3). Of Jeremiah's prophetic work, God likewise comments: "Perhaps [Heb. *ulay*] they will listen" (:2,3; 36:3,7; 51:8; also Is. 47:12). This uncertainty of God as to how His people will respond to His word reflects the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to our kind of time. It has huge implications for us, too. With what eagerness must God Almighty look upon us as we sit down to read His word daily! 'Are they going to listen? How are they going to respond?'

26:8 *You shall surely die*- People get very angry when we say things which criticize their relationship with God and their behaviour before Him, and suggest that their established way of worship is wrong.

26:19 In Hezekiah's time, all Judah had to repent to avert total destruction- but even though they didn't, the prayer of Hezekiah saved the nation. This is the power of just one righteous person, God is so sensitive to righteousness. In the Old Testament there are several examples of just one righteous man saving the sinful or spiritually weak people of God from destruction; and those cases were to prepare Israel for the concept of the supreme righteousness and intercession of Christ being able to save we who are likewise sinners.

27:3 *The messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah*- Instead of trusting solely in God, Zedekiah was trying to make alliances with other nations to stave off the Babylonian invasion. But the message was again that all such human might would fail, and total repentance was the only way for Judah to be saved.

27:5 If God takes away from us what we have been accustomed to having- in Judah's case, their independence as a nation- then we should recognize that God as creator of all has the right to do

this, and that nothing we have, be it material or immaterial, is personally ours. This is one outcome of believing in God as creator rather than in atheistic evolution.

27:6 *And the animals of the field also*- This is emphasized several times. We see thereby God's huge sensitivity to the natural creation. It also opens up the possibility that there is a latent spirituality within all of creation; God is in some sense in contact with them. Rom. 8:19-23 seems to hint that the natural creation will in some sense be delivered into a new spiritual dimension at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

27:14 Speaking God's truth made Jeremiah everybody's enemy. His own people, from the masses to the leadership, the religious leaders and their false prophets, the surrounding Gentile nations- all were insulted by what he had to say. There are times in our own ministries when we will be left alone because of our loyalty to God's word- or so it will seem.

27:21 It would appear that the expensive vessels of God's house had been taken into the house of the king. We must learn the lesson, not to use the things of God's spiritual house for our own personal benefit.

28:3,4 Hananiah had taken Jeremiah's prophecies of restoration but said it would happen within two years rather than the 70 years which Jeremiah had spoken of in chapter 25. And he inserted a false prediction that Jeconiah would return from Babylon. False teaching follows this pattern; slightly changing God's true word and slipping in a few other things. This is what makes false religion attractive, and why it will be accepted by those who aren't familiar with God's word. We live in a world where there are many voices, many claims, clamouring for our belief; only a familiarity with the Bible text and an acceptance of it as the final authority will enable us to discern truth from error.

28:11 *The prophet Jeremiah went his way*- There are times in such conflict situations when we too just have to walk away. God's says one thing, and the popular religious leaders say another. We can make our point and then walk away from endless argument and controversy.

28:13 *Go, and tell Hananiah*- Jeremiah may well have thought 'Oh no, I never want to see that man again'. But the motive and purpose of correcting false teaching is for the sake of helping those who are deceived.

29:5,6 By doing so, the exiles would be expressing their faith that God's word about a 70 year captivity was going to be true. The Jewish false prophets in Babylon were telling them that the captivity would soon be over and they would be back in the land of Judah (:8). False teaching tries to tell us that we can have the restored Kingdom now, with no need to wait long, no need to accept our sinfulness nor truly repent.

29:7 *Pray to Yahweh for it; for in its peace you shall have peace*- Alluded to in 1 Tim. 2:1,2 about how we should pray for the nations in which we live, that we might be able to live in peace.

29:15 The sin of the Jewish captives in exile would bring about suffering on the Jews who then remained in the land (:16,17). Again we see that sin is about the damage we do to others.

29:23 *And have committed adultery*- Repeatedly, the false prophets of both Old and New Testaments are associated with immoral behaviour. Wrong beliefs about God often lead to wrong

behaviour; false teaching is often wrong teaching about way of life, rather than being simply honestly mistaken in theological interpretation of the Bible.

*I am He who knows, and am witness-* It's not painless to simply say that we believe God's Name is Yahweh and that this means "I am". He therefore sees and knows all things because He "is" in all ways, and our lives must be appropriate to Him being as He is. Note that God is presented as both witness and judge. Our lives are as it were played out before the Divine courtroom.

29:26 The whole tremendous experience of having God's mind in them, sharing His perspective, seeing the world through His eyes, made the prophets appear crazy to others. There's a marked emphasis upon the fact that they were perceived as madmen (:24,26; Hos. 9:7; 2 Kings 9:11). For us to walk down a street for even ten minutes, feeling and perceiving and knowing the sin of every person in those rooms and houses and yards, feeling the weeping of God over each of them... would send us crazy. And yet God strengthened the prophets, and there's no reason to think that He will not as it were strengthen us in our sensitivity too.

30:7 *That day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble-* Dan. 12:1 says the same thing in the same language, but says that the ultimate salvation of Israel will be in the appearance of Christ and the resurrection from the dead (Dan. 12:2,3). The Babylonian invasion was known as the time of Israel's trouble (2:28; 8:15; 11:12; Neh. 9:32). There was the possibility that the Babylonian invasion and capture of Jerusalem was the time of trouble which would lead to Israel's final salvation in the coming of their Messiah; but instead they chose to believe their false prophets and refused to repent. So the whole possible scenario didn't come true then, and was reapplied to a latter day invasion of Israel, the taking of Jerusalem, Israel's repentance, hearing the words of the true prophets, the return of Christ, the resurrection and the establishment of God's Kingdom. That scenario could now come true at any moment.

30:17 *I will restore health to you-* Although their wound was humanly incurable (:12,15). God really can do the impossible, and impossible thing we struggle with is that sinners condemned to suffering and death can really be saved from that and given eternal life.

*Zion, whom no man seeks after-* The attitude of others to us God's people is so painful for Him. He desperately seeks His people, and for others to consider we are down and out, not wanted by anyone, provokes Him to action. Even though His people were so sinful, the fact others mocked them was significant to God. This colossal sensitivity of God is an encouragement to us who can feel at times that we are insignificant and ultimately, existentially alone.

30:18 We see here the theme of God's Kingdom actually being a re-establishment of the entity which once was on earth (Ez. 21:25-57; Acts 1:6). See too :20 "as before".

31:13 This is what shall happen after Rachel weeps for her slain children (:15) and she enters the new covenant (:31). She will be as a virgin who takes her tambourine in hand and dances, entering a new covenant with her *ba'al*, her Lord, her husband, who has obliterated the memory of all her sins in a way that only a Divine being could do (:13). Women in love are stereotypically associated with emotions of giddiness, hysteria, excitement, joy... and this is the language applied to the once weeping Rachel, who wept over the children God had taken from her. And yet... according to the New Testament quotations and expositions of :31, this is the very same 'new covenant' into which

we enter in baptism (Heb. 8:8,13; 12:24). This is God's joy over us, and it should be ours over Him. The damage of sin can at times seem so permanent that we can feel that nothing whatever can change things for us now, as Rachel weeping for her children. But the dramatic transformation really can happen when we enter into the new covenant. It's hard to put together how God will slay Rachel's children with thirst, forget them and show them no pity (Hos. 2:3,4; 4:6; 9:12), leave her weeping for them, and then dry her eyes and speak of a new covenant and new relationship with her. But the point of it all is that this is indeed how radical the cycle of sin, judgment and repentance really is in the lives of each of us. If a movie were to be made of all this, none of us would be able to resist it. The story of how through love gone sour, estrangement, anger and battery, a couple triumph in love and true, eternal intimacy. But this is the wonder and power of true repentance. And it is also a powerful window into the consequence and nature of human sin. The whole story, the images and ideas... surely leave us knowing once and for all that our religion and relationship with God simply can never be merely abstract contemplation of Biblical ideas, devoid of commitment and passion in response to God's love. All these wonderful ideas come down to us through reading and reflection upon Scripture. But Bible reading, understood and felt as it should be, can from now on for us surely never again be a passive, neutral, private experience. If we truly are in covenant relationship with this wondrous God, it demands our all. Our failures, forgiven as they are, will haunt us for their awfulness; and the wonder of His love will never cease to move us to real tears in the midst of this passionless, too busy, postmodern world.

31:22 *A woman shall follow after a man*- It was unheard of for a woman to take the initiative in starting a romance leading towards marriage; the man always chose his woman. Hence Ruth and Naomi's outstanding initiative regarding Boaz. Our repentance is presented here as a woman taking the initiative to as it were woo God Almighty; who as it happens has a heart that yearns for her anyway (:20). This is the strange romance of repentance, a mutual attraction that lasts for eternity. And the grace of it all is that this initiative of Judah for God, this new thing in the earth, was created by Him.

32:8 *Then I knew that this was the word of Yahweh*- To buy property in a land terrorized by the Babylonians and about to be taken over by them (note the date given in :1), as God Himself had predicted, seemed pointless and foolish. There was only any point in doing this if it would result in Jeremiah's family gaining the land at a future date, but it seems from 16:2 that Jeremiah had no children. But sometimes God asks us to do such counter-instinctive things that we know that this just has to be His hand. Likewise Peter tested whether it was really Jesus walking on the water by saying that if it was Jesus, then only He would ask him to come walking on the water; only the Lord would ask us to do such counter-instinctive things (Mt. 14:28).

32:15 The repeated emphasis upon witnessing the purchase and making it legal was because at the end of the 70 years captivity, land would again be valuable and be bought and sold; and this land which Jeremiah was buying would therefore be a valued part of his family's inheritance. So God was asking Jeremiah to put his money where his mouth was for the sake of the hope of the restored Kingdom which he was preaching. Sometimes God asks us to do the same; to make a sacrifice, even a financial one, for the sake of the hope of the Kingdom which we profess to others.

32:23 *Done nothing of all that You commanded*- Yet they were *partially* obedient; even within Jeremiah we see evidence of them offering sacrifices. But giving only part of our hearts to God is

effectively giving nothing; the lesson is the demand for whole heartedness in devotion. Hence :30 says that Israel “have done *only* that which was evil in My sight from their youth”. Another window onto this is to understand that when someone believes, righteousness is imputed to them; but to the unbeliever, sin is imputed (Rom. 4:8). Hence all the blood of the prophets was counted upon those who slew Jesus (Mt. 23:35). We cannot therefore simply choose not to believe and claim some kind of neutrality before God; sin will be added to our existing sins (Ps. 69:27).

32:25 Although Jeremiah did what God commanded and openly justified it to others on the basis that one day, God’s promised restoration would happen- yet he evidently struggled within himself and with God about this issue. We may appear confident in faith and hope in the future Kingdom, and so may others, but who knows the internal struggles going on within us all.

32:37 *Out of all the countries*- The Babylonians scattered the Jews amongst all their empire. Hence the book of Esther describes how the Jews were to be found in all 127 provinces of the empire; the command to kill them and then to save them had to be written in all those different languages (Esther 8:9; 9:30).

32:40 *I will put My fear in their hearts*- Part of the new covenant involved God giving those included in it a new heart (:39), putting His word within their minds (31:33). Whilst we of our own freewill have to be prepared to enter that covenant with God, our salvation isn’t by our works nor by our steel willed mastery of our own minds; God works within the human heart, to some extent even giving us spirituality.

32:44 These were exactly the things which Jeremiah had been asked to do right then, *before* this promised time of restoration of the Kingdom. The command wasn’t simply so that his relatives’ descendants might be blessed by his obedience with some land to the family name (note the implication in 16:2 that he didn’t have his own children); rather was it an invitation to him to live out the Kingdom life in this life, even though the environment was very much not the time of God’s restored Kingdom, in fact the very opposite. We too are invited to experience the Kingdom life in some ways even now.

33:7 *As at the first*- One proof that the future Kingdom of God will be on earth rather than in Heaven is because that Kingdom is to be a restoration of the Kingdom of God as it had been in the form of Israel (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:6). The language of restoration “as at the first” is a major theme in Jeremiah- note “yet again” (:10).

33:10 *That are desolate*- They were not at that moment desolate (:1), but God’s prophetic word is so certain that what He predicts will happen is spoken of as if it already exists. Likewise :12 “which is waste”.

33:15 Israel’s return from the nations where they had been scattered would be associated with the coming of Messiah to lead them once they had returned. It seems from Haggai 2 and Zech. 4 that Zerubbabel [meaning ‘branch brought from Babylon’] could have fulfilled these prophecies. But due to the prosperity in captivity which the Jews attained (see Esther 10), most chose not to return to the land, and those who did weren’t willing to obey God’s law. Indeed, extra-Biblical history records that Zerubbabel returned to Babylon. So the “branch” prophecies were reapplied to Christ; by baptism into Him, God’s righteousness is counted to us. We live at a time when the Jews are literally

scattered worldwide; around the time when they return to the land, Christ will come as “the branch” to restore God’s Kingdom on earth. We may yet have to see a far greater return to the land than happened since the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel.

34:11 The prophets not only reflected God’s dismay and passionate feelings, they expressed their own dismay too. Lack of justice was a major concern of the prophets. But to us, injustice may be so commonplace we don’t really worry about it too much. Given all the idolatry going on at the time of Jeremiah, we’d have expected the condition for being spared judgment at the hands of their invaders to be: ‘Throw your idols away!’. But :11,22 offers them a reprieve if they stopped abusing their brethren. When, temporarily, the Jews ceased doing that and proclaimed liberty to their brethren- the pending judgment was put on hold. When they again abused their brethren, not giving them the “liberty” which must be afforded to all those made in God’s image, then the Babylonians returned. And we need to ask whether we proclaim liberty to our brethren- or abuse them by not allowing them the basic freedom which is the dignity God allows to each of His children.

34:17 *Among all the kingdoms of the earth*- The Hebrew *eretz* means both “earth” as in the sense of the whole planet, and also “the land” promised to Abraham. This ambiguity helps us understand how the restoration prophecies could have had their fulfilment in the regathering of the Jews scattered throughout the 127 provinces of the Babylonian and then Persian empires, which straddled the land promised to Abraham; and yet they will now have their major fulfilment in our last days, in the restoration of Israel from their dwelling places in literally the entire planet.

34:18 This speaks of how the Jews must die, because they passed between the pieces of the dead animal sacrifices in making a covenant. The idea of the dead animals in the ceremony was to teach that ‘So may I be dismembered and die if I fail to keep my promise’. God too has cut such a covenant commitment to us. In Genesis 15, He made a one-sided commitment to Abraham and to us Abraham’s seed by baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29); and He passed between the pieces of the sacrificed animals to confirm it. But it was 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). Usually both parties passed between the dead animals- but in Gen. 15, only Yahweh did. It was a one-sided covenant from God to man, exemplifying His one-way grace. 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. 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. From one viewpoint, the only way we can not be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in this covenant.

35:14 Jonadab’s requirements of his descendants were unreasonable. There was nothing wrong in drinking wine nor in owning vineyards or living in a house. Indeed, all these three things are listed amongst the blessings which God would give Israel in Canaan (Dt. 6:11; 8:12; Ps. 104:15). But the point is that if other people can show such careful obedience to human commands, even if they are unnecessary and increasingly irrelevant- how much more should we be obedient to God’s word. All around us are great examples of single minded dedication of life- to wrong principles. Self-sacrificial humanitarian atheists are ever before us with their good deeds. Men give their lives to and for what



they believe and for political leaders- even though those beliefs are faulty and the leaders have feet of clay. How much more committed should we be... faced as we are with the ultimate truths of God and His Son. *If they can do it- why can't we, and why can't we do even more than them?* We can also reflect that Jonadab asked his descendants to not indulge in the legitimate blessings which God had given (houses, wine and vineyards). There are different levels in spiritual life; we can grab what blessings God gives us and run with them; or we can forego them, give them to others, use them for Him, refuse them simply to exercise the spiritual muscles of our self-control.

36:2 Jeremiah was asked to write down his words *so that perhaps* Judah would repent (:3). God recognized that by regularly reading those words there was a far higher chance the message might sink in and they would be motivated to action. Hearing God's word read to us is one thing, but reading it ourselves is another process. We who are literate and have Bibles are greatly blessed with the potential for really getting to grips with God's word in a manner which others haven't been blessed with. To waste and fritter away that responsibility in favour of trashy novels is something we shall have to give account for.

36:3 God says that perhaps Judah would *hear His word* and repent; in :7 Jeremiah repeats this by saying that perhaps Judah would *pray* and repent. True prayer is therefore a reflection of our hearing of God's word. His word influences ours. If the Lord's word abides in us, then prayer becomes powerful, as our will merges with that of God in our requests (Jn. 15:7).

36:9 The paradox is that the leadership fasted, but didn't ultimately want to hear God's word. Even such self-deprivation is of no meaning unless we are going to be guided by God's word.

36:19 It's a common feature of human response that we tend to 'shoot the messenger', and this is supremely true when it comes to response to someone preaching repentance and God's demands upon human life. This is the main psychological reason behind religious persecution. The source of discomfort must be removed from our presence or even destroyed.

36:23 As noted on :19, the natural human response to God's word prodding at their conscience is to remove it, to shoot the messenger. In our day one way of getting rid of the inconvenient demands of God's word is to declare parts of it uninspired by Him; not really His word, just the local views of the time; or to embark upon complex academic attempts to cloud the obvious message with a cloud of uncertainty, radical re-translation and polemics.

36:24 *They were not afraid-* But when they first heard those words, they were afraid (:16). Our response to and even interpretation of God's word is so often influenced by those around us. In the presence of unbelievers we can be tempted to see it the way they do... Bible reading and response has to be a totally personal enterprise, and at times it calls us to be prepared to stand alone, with our backs to the world if necessary.

37:12 Later in Jeremiah, we read of how Jeremiah was given the choice of honourable retirement in Babylon, or to remain with God's spiritually weak people in the land. He chose to stay with them, and even went down into Egypt with the weakest of them. Perhaps he learnt to do that from his experience at this time. We too are taught by failures in one situation to be stronger the next time we are faced with the choice. It seems he had had enough and just wanted to get away from the aggressive, rejective audience he had in Jerusalem. It is hinted in 32:25 that Jeremiah may have

somewhat resented having to buy the field, so that perhaps his family relatives would inherit it at the time of the restored Kingdom in 70 years time, after his death. So he wanted to enjoy it now. And for these things he suffered. We can't have the hope of eternity *and* enjoy it now, even if we may have some foretastes of it.

37:17 Those who know God's word will find encouragement there in their experiences of life- but that encouragement is dependent upon their appreciation of the word, and their ability to see the similarities between their situation and that of others who have gone before. Thus when Zedekiah called Jeremiah out of the prison house to meet him and show him the word of God, he ought to have perceived that he was going through the very experience of Pharaoh with Joseph (see too :20). Jeremiah's desperate plea not to be sent back to prison to die there surely echoes that of Joseph to his brethren; for Jeremiah was let down like Joseph had been into a pit with no water in, so reminiscent of Joseph (Gen. 37:24). But Zedekiah didn't want to see all this; he should've listened to Jeremiah, as Pharaoh had listened to Joseph and saved himself. It was all potentially set up for him; but he refused to take note. One of the many reasons for daily Bible reading is that we become familiar with the text of Scripture, and can more easily perceive the similarities between our life situations and those of Bible characters who have gone before us.

38:7 *Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, a eunuch*- As a dark skinned foreigner who was well known to be a eunuch, he would likely have been despised within Jerusalem society. But it was exactly the despised who God loves to use as tools to save His people. And it's exactly these types who have the empathy to be able to reach out to save those like Jeremiah. We too can be such people, if we meditate enough upon who we really are and the significance of our sins.

38:16 *Who made us this soul*- The fact we had our lives created by God means we should never taken another's life apart from at His specific command.

38:23 You shall cause this city to be burned with fire- God somehow arranged things within His purpose so that Zedekiah's repentance would have enabled the salvation of all Israel. But his failure to repent, his fear of his image amongst men who were themselves condemned and on borrowed time, meant that judgment came on all His people. What this shows is that there are times and places where God is willing to save people for the sake of the spirituality of a third party, but if he or she fails in this, deliverance doesn't *necessarily* arise from another place, as it would have done in Esther's time.

38:22 *Your feet are now sunk in the mire*- The emphasis would've been on "*your* feet". Jeremiah witnessed to Zedekiah on the basis of bridge building. Jeremiah warned him that politically and spiritually, *his* feet were sunk in the mud - just after Jeremiah himself had sunk in the mud and been miraculously delivered from it (:6). We must build bridges into the real world in which the people who are our audience live and love, work and play, laugh and weep, struggle and suffer, grow old and die. We do this by revealing to them that we too are human, we're not knights in shining armour; and we seek to relate our experiences to theirs, so that there is that point of 'flash' where we as it were catch each others' eye, and are united by experience. It is from that point that we have won their trust and can proceed to credibly share the doctrinal content of the Gospel with them. The more real, the more credible.

39:5 The parable of the good Samaritan features a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and being attacked, to be saved by grace when no human help could assist him (Lk. 10:30). The wounded man represents us all, and yet he is modelled upon Zedekiah. This weak king who loved hearing God's word and wanted to do the right thing but was simply weak and gave in to the pressure of circumstance and thereby seriously sinned- is representative of each of us.

39:10 These very poor people didn't show themselves spiritually strong, whereas at least some of the more prosperous who were taken to Babylon did repent and some returned to the land after 70 years. Poverty doesn't always mean spirituality; for the problem with poverty is that it can become obsessive and distracts people from God.

39:18 *Because you have put your trust in me-* Ebedmelech is commended for his faith, and yet at the same time God points out his fear (:17). Ideally, faith should preclude fear. Ebedmelech feared, and yet he still believed. Perhaps faith is rarely total in human beings, but God accepts that all the same, in His grace. Note that Ebedmelech is promise deliverance because of his faith- when we would have expected him to be given deliverance because he had delivered God's prophet Jeremiah. Thus we see that good works are not on their own of significance to God; it is faith in Him which is of the essence.

40:4 *All the land is before you-* Jeremiah would have recalled how Lot was in a similar position, given the opportunity of living where he wanted; and he wrongly chose the Sodom area, and spiritually suffered for it. Jeremiah would've immediately been on his guard, in case this offer of living where he liked could lead him to wrong choices. The more familiar we are with Scripture and the more we reflect upon and personalize it, the easier it will be for us to see our situations as being in essence what others were in, and the clearer the decisions will become.

40:6 Jeremiah was popular with the Babylonians because he had repeatedly urged Judah to surrender to them and predicted the Babylonian victory. So he was offered a nice retirement package in the opulence of Babylon, amongst his fellow Jews, whom God had predicted would be the ones who would repent, rather than those very poor few who remained in the land. Jeremiah's chose to remain in unstable Judah, which would've suffered all the practical and economic problems associated with anarchy, marauding gangs and a land destroyed by a lengthy military campaign; and he also chose to remain among the materially poor and spiritually weakest. They wouldn't have been very nice company. The first wave of Jews taken captive to Babylon included faithful Daniel and his friends, Ezekiel and other prophets. But Jeremiah chose the hardest way, to stay with the weakest and poorest; he must've been so spiritually lonely. In various contexts we also have these choices, and if we are truly motivated by the love of Christ, we will seek the higher level choices as Jeremiah did.

40:9 *Don't be afraid to serve the Chaldeans-* Gedaliah is alluding to Jeremiah's words of 27:8,11,12, where he had urged Judah to recognize their sins and the need for punishment of them, and therefore serve the Chaldeans. Because they didn't do this, destruction came. But even afterwards, it seems Gedaliah was still urging the people to accept this principle.

40:10-15 The positive situation described here, both materially and spiritually, was perhaps an outcome of the people being willing to obey Jeremiah's earlier appeal to serve the Babylonians (see on :9). It would seem from 41:5 that the destroyed temple was at least partially operating; and as

many as 80 men had cut themselves in repentance and a fervent desire for God to hear their prayers, and were bringing sacrifice to Him. The king's daughters were allowed to remain in Mizpah, and some of the "greatest" amongst the Jews also remained in the land (42:1). This situation is never predicted by Jeremiah; all the prophecies suggest a total destruction of the people and the severing of God's relationship with the land. But in wrath God remembered mercy; what we see here is grace indeed. And yet, once again, the situation didn't last because of human failure- in this case, Ishmael's evil explained in chapter 41, and Gedaliah's unwisdom in :16.

41:1 To eat bread together was a sign of fellowship and mutual acceptance. The breaking of bread service is therefore designed as a comfort to us of the Lord's acceptance of us. He is willing to do this any time with us.

41:5 See on 40:10-15.

42:4 *I will keep nothing back from you*- Paul uses the very same phrase from the LXX in Act 20:20 in the same context; of declaring to God's people what He has revealed to him. Many of the allusions made by Bible characters to the words of other Bible characters may not have been conscious; but they were so filled with God's word that they came out with those phrases which they had in their hearts as a result of their continual reflection upon God's word. This is how the Bible can become a living word for us; in that we find ourselves talking even to ourselves, in our deepest self-talk, in the terms and phrases we encounter in the Bible (Eph. 5:19). This is the essence of spiritual mindedness, which is what Christianity is all about.

42:6 *We will obey*- Whilst their attitude is great on paper, chapter 43 explains that they simply rejected the answer they received. At this point, they were approaching God and seeking guidance from His word with their minds already made up as to what they wanted the answer to be. This is the attitude which robs so much prayer and Bible reading of its value- people can do these things in the hope they will be confirmed in their own views and wishes, and if they aren't confirmed in them, they just continue in them anyway. Prayer and Bible study must be done with a true openness of mind and willingness to be directed by them, even into paths and choices we strongly don't wish to make.

*God to whom we send you*- Prayer was envisaged by them as a going to God, a journey into His presence. Although we are in His presence all the time, this doesn't take away the special entry into God's personal presence which is what prayer is all about.

43:2 See on 42:6. The way out of finding that God's word is telling us something we don't want to hear is to claim that actually, that part isn't inspired. The problem with rejecting parts of God's word- the inconvenient bits- is that we then have no mechanism with which to decide which parts to accept and which not to; the process becomes subjective to the point that God's word is no longer His but effectively our own. And it's pride which is at the root of refusing to accept God's word as inspired- for "all the proud men" refused to accept Jeremiah's word as inspired.

43:5 *The remnant of Judah, who were returned from all the nations where they had been driven*- It seems that during the short period of peace immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem (see on 40:10-15), some of the Jews who had fled over Judah's border into neighbouring countries started to return. This was becoming a foretaste of the prophesied restoration and return which was to happen

after 70 years; but their trust in Egypt and lack of faith in Jeremiah's prophetic word meant that this possible scenario didn't come true. We too by grace have many possible scenarios open to us, but our unbelief and desire to follow our gut feelings lead us not to fulfil them.

43:8 *Jeremiah in Tahpanhes*- It's incredible that Jeremiah went there with them, despite having had his prophetic words specifically ignored, and being slandered as actually not a true prophet of Yahweh. But this was his level of identity with God's people, weak as they were. After reading this verse, the spiritual weakness of others in the family of God should never again make us think that we want nothing to do with them. We need to stick with them as Jeremiah did.

44:3 Time and again Jeremiah accuses the people of purposefully inciting God to anger through their worshipping of Him along with other gods (7:18,19; 11:17,18; 25:6; 44:3-8)- whereas the onlooker would've likely commented that at least they were doing *something*, and Jeremiah should just calm himself down about it all. The demand is for total dedication.

44:14 *For none shall return save such as shall escape*- God's grace is amazing here. He had promised total destruction of Judah; but some survived. He had told Jeremiah that He wouldn't respond to Jeremiah's prayers for the people (7:16; 11:14). Yet Jeremiah had prayed for this remnant of the people, and God had responded (42:6). The people had solemnly promised to do whatever God said in response. He told them not to go to Egypt. They went anyway. God said they would be destroyed there "so that none... shall be left to return". And now He hints at the possibility that some would still return to Judah from Egypt. He so seeks relationship with His people. See on :28.

44:18 *Were well, and saw no evil*- Their motivation was simply to have a situation where they would experience good and not "evil", in the sense of disaster. Yet they had claimed that they would accept God's word whether it meant good or evil for them (42:6). However, their agenda was clearly that they wanted good in this life, right now; rather than accepting evil now as a preparation for God's future Kingdom. The prosperity Gospel has likewise totally misunderstood this; through much tribulation in this life we shall come to enter God's Kingdom (Acts 14:22).

44:19 There is fair emphasis on the role the women played in the decision to worship "the queen of the sky". Perhaps the women were attracted by the idea of a female deity and cast off their faith in Yahweh because of that attraction. People can be abused and discriminated against, just as women were at that time, and yet allow this to lead them into rejecting the true God because they think some other religious system gives value to the abused and glorifies them; when in fact it is Yahweh alone who can glorify anything and ultimately right any wrong.

44:28 Having said that all the Jews in Egypt would be destroyed (:27), there is still going to be a tiny remnant, by God's grace. See on :14.

45:5 The command not to see great material things for himself was given to Baruch in the context of the fact that the entire nation of Judah was about to be taken over and destroyed by Babylon. Likewise James 5:3 comments upon the absurdity of heaping up treasures in the last days. If Jesus is about to return and establish His Kingdom here, then amassing wealth in this present order of things which is so soon to be destroyed is bizarre. To live *as if* the day of Christ's return is upon us appears to have been an expectation of the early Christians. It is not to say that we actually *know* that day shall be here imminently; rather are we to live *as if* it will be.

46:2 The disobedient Jews had fled to Egypt because they thought there would be support and stability there from the Babylonians. Here God prophesies that the Egyptian army would be destroyed and wouldn't be a strength to the Jews. Egypt so often becomes a symbol of human strength which God's people are tempted to trust in rather than in Him. His requirements are often counter-instinctive to obey; to remain in the ruins of Judah under Babylonian occupation was in fact the way to peace; but Egypt always looks the logical, more attractive choice.

46:5 *Why have I seen it?*- Jeremiah like us at times was weary at having to teach bad news to sinners, and the loss of life because of human pride.

46:9 The reference to "mighty ones" here and in :5 is an allusion to the Hebrew word *elohim*, which also means "mighty ones" or 'the one great mighty one', and is often applied to God and His armies of Angels. The mighty ones of Egypt and her allies were what Judah preferred to trust in, rather than in the mighty ones of Israel's God. Hence God calls Himself by His title "Yahweh of Armies" in :18. His was the true army, not human armies. Day by day and at times hour by hour, we have this same choice- between trust in God's might or human might. Biblical history is recorded so that we might make the right choice.

46:27 *None shall make him afraid*- This was how it would be at the time of the restored Kingdom of God; and yet Judah are then told that therefore right now in this life "Don't you be afraid" (:28). They were to live now the kind of life they would eternally live in the Kingdom; and we too are asked to live the Kingdom life now. In this sense as Jesus often promised, we who believe in Him "have eternal life" right now (1 Jn. 5:13); not in that we will never die in this life, but in the sense that we can begin to live now the kind of life we will eternally live in the future Kingdom.

47:1 The Philistines were another group of people with whom Judah were tempted to trust upon against the Babylonians; but here their destruction is foretold. They should of course have realized from Biblical history that the Philistines were God's enemies, and they ought to have driven them out of the land rather than think about making such alliances with them.

47:6 Again as in 46:5 we sense Jeremiah's weariness at all the bloodshed and his desire for an end to come. We likely feel the same as we survey our world and the prophecies of its immediate future. The fact is, if Judah had been faithful, there would've been no Babylonian invasion, no destruction of the nations Judah wanted to make alliances with to stave it off rather than repenting.

48:6 It appears that God was even concerned saving some of Gentile Moab, who had been so aggressive to His beloved people. He gave them the same choice as He did to Judah- if they believed that Babylon really would take their land, then they should act appropriately. But just as leaders madly cling on to power, so people more than anything else want to retain their existing lifestyle and environment; we are all so conservative by nature, as Jesus recognized in His parable of Lk. 5:39. The old must continue at all costs, we think; whereas God's word demands of us a counter-instinctive and radical change. This theme continues in :11, where we read of Moab as wine which has settled for too long.

48:9 It really was God's will that even Moab be obedient; or perhaps this was Jeremiah's interjection, as he too wished that Moab would flee their land and thereby escape death at the hand of the Babylonians. There was no gloating over the fact that Israel's historical enemy was also to

suffer, just as believers shouldn't get caught up in feelings of national aggression against another race; rather did God and Jeremiah reveal a true perception of the value of the human person, and therefore a desire that they should repent.

48:13 The intended purpose of the judgment upon Moab was so that they would quit their allegiance to Chemosh their god. In those days, a people couldn't exist without a national god, and in any case, there is within all humans a basic desire to worship at least something. The implication seems to be that if they quit Chemosh, then they would adopt Yahweh as their national God.

48:31 *Therefore will I wail for Moab*- Moab was to weep for her own destruction (:20), but Jeremiah was so identified with them that he felt their future pain and desolation, and wept with them ahead of time. This was how sure Jeremiah was that these prophetic words he preached would come true. He didn't just relay them to the world as a duty, as merely a messenger. He identified with his audience and felt for them. This is our pattern in preaching. We must ask whether we have a heart that bleeds for this world, whether we have ever wept tears for the people we preach to and for the world around us which is fast heading to destruction.

48:36 *Therefore my heart sounds for Moab*- The preceding verses are clearly God Himself speaking. Both His and Jeremiah's heart [see on :31] groaned for Moab, the continual enemy of God's people. God weeps for the arrogant, for the condemned, for His enemies (:42). We who at times fear His judgment of us should remember this; ultimately His love and desire to save is very great, and we unlike Moab have openly shown in baptism, daily prayer and the life of faith that we do indeed want to be saved.

48:47 The latter day blessing of Moab will be when Christ returns and all Israel's angry neighbours finally humble themselves and accept the God of Israel. So many prophecies of their judgment end with this prospect in view. The destruction of the wicked is but part of God's greater plan to bring people from all nations to Him and the eternal blessing of His Kingdom on earth.

49:1 *Why then does Malcam possess Gad*- It was Ammon who had gone over their border to possess the land intended for the Israelite tribe of Gad; hence the reference to Israel repossessing their own land from Ammon in :2. But Malcam, the god of Ammon, is spoken of here as if it was Ammon (as in :3). A people are identified with the name of their god, in that those who worship idols become like them (Ps. 115:8). Israel were unusual in that they had a national God, Yahweh, but they didn't totally identify with Him because they also worshipped gods like Malcam whom the surrounding nations worshipped. By baptism into the Lord's Name and becoming the spiritual people of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29) we are to be totally identified with our God.

49:9 *If thieves by night, wouldn't they steal until they had enough?*- This recalls how Prov. 6:30 says that we don't despise a thief who steals because he is hungry. Although all sin is sin, it seems that there are degrees of sin, hence the varying degrees of sacrifice required under the Law of Moses for different sins. God is particularly angry with those who revel in sin as Edom had done, for they as it were sinned for the pleasure of it rather than because human weakness pushed them into the sinful situation (not that sin in any form can be justified). We should bear this in mind when responding to others' failures.

49:11 *Let your widows trust in Me-* As in all these prophecies there is an appeal for these enemies of God's people to repent. The widows of the soldiers whom God had slain are asked to turn to God and trust Him; again we see that the ultimate intention of judgment is to bring people to God and finally bring about the establishment of His Kingdom.

49:16 God wanted to bring down the pride of Edom. They were not His people, they were one of many Gentile nations. Yet God observed their pride and how they trusted in their mountain strongholds. His colossal perception of the attitudes of every human being on earth is perhaps beyond our full appreciation. If He looks with such detail upon the hearts of those who don't know Him, how much does He look upon us, and also knows the hearts of all those who intersect with us His children.

49:25 *How is the city of praise not forsaken, the city of My joy!-* This could be the stubborn denial of the king of Damascus. Yet Jerusalem is the city of praise that shall not be forsaken eternally, and which shall be the eternal joy of God's people when it is declared the capital of the future Kingdom of God on earth (Ps. 9:14; 102:21; Is. 62:12; 65:18). So it seems that God and Jeremiah interject in the midst of these woeful prophecies of the destruction of Gentile cities like Damascus, to reflect that ultimately Jerusalem will not be destroyed like they shall be. This encourages us to see the predictions of Jerusalem or Zion's eternal presence and joy as having a literal dimension to their fulfillment; the Jerusalem which we can locate on a map, view photographs of or visit shall indeed be the eternal capital city of God's Kingdom on earth, in the same way as Christ shall reign eternally on David's throne / place of kingship, which was in Jerusalem (Lk. 1:31-35).

49:28 *Which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck-* The destruction of all these nations is prophesied as a warning to Judah not to make allegiance with them in the hope they would stave off the Babylonian invasion. The lesson is so repeated- that all human strength is not going to work out, the only way of escape from the consequences of sin is by listening to God's prophetic word.

49:30 *Has conceived a purpose against you-* But :31 explains that God had commanded Nebuchadnezzar to attack these nations. God is therefore shown to be capable of putting thoughts and ideas in the minds of wicked Gentiles, even though they of their own freewill conceive the plans themselves. We're unable to exactly understand this process nor the ethics of it all, but the fact is that it happens. The encouragement is that if God does this kind of thing to wicked people, He is likewise able to work upon the weak hearts of those of us who do love Him in weakness and who eagerly invite Him to put good rather than evil in our hearts because we feel so weak in our own mental strength.

50:2 *Babylon is taken, Bel is disappointed, Merodach is dismayed-* Note how Babylon is so identified with her gods; see on 48:13; 49:1.

50:3 Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (compare :3 and :13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29,32).

50:4 God's intention was that when Babylon fell, the exiles would repent and return to rebuild Zion and enter the new covenant (:5). Babylon fell, the new king, Cyrus of Persia, commanded them to



return and rebuild the temple; but the Jews didn't repent and therefore many of them remained in Babylon, where they had a good life. The fall of Babylon is spoken of in Revelation as happening at Christ's return; the prophecy will be reapplied and fulfilled at that time. The return of the Jews to Israel over the last few generations is surely a preparation for this.

50:8 There was an urgency to flee from Babylon, even though at the time the Jews were prosperous there; there were Jews in leadership positions, as the Biblical record makes clear in Daniel; and archaeological research shows that the Jews were in senior business and administrative positions. But there was an urgency to flee from there and return to Judah and rebuild the Kingdom. The call to leave Babylon is interpreted in the New Testament as representing the call of the Gospel, to leave this present system of things at least mentally (Rev. 18:4). But will the new Israel respond better than historical Israel?

50:14 *She has sinned against Yahweh*- Gentile unbelievers are still counted as sinning against God. His sensitivity to sin must make it so hard to be God... perceiving and feeling the sin of every person amongst the billions of this world. We should be therefore the more sensitive to His sensitivity. This also means that He must be thrilled with the genuine efforts of His people to be righteous, as He observes so much rebellion against Him.

50:20 *The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none*- An encouragement to us as to the totality and depth of God's ability to forgive.

50:29 *For she has been proud*- For all the millions of sins of Babylon, not least her idolatry, it is her pride which is seen as her main sin; for pride is the essence of all sin (see too :31,32,36).

50:33 *They refuse to let them go*- The Babylonians 'refused' to let Judah return in the same way as Egypt did under Pharaoh. However, there's no hint that the Jews actually asked to return. Babylon 'refused' to respond to the Angels' attempts to encourage Babylon to send the Jews back; this may be referred to in Dan. 10:13. From the viewpoint of a Jewish person in Babylon, all this Angelic activity was quite invisible. We too can think God is inactive when in fact He is working powerfully for us behind the scenes.

50:39 *It shall be no more inhabited forever; neither shall it be lived in from generation to generation*- The fact Babylon has been rebuilt at times and didn't cease to be inhabited after the Medes captured it and overthrew the Babylonian empire means that this prophecy must have a future fulfilment. It's not impossible that literal Babylon may be rebuilt, and the latter-day equivalent of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires be re-established in the form of some superpower which will likewise persecute Israel and meet their final end at Christ's return.

51:1 *A destroying wind*- The Hebrew *ruach* translated "wind" is also translated "spirit"; God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). The reference seems to be to a specific Angel who was given the task of destroying Babylon; rather like the Angel who slew the firstborn of Egypt and the faithless Israelites in the wilderness is called "the destroyer" (1 Cor. 10:10). God gives His Angels specific tasks to perform, in the same way as He works with us and will work with us when we take over the Angels' role in the future Kingdom on earth (Lk. 20:35,36; Heb. 2:5). We have even now been given specific work to do, and we should pray to perceive what that is (Eph. 2:10). Also note that the apparently 'negative' phenomena in human life, "evil" in the sense of destruction, come from God

through His Angels designated to perform that work- there is no personal Satan figure who is out of God's control and working against Him.

51:6 Quoted about us in Rev. 18:4; see on 50:8.

51:8 *Wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed-* If God wanted to save even Babylon, how much more is He eager to save us who do believe in and love Him. After all the prophecies of destruction against Babylon, they could all have been averted if she had been taken the message of repentance by the Jews and had accepted it. But part of the problem was that the Jews were comfortable in Babylon [see on 50:8] and therefore they didn't see she needed to repent too much, and they didn't preach this to her. One of the reasons we don't preach to this world is because we are too comfortable within it, as Judah was in Babylon.

51:9 *Her judgement... is lifted up even to Heaven* – But sins are described as rising up to Heaven (2 Chron. 28:9)- here the judgement for them is spoken of as also rising up to Heaven (same Hebrew words). Sin and judgment are therefore paralleled. Sin is its own judgment. Whenever we commit sin, we do so knowing (at least in one part of our brain) the judgment / condemnation which it is. In this sense, we know God's judgments, and the coming day of judgment shouldn't therefore be some totally unknown situation for us. For we have His judgments revealed ahead of time in His word.

51:12 *Yahweh has both purposed and done that which He spoke-* The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence the statement here that He has planned *and done* as planned (see too 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; 37:26; Zech. 1:6; 8:14). This 'gap' is significant when we come to consider the idea of God's 'repentance' or change of mind- stating something is going to happen, but then changing His mind because of human behaviour during the 'time gap' between the statement and its' execution. How then are we to understand God's capacity to know the future? All we can say is that God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Often we read of how God says He is planning evil and devising a plan against His enemies (18:11; 26:3; 49:20,30; 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). But having shared with us His plans through the prophets, He is open to being persuaded not to perform them- as we see in the case of Nineveh, and the intercessions of Moses. See on :29.

51:15,16 The implication is that the same Divine word which brought about creation (God spoke His word and it was done), and which still sustains it, is the same word of God which we meet in the prophets proclaiming destruction. The awesome power of God's word as it is in our times in the Bible is the same creative power we see in the natural creation, and carries the same destructive power as has been witnessed throughout history in His destruction of wicked entities.

51:24 The destruction of Babylon was because of their destruction of the temple; but it took at least 70 years for this judgment to come, in the same way as it took nearly 40 years for Jerusalem to be destroyed for crucifying Christ. The generation who killed Him and that which destroyed the temple all died in their beds. The gap between the sin and the judgment coming was surely in order to give a chance for repentance, and for the subsequent generation to perceive the evil their fathers had done and repent of it. But this lack of repentance and disassociation was what caused such fearful judgment to finally come upon them. In the

length of the ‘gap’ we see the passion of God for human repentance and for people to perceive the sin not only of themselves but of the societies in which they live.

51:29 *The plans of Yahweh against Babylon do stand*- God states His plans but is open to change; in Babylon’s case, they remained or ‘stood’ because there was no repentance nor intercession for her; see on :12.

51:36 *I will plead your cause*- Judah is as it were the one who takes Babylon to the Divine court, with the complaint of :34,35. God is the one who will both plead our cause as an advocate, *and* take vengeance, i.e. order the sentence, as our judge. Micah 7:9 speaks of how Micah has sinned against Yahweh, and yet He will plead his cause and also execute judgment. Likewise with Israel, the Lord stood up to plead as an advocate, and also He stood as the Judge to pronounce the verdict in favour of His people (Is. 3:13); even though He is also the witness against them (Mal. 3:5). In this mixture of metaphor we see how the judicial process is biased in our favour by the simple fact that God loves His people; hence Paul, having made the same observations with his use of legal terms, concludes that there is nobody who can condemn God’s people (Rom. 8:33,34). The events of our lives, all the abuses we suffer, are being considered by God right now in His court. He is both our advocate, the ultimate accurate witness to our sufferings, both of the facts and also our internal feelings, and is also the judge. His apparent silence isn’t that at all. The ongoing process of the court of Heaven should be our continual comfort.

51:39 *A perpetual sleep and not wake*- The ultimate punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23), which is unconsciousness, without any hope of a future resurrection. Eternal conscious torment of the wicked isn’t taught in the Bible.

51:48 *The heavens and the earth*- Another example of where ‘heavens and earth’ refer to the people of Israel and aren’t to always be taken literally, especially when we read of their ‘destruction’.

51:61 The Babylonians had been kindly disposed to Jeremiah because he had prophesied their victory against Jerusalem and had urged Judah to surrender rather than fight Babylon; and they had offered him a comfortable retirement in Babylon after Jerusalem fell (40:4). Such a prophecy would’ve seemed the height of ingratitude towards them. The captive Jews had just arrived in Babylon; to pronounce the destruction of Babylon was the last thing they wanted to do, because they sought the favour of their captors. To speak out God’s word is so often counter-instinctive, awkward, embarrassing and difficult.

51:63,64 Babylon’s destruction is as a stone being cast into the sea (Jesus repeats this in Rev. 18:21). But Jesus also uses this very image to describe the judgment of those who offend one of His little ones (Mt. 18:6). To upset fragile believers by our rejection of them is to be as bad as proud, idolatrous Babylon who destroyed Yahweh’s temple and slew His people. And it will meet the same judgment. We should therefore be extra careful not to reject our fellow believers, especially the “little ones” whose faith is new or fragile. Three of the Gospel records feature this saying of Jesus (also Mk. 9:42; Lk. 17:2); it is so very important.

52:3 Zedekiah’s rebellion was of his own freewill, and God through Jeremiah had pleaded with him not to rebel but to surrender; yet in another sense, God confirmed Zedekiah in this stubbornness, because He wanted to express His anger against Judah. If we reject God’s word as Zedekiah did, then we will be confirmed in the way to destruction we wish to go.

52:8 See on 39:5.

52:27 If this includes Seraiah (:24), and this Seraiah is the same one as in 51:61, it may be that he died because he had in his heart decided that he would not relay God's word nor obey the difficult preaching commission which he had been given (see on 51:61).

## LAMENTATIONS

1:1 God speaks as if He is married to Israel, and that even in their sufferings, He would suffer with them, as a husband suffers with his wife: “the destroyer will come upon *us*” (Jer. 6:22,26) even sounds as if God let Himself in a way be ‘destroyed’ in Israel’s destruction; for each of us dies a little in the death of those we love. The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (here and Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question- if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of the immortal God is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God’s feelings at His peoples’ destruction, but it paves the way for the idea of God somehow being “in Christ” at His death.

1:9 *No comforter*- Seeing God knows all things, we should have total openness with God; this is why some of the great heroes of faith apparently openly question God, because they realized that if they felt something internally, then God knew this anyway. Thus Jeremiah complains that Zion has no comforter- in clear reference to the prophecies of Is. 40:1 that when Judah went into captivity, they would have a comforter. When Jeremiah complains that “The comforter who should refresh my soul is far from me” (:16) he is surely saying ‘The prophesied comforter of Isaiah just simply hasn’t come!’. He had his doubts- and he expresses them openly to God. We can find this same openness in prayer before God if we have a living relationship with Him.

1:18 In Jer. 15:15-19, Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and accuses God of deceiving him. God’s response is to ask him to repent of this, so that he can resume his prophetic work. Perhaps Jeremiah had this incident in mind when he commented: “Yahweh is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment”. This indicates that at least in Jeremiah’s case, he was not irresistibly carried along by the Spirit in some kind of ecstasy, having no option but to speak God’s word. His speaking of God’s word required that he shared the essentially loving and gracious spirit / disposition of his God; and he struggled to have this. Note too how repentance requires a specific, sober recognition that God is right and we were wrong- repentance isn’t a mere shrugging of the shoulders and half-second acceptance that we messed up.

2:1 Ascending to heaven and falling from heaven are Biblical idioms often used for increasing in pride and being humbled respectively - see too Job 20:6; Jer. 51:53 (about Babylon); Mt. 11:23 (about Capernaum). The language of falling from Heaven which we meet in the Bible isn’t therefore to be taken literally.

2:14 before the Babylonian invasion, Judah had been offered the prospect of eternally remaining in their land, if they repented (Jer. 7:7). And after it happened, Jeremiah commented: “Your prophets...did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity”. It could have been ‘warded off’ by the peoples’ repentance and the more powerful entreaty of the prophets. Note how Jeremiah, himself a prophet at the time, so wishes to take the blame upon himself for not pleading more powerfully with the people. Perhaps we will have similar feelings when the time of tribulation breaks forth in the very last days. Others’ repentance to some degree depends upon the depth of our entreaty.

2:15 Christ on the cross was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel’s sins when He was offered gall to quench His thirst (3:15) and when those from Jerusalem mocked and wagged their heads at Him. By baptism into His death we accept that the just judgment for our sins

has been laid upon Him, and we will rise again with Him in resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). We will therefore avoid the tendency to transfer our sin and the judgment for it onto others, and judge them harshly.

2:16 *Gnash the teeth*- There will be "gnashing of teeth" for the rejected at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). In the Old Testament, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (here and Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves?

2:18 Jeremiah wanted his grief to be reflective of the grieving prayer of the remnant to their God. His grief really was and is to be the pattern for others. Attitudes to prayer influence others. Doubtless it influenced the Lord Himself, who wept over Zion (Lk. 19:41), inevitably holding Jeremiah in His mind. Note that Isaiah had prophesied that God would not rest until Zion be restored. Watchmen would be set upon Zion's walls who would give Him no rest until the walls be rebuilt (Is. 62:1,6,7). At this time, Zion was felt by God to be the "apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8). This prophesy started to be fulfilled straight after the Babylonian invasion when Jeremiah urged the desolated people to pray: "Let tears run down like a river day and night; give yourself no respite; don't let the apple of your eye cease". The prayerful remnant gave *themselves* no rest; and thus was fulfilled the prophecy that *God* would have no rest. Sincere prayer according to God's will meant that there was a strong mutuality between the Father and those who prayed to Him. The apple of *His* eye was also theirs; and thus the prayers were ultimately answered and Zion was restored. Our spirit and His are united. All this speaks of an incredible personal bonding in prayer between the Creator and each, specific one of His creatures.

3:7 Jeremiah felt himself totally identified with sinful Judah. Instead of turning away in disgust from God's sinful people who had so abused him, he instead strongly identified with them and on that basis pleaded with God for them; and in this he sets us an amazing challenge and pattern. He was "afflicted" (1:9; 3:1; as Judah, 1:3,7; "built against", :5, as Judah was, Jer. 52:4; "made old", i.e. prematurely aged, :4, as Judah, Ps. 102:26; 50:9; 51:6; felt his prayers not heard, :8, as Judah's weren't; walled about and inclosed, :7,9, as Judah (Hos. 2:6); had God act to him "as a bear", :10, as He was to Judah (Hos. 13:8; Am. 5:19); and "as a lion", :10, as He was to Judah (Jer. 5:6; 49:19; 50:44); God bent His bow against him (:12), as He did against Judah (2:4 s.w.); suffered affliction and misery, :19, as Judah did (1:7 s.w.); drank gall (:5,19) as Judah had to (Jer. 8:14; 9:15; 23:15); had none to comfort him (1:21), as Judah didn't (1:9); bore a yoke (:27), as did Judah (Jer. 27:8,12).

3:13 Notice how Jeremiah's innermost being was turned for his people, because he felt that *he* had shared in their sin. The arrows of God entered into his kidneys, and this is why he so cried out. But God's arrows were against a sinful Judah (2:4). Yet Jeremiah so identified with them that he felt they had entered *him*; and this is why he could cry out in the way he did. Even though he hadn't sinned as they had, he felt that because they had, so had he, as he was so identified with them. He reached such a level of grief through identifying himself so closely with those for whom he grieved. Time and again, the descriptions of his personal suffering and grief are expressed in the terms of the very sufferings which he had prophesied as coming upon a sinful Israel. And so with us, if we feel and show a solidarity with the people of this world, with our brethren, then we will grieve for them. If we

maintain a selfish, postmodern detachedness from them, then we will never have a heart that bleeds for them. Jeremiah could so easily have shrugged his shoulders and reasoned that Judah had had their chance; and it wasn't on his head. But he didn't. His attitude was that he had to seek the sheep until he found it.

3:15- see on 2:15.

3:38 *Evil and good come out of the mouth of the Most High*- As in Is. 45:5-7 we see that both positive and negative experiences come from God; He is truly almighty and doesn't just provide the good whilst the evil, or disaster, comes from some sinful 'Satan' being. This isn't taught in the Bible; in fact, the very opposite.

3:40 God *now* tries our hearts (Job 7:18; Ps. 11:4; 17:3; 26:2; 139:23). In likely allusion to the these descriptions of God searching and trying our hearts in the Psalms, Jeremiah says that we should search and try our hearts- we should seek to know ourselves as God does, seeing ourselves as He sees us.

3:45 Paul described himself as the offscouring of all things- using the very language of condemned Israel (1 Cor. 4:13). Paul so wanted to see their salvation that he identified with them to this extent. By doing so he was reflecting in essence the way the Lord Jesus so identified Himself with us sinners, as our representative, "made sin" [whatever precisely this means] for the sake of saving us from that sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

3:48-51 What he saw with his eye affected his mind / heart. Let us not see the doom of others, the pain and suffering of another life, and walk on by not permanently moved. What we see should affect our heart- if we have a heart that bleeds. And a bleeding heart doesn't merely bleed- it *does* something concrete, in prayer and action. Consider other examples of the bleeding heart of Jeremiah in 1:16,20; 2:11.

4:6 By an interesting metonymy in the Hebrew language, the idol, the thing that facilitated sin, is put for their punishment / ruin. Sin and the punishment for it are inextricably linked. The Hebrew language reflects this identity here too, in that the Hebrew word for "punishment" is the same as for "iniquity". And so it is with all the things of this present evil world; movies, music, novels, the needle, the bottle.... there is nothing unclean in itself, but these things can all be put by metonymy for the condemnation that can arise from the sin they facilitate. It's a powerful thought, as we face hourly temptation.

4:11 Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4). Those who will be condemned will be only those who really wanted it.

4:15 Israel were made to depart into captivity because of their self-righteous rejection of their brethren, telling them to 'depart' from them because they considered them unclean- when they themselves were unclean.

5:7 In this very context, Ez. 18 later emphasized that the people at that time were suffering for their own sins, not just for those of their fathers. Yet Jeremiah seems in his grief to have overlooked that; and yet by grace he remained amongst the faithful, despite circumstances

leading him to overlook parts of God's truth and not facing up to the seriousness of Israel's sin as he ought to have done.

5:20,21 Jeremiah's prophecies of gracious restoration were known by the exiles; but many passages in Isaiah, the Psalms (e.g. Ps. 137:7-9) and Lamentations (:20,21) indicate that the exiles had little conviction they would be fulfilled, considering Judah as "utterly rejected" by God, and just getting on with their lives in Babylon without any real hope in God's salvation. Considering the prosperity of their lives there, this was an all too convenient conclusion for them to draw. Once again we see that false interpretation of Scripture invariably has a moral subtext to it. Is. 40:1,2 speaks a message of comfort to the exiles: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God". But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachael who refused to be comforted over her loss (Jer. 31:15); they claimed they found "none to comfort" (1:2,16,17,21). But they were wilfully refusing the comfort of God's repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn't grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn't want to- it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: "I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?". And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up?



1:5 Ezekiel's opening vision of the cherubim was surely to encourage the captives in Babylon that above them was an awesome Angelic system, that was able to carry them with it back to the land- if they were workers together with God. Although it seemed that they were sitting still, nothing was happening, they were just passing time by the rivers of Babylon, above them there was an intensely active system of Angels working for their good. Asaph, writing Psalms in the captivity, perceived this when [surely referring to Ezekiel's recent vision] he speaks of how the God who dwells between the cherubim is in fact actively leading Judah somewhere (Ps. 80:1). Despite God's apparent silence, there is likewise a huge Angelic system whirring away over our lives too.

1:7 *Straight feet*- The return of the exiles led by Ezra made the journey by a "right way" from Babylon to Zion (Ezra 8:21). Yet this is the very word used about the "straight" feet of the Cherubim Angels in Ez. 1:7,23. The return from Babylon involved following in the path of the Angels, walking in step with them. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:9 spoke of how the returnees would walk "in a straight way" (s.w.) "by the rivers of waters"- and surely Ezra consciously alluded to this when by the river Ahava he fasted for the exiles to return in a "right / straight way". He knew that these prophecies of restoration would not just automatically come true- they had to be fulfilled by much prayer, fasting and stepping out in faith. But so very few perceived that. And the challenge remains for us today- to walk in the way which God's Angels have potentially prepared for us, with prayer and boldness.

1:20 The wheels represented God's people Israel on earth. If they had kept in step with the Spirit-Angel, following Him both to Babylon and back to Judah at His bidding, they would have been in step with God's plan for them, and all would have prospered. This passage appears to be behind Paul's appeal to us to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

1:25 *There was a voice*- The supreme exaltation of the voice / word of God.

1:26 *As the appearance of a man on it above*- Ezekiel saw only likenesses and appearances, rather than God Himself. But the implication is surely that we are made in God's image and likeness, and therefore we are invited to understand that God exists in a corporeal form, in which image our bodies appear. Understanding God as a personal being rather than intangible 'spirit' greatly enhances our relationship and prayer life with God.

2:4-6 Ezekiel was shown "what the house of Israel are doing in the dark" (8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must've been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would've been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and "iron pillar" to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn't be "dismayed at [the] looks" of those who watched them with anger and consternation (. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27; Jer. 1:18; 15:20). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

3:3 This eating of God's word was to represent how Ezekiel wasn't merely to relay God's word as a disinterested messenger, but to assimilate it personally, receiving it into his heart before he spoke it to others (:10), just as we should in our witness.

3:7 Having specifically told Ezekiel that Israel would *not* hearken to His word, God later tells Ezekiel to act out his parables in front of them- for " it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house" (12:3). Here we see the supreme *hopefulness* of God, which we too should have when it appears we are preaching to hopeless cases.

3:12 *Rushing*- The Angels are involved with the Cherubim. Yet in Ezekiel's context, the language of chariots inevitably suggests the approach of enemy armies. Thus the cherubim chariots represented not only the Angels, but also the chariots of God's enemies; for the Lord of the Angelic hosts was manifested on earth in the Babylonian hosts. The word for the "rushing" noise of the cherubim wheels is used elsewhere about the noise of the chariots of Israel's enemies and the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 10:22; 47:3; Nah. 3:2). The Angelic armies of Heaven were therefore revealed on earth in the chariots of Babylon; it was both Babylon and the Angelic cherubim behind them who took Judah captive, and who could also return them to their land. Hence the stress in Ezekiel's vision that the wheels of the cherubim were on the earth / land. Clearly enough, the things that go on in our lives, even those things which appear as brutal and tragic as the Babylonian chariots were to Judah, are not random machinations of men; they are, in some unfathomable way, under the direct control of a God of love, who only means to do us good at our latter end.

3:17-21 Our duty is to witness to the Truth even if there's no response; realizing that we may have to answer at the last day if we do not do so.

3:18 Perhaps this said to Ezekiel because for 7 days he hadn't told them the word of God as he had been asked to (:11,15,16).

3:20 God does not just disregard those who turn away from Him. He deceives them, and leads them into a downward spiral of moral and doctrinal declension. He laid a stumbling block before the righteous man who turned to sin.

4:1-5 Preaching through these acted parables would've led to people thinking Ezekiel was mad or at least, very 'odd'; just as they may consider us when we share God's word with them as He asks.

4:14 This is very similar to the situation when Christ asked Peter to kill and eat unclean animals (Acts 10:14). Peter saw the similarity, taking (as we should) guidance and encouragement from a Biblical example of a person who was in his situation. Peter therefore replied by quoting from Ez. 4:14, where Ezekiel refuses to eat similar food when asked to by the Angel. Perhaps Peter saw himself as Ezekiel's antitype in his witnessing against Israel's rejection of the word of God in Christ (note how 4:16 is a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in AD70). 'In the same way as God made a concession to Ezekiel about this command to eat unclean food', Peter reasoned, 'so perhaps my Lord will do for me'. But the Lord was to teach him even greater things than Ezekiel.

4:15 God is open to dialogue with His children, and is willing to make concessions to human weakness and foibles; just as we should be to others.

5:11 *Will I also diminish you*- The implication was that they had diminished God. It may be purposefully putting it in arresting terms, but all the same it's ultimately true that if we don't give God the glory we are intended to, then we are diminishing Him of what is potentially and rightfully His. This is the degree to which He has come down to our level in His interaction with men.

5:13 The very existence of “the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” is in order to “make known the riches of his glory upon the vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:22,23 Gk.). After the experience of Divine judgment, “you shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem” (14:22); and yet these are exactly the words used here in 5:13 to describe how God will be ‘comforted’ after the judgments. We will come to share God’s perspective through our experience of the judgment process. It will teach us to be like Him, to see things from His viewpoint. As a result of it, the struggles we have over “why...?” so many things happened will be resolved. The purpose of the judgment is not only to convict us of our sinfulness, but also to make us appreciate our own righteousness for what it was and is. The faithful almost argue back with the Lord when He points out to them their righteous acts; they were done within a spirit of service that simply didn’t see them as He does.

6:7 *You shall know that I am Yahweh*- This is as a refrain throughout Ezekiel. Ultimately, the wicked will come to know Yahweh through their experience of His judgment, but then it will be too late. We are to “know” Him now, rather than too late in the process of condemnation.

6:9 *I have been broken*- The God who is Almighty and so more powerful than us has become so involved with humanity that His heart was broken by Israel; and if it was broken in Ezekiel’s time, we cannot imagine what His feelings were at the crucifixion of His Son. To truly love makes us weak and vulnerable, and the awesome extent of God’s love has in a sense done the same to Him. Not that we are righteous of ourselves, but it’s worth reflecting how our feeble efforts to love Him are therefore so thrilling to Him.

*Their lewd heart... their eyes, which play the prostitute*- This is the language of sexual addiction, and it applies to God’s woman, Israel. No wonder they so broke His loving heart.

6:13 The bodies of Israel lay strewn around their idols because in fact the idols they worshipped were the idols of their enemies, who would’ve sacrificed the corpses of the Israelites to *their* gods. It’s so bizarre that Israel should’ve worshipped the idols of their victorious enemies, but this is how bizarre sin is.

7:9 *According to your ways*- Here God says that He will punish Israel at the hand of the Babylonians according to their sins, proportionate to them. But when Israel *were* punished by the Babylonians, Ezra (9:13) realized that they had *not* been punished proportionate to their sins. Yet in Is. 40:2, again in the context of Judah’s punishment by the Babylonians, God says that their judgment had been double what it ought to have been; and yet Ezra says it was *less* than the promised proportionate recompense for their sins. Here we have the utter, humanly inconsistent grace of God; almost taking guilt for punishing them too much, not punishing them enough, and yet saying He will punish them in exact proportion to their sin (see too 5:11; 8:18,19; 9:10). All we can say is that God is passionate and emotional. He hates punishing His children for their sins, just as any loving parent does, even if He speaks at times in the fire of His wrath. And when He did punish Judah, it seems He almost rushes to take it back and say it was far too much. This isn’t to say that God is in any sense fickle; the paradox can perhaps only dimly be understood by the analogy to human parenting dilemmas. All we can say is that His love and passion for His wayward children is real and felt, and He will not hold Himself to His word of judgment in a legalistic, literalistic sense- quite simply because love, not least *His* love, is beyond such limitation.

7:12 *The time has come*- And yet God says elsewhere that it is still to come (:10). God is outside of time as we know it. The future is as if it's happened. Because of this, God can speak of the dead as if they are alive, although they are not; and can speak of people as if they were alive before birth. He can speak of a day coming as if it has come (Is. 3:8). We need to bear this in mind in interpreting His word.

7:20 *Therein*- Amazingly, there were idols made in Yahweh's temple...

7:23 The Hebrew word *mishpat* means [and is translated] both "crime" (7:23) and "judgment" (5:7,16,20). Every sin is its own judgment, and brings us immediately as it were before the judgment throne of God. And yet *mishpat* is also translated "ordinance", in speaking about the commands of God (11:20). Acts of obedience are also acts of judgment; they too bring us positively before the judgment of God. The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'judge' mean both the process of discerning / summing up, and also the execution of judgment.

8:3 *Which provokes to jealousy*- Any form of idolatry provokes God to jealousy. The vast extent of His love for us means that any unfaithfulness provokes His feelings of jealousy; love and jealousy are in this sense part of the same thing.

8:12- see on 2:4-6. It seems that righteousness goes unrewarded and sin goes unpunished. This is a very strong impression to the surface level view of things as they currently are. Those who thought in their hearts that "Yahweh doesn't see" likely never said that in so many words. But their persistence in sin, like ours today, arose from a disbelief in practice that God does in fact see and know all things. They thought that "the Lord will not do good, nor will He do ill" (Zeph. 1:12); "my way is hidden from the Lord" (Is. 29:15; 40:27). This of course is the attitude with which we daily live. The question is, will we perceive it as the prophets did, and live with the belief that God is in fact intently watching us, 24/7?

8:13 Amongst God's people, some sins are "greater abomination" than others . Even amongst the Gentiles, God sees some as sinning more than others (7:24). This doesn't mean that the 'smaller' ones don't count. But it reflects God's great sensitivity to human behaviour. The varying scale of sacrifices for various sins reflects this too. The Lord Jesus spoke of the man with "greater sin" (Jn. 19:11), and of other men who owed varying amounts to the Father. God's eye did not spare or pity Israel, *because* they thought that sin was a light thing to Him (:17,18). They thus insulted His essential nature.

9:2 *One man... with a writer's inkhorn by his side*- Ezekiel was seeing himself in the vision.

9:4 *Foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations*- In some ways we can do nothing about the state of things in the world or amongst the people of God, because we cannot change other people. But what marks us out as God's people is that in our deepest minds [symbolized by the forehead], we weep for it all. This was the characteristic which saved Lot when Sodom was destroyed (2 Pet. 2:8).

9:5 This is reminiscent of the Passover Angel sealing the faithful Israelites against the destruction of the "Destroyer" Angel. But now, unfaithful Israel were no better than the Egyptians.

9:8 Ezekiel's intercession was after the pattern of Abraham pleading for Sodom and Moses for Israel. Their examples inspired Ezekiel in prayer, as they should us. But it wasn't heard at this time; for in the end, wilful sin just has to be punished, and no mediator or intercession can change things.

10:8 Ezekiel had to put his hand under the wings of the cherubim; and then there appeared permanently in the Cherubim visions "the form of a man's hand [i.e. Ezekiel's] under their wings" (:2,8). I take this to be indicative of how humanity can be so deeply a part of God's work; we are identified with Him and His Angels. The visions involved the whole system held up as it were upon a human hand; and God in the image of a man crowning it all in the Heavens. Truly God isn't far from any of us; and in a sense, "God is in need of man".

10:14 The four faces are likely to be connected with the four standards of the tribes of Israel (Lion = Judah, Man = Reuben, Ox = Ephraim, Eagle = Dan). Each of those tribes had two other tribes assigned to them in the encampment procedures of Num. 2. There is extra-Biblical tradition that the cherubim in Solomon's temple had the same four faces which Ezekiel saw on the cherubim- lion, ox, man and eagle. Those to whom Ezekiel related his vision would have immediately understood the point- that the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the Heavenly, and that above that was a huge Angelic system operating, which also represented God's people- them. But that huge system was to remove to Babylon, and then the final visions of Ezekiel show that glory returning. Ezekiel, as the representative "son of man" was caught up within that system and transported at ease between Babylon and Jerusalem- and those who wanted to opt in with God and His Angels could likewise be taken to Babylon and returned. Those who chose to remain in Babylon were therefore resisting being part of an awesome system of God manifestation and Angelic operation. We have that same choice in things great and small today.

11:1 The wheels of the cherubim represented God's people Israel on earth. If they had kept in step with the Spirit-Angel, following Him both to Babylon and back to Judah at His bidding, they would have been in step with God's plan for them, and all would have prospered. This passage appears to be behind Paul's appeal to us to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Ezekiel himself was the great example of this, for he was "lifted up" by the Spirit just as the wheels were lifted up, and went wherever he was taken, backwards and forwards between Babylon and Judah (8:3; 11:1). He became part of the Cherubic system.

11:15 *I will judge you in the border of Israel*- Babylon and Assyria were located at the borders of the land promised to Abraham.

11:19 Sitting there in captivity, God offered His people a new covenant (:19,20,25 cp. Heb. 10:16); they could have one mind between each other, and a heart of flesh. But Israel would not, and the whole offer was rescheduled and reapplied, so that it is now accepted by those who turn to Jesus Christ. Their being of "one heart" after baptism (Acts 4:32) was a direct result of their acceptance of this same new covenant which Judah had rejected. In our hearing of the offer of the new covenant, we are essentially in the position of those of the captivity, hearing Ezekiel's words, and deciding whether or not to believe it- or just continue to be obsessed with just trying to make the best of a rather dumb life.

11:22-24 When the cherubim lifted up, so was Ezekiel lifted up. Judah should have left Jerusalem when the Spirit told them to; and they should have upped and left Babylon when the Spirit told

them to. But they were out of step with the Spirit, despite Ezekiel's acted parable of literally being lifted up and going where the Cherubim went. The equivalent of this for us is surely our sense of doing all for God's glory, of having this as the final deciding factor in all our decisions.

12:3- see on 3:7.

*Perhaps they will consider-* The Hebrew word *ulay*, 'perhaps', is significant in revealing how much God has given us freewill; for we are invited to understand that perhaps God limits His foreknowledge so that He didn't 'know' whether they would "consider" or not. He speaks the same way in Is. 47:12; Jer. 26:2,3; 36:3,7). This 'uncertainty' of God as to how His people will respond to His word reflects the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to our kind of time. It has huge implications for us. With what eagerness must God Almighty look upon us as we sit down to read His word daily! 'Are they going to listen? How are they going to respond...?'

12:22-25 The desolation of Israel by the invaders was repeatedly foretold by the prophets. The message was continually mocked by the false prophets, who claimed inspiration from God to claim that the day of judgment had been endlessly delayed. They also belittled the predictions made by true prophets like Ezekiel, spreading their ideas until it became a common joke that Yahweh's prophets kept speaking of a coming day of the Lord that never came. But God's reply here was clear. The similarities with the last days leading up to AD70 are clear- the prophetic word was likewise mocked with the taunt "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Pet. 3:4). The true word of God regarding the coming day of the Lord was mocked; a belief that "the days are prolonged" led to the conclusion that "every prophetic vision fails", as the thought that "my Lord delays his coming" (Mt. 24:48) resulted in a lack of faith in the word of promise. Christ's statement that "all shall be fulfilled" at His coming (Lk.21:32) matches the assurance given here that "every vision" *would* be fulfilled when the day came. Those within the people of God at Ezekiel's time who were expressing such doubt were matched by some within the body of Christ in the first century. Clearly they must have their latter day counterparts.

12:25 'Yahweh' can mean 'I who will be'. Because He is, and He *will be*, therefore the words of the 'I will be', really will be. His very Name is the utter guarantee that His word for us will be fulfilled.

13:5 God is so sensitive to prayerfulness. He condemns the leaders of Israel for not stopping the gaps or building the wall, i.e. interceding, for Israel. If only there had been a prayerful minority, God would have changed the whole course of His dealings with Israel. But petty materialism and self small-mindedness was what stopped those leaders from doing their job.

13:9 *Neither shall they enter into the land of Israel-* Ezekiel seems to be writing this in the context of the first wave of captives taken to Babylon. The false prophets amongst them were saying that all would be well with Jerusalem (:16); whereas Ezekiel spoke on God's behalf in revealing the sins going on there, and saying that because of them, the rest of Judah would be taken captive. Although it was God's purpose to restore the captives to Judah, these false prophets would die in Babylon and not return there. This kind of thing has gone on from the time of the serpent in Eden- questioning God's word, and saying what others would like to hear as if it is from God.

13:11 *You, great hailstones, shall fall-* Note the sudden change of pronoun. This is an example of how God personally addresses the natural creation. He may be speaking to the Angels who control

it, and yet there is also the sense within the Bible that God is somehow in conscious, active dialogue with the natural creation, and hasn't merely left it ticking on mindless clockwork.

13:18 Any attempt to manipulate or get power over other people within God's family, be it done consciously or unconsciously, should be outlawed for us by the simple consideration that they are in fact *God's* people and not ours.

14:7 People who were worshipping idols in their hearts still wanted to come and hear God's word from the prophet. Like those people, we are tempted to worship the true God as well as idols, rather than making a clean break. People come to God's word as it now is in the Bible, but they are confused by God in the message they hear from it because they come to His word with idols in their hearts. Mere Bible reading won't make us righteous; the attitude of mind we bring to it is all important. If we come with idols in our hearts, then reading God's word will lead us yet further from God.

14:9 Clearly God is capable of deceiving people, and at times He even uses His word as the medium through which He does so. We can never be passive in our relationship with God, nor stand still in our journey with Him. He is constantly active through His word to lead us either closer to Him or further away from Him.

14:14 *Noah, Daniel, and Job*- Each of these men delivered others by their intercession and personal righteousness. Noah delivered his family, Daniel his people, and Job his friends. God is willing to save people for the sake of a third party, but there clearly has to be some base level of spirituality in the person. By Ezekiel's time, there wasn't even that.

14:22- see on 5:13.

*The evil that I have brought*- God and not some cosmic 'Satan' being is the One who brings "evil" in the sense of calamity against people. See on Is. 45:5-7.

15:5 There in Babylon they were as the vine tree, burned up and fit for no work; and yet, still used to perform God's work, by grace alone. And these men were truly types of us. Even before they were burnt up, the vine tree of God's people wasn't good for any work (:3), and had no superiority over the other trees (:2). God's people aren't better, of themselves, than the peoples around them; we're not good at works, even if we think we are; the way God uses us is a reflection of pure grace, and how He delights in using the humanly worthless and useless to do His work.

16:3 Israel are reminded that ethnically they're not so different from the surrounding nations, seeing that Abraham their ancestor was originally from Ur. The basis of being 'Jewish' and part of God's people was therefore God's grace rather than anything ethnic.

16:5 This is very much the language of Isaac's half brother Ishmael, ancestor of many of Israel's enemies (Gen. 21:10-16). Israel were no better than the Gentile world, just as they are today not inherently better than their Arab cousins, and as we in essence are no better than the world around us. It's God's calling, which is by grace alone, which makes all the difference.

16:8 God found Israel in the wilderness, covered them with a cloud (cp. His 'skirt') at Sinai, and there entered a covenant with them.

16:10 This alludes to the materials used for the tabernacle and priestly clothing. The intention of all that legislation, as with all God's Law, is to make us beautiful in His eyes.

16:13 *You ate fine flour, honey and oil*- A reference to the priests eating these offerings. The whole people of Israel are spoken of here as if they were priests; it was God's intention that the whole nation should become priests (Ex. 19:6). We as the modern people of God are likewise all intended to be priests (1 Pet. 2:9), taking spiritual responsibility for others rather than leaving it to a dedicated minority of the community.

16:20 Our children are borne to God; we're not therefore free to raise them as we wish, but as He wishes, because they are His children.

16:37 The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (:7,9,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are 21st century readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism. The shocking sexual language and imagery of the prophets was in order to help Israel see that this was how far they had outraged God. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences.

16:49 Note how pride, ignoring the poor and self-indulgence are highlighted as Sodom's essential sins; the sin of homosexuality is no worse nor better than these sins.

*This was the iniquity... fullness of bread*- The "fullness of bread" was itself a sin. Hoarding wealth when others are poor and needy is "iniquity".

16:50 The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list of their sins, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the



memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The worldviews of many societies have taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church, or ignoring others' poverty. But is this really right...?

16:51 This statement that Judah (the two tribe Kingdom) sinned more than Israel (the ten tribes) needs some meditation upon; God really did lavish grace upon the weakest of the weak.

17:3 *Great eagle*- Nebuchadnezzar; *Full of feathers* –Many subject peoples; *Various colours*- Various nations within the Babylonian army and confederacy.

17:4 *The topmost of the young twigs*- The princes of Judah taken to Babylon.

17:5 *The seed of the land*- Zedekiah. *Planted it in a fruitful soil*- Set up as King of Judah, supported by Babylon.

17:6 *A vine of low stature*- Judah under Babylonian control could never become a high nation; her roots tended towards Nebuchadnezzar for all support.

17:7 *Another great eagle*- Pharaoh-hophra, king of Egypt. *This vine bent its roots toward him*- Judah broke their agreement with Nebuchadnezzar and sent to Egypt for help to rebel against Babylon.

17:8 *That it might be a goodly vine*- If Judah had accepted their domination by Babylon as a just punishment for their rebellion against Yahweh, God potentially had set up a situation whereby this could have been fruitful for His people. Wriggling out of our sins never brings the blessing God has prepared for those who accept their sins and the consequences of them.

17:9 *Cut off its fruit*- Zedekiah's children killed. *The leaves*- Judah's leadership.

17:15 *Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?*- God's people are held to be honest to the agreements they make with unbelievers, as well as their covenant with God.

17:22 *A tender one*- Messiah, the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:2), one of the twigs of the Jewish nation as Zedekiah had been, a Jew of our human nature.

17:23 The great tree speaks of Christ's Kingdom, under which people from all nations would find refuge (Mk. 4:32).

17:24 The low tree which is exalted speaks of Christ; the dry tree which will flourish was understood by Jesus as a reference to Himself on the cross (Lk. 23:31). There, as also explained in Is. 53, He appeared to be a "dry tree", a man dying without any children; but through that death, He flourished into many children, in us who have believed in Him and been born anew as God's children.

18:4 The Jews of Ezekiel's time felt they weren't bad people, but were unjustly suffering the effects of their fathers' sins. The Hebrew word translated "soul" here has a wide range of meaning, but generally it refers to the human person. The person who sins will die. The soul therefore isn't

something inherently immortal. This is a pagan idea which has sadly been accepted by some Christian traditions.

18:14 Note the double usage of the word “sees”. He sees the sins, and then he really sees them, and doesn't do them. This is how we must be in our registering of the fact that sin really brings death. We can know that sin brings death as theory; and we can *really* know it.

18:20 This simple truth demonstrates that the idea of suffering because of the sins of another person in another life is simply not true; we are judged for our own sins and not those of others. This can also psychologically free a person from the tendency to apply to ourselves ‘guilt by association’ for others’ sins. However, it’s also true that we can suffer the effects of others’ sins, and the Bible contains examples of this, not least our suffering the effect of Adam’s sin. But we are personally judged only for our own sins. We need to draw this line very clearly in our self-examination; between the suffering we experience as a result of others’ dysfunctions and sins, and that which is in response to our personal sins.

18:22 *Remembered against him*- An implication that in some sense, at the day of judgment, there will be a ‘going through’ with the wicked of all their sins; whereas for the righteous, these will not be remembered and instead their good works will be recounted to them (:24). The parable of Mt. 25:36-44 says as much.

18:29 Working through the logic here, the answer to the ‘God’s not fair!’ syndrome is to reflect deeper upon our own sinfulness, and the simple fact that sin nets death.

18:32 God has no pleasure in punishing the wicked; rather do they punish themselves. He’s not some capricious deity who takes pleasure in using His omnipotence to make His opponents suffer. His dislike of punishing the wicked is proof enough that ‘hell’ doesn’t refer to any concept of eternal, conscious torment of the wicked; Biblically, *sheol* (the word translated “hell” in some Bibles) is the same word translated “the grave”. Death is the punishment for sin, not eternal torment.

19:2 The lioness represents Judah or Jerusalem.

19:3 *She brought up one of her cubs*- Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, whose father was conquered killed by Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt.

19:5 *Took another of her cubs*- Jehoiakim, after Jehoahaz had been taken to Egypt (:4).

19:6 *He went up and down among the lions*- Jehoiakim acted like the leaders [“lions”] around him in the Gentile world.

19:11 A reference to Zedekiah and his sons; but Zedekiah became proud, was broken down by the Babylonians and Jerusalem was burnt (:12). Zedekiah comes over in Jeremiah as a weak man when it came to doing the right thing; it seems he wanted to obey God’s word through Jeremiah, but feared the opinion of the princes and that the Babylonians might abuse him (Jer. 38:19-24). However, this verse fills out the picture- his fear of the opinion of others was due to his pride. We may appear humble, but if we are only so because we are image conscious- then in fact we are proud.

20:3 *Is it to inquire of Me?*- We can come to God's word in the Bible or bow in prayer before Him, but have our minds already made up, and not actually be seeking Him and His perspective at all. To truly "seek" God as we are often exhorted is not at all easy.

20:8 The degree to which righteousness is imputed to us is hard to feel. Dt. 32:12 states that there was no strange God with Israel- but here we read that they took the idols of Egypt with them, as confirmed in Acts 7:43. God counted wayward Israel as righteous after their Red Sea baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2); at that time, as Balaam said, God did not see iniquity in Israel, nor behold the perversity that was in Jacob (Num. 23:21).

20:9 *I made Myself known to them in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt*- Our exodus from the world at baptism, which is our Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1,2), is a witness to the world around us. Our conversion to Christ therefore cannot be unnoticed by the world, there must be a visible element to it.

20:12 *A sign between Me and them*- The Sabbath was a sign between God and Israel, not between God and Gentile believers today.

20:22 God swore that He would destroy Israel in the wilderness (:21); but God 'withdrew His hand', He took back this promise. Likewise God said He would destroy Israel in Egypt (:8). But He didn't (:9). Clearly enough God is willing to change His intended judgments of His people, so sensitive is He to their repentance and spirituality.

20:25 An example of how God confirms people in the downward spiral they choose. Likewise :26 implies that God led His people into idolatry in order to make them desolate.

20:34 The mighty hand and stretched out arm of God was available to bring Judah out of Babylon- but most of them preferred to stay there. The wonderful possibility of a new covenant (:37) went unrealized- to be deferred until the true Israel of God are gathered home in our last days.

20:37 *The bond of the covenant*- The Hebrew translated "bond" is literally a fetter, a tie that binds, that restricts. To be in covenant relationship therefore means that we are not free to do as we like; there is an element of regulation in our lives, but of course it has a purpose- to bring us to God's Kingdom and keep us within the sphere of relationship with Him. But a covenant is a two way thing. This tie that binds applies to God too; hence the wonderful, oft-repeated idea of His *chesed*, His covenant faithfulness to us His people. He likewise carries a kind of responsibility to us.

20:38 *They shall not enter into the land of Israel* - Ezekiel told the captives during the early stages of their captivity that the false prophets and "rebels" amongst them would receive the condemnation and judgment of not returning to the land (also in 13:9). And yet when the command came to return to the land, most of the people chose to remain in Babylon- and therefore they chose their own condemnation. They were a "rebellious house" (2:3). For they were aware from Ezekiel's words that not returning to the land was God's condemnation. Those who will not be in the Kingdom will be those who chose not to be there- all who truly love the Lord's appearing will be accepted

20:40 *There will I accept them*- As in :41. This 'acceptance' was to be when Judah returned from captivity, and the same word is found in 43:27 where a temple was to be built and sacrifices offered,

“and I will accept you”. The intention clearly was that the temple was to be built upon Judah’s return from captivity; but they failed to live up to the wonderful potential enabled.

20:49 The fact that his audience disregarded and mocked his message was so hard for Ezekiel to endure. No true preacher of the Gospel hasn’t had the same feeling at times.

21:26 *The mitre... the crown*- The implication is that the King to be deposed was a King-Priest, as if the priestly and kingly lines had crossed in his genealogy. This points forward to the Lord Jesus.

Mary understood that through her conception, God had put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted *them* of low station in this life (Lk. 1:52). This clearly alludes to Ez. 21:26, where the princes are to be put down and *him* that is low is to be exalted, i.e. Messiah. But Mary felt that she had been exalted; thus she shared Messiah’s exaltation because He was in her and she in Him. We too are in Him, and we should feel something of the pride and joy, along with the suffering, that comes from that identification. She parallels *her* lowly estate with *them* of low station in this life (Lk. 1:48,52)- perhaps referring to her and Jesus? Yet despite all her undoubted spiritual perception in her song of praise, she didn’t have totally pure understanding. It seems from her allusion in Lk. 1:52 to Ez. 21:26 [the mighty being put down from their thrones and the humble one exalted] that she thought that Ezekiel’s prophecy about Messiah’s restoration of the Kingdom had already been fulfilled in her conception of Jesus. It could be that she was so sure that her child would one day do this that she saw the time of the coming of “Him whose right it is” as being right there and then; and yet we know that it is in fact still future.

21:27 The throne of the kings of Judah was to be no more until Christ, the rightful King of Israel, returns. He is the One who was low who has been exalted on high (:26). The triple ‘overturning’ could refer to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the Roman destruction in AD70, and a final overturning of the city in our times, just prior to Christ’s return as King of Israel. Alternatively, the triple ‘overturning’ refers to the three invasions of Judah made by Babylon. The future Kingdom of Christ is to be a re-establishment of the Kingdom of God as it once was, based around Jerusalem. The return of Christ is spoken of as the restoration of that Kingdom in Acts 1:6, where the disciples are basically asking when this prophecy of Ez. 21:27 will be fulfilled.

22:2 *Judge the bloody city... cause her to know all her abominations*- The purpose of judgment is to reveal sin to those being judged. We must face up to our sins, know them for what they are- either now, or in the process of rejection at the final day of judgment.

22:3 *So that her time of judgment may come, and that makes idols against herself to defile her*- Notice how the judgment and defiling were brought about by her own behaviour. Those who are condemned have condemned themselves (see :31).

22:9 Because gossip is such an epitome of the flesh, it is ranked here along with sins like fornication, idolatry and murder. Other scripture teaches that to hate your brother in your heart was and is as bad as murdering him (Mt. 5:22; 1 Jn. 3:15). Here, the connection is made between gossip and murder. To gossip against our brother is to hate him.

22:15 *I will consume your filthiness out of you*- This suggests that as the day of the second coming approaches, Israel will be progressively purged and move closer and closer towards repentance. It is

our duty to show them the Gospel so that they can make sense of their sufferings and see what they are intended by God to lead them towards.

22:22 This wrath of God was still ultimately constructive- because through the heat of the fire of His wrath, God intended to purge out the dross from His people, so that they might be saved. A very common tragedy in human experience is when people suffer terribly, and yet still don't make the changes God intends. So much suffering, especially of Israel, has in this sense been in vain.

22:26- see on 42:20.

22:30 Even at this dire time of Judah's weakness, God would have changed His entire program of judgment for the sake of just one man. But there was none, it seems Ezekiel himself wasn't passionate enough even. Thus God says He has consumed them in His wrath (:31), whereas Moses 'turned' God from executing His wrath as He planned (Ps. 78:38; 106:23).

23:8 *Neither has she left her prostitution since the days of Egypt*- A reference to how Israel took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (16:8,9), just as we can take this world's idols with us through the waters of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

23:11 Judah (the two tribe Kingdom) are portrayed here as more sinful than Israel (the ten tribe Kingdom), although the historical records in Kings and Chronicles suggest that Judah had more spiritual Kings than did Israel. We must conclude that occasional good leadership doesn't therefore affect the entire community. Seeing relationship with God is so intensely personal, good leadership can only be of limited value, and it therefore shouldn't be over-emphasized as the reason why a community are righteous or not.

23:14 *Men portrayed on the wall*- The context suggests this was some kind of visual pornography. There's a lot of language in these verses which speak of her attraction to them visually. The impression is given of a totally superficial woman who became sexually obsessed- when married to God Himself. This is how we can become, unless we understand our covenant relationship with God to utterly preclude any other relationship.

23:19 *Remembering the days of her youth* – Israel's memories and perception of their time in Egypt were very warped. It was a furnace of suffering for them, and yet they remembered fondly the food which the Egyptians ate (Num. 11:5), and the gods they worshipped. We need to understand our life before baptism for what it was, and not keep hankering after it.

23:22 *Your lovers... from whom your soul is alienated*- No illicit relationship can ever last, and the supposed love always turns to hate or alienation. Israel are the classic case- it was the nations whose gods she worshipped who came and destroyed her without mercy.

23:27 *Your prostitution brought from the land of Egypt*- It is repeatedly emphasized that Israel took Egypt's idols with them (16:8,9 and elsewhere in this chapter). Yet Ezekiel is writing centuries afterwards. The faithless attitude Israel had when they left Egypt influenced their spiritual walk afterwards. How we start our walk with God is so important; and we should be very aware of this in raising children and in our attitude to new converts within the church.

23:34 Ezekiel speaks of how every act of idolatry was seen by God as the fickle wife of a faithful husband deceitfully liaising with another, worthless, man. And there is a similar shocking terror associated with our infidelities to the Lord who bought us for His own. The self-hatred of repentant Israel before they accept the new covenant is described with a purposefully terrible idiom: *a woman plucking off her own breasts*. These words must be seen in the context of Israel offering these parts of her body to the hands of the Gentiles (:3,8). And now, with her own hands, Israel would fain pluck off her breasts in realization of her degradation. This self-loathing must be part of every true repentance; for we too, in advance of Israel, ought to have repented a like repentance, and entered the very same covenant. Just reflect upon the self-loathing in repentance of 6:9; 20:43; Job 40:4; 42:6. This is how sin is serious. Alternatively, we can read this self-hatred as an Old Testament form of what Jesus repeatedly warned about- the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” which will be experienced by those rejected at the judgment seat (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

24:7 *She set it on the bare rock*- But :8 says that *God* made her do this with her blood, so that she would incite His wrath. Here we have an example of how God confirms people in the sin they choose to commit. There’s both a downward spiral and an upward one, we can never take a break from our spiritual journey, constantly we are being confirmed in the direction we choose.

24:12 *Wearied herself with lies*- The wearying with lies suggests that it was due to their listening to false prophets rather than the true word of God that the fire did not cleanse them.

24:16 *The desire of your eyes*- The implication is that Ezekiel dearly loved his wife and found her very attractive. Yet just as he so loved her, so Judah loved Yahweh’s temple (:21). We must realize that Judah weren’t atheists, they hadn’t rejected Yahweh. On one hand they loved Him, but they loved their other gods too.

24:23 The emphasis is very much on the psychological suffering of the condemned Israel. Ezekiel wasn’t allowed to weep, which is the natural expression of grief. It therefore bottled up within him, causing deep psychological pain; in order to present Israel with an illustration of how they would feel under God’s judgment. The punishment of the rejected at the final judgment will be “gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 24:51), which is again a picture of anger with oneself and internal torment at what might have been, the eternal future which they chose to miss. The wicked will not be punished with literal fire or torture; the internal psychological pain will be in fact far worse. These pictures of condemnation are frequent in the Bible; not to scare us into submission, but to bring before us the eternal consequence of the decisions we take in this life, for the flesh or for the Spirit.

24:27- see on 29:21.

25:11 *They shall know that I am Yahweh*- God judged nations in order that men might *know* Him as Yahweh (see too 28:22; 30:19). But did they? Often God states His intentions and wishes for people’s faith as if they have been realized. In this we can see the hopefulness of God, like the shepherd who searches for the lost sheep with the attitude that he will search until he finds it (Lk. 15:4). We should have this hopefulness in all our witnessing to others.

25:14 *By the hand of My people Israel*- The Law of Moses had commanded Israel not to hate Edomites (Dt. 23:7); so they were intended to carry out this judgment with no personal hatred, just as at times we have to. Despite Josephus claiming that the Maccabees fulfilled this prophecy,

Obadiah 21 speaks of how this judgment will be fulfilled in the last days around the second coming of Christ (cp. Is. 63:1).

25:15 *For the old enmity*- A reference to the Jacob:Esau hatred, which will finally be resolved in Jacob's favour- by God's grace alone.

25:16 *The rest of the sea coast*- The Hebrew word for 'Philistine' is the same as that now used for 'Palestinian'; the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip are in exactly the geographical location spoken of here.

26:7 This speaks of how Babylon will surround and destroy Tyre. But this never happened in recorded history- it was done by Alexander and the Greeks much later. 29:17-20 explains that because the King of Babylon laboured so hard to take Tyre (even though he never actually succeeded) God would give him the land of Egypt as a reward. This doesn't mean that the word of prophecy failed. Rather does it mean that God is open to a rethinking of plans and futures in accord with human response. Although all the conditions for Tyre's fall and Babylon's victory against her aren't given, evidently there must have been such unrecorded conditions; and they weren't fulfilled, hence Tyre was spared destruction by the Babylonians, and yet they were 'rewarded' for their part in the situation. Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant, but God changed the terms and conditions of his labour. He would not conquer Tyre, but he was given Egypt instead. Is it that God changes His mind? Did someone (of whom there is no record) plead successfully for Tyre, like Lot did unsuccessfully for Sodom? Or did Tyre like Nineveh get to hear of this prophecy, and repent, so it didn't happen? Or is Tyre yet to fall in some last days scenario? Or is it that God tells us something, only a piece of the future at a time, and then we get a fuller picture later on? We do not need to question God's prophesies. We can believe Him each time, and believe the changes He makes as well. Ezekiel has a lot of conditional prophecies- not least the last nine chapters with their description of the temple situation which could have come about if Judah had returned from exile and rebuilt the temple as God intended.

Another approach would be to reconsider our philosophy of history. In this age where science is assumed to have all the answers, the assumption is likewise made that the science of history is somehow complete. But primary sources for ancient history are limited; there are large gaps in ancient history, and primary sources may exist for some incidents which aren't very significant on the larger canvass; and likewise major incidents are at times unnoticed in the sources currently available. So it's possible that Nebuchadnezzar did do to Tyre as required by this prophecy, it's just not recorded; and Alexander also destroyed the city later (this would require special attention to our note on 26:21 about the meaning of the phrase "no more be rebuilt").

26:8,9 The references to making mounts against Tyre's walls show that the "Tyre" referred to here isn't any island fortification as claimed by some.

26:12 *Lay your stones and your timber and your dust in the midst of the waters*- Alexander the Great broke down Tyre and carefully laid the rubble in the water in order to build a causeway with which to reach the island castle of Tyre which still held out against him.

26:21 *No more be rebuilt*- This also may have been part of a conditional prophecy- see on :7. It could be that the Biblical Tyre wasn't on the same spot as the city now known as "Tyre". The Hebrew can bear the translation 'Not be built any more', meaning that the building

which was then ongoing would end. The same grammatical construction is found in passages like Ex. 9:29, where Moses says that ‘As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord ... there will be hail no longer...’. This doesn’t mean that there would never be any hail ever again; it means that the current hailstorm would stop. Another example in Neh. 2:17.

27:3 *Perfect in beauty*- Arrogant self-confidence, opulence, human beauty, human wisdom, praise and respect from others, power... all the things which people so strive after in our society were all obtained to their fullness by Tyre, and yet these are the very things which they were condemned for. Note how the prophets pointed out to Gentile nations their sins and failures before the God of Israel; sin is still felt by God as sin, even if it is committed by those not responsible to His final judgment. It must be so hard for God, feeling all this offence against Him. However, it was Jerusalem which was the city seen by God as “perfect in beauty” (Ps. 50:2); Tyre wasn’t simply boastful, but consciously wanted to take over from Jerusalem as God’s chosen city. They thought that their wealth and human advantage could buy for them status with God- as people do today. It was Tyre’s aspiration to replace Israel as God’s people which He found so upsetting- see notes on chapter 28.

27:17 Judah and the land of Israel- Ezekiel would’ve reflected that this list of good things from his own land was produced at a time of blessing on the land (Dt. 8:8; 32:14); for at his time, the land was desolate and not trading with Tyre. As a young Jew in Babylon, Ezekiel likely knew nothing of Tyre personally, and so the detailed list in this chapter is an example of Divine inspiration giving the Bible writers information which was beyond them personally to amass.

27:36 *Never again*- See on 26:7,21.

28:13-15 It is wrongly assumed that this refers to Satan once having been in Eden. But the words “devil” and “satan” do not occur in this chapter, nor in the rest of Ezekiel. The context shows this is a prophecy about the King of Tyre; the preceding chapter 27 is an oracle against Tyre, and now chapter 28 speaks specifically about the King of Tyre. Ezekiel chapters 27 and 28 clearly hold together as a literary unit. The city of Tyre and the King of Tyre are described in similar terms, e.g. “perfect in beauty” (compare 27:3 and 28:12; 27:16,17 with 28:13; 27:33 with 28:16). The passage plainly speaks of the King of Tyre, not anything that happened at the beginning of the world. It is commonly believed that Satan was thrown out of heaven into Eden, but this passage says that this person was in Eden before he sinned and was cast out when he sinned. The garden of Eden was on the earth, not in heaven (its boundaries are given in Gen. 2:8-14), therefore the casting out was not out of heaven. The person was to “die the death of the uncircumcised” (:10), but angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36). That a man is referred to is confirmed by v. 9: “you are man”. Verse 2 defines him as the “prince of Tyre”. The Hebrew word for “perfect” is applied to Noah, Abraham, Job and David (Gen. 6:9; 17:1; Job 1:1; Ps. 18:23 & 25); it doesn’t imply a supernatural being. “You were in Eden” refers to where the king of Tyre was in place, not in time. Pharaoh and Assyria are similarly described as being like trees in Eden, and having these trees in awe (31:2,3,8,9,16,18). The trees in Eden are not to be taken literally, they represent the nations whom Pharaoh and Assyria conquered, possibly referring to the fact that they were all within the old geographical boundaries of the garden of Eden. Eden was a geographical area on earth known to Ezekiel's readers- this is how it is used elsewhere in Ezekiel (Ez. 27:23; 31:8,9; Is. 51:3; Gen. 13:10). ‘Eden’ was not understood as a historical reference to the garden of Eden in early Genesis, but rather to a known nation / region of Ezekiel's time. The sin of the King



of Tyre is defined in :16-18 as dishonest accumulation of wealth. The sin in view wasn't some Angelic rebellion against God. The language of precious stones in :13,14 is an allusion to the stones set in the breastplate of the high priest of Israel (Ex. 39:10-14). Tyre was "on the holy mountain of God" (:14)- but this holy mountain is Mount Zion, Jerusalem here on earth (20:40). The prophecy of the fall of Tyre is being consciously framed to mirror the fall of man, e.g. v. 2 "you are man"; "man" is *Adam* in Hebrew, as if God is saying to the prince of Tyre, "You are like Adam in this parable". Verse 17 tells how he will be brought to the ground - as Adam had to return to the dust. The passage is often skim read, leading to the assumption that the King of Tyre is being likened to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, or to some Satan figure who fell from Heaven at that time. But careful reading shows that the King of Tyre is being likened to Adam in Eden, not to the serpent. Verses 14,16 sound like a reference to the King of Tyre as Adam: "I put a terrifying angel there to guard you... the angel who guarded you drove you away " (:14,16- this is also the reading of the G.N.B. and T.E.V.)

Another approach is suggested by archaeological discoveries in Tyre. A large cherub-sphinx with a king's head and animal's body set on a base of sculptured mountains was discovered, evidently a deification of a king of Tyre. With Hiram's knowledge of the true God, it seems that subsequent Kings of Tyre came to put themselves in the position of God, seated between the cherubim on Mount Zion, in the same way as the king of Assyria effectively aspired to the same thing - Phoenician inscriptions have been uncovered calling the king of Tyre "Lord of the Heavens". Even more amazingly, the jewels described in v. 13 were all found embedded in this sphinx-cherubim. The three jewels of the breastplate missing from the list in v. 13 were also missing from the sphinx. Inscriptions also describe Tyre as the "garden of God", and reliefs of cherubim guarding Tyre as they did Eden have been found. Thus the king of Tyre had set up a blasphemous system of worship copying that of the temple and of Eden, with himself as God in the midst of it. "The king of Tyre" (:12) may be a reference to the Tyrian god Melkart ("King of the city"). Perhaps Tyre had installed a system of Yahweh worship similar to that which was in Jerusalem (perhaps a result of Hiram's relationship with Solomon and assistance in building Yahweh's temple)- but this had become mixed with the worship of Melkart. "You seal up the imitation" (:12) show how God was aware that this replica of His system of worship had been pushed by the king of Tyre as far as it could go. According to the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary: "This feeling of superhuman elevation in the king of Tyre was fostered by the fact that the island on which Tyre stood was called "the holy island" [Sanconiathon], being sacred to Hercules and Melkart, so much so that the colonies looked up to Tyre as the mother city of their religion". The city was thought of as rising from the waters like the rock-throne of God. This would explain why the King of Tyre is criticized for saying " I am a god, I sit in the seat of God " (:2). It would also explain all the allusions to Israelite worship- he was setting himself up as a rival to Zion, dressing himself in clothing featuring all the jewels in the High Priestly breastplate (Ex. 28:15-20); the word used for his "workmanship" with those jewels in :13 is used in Ex. 31:3,5; 35:31 of the workmanship of the tabernacle and associated garments. The King of Tyre claimed to be "perfect in beauty" (:12)- just as Zion was described earlier in Ezekiel in the same terms (16:14).

29:12 This prophecy of forty years could have been a provisional prophecy- see on 26:7,21. See too the note on 26:7 about the fact that ancient history has blank areas- perhaps this prophecy was fulfilled but there is no record of it.

29:17-20- see on 26:7.

29:21 *I will give you the opening of the mouth in their midst*- In the midst of the surrounding nations. But at the time of the Lord's return, when Israel repent and enter the new covenant with Him, they will remember all their past sins and never open their mouth any more because of their shame (16:63). They will be so ashamed that they *will feel as if* they can never open their mouth. But Yahweh will open their mouth, and they will witness. In some anticipation of this, Ezekiel as the "son of man" prophet, a representative of his people just as the Lord Jesus was to be, had his mouth shut in dumbness, and he only had his mouth opened when Israel came to know [to some degree] that "I am Yahweh" (24:27). In all these evident connections something marvellous presents itself. Those who feel as if they just cannot open their mouths in witness are the very ones whom the Father will use; He will open their mouths and use them exactly because they are ashamed of their sins! And so it should be with us.

30:2 The wailing and lamentation for the fate of Gentile nations, even those who had been enemies of God's people, really shows how neither God nor Ezekiel had the slightest pleasure in the punishment of the wicked. God's desire is to positively manifest and develop His Name; this is His focus, rather than hitting back against those who rebel against Him.

30:13 *I will put a fear in the land of Egypt*- God often punishes people by sending attitudes of mind upon them.

30:18 *The day shall withdraw itself*- A reference to the collapse of the meaning of time as we know it around the period of Christ's return? This verse speaks of the time when Egypt comes to know the Lord through His judgments (:19)- and this must have some reference to the last days.

30:21 *I have broken the arm of Pharaoh*- One arm of Pharaoh had already been broken when Babylon defeated Pharaoh-Necho at Carchemish (Jer. 46:2) and took away from Egypt all her territory from the Nile to the Euphrates (2 Kings 24:7). This breaking of Pharaoh's arms one by one is likely because God wished them to repent after the first arm was broken. God doesn't afflict just to be cruel, but because He has a purpose, to His glory.

30:23,24 The language of scattering amongst the nations after being attacked by a Babylon empowered by God is exactly the sort of thing the prophets said would happen to Israel. There is a Biblical theme that God's people suffer the same judgments as the world, Egypt, if they act like the world. Hence we are warned to beware lest we be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). In our hearts and actions, there must be a chasmic difference between us and this world.

31:1 This was a month before Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians. Judah were desperately hoping that Egypt would come to their rescue, and in this prophecy there is the clear message that Egypt like Assyria before them, like all human strength, is doomed to not ultimately save us. Judah were intended to learn from history- the apparently invincible Assyrian had fallen, so would Egypt. But our human tendency to live in an eternal present means that we tend not to learn the lessons of history; yet God's word is full of history for us to learn from. Note how Is. 52:4 likewise parallels Egypt and Assyria.

31:3 God's people Israel are likened to such a cedar (17:3), spreading out roots to the waters (Ps. 80:11). The implication is that Assyria wished to usurp Israel as God's people and appropriated such language and imagery to themselves. It is *God's* Kingdom which gives "a forest-like shade" (Mk.

4:32); but the kingdoms of men appear as fake imitations of God's Kingdom; and it is our wisdom to perceive the difference.

31:6 *Under its shadow*- The smaller nations lived under the shadow of the superpowers like Egypt and Assyria, but they had eventually fled from under the shadow of Assyria (:12). Judah like us today are asked not to dwell under the shadow of such superpowers- in our day, perhaps insurance policies, savings, home ownership- but to dwell under the shadow of God's invisible Angel-cherubim wings (Ps. 17:8; 91:4). For a small nation like Judah wedged at the time between the superpowers of Babylon and Egypt, this was a radical demand- to dwell at peace under the shadow of God's care.

32:2 *Take up a lamentation*- Ezekiel and the faithful are being invited to as it were attend Egypt's funeral and participate in the laments- rather than trust in her. We too, living as we do at the end of human history, can do the same- laying to eternal rest, in our own minds and faith, the pomp and the power and the pride of this world.

32:10 The prophesied judgment upon Egypt [a symbol of the world] included that the sun was to be made dark, and people would be "amazed" at her. This is just what happened when Christ was crucified (Is. 52:14). The judgment of Egypt / the world had some elements of fulfilment in the 'judgment of this world' which occurred through the cross (Jn. 12:31). The crucifixion of Christ declared all worldly strength to now be nothing compared to the power of God's love toward us.

32:18 *Cast them down*- This was the power of the word of prophecy. What Ezekiel said on God's behalf was as good as done.

32:26 *Meshech, Tubal*- At the time of this prophecy, these nations had already passed off the scene. They were Scythian tribes who were much feared in the area. Yet we read of them in 38:2 as coming to invade Israel and being destroyed by dramatic Divine intervention. This seems to be a prophecy of the last days, suggesting that the political and military situation around Israel at the time of the Babylonian invasion will be seen again in the last days. The current trends in the Middle East show this coming about. Another possibility is that the sequence of events intended in chapters 37-40 simply didn't happen because of Israel's failure [restoration of Israel, invasion by the Scythian tribes, the destruction of that invasion by Divine intervention and the establishment of God's Kingdom based around a renewed temple in Jerusalem]. The Scythian tribes like Meshech and Tubal passed off the scene, but not in the dramatic way envisaged in chapter 38; instead the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days.

32:26-30 gives a picture of the mighty warriors of the nations around, lying in their graves. This refers to the custom of burying warriors with their weapons, and resting the head of the corpse upon its sword. Yet this is a description of Sheol, the word translated in some Bibles "hell" - the grave. These mighty men lying still in hell (i.e. their graves), hardly supports the idea that hell is a place of fire. Physical things (e.g. swords) go to the same "hell" as people, showing that hell is not an arena of spiritual torment. Note how Sheol is often paralleled in this chapter with "the pit", clearly referring here to the mass graves of the once mighty soldiers.

33:4 *If the sword come*- Yet the context speaks as if the sword will surely come. But if the watchman warns the people, there arises an element of possibility- "*if the sword come*". The implication is that God is willing to change the intended judgment if people repent (:11), as happened with Nineveh.

33:8 If we do not warn the wicked of their way, "his blood will I require at your hand". Some will have to give an account on judgment day of their specific lack of witness. Yet we can live day after day, saying nothing to our fellows, as if it doesn't really matter, because nobody notices... Not only our salvation but that of others can be limited by our exercise of freewill. If others' salvation is not to some extent dependent upon our preaching, then there is no meaning to the very concept of preaching.

33:10,11 Like so many a prisoner, so many a Christian, like Judas and Achan, like you and me, they had the sense of desire to come back to God, the detailed realization of wherein they had failed; but not enough real strength of purpose to seriously repent.

33:13 *If he trust to his righteousness and commit iniquity*- This is a warning to the righteous, that they will fall into sin if they trust their own righteousness. Good living believers fall into sin once they start trusting their righteousness. As Paul explains throughout Romans 1-8, we are saved by our faith in righteousness being imputed to us. God has arranged our salvation this way so that our faith in the fact that we aren't righteous (for all our good living appearances compared to the surrounding world) will keep us humbly trusting in *His* righteousness being counted to us- and this is the mentality which leads us to not sin in practice.

33:31 Ezekiel's audiences loved to come and hear God's words at his mouth- and in response to them, "with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goes after their gain". Materialism stopped them from really accepting those words, even though they theoretically assented to their inspiration. Only in their condemnation would they know "that a prophet *has* been among them" (:33). And so there is a chilling choice: to *really* accept the power of inspiration now; or have to learn it through the process of condemnation when judgment comes.

33:32 *They hear your words*- God prophesied that those to whom Ezekiel witnessed would not hear His words (3:11). And yet they came and sat before him, desiring to hear God's word. They wanted to hear, they heard, and yet they didn't really hear. The prophets were like buskers singing songs in the subway, which we may listen to with half an ear, even admire them for a few moments, and then walk on in our busy lives. But the prophets were speaking forth the words of passionate love of God Almighty for His people...

34:4 *Cause to return*- The great restoration prophecies of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31 speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The Hebrew word *shub* means both 'to return' in the sense of returning to the land, and 'turning' in the sense of repentance (see :4,16 and frequently in Ezekiel). But these restoration prophecies are packed with allusion to the great shepherd Psalm 23. Here, David says that the good shepherd 'causes me to repent' (Ps. 23:3 Heb.). This is matched in Ez. 36 by the idea of God *giving* Israel a new heart. And the parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also these restoration passages, in speaking of how He goes out and finds the lost sheep and brings it back home. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace. The even more incredible thing, though, is that Judah refused to accept this grace; they didn't 'return' to the land because they saw no need to 'return' to God. They willingly forgot that they were only in Babylon because of their sins;

to 'return' to the land was a 'return' to God, which He had enabled. But they were like the lost sheep refusing to sit on the shepherd's shoulders, preferring to sit in a hole and die... and this is the warning to us. For truly, absolutely all things have been prepared for us to enter the Kingdom. It's only those who don't want to be there who won't be.

34:5 *Scattered because there was no shepherd*- Good leadership produces unity; disunity amongst the sheep is therefore a reflection of poor shepherding. They scatter because they aren't fed by the shepherds and go elsewhere for food (:9).

34:11 *I Myself, even I, will search for My sheep*- The passage in John 10 which Jesus speaks of Himself as the good shepherd who seeks out God's sheep is full of allusion to this chapter. When He says "I and My Father are one" (Jn. 10:30), He is speaking in this context of His being the shepherd on God's behalf. This principle of agency, of operating on behalf of God in His Name, doesn't mean that Jesus was God Himself in person, but rather that He manifested the Father, so that God's shepherding was achieved through the person and work of Jesus.

34:20 *Between the fat sheep and the lean sheep*- The shepherds are here likened to fat sheep. Shepherds or pastors are themselves sheep and in that sense no different from those they are shepherding. This should result in an appropriate humility in all pastoral work.

35:5 "Esau is Edom" (Gen. 25:30; 36:1). The reference here is to the hatred between Jacob and Esau which played itself out between their descendants. Bitter argument between family members of one generation can continue over many generations; one aspect of the sin of division and enmity is that it tends to continue after our time, or after the protagonists have resolved with each other, as Jacob and Esau did. And each generation, according to this prophecy, is held responsible for their part in any hatred against their brother.

35:10 The two nations refer to Israel [the ten tribes] and Judah [the two tribe kingdom]. As God "was there" in the land of Israel in their past, so when the Kingdom is re-established it will again be known that "Yahweh is there" (48:35). The future Kingdom on God on earth will be a re-establishment of God's Kingdom as it earlier was in the form of Israel and Judah.

35:12 *I, Yahweh, have heard*- The extent of God's knowledge is amazing. He consciously is aware of every thought, intention, implication and actual spoke word of every single person in the world, including Gentiles like Edom.

36:13 *You are a devourer of men*- This prophecy is given to the physical land of Israel. It seems the captives in Babylon didn't want to return after the 70 years because they felt the land itself was somehow evil and would devour them. This is a similar mistake made by Israel in the wilderness, who slandered God's land rather than accepting it was a land of blessing. Being influenced by worldly superstitions and fears leads many of God's people to reject the hope of His Kingdom, and prefer to remain in the world rather than taking possession of the good Kingdom prepared for them. But God worked with Judah in their misunderstanding- He promises that from now on, the land will not be like that (:14). This is rather like in New Testament times, Jesus worked with the wrong ideas people had about demons, and demonstrated that even if this was what they feared, they were actually of no power compared to the inbreaking of God's Kingdom power which was possible for those who believed.

36:15 *Neither shall you cause your nation to stumble any more*- The Jews blamed the high places of the land of Israel for having bereaved them of their children (:13) and having made them stumble; but it was in fact they who had chosen to go up to the high places, build altars there for false gods, and sacrifice their children to them. God doesn't specifically correct them, although He privately explains the real situation to Ezekiel (:17,18); rather He works through that wrong idea, supposing for a moment it were true, but assuring the people that this will no longer be the case- just as Jesus did by using the language of demons when He did healing miracles, without specifically stating the basic truth that demons in fact don't exist.

36:27 *Cause you to walk in My statutes* - Entering the new covenant which God here proposed to His people involved Him promising to make them be obedient to His ways. We who have entered this same new covenant (Heb. 8:8-13) are likewise party to this same operation of God on human hearts- if we want it.

36:27-29 A new spirit was potentially given to the exiles who returned from Babylon, God put in the heart of men like Nehemiah to revive the work (Neh. 2:12 same Hebrew word). But this didn't force them to be obedient. They chose not to be, and so the promised kingdom blessings of corn etc. were replaced by famines in the times of Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi.

36:33 This says that although Judah had profaned God's Name in Babylon, yet He would sprinkle their hearts by grace and make the new covenant with them; and *then*, "In the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited". But in recorded history, there was no apparent connection between Judah's forgiveness and the rebuilding of the land. God enabled the exiles to return and rebuild the cities even though they didn't repent; such was His grace and urgent desire to give His spiritually weak people the Kingdom He had potentially prepared for them. We can take strong encouragement from this.

37:5 *I will cause spirit to enter into you*- This is an amplification of 36:27, where God explained His plan to make a new covenant with the returning exiles from Babylon. His Spirit would enter them and He would "cause" them to be obedient to His covenant, and they would return to the land and rebuild it. The dry bones represent Israel and Judah in their captivity, spiritually dead and thinking they were too far gone for God to revive them. God's plan was to revive them and return them to His land and for them to rebuild God's Kingdom there. But only a few returned from exile, and they were more interested in building up their own kingdom and houses than God's Kingdom and house. The return from exile therefore featured some small fulfilment of the potential which is outlined as possible in chapters 36 and 37. The return of Israel to their land, arising as it were out of the death camps of Europe to rebuild and make fertile the neglected land of Israel, was likewise a small fulfilment of these prophecies- perhaps in the 1940s and 50s, as at the return from exile, there could also have been the fuller fulfilment of this chapter. But again, there wasn't the all important turning to God in spirit and truth. It seems we must await yet further persecution to lead Israel to return to their land in repentance and faith in Christ, and then the promised Kingdom conditions will come about.

37:7 The sound of the cherubim Angels which Ezekiel heard was like the noise of an earthquake (3:12). Those two Hebrew words, for "noise" and "earthquake", occur here in 37:7, when he hears the "noise" of "shaking" or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh. The Spirit came from four places (:9)- just as there were four

cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army (1:24), so revived Israel stood up as a great army (:10). The Angel cherubim would work with God's disillusioned and broken people, to revive them, so that they would become like the guardian Angels of Israel above them. The point was that the Angel cherubim system which Ezekiel had seen at work amongst the captives was able to gather them together, and give life to the nation. And yet that didn't happen to those exiles- because they didn't walk in step with the spirit.

The Hebrew word for “noise” here is the same word used in Ezra 1:1 about the “proclamation” of Cyrus for Judah to return to the land. Most of God’s people didn’t return; the majority preferred to stay in Babylon. Therefore the prophecy was deferred in fulfilment until our times; the tragedy is that so much was potentially enabled at the time of Cyrus’ decree, and Judah made such little use of it.

37:11 These were the very sentiments of Jeremiah in Lamentations, and those who wept by the waters of Babylon when they remembered Zion.

38:2 Gog is an individual, not a nation; he is portrayed as the singular leader of a confederacy of Scythian tribes, several of whom have been mentioned previously in Ezekiel and were known at the time.

38:5 *Persia, Ethiopia and Libya*- These areas don’t exactly correspond to the areas bearing those names today. But clearly they refer to a group of people from what is now Iran and north Africa.

38:8 The invasion is to come against Israel after the Jews have returned to the land from many nations and are dwelling there confidently and in material prosperity (:11,12). In the prophetic schema which God had made potentially possible, the exiles were intended to return in faith and repentance, rebuild the land and temple and receive great material blessing from God. If that had happened, there would then have been this invasion outlined in chapter 38, dramatic Divine intervention (chapter 39) and then the re-establishment of God’s Kingdom based around a rebuilt temple and the returned glory of God in Zion as detailed in chapters 40-48. But Israel failed in all this, and so the prophecies will have a re-scheduled and re-applied fulfilment in the last days before Christ returns. The nations and tribes mentioned are from the areas today occupied by the Islamic enemies of Israel. The fact there is a nation of Jews in Israel is also an encouragement that the Middle East situation is moving towards the time of fulfilment of this prophecy.

38:11 This dwelling securely sounds like the time of Messiah’s Kingdom described in 37:24-27. Psalm 2 predicts a scenario where Christ is King in Jerusalem, surrounded by His enemies, whom He then goes out and destroys. There is no suggestion in Ezekiel 38 that the invasion is successful

38:13 “Young lions” is a term elsewhere used in Ezekiel to refer to leaders or princes (19:2,6; 32:2). The Hebrew of this verse could imply that these three nations notice that the seven others are going to take spoil from Israel, and decide to join in with them. This would bring the number of Israel’s invaders in this prophecy to ten- which is the number of horns of the beast which desecrates the land of Israel in the last days, and the number of surrounding nations who attack Israel according to Psalm 83.

39:1 The emphasis of the prophecies is upon the individual leader of the confederacy. It seems there will be one specific, charismatic anti-Christ figure who leads the world's opposition to Christ in the last days.

39:3 This speaks of the failure of military technology- a scenario we can well imagine in our times.

39:4 *On the mountains of Israel*- Here we see God's grace; because the mountains of Israel were the high places where Israel had built altars to other gods and sacrificed their children to them. But in these very places, God would show Himself strong for His people.

39:6 *Those who dwell confidently along the seacoasts*- Maybe referring to the Palestinian enemies of Israel dwelling in the Gaza strip, confident because of some international body guaranteeing their safety?

39:9 The burning of wooden weapons and the cleansing of the land from dead bodies (:12- :16) was likely part of the scenario which was intended by God at the time of the return from exile, but Judah's lack of commitment made this possible scenario not come true; the essence but maybe not the details of the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days, when God finally intervenes to save His repentant people from their invaders and establish His Kingdom on earth.

39:17-20 This gathering of the birds of prey at Gog's destruction is alluded to in Rev. 19:17, which draws a parallel between Gog and the confederacy he controls and the latter day false prophet and "the beast" (Rev. 19:19). The confederacy of tribes which bordered Israel spoken of in Ez. 39 therefore become "the beast" of the latter day prophecies. We can therefore expect this "beast" to refer to Israel's neighbouring Islamic enemies in the last days.

39:29 *For I have poured out My Spirit*- Clearly the meaning is "I will pour out My Spirit". Here we have one of many examples of where God speaks of future events as if they've already occurred, so certain is His word toward us (Rom. 4:17). Verse 8 outlined the same principle: "Behold, it has come, and it is done".

40:1 The return of the exiles from Babylon could have led to the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, replete with a Messiah figure and a temple according to the pattern showed to Ezekiel in Ez. 40 - 48. Parts of many of the prophets looked forward to this time, as did the restoration prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah 40-66. All of these could have had their fulfilment in the return under Ezra, but this was disabled by the poor response to the call to return. Under Nehemiah and then even in Malachi's time, these Kingdom prophecies could have had their fulfilment, but time and again Judah failed to live up to the necessary preconditions. In all this lies abundant exhortation for us; so much *could* happen but doesn't, because of our failure to live out and fulfil prophecy... instead, like Judah, we tend to assume that the time for fulfilment will inexorably arrive some day, regardless of our effort. The details of the temple are to the micro detail. They were commands rather than predictions, for Judah to fulfil. Ezekiel 40-48 was intended as an architectural record of the 'old' temple upon which a new one was to be reconstructed.

40:29 Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own



people. No fewer than 24 times in Ez. 40-48 are we told that the temple was to be built by 'measure' (e.g. 40:3,5,10,21,22,24,28,29); and the same word occurs frequently in describing how Nehemiah gave various groups of Jews their own 'measure' in the work of rebuilding Jerusalem (Neh. 3:11,19,20,22,24,27). See on 48:31.

40:46 It could have been possible for the Messianic Kingdom to have been established at the time of the restoration, and these temple prophecies would fit perfectly into this context. Thus Ezekiel emphasised that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (see too 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); Ezra, the leader of the initial restoration, was one of the sons of Zadok (Ezra 7:2). He was in a position to fulfil those prophecies, although the bulk of his brethren seem to have precluded this. Ezra was enabled to beautify the temple (Ezra 7:27), the very same Hebrew word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would "glorify" His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire- all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. Ez. 40-48 stress the "gates" dozens of times; and Nehemiah's account likewise stresses many times the attention he paid to setting up the "gates", as if he saw his work as fulfilling Ezekiel's words. 42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple with the same Hebrew word used for the temple vessels which were brought out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's 'Kingdom' passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20).

*The keepers of the charge-* Judah were to keep the charges of God relating to His house. Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's vision, tried to get them to "keep the charges" (s.w. Neh. 7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). But soon, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w.). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God's Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose even the true faith- because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God's law, rather than willingly devoting their way of life to the realisation of His vision.

41:5 These rooms around the temple were in Christ's mind when He spoke of how in God's house or temple, there are many rooms; and He has prepared one for each of us by His death on the cross (Jn. 14:2). It could be that He understood the temple as a spiritual house, and that the vision of 40-48 was going to be fulfilled in a more abstract, spiritual manner.

41:8 *A full reed of six great cubits-* see on 45:1.

41:26 There are many links between Solomon's temple and that described by Ezekiel. The repeated stress on the cherubim / palm tree decor in both the records of Solomon's temple and also Ezekiel's encourages the idea that the prophesied temple was to be seen as a re-establishment of Solomon's (1 Kings 6:29,32,35; 7:36 cp. Ez. 40:16,22,26,31,34,37; 41:18-20, 25,26). There were "thick planks" upon the porch of Solomon's temple; and the same word is only used elsewhere in describing how this would feature in Ezekiel's temple too (1 Kings 7:6 cp. Ez. 41:25,26). Even the "windows of narrow lights" (1 Kings 6:4) were to be replicated (Ez. 40:16; 41:16,26). Solomon's system of "chambers" was likewise copied (1 Kings 6:5,8,16 cp. Ez. 41:5-11 same Hebrew word). The glory of Yahweh was to fill Ezekiel's temple as it had done Solomon's (Ez. 43:5 cp. 1 Kings 8:10). Both temples were to be ready for operation on "the eighth day" after their consecration (Ez. 43:27 cp. 1 Kings 8:66). Ezekiel's temple was to be of a similar size to that of Solomon's; see on 45:1.

42:16 *Reeds*- The problem is that the length of the reed isn't specified. See on 45:1.

42:20 The new temple was "to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common" (Ez. 42:20 RV)- alluding back to Ezekiel's earlier lament that Judah had not made that very separation (Ez. 22:26). Time and again, the new system is described in terms which allude to the bad practices in the old system- e.g. the stress of Ez. 42:4 etc. that the doors of the new chambers were "toward the north" connects with how Ezekiel had earlier seen women weeping for Tammuz "towards the north" in the temple (Ez. 8:14; Ez. 9:2).

43:5 The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Cyrus empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

43:8 How close God was ought to have made them quit their idolatry. But their cognizance of the closeness of God was merely theoretical. They didn't feel nor respond to the wonder of it. And truly, He is not far from every one of us.

43:10 Ezekiel showed Judah the general picture of the temple; if they were obedient, then God promised to give them more details so they could build it in reality. There is a congruence between the style of address found in Ez. 40-48 and the earlier part of the prophecy. This is because Ezekiel is addressing the same audience- those who had heard his criticisms and appeals for repentance were the same group who were now being commanded to build a temple according to the dimensions given. Thus "You shall tell the rebellious house of Israel..." (44:6) is the same rubric used earlier (2:5; 3:26; 12:2,25; 17:12; 24:3). The new temple was "to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common" (42:20)- alluding back to Ezekiel's earlier lament that Judah had not made that very separation (22:26). Time and again, the new system is described in terms which allude to the bad practices in the old system- e.g. the stress of 42:4 etc. that the doors of the new chambers were "toward the north" connects with how Ezekiel had earlier seen women weeping for Tammuz "towards the north" in the temple (8:14; 9:2). Ezekiel himself was to provide the sons of Zadok with a bullock for a sin offering (43:19), as if he himself could have been present in the work of the building and dedication of this temple. Ezekiel himself, as a priest, was to inaugurate the altar by sprinkling blood upon it and making an offering (43:20-25). Ezekiel's temple prophecies are described as "the law of the house" (43:12). They were a law, a commandment to be fulfilled. This explains the commandment style of the instructions, e.g. 44:2: "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened". The description of Ezekiel's Temple was to be given to the captives in Babylon by Ezekiel, to lead them to repentance and to assure them of what could be if they repented. Then when the invitation to leave Babylon and return came in the time of Ezra, they ought to have been motivated to return to the land and build the temple which Ezekiel had explained to them. But sadly most

of them weren't very deeply motivated at all; they wanted to build a temple, but not to the extent Ezekiel had outlined. The intention was that *then*, when the temple was built (:11), they were to be obedient in all the ways in which they hadn't been obedient in the past, with the result that they were now sitting in captivity (44:24).

43:19 This suggests the temple could have been built within Ezekiel's lifetime, for he was to give the animals to the sons of Zadok to offer in the temple; Ezekiel was to prepare the daily sacrifice (46:13). But due to the Jews' selfishness and lack of spirituality, it didn't happen. This accounts for the many links between the Ezekiel prophecies and prophets like Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. What was theoretically possible, what potentially could have been, simply wasn't- because of their self-centredness and lack of effort. The prophecy of Ezekiel 40-48 was therefore primarily command rather than prediction. This was how it should have been, but the Jews failed to obey it all. They were minimalists, satisficers, rather than rising up to their full potential.

43:21 Nehemiah built 'Miphkad', "the Muster Gate" (Neh. 3:31 RSV), the "appointed place" [same Hebrew word]; he really tried to fulfil this command of 43:21. See on 40:29; 48:31. But one man's obedience couldn't in this case count for the whole people.

43:27- see on 20:40. If Judah resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan, "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered (Hag. 1:8). They should be more committed to building the temple "that I may appear in my glory" (RSV). The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time- but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-satisficing laziness. The same word is used here in 43:27- *then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would "accept / take pleasure in" His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not "accept" them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.).

*I will accept you*- This is to be connected with the prophecy of 20:41, that God would accept His people when they had been regathered from Babylon.

44:2 The priests were to shut the gates (44:2; 46:2,12); but the returned exiles in practice refused to do this unless they were paid for it (Mal. 1:10). The potential set up simply wasn't realized because of petty selfishness.

44:6 *Let it suffice you*- These words are picked up from the LXX by Peter, and applied to all of us in 1 Pet. 4:3: "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles" (Gk.). The temple vision should have made them ashamed of their sins (43:10,11). It should have motivated them to live the Kingdom life in their lives. Ezekiel's prophecies should have been an inspiration to Israel to be obedient and live out these things as a reality before them, and thereby see other prophecies come true in their own experience. They could have entered upon an upward spiral of spirituality. The form of the house, the very description of it by Ezekiel, should have inspired them to feel that they had had enough of sin.

44:7 The house was not to be profaned, the covenant wasn't to be broken. Judah returned from exile, built a temple, but profaned the Sabbath (Neh. 13:17,18), and profaned the temple by their marriage with Gentiles and their "weariness" with the temple ordinances (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11). They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, and so they had no part in it. Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods (Ezra

9:1,14). We can externally appear obedient, as Judah did by building a temple, but our hearts can be far from the things of God's covenant. By doing this, Judah precluded the possibility of all that is spoken in Ez. 40-48 from being fulfilled at that time.

44:9 The temple was primarily for the worship of Israel, "the people of the land" (45:22; 46:3,9), not for the whole world- no uncircumcised will be allowed to worship in it.

44:31 There are many details in Ez. 40-48 which seem very hard to apply to a future Kingdom under the rulership of Jesus. The offering of animal sacrifices in order to gain forgiveness seems to flatly contradict the teaching of Hebrews concerning the one time nature of the Lord's offering. The existence of animals who will have been "torn" by other animals seems hard to square with the Kingdom prophecies of Isaiah 9 and 11 about the animals living at peace with each other. The language used about "the prince" also seems impossible to understand about an immortal being. The whole prophecy was a command for the returning exiles from Babylon rather than prediction of the future. If we insist that every part of Ez. 40-48 is going to have a literal fulfilment in the Millennium, then we have to accept that Jesus will accept divorce and remarriage in His Kingdom- it's just that the priests won't be able to marry divorcees, but others will (44:22).

45:1 The problem is that the Hebrew text strangely omits the measurement unit. The "oblation" would be about 60 miles square if we measure it in "reeds" as some Bibles assume, although this term isn't in the Hebrew text here; if the "reed" is "six great cubits" as defined in 41:8, then this area would encroach either upon the Mediterranean or the Dead Sea, and it seems contextually more likely that a smaller area measured in cubits is intended, which would make the temple similar in dimension to Solomon's temple (see on 41:26). If measured in reeds, this large area somewhat disrupts the distribution of land amongst the tribes as detailed later in Ezekiel. If the missing measurement unit here is cubits and not reeds, it is likely that it is in the dimensions of the temple itself. The area described here in 45:1 is to be "the length of twenty five thousand". The following verse speaks of *cubits* as the measurement unit. Only the context can decide whether cubits or reeds is meant in many of the Ezekiel passages. If it is going to be thousands of reeds, then it would be over one mile square. However, Jer. 30:18 RSV prophesies that "the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall be where it used to be". And passages as varied as Zech. 1, Ps. 68 and Micah 4 all insist that the temple of the restored Kingdom was to built *within* the city of Jerusalem. If the temple is 500 reeds square, there will be no room for a city, assuming the city will be of the same size as the previous old city of Jerusalem.

45:8 The princes were not to oppress the people as they did in the recent past (45:8 cp. Jer. 22:3; Ez. 18:7,12,16; 22:7,29; Zeph. 3:1, where the same Hebrew word for "oppress" is found). Thus there was to be repentance for the 'oppression' which Ezekiel had earlier had to criticize Israel for. They were to have "just" balances (45:10), as opposed to the "unjust" balances which they had in the lead up to the captivity (Jer. 22:13 Heb.). In the past, they had brought strangers into the temple; but in the new system, they were not to do so (44:7 cp. 9).

45:16 "The people of the land" were to have a part in the new system of things (45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration with whom Judah intermarried and whose gods and language they accepted (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration

under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress these strangers / Gentiles. So much was made possible potentially that never happened, because of Judah's short sightedness and failure to grasp it. The same is true in the lives of God's people today.

46:11 "The prince" of 21:27 was Judah's last ruler- so "the prince" later in Ezekiel would appear to be a promise of a restored monarchy. Yet tragically, the royal family chose to remain in Babylon. "The prince" offers as He is able (:11)- hard to apply to the Almighty Lord Jesus. He offers sacrifice for his own sin, and has children, to whom He will pass an inheritance. And he has to be warned not to oppress the people (:18). It is a more comfortable interpretation to see him as primarily referring to Zerubbabel or Joshua the High Priest (44:3). It is evident from 46:3 and 44:3 that the promised Messiah figure was to be both a king and a priest- which would fit Joshua. Those men could have been so much; but their dysfunctions meant that what had been potentially prepared for them didn't come true. The very same happens in the lives of so many of God's people. We must pray for wisdom to understand what God intends for us, and have the faith to realize that we really can realize it in our lives. Zechariah concluded his prophecy about this Messiah figure with the comment that it would come to pass, if he would diligently obey the voice of the Lord (Zech. 6:10-15). Joshua- Jesus didn't live up to it. And Zerubbabel never ruled in Jerusalem- he returned to the soft life in Babylon after the temple was rebuilt. But the prophecies suffered a deferral. They will in a broad sense be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, *the* branch, although the details were the commands which God intended the Messiah figure of Ezekiel's time to fulfil.

46:12 *One shall open for him the gate*- David in his humility aspired to be such an anonymous gatekeeper in God's temple (Ps. 84:10). And yet "the prince" is defined as being "David" (34:24; 37:25). He was the prince exactly because he wished merely to the anonymous gatekeeper who would open the doors for the prince. In this we see the classic illustration of Christ's teaching that true greatness is in humility; He will be the highest in the Kingdom because in this life He debased Himself lowest (Mt. 23:12; Mk. 9:35; 10:44).

46:13- see on 43:19.

46:18 They had gone into captivity for these kind of abuses, and they were to return and rebuild the temple after the pattern of Solomon's, repent of their sins, and live righteously, and they would have the possibility of bringing in the Messianic Kingdom. But they chose to be satisfied with a semi-revival, a quasi repentance- just as we can be so easily. And Nehemiah records how the princes *did* oppress the people, taking their land / possessions away from them.

47:12 This is alluded to in Rev. 22:2,14, where the future Kingdom of God on earth is spoken of as having a tree or forest of trees of life, giving healing to the nations each month. Again we see that the essence of Ezekiel's vision will come true, but maybe not the exact details, which were tailored to Judah's possible experience on return from captivity.

47:13 The restored Kingdom of God could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But according to the record in Ezra and Nehemiah, they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn't even want to inherit it; they

preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

47:16 The whole style of Ez. 40-48 is relevant to what could have been in Ezekiel's own time, rather than a specific prediction of the future- the borders of the land are described as "Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus... on the north northward *is* the border of Hamath".

47:23 The commandments about giving the Gentiles inheritance amongst the tribal cantons are understandable in the light of the fact that the Samaritans were living in the land at the time of the restoration. See on 43:10. Within Ezekiel, Israel are criticized for oppressing the stranger / Gentile who lived with them (22:7,29); and now they are told that in the new temple system, the stranger must be generously given an inheritance in the land, he must be counted as actually belonging to one of the tribes.

48:29 It was Ezekiel, as he sat with the exiles in Babylon, who was to divide the land by lot unto the various tribes. The tragedy of all the details recorded in Ezekiel 40-48, and the very reason for their being preserved to this day, is to show us to what great extent God has prepared potential things for His people, and yet they can be totally wasted if we don't respond. In fact according to Mic. 4:10, it was God's purpose to exile His people to Babylon, and *there* to deliver them from their enemies. And yet they preferred to side with their enemies and to prefer non-deliverance from Babylon. The tragedy of it all is almost unthinkable, and yet this is what we do if day by day we chose the things of this world against the deliverance from this world which there is in Christ.

48:31 Nehemiah arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. See on 40:29; 43:21. This verse is alluded to in Rev. 21:12, where it appears to be given a more symbolic application to the people of God, the new Jerusalem. Judah failed to build the new Jerusalem as intended, and so the essence of the vision was reapplied in a more abstract sense, and in this form will have its fulfilment in essence.

48:35- see on 35:10.

1:8 There was nothing in the Law of Moses which specifically forbade eating or drinking these things. But Daniel would've been defiled in his conscience. We too should go to great lengths to always have a good conscience, even if in the eyes of the world and of other members of God's people we appear strange.

2:19 Given the urgency of the situation, Daniel would've been tempted to rush in to the King with the interpretation, knowing that every second counted to save the lives of his friends and himself. But firstly he takes time to thank God; we should do the same in life's crises.

2:21 *Wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding*- God confirms people in their wisdom and understanding. God gives more to the one who already has obtained some more (Lk. 19:25). There is an upward spiral in spiritual growth, which has God's word as the dynamic within it.

2:23 *Made known to us*- Notice how selfless Daniel was, in feeling that the interpretation had been made known to "us", not just him personally, because he recognized that there had been prayers of others involved, not just his- hence he later says that *we* will make known the interpretation (:36).

2:35 *No place was found for them*- Quoted in Rev. 20:11 about the present world system being destroyed at Christ's second coming.

2:39 *All the land*- The Chaldee word translated "land" here is equivalent of the Hebrew *eret*, which is used in the Bible to refer to either 'the land' promised to Abraham, or the whole planet. Bible prophecy is centred around the land and people of Israel. The Gentile nations mentioned are significant only in terms of their relations with Israel. Babylon at that time ruled over the land of Israel, but not over the whole earth. The prophecy predicts how after Babylon there would come other empires who would rule over Israel. The chest of silver refers to the Medo-Persian empire, the thighs of brass to the Greeks, and the two legs of iron to the Roman empire, the two legs possibly referring to the Eastern and Western parts of the empire. After that, Israel ceased to be a nation, until in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Jews returned and established the state of Israel. The mixture of nations represented by the feet of iron and clay will dominate Israel for a short time- in decorum with the fact that the feet of the statue were not a very large part of its total height. This may refer to a union of nations dominating Israel in the time just prior to Christ's return. He is the stone cut out without hands (:45)- He was born of a virgin with no human hand involved. At His return He will destroy all human kingdoms and establish God's eternal Kingdom on this earth, which shall last eternally.

2:44 Clear indication that the Kingdom of God is to be established on earth- not in Heaven.

*Crush to powder*- Alluded to by Jesus when He taught that He is the stone upon whom we either fall and are broken, or He will fall upon us and grind us to powder (Mt. 21:44). The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and become broken people, limping like Jacob by grace into His Kingdom; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at His return, in that we will share the judgments of this present world system. Hence Paul speaks of how the rejected amongst the people of God will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). The crucial separation between us and the world must be made now.

2:45 The whole image stands complete in the last days; there will be a latter day Nebuchadnezzar who has beneath him a system comprising all the elements of Israel's previous dominators.

2:48 Daniel went through a yo-yo pattern of being promoted into the limelight, and then (in an unrecorded manner) slipping out of the limelight into relative obscurity, from which he was promoted again. Thus in 2:48 Daniel is made Prime Minister, in the events of Chapter 3 he seems to be strangely absent, in 4:8 Daniel is brought in to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's second dream almost as an afterthought, implying he was out of the limelight; by 5:11 King Belshazzar was unaware of Daniel, but promoted him to be third ruler in the Kingdom (5:29). Daniel was made master of the magicians by Nebuchadnezzar; but by the time his son was reigning, this had largely been forgotten (Dan. 5:12)- because Daniel evidently was nowhere near that job to which he'd been promoted. Why did Daniel slip out of the limelight? Was it not for the sake of his conscience? As a member of the Jewish community, it would have been so easy for Daniel to stay where he was, reasoning that holding down a job like that would enable him to do so much for the Truth. But he realized that his personal conscience and devotion to the spiritual life must be given number one priority if he was to help his people. There is an exact correspondence between the mind of Daniel here and the fervent believer who refuses promotion, jumps out of a career that is rubbing too strongly against the conscience...

3:1 The image of the Daniel 2 vision had described Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold, who would soon be replaced by other world empires. Nebuchadnezzar didn't like the sound of this- and so he blasphemously made an entire image of gold, as if to imply that he would in fact never come to an end. Believing in the coming of God's eternal Kingdom means we recognize our own frailty and mortality, and however small *our* 'kingdom' is in this world, it will quickly come to an end. Our focus will be on that Kingdom which is to come, rather than upon our 'kingdom' in this life, that very limited circle of things over which we have some power and control. Nebuchadnezzar didn't want to accept this; he like many unbelievers tried to live within the assumption, and create the impression, that his life and 'kingdom' would continue for ever. See on 4:3.

3:6 Rev. 13:14,15 speaks of the beast creating an image in the last days before Christ returns, and persecuting all those who refuse to bow down to it. This is clearly alluding to what happened in Daniel's time in historical Babylon. The essence of what we read here will therefore be seen in the last days before Christ's return. A "herald" cried aloud to peoples of all nations and languages, and bid them worship the Babylonian image, on pain of being cast into a fiery furnace (:4). And yet in Rev. 14:9,10, an Angel herald cries to all nations and languages, warning them that if they *do* worship the image, they will be cast into the lake of fire. The Angels had observed Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance and defiance, and many centuries later they will work out their way of parodying it in their future proclamation.

3:8 *Chaldeans*- The very astrologers (4:7) whose lives Daniel had just saved (2:12). When we do good to others, very often they aren't merely ungrateful but positively resent us and seek to hurt us. This is a sad tendency of human nature, exemplified throughout history. If it happens to us, we must remember that it is in fact normal, and Biblical history is full of such examples, coming to their ultimate term in the Jewish hatred of their Saviour, Jesus.

3:18 Even if God didn't preserve them, they would still serve Him alone. Perhaps they had Job's words going round in their minds: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). We cannot expect nor demand Divine deliverance from our crises; our love and trust of Him lead us to accept that He truly knows best and wishes us only our eternal good in our latter end.



3:28 *Yielded their bodies*- Alluded to in Rom. 6:13,19, where we are told that at baptism we yield our bodies in service to God as our true King and Master.

3:30 Where was Daniel at this time? Sick? Weak in faith? Away on business?

4:3 *From generation to generation*- Nebuchadnezzar learnt from his mistake of wanting his kingdom to last for ever- see on 3:1. He now recognizes the truth of the vision of chapter 2; that *his* kingdom and life were so very brief, and only *God's* Kingdom will be eternal.

4:17 The Chaldee words translated "sentence", "decree" and "judgment decision" are all legal terms. This is an insight into the court of Heaven- presumably the matter in question was Nebuchadnezzar's pride and his position on the Jews (Daniel's advice in 4:27 to shew mercy to the poor may be a reference to what the King should've been doing to the Jews- perhaps by enabling their return to their land?). And a 'judicial decision' was made and "a watcher and a Holy One came down from Heaven" to operationalize it (:13). If this is the extent of Angelic attention to the heart of a Gentile king- how much more earnestly are they debating the states of our hearts and our actions, and issuing decrees for action accordingly? God doesn't respond to the issues in our lives on autopilot, He doesn't use standard form responses; there is real, live, active discussion about little you and me in the court of Heaven itself, with Angels sent hither and thither in response.

*The kingdom of men*- Whilst God is ultimately the King of His entire creation even now, He has given man freewill to rule the world and his own life as he wishes. Thus at present the world is comprised of "the kingdom of men". At Christ's return, "the kingdoms of the world (will) become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Then God's will and desires will be completely and openly performed in this earth. Hence Jesus' command for us to pray: "Your kingdom come (that) Your will be done on earth, as it is (now) in heaven" (Mt. 6:10).

*The most abased*- That most abased man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted- to be King of God's Kingdom. The equivalent Hebrew word is used in Is. 53:3 about Christ's ultimate abasement on the cross.

4:19 Daniel in those moments must have been sorely tempted not to speak forth God's word, suspecting it might cost him his life. We too have those moments when we struggle whether or not to open our mouth and testify as we should.

4:21 A spreading tree giving much fruit to all who took refuge under it is the very idea used by the contemporary prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 17:23) in describing the true Kingdom of *God*. This was to point up the choice available to Israel: a part in the Kingdom of God, or that pseudo-Kingdom of this world. We have the same choice today, living as we do in spiritual Babylon.

4:25 *Until you know*- The King was still struggling to accept the truth of the chapter 2 vision, that *his* kingdom and life were very limited, and he must refocus himself upon *God's* eternal Kingdom rather than upon his *own* life and kingdom. He theoretically had accepted the truth of this in 2:47 and 3:29; but he didn't accept it in his heart until after his humiliation (:34). We may likewise struggle to really accept the Gospel of God's coming Kingdom as we should; for believing in it requires a radical refocus of our lives today, right away from ourselves and our own lives and 'kingdoms'.

*Gives it to whoever He will-* The fact God gives the kingdoms of this world to whoever *He* chooses should overarch our decision making when it comes to voting in elections and being involved in politics.

4:27 Daniel prophesied in clear enough language that Nebuchadnezzar would surely be driven away from among men and live as an animal. But he goes on to plead: “let my advice be acceptable to you, and break off your sins by righteousness”- as if to say that no matter how definite and categorical the prophecy of punishment, it was after all conditional, even though the conditions weren’t even hinted at within the actual prophecy. God is so sensitive to human repentance.

4:32 The world is under *God’s* control, not that of demons or supposed evil beings in Heaven.

5:13 This incident is so similar to Joseph being suddenly summoned to come to the mighty king and explain a dream which was worrying him, on the recommendation of another who remembered his previous ability in interpreting dreams; and they were both rewarded by the king in similar ways (Gen. 41:14,40-42). The fact circumstances repeat within the lives repeat within the lives of God’s children and also between people, one believer experiencing strangely similar situations to what one another one has done, is all a sign that our lives are under God’s control, and they develop according to patterns which He uses and has used with others. This means that we can feel great fellowship with Bible characters, and also with other believers of our own age. Daniel must have immediately thought of Joseph as he received the command to come before the king, and would’ve been strengthened by it. Likewise the scene here in Daniel 5 of Gentiles praising their gods, mocking Yahweh, and then suddenly being destroyed was a repeat of that in Jud. 16:24.

5:20 *His spirit was hardened-* The hardening was done by God. He confirmed Nebuchadnezzar in the mental position he chose to adopt. The language is similar to how God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart.

5:22 *Though you knew all this-* A classic example of how knowledge brings responsibility to God’s judgment (Lk. 12:48; Jn. 15:22).

*You, his son, Belshazzar-* Triple emphasis is given to the fact that God was watching and speaking so directly and personally to this man, whose name He knew.

5:26 *Numbered-* God allows things to happen and permits nations to prosper for specific periods of time. The number of our days is likewise numbered (Job 7:1; 14:5; 38:21). God isn’t absent from our world; everything is under amazingly tight observation and control.

5:27 Judgment is in a sense ongoing in this life; it’s not that God is indifferent now, and will weigh our case only at the last day. Right now, human lives are weighed before God.

6:10 Daniel could have just prayed privately, in his heart. Many other Jews probably did this. But he chose to continue to openly pray. He was prepared to give his life for what was only a conscience issue. We too must establish and be prepared to live by our conscience, no matter what others think. Note that Daniel and other faithful believers like David (Ps. 55:17; 119:164) prayed regularly, just as the incense (cp. prayer) was offered regularly. Regular prayer is a good discipline in the life of the believer, rather than praying only when we have the mood or in emergencies. Daniel was willing to die in justification of his habit of open, unashamed, regular prayer.

6:20 *You serve continually*- Darius was referring to Daniel's continual prayer. Prayer is a service to God; something we can do even if we are incapable of doing any more physical, external service to Him.

6:22 The mouths of the lions were closed so that they did not "destroy" Daniel; and because of this, Darius praises God, saying that His Kingdom would never be 'destroyed' (:26, same original word). Daniel was not destroyed; and thus Darius came to believe that God's Kingdom would not be destroyed. Daniel was set up as a living part and foretaste of that Kingdom, just as we too are to exemplify the life of the future Kingdom in our lives today; in this sense we 'have eternal life' in that we live the kind of lives which we will eternally live in God's future Kingdom. To a far greater extent, "the Kingdom of God" is a title given to the Lord Jesus- because He in His mortal life was the essence of that Kingdom, the embodiment of the life which shall then be lived.

6:25 Note how **Daniel is presented as a type of Christ in this chapter**. 6:14 Ruler labouring not to kill a righteous man, manipulated by his own underlings = Pilate; 6:17 Den of lions- den s.w. pit Is. 14:15, where it is paralleled with the grave. 6:17 Stone sealed and put on the mouth of the cave [den]= Mt. 27:66; 6:17 the purpose could not be changed regarding Daniel's death= Jesus died by the determinate counsel of God, Acts 2:23; 6:22 An Angel sent; 6:22 'resurrection' early in the morning; 6:22 Daniel not hurt because innocence found in him = Acts 2:24; 6:23 Daniel taken up out of the den = resurrection and ascension, s.w. Ps. 139:8 who shall *ascend* to Heaven; 6:23 no damage was found on Daniel implies they examined his body= Lk. 24:39; 6:25,26 decree = great commission to spread the knowledge of God's Kingdom which we must fulfil after the Lord's resurrection.

7:7 Note the emphasis in Dan.7 that the fourth beast is totally different from all other beasts. The Roman empire was not so completely different from the preceding empires to warrant this description. 7:7,19 imply that the vision of the fourth beast and little horn was separate from his vision of the four beasts (:2). The first vision was of four beasts and therefore included some reference to the fourth beast, in its manifestation as the Roman empire. But "after this" (:7) there was the more detailed vision of the fourth beast and little horn. This alone implies that they were to have a special manifestation in the last days. The awesome power and strength of this system amazed Daniel, despite what he had already seen. In Daniel's first vision of the four beasts he says that they were "different one from another" (:3). But in the second vision he realized that the fourth beast "was different from all beasts that were before it" (:7), as if they were all relatively similar. The persecuting power we are about to see revealed will thus not be a political or religious power of the type previously seen in history. It is therefore almost beyond our conception of exactly how large and strong this power will be: a world superpower directing its venom against Jews and true Christians.

7:19 This describes the fourth beast as having the iron and brass metals of the image of Dan.2 in it. The fourth beast had feet and teeth, we are specifically told. The lion, representing the head of gold, had feet (:4); the bear, representing the breast of silver, had powerful teeth. Thus the fourth beast had all the characteristics of the other beasts. By its being destroyed through its ten horns being smitten by Christ's return, it is as if the image of Dan.2 is standing erect and

complete in the last days, being hit on the ten toes (cp. the ten horns of the beast) by Christ's return.

7:22 The metals of the image in Daniel 2 have their counterpart in the vision of the beasts in Daniel 7. The little stone (Christ) hits the image on the feet and then destroys all the metals together. This means that in some sense the image must stand complete in the last days. The various beasts and metals must all be in existence at the time of Christ's return in order for Him to destroy them by his coming. The little stone hits the image on its ten toes- corresponding to the ten horns of the fourth beast of Dan.7. The ten horns must in a sense be in existence at the time of Christ's coming. Amongst the horns there develops a "little horn" (:8) which persecutes the saints, but is destroyed by Christ's return (:8-11). This horn "made war with the saints... *until* the ancient of days came" (:21,22). Thus the saints will in some way be under persecution when Christ comes. This may be yet future; or it could be that the colossal moral pressure upon true Christians from every angle which we now experience is in fact effectively persecution.

7:25 "A time (a year), times (two years) and an half", i.e. 3.5 years (Dan.7:25; 12:7; Rev.12:14). The New Testament speaks of a similar period of 1,260 days -also 3.5 years (Rev.12:6; 11:3); 42 months (3.5 years) (Rev.11:2; 13:5). It seems fair to assume that they are all speaking of an identical or associated period of time. See 9:26.

8:1 There are few Bible characters who use their own name so much- but Daniel is always calling himself "I, Daniel" (7:28; 8:1,15,27; 9:2; 10:2,7; 12:5). His self-perception was very clearly that he was a Hebrew, and a witness to God's justice / judgment. Daniel has much to teach the man or woman caught up in the corporate life, the engrossing pull of business, education or social contact. His self-perception was that he was not of his surrounding world, even though those around him wanted to see him as one of them. And further, God Himself frequently addresses Daniel by his name- "Daniel". Daniel realized that this was how *God* perceived him; and he wished to perceive himself as God perceived him. And he didn't show one face to the world, and one to God. He openly showed himself to the world as he perceived himself, and he perceived himself as God perceived him. We too should show no shadow self to this world, no appearance; but the person whom we essentially are, and whom God perceives us as being. His children, His witnesses, His people.

8:15 Daniel sought to understand the meaning of a vision; but two verses earlier, an Angel had asked another Angel for understanding of the same vision. Here surely we have the practical meaning, in Angelic terms, of God knowing our prayers and arranging the answers before we even ask them. Perhaps it was Daniel's guardian Angel who asked a more senior Angel for the interpretation of the vision, knowing Daniel was going to be asking for it. Yet it was the second Angel who actually gave the answer to Daniel (:14). Verse 16 describes the one Angel standing at the Ulai river calling out: "Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision". Yet at this time, Daniel himself was in vision at the Ulai river (:2). His guardian Angel was there, right in front of him. And He had foreknown Daniel's feelings and arranged for another Angel to respond to them... and so the second Angel (Gabriel) also comes near where Daniel was standing (:17). His guardian Angel had literally called Gabriel to come over to Daniel... And all this kind of thing is going on for you and me *hourly* in the court of Heaven!

9:12 God brought the "evil" or disaster (:14); there is no personal Satan who does this, God creates both good and evil in a judicial sense (Is. 45:5-7).

9:15 *We have sinned*- So often in this prayer, Daniel associates himself with his sinful people. No matter how weak we perceive our fellow believers to be, we are part of the body of Christ as they are, and we cannot in this sense disassociate ourselves from them. When we see their sins, we should feel shame for the fact that the body of God's people behave like this, and ask God to forgive *us*.

9:23- see on 10:2.

9:26 69 weeks is 483 days. On the basis of a day for a year, this would make 483 years. However, Jewish time is often reckoned in Lunar cycles rather than Solar, as Europeans are accustomed to. The decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem was given, according to profane history, BC457. On the basis of Lunar time, 69 weeks of years comes out at 486.5 Lunar years. Allowing for a BC/AD calendar inaccuracy of 4 years, this brings us to AD33.5 for the time of Messiah being cut off; which is exactly when Jesus was crucified, 33.5 years after his birth. The 69 weeks being split into 7 weeks and 62 weeks is understandable once it is appreciated that most Bible prophecy has some immediate reference to the period around which it was given. 7 weeks of years would come to around 50 years. According to the records of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai it would appear that the bulk of the work was done in the 50 years after the issuing of the decree for rebuilding. This mini time period would doubtless have been of great encouragement to the Jews of the time as they laboured in the rebuilding work amidst so much opposition. The final week of tribulation is hard to interpret, perhaps because if Israel had accepted Christ as Messiah as intended, it could have been fulfilled without the delay which was necessitated. One possibility is that the 3.5 year tribulation of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans between AD67 and AD70 was the half week in which the sacrifices ceased to be offered in the Jerusalem temple (:27). The remaining half week would be fulfilled in the final 3.5 year tribulation before Christ's return (see 7:25). The jump in fulfilment from AD33 to AD70 and then to the last days is the same kind of jump in hiatus found in the gap between the legs and the feet of the image in Dan. 2, and between the succession of beasts and then the terrible beast and the little horn in Dan. 7. These are but suggestions for the interpretation of some of the hardest words in the Bible.

10:2 Verses 2 and 3 show Daniel praying for three weeks- presumably for the fortunes of Israel to be restored. As the days went by, it would have seemed natural to assume that the prayer was going unanswered. However, the Angel told him that "from the first day... your words were heard" (: 12), but the delay was because "the prince of the Kingdom of Persia withstood me (the Angel) twenty-one days"- i.e. three weeks. So his first prayer was heard, but it took the Angel three weeks to work out the answer in practice. How many of our prayers are like that! The Angel then describes how he confirmed and strengthened Darius (11:1) to the same end to enable the prayer to be answered- as if when our Angel sees someone set in a course of action which will lead to the answer of our prayer, they are confirmed and strengthened in it. The same idea is found in Dan. 9:23; a command being given from God to answer a prayer as soon as it's prayed, but there being a delay to the answer due to the Angels effecting the answer. The wonder of all this needs some reflection. Our words, the thoughts within human braincells, call forth the Angels from the court of Heaven. Our prayers may be answered immediately, but it takes time for the answers to be worked out.

10:12 An Angel is sent from Heaven to earth for the sake of human words... The prayers of a man standing at a bus stop on earth can call forth cosmic action. This is the power of prayer, and the extent of God's sensitivity to us.

10:19 Whenever Angels appear to people on earth, they are afraid but the Angel comforts them not to fear. It will be the same when the Angel appears to gather us to meet Christ at His return.

11:3 The "mighty king" is Alexander the Great; as soon as he arose to great power, he died and his empire was split amongst his generals (:4). This is confirmation of the prophecy in Daniel 2 that the Greek empire would also pass off the scene. The rest of the chapter describes how the situation after his death developed in relation to those nations who had domination over Israel; how the mighty powers fought with each other, their fortunes ebbed and faded according to the amount of time God had assigned them.

11:25 *Not stand*- This is typical of the language found in this chapter. The rival kingdoms of men appear so powerful and stable, and are so confident- for a time. Chapter 2 has explained how human empires all pass off the scene, they cannot 'stand' for ever, they last only for a time, and will be finally replaced by God's eternal Kingdom when Christ returns. Regardless of the exact details of fulfilment, the chapter gives us the general impression of the vanity of human strength, how all human beauty fades to grey, earth's proud empires pass away, and only the things and people of God's eternal future Kingdom will ultimately stand for ever.

11:31-36 This describes the situation at the time of the Maccabees. However, Jesus speaks of the abomination as also being set up in the last days before His return (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14). So whatever fulfilments these words had in the time e.g. of Antiochus, they were only precursors of the main fulfilment in our last days.

11:40-45 This may refer to a latter day invasion of Israel by a "king of the north", supported by Middle Eastern powers, which will have the temple mount in Jerusalem (:45) as its target. The invader will be destroyed by the return of Christ, at which time there will be resurrection, judgment and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth (12:1-3).

12:1 *Michael*- The Angel that represents Israel, Daniel's people.

12:2 Immortality is thus given when Christ returns, after the resurrection and at the judgment seat of Christ- not at the moment of death.

12:3 12:3,10 draw a parallel between those having wisdom and those who turn many to righteousness. Some translates "those who are wise" as "the teachers", reflecting the play of ideas within the Hebrew sense of 'wisdom'- to have wisdom is axiomatically to teach it. To possess God's Truth therefore means that we will share it with others in some form; one cannot keep good news just to themselves.

12:4 Running is an idiom for responding to God's word (Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; 2 Thess. 3:1). In the last days there will be some who understand the prophecies which Daniel so wanted to but couldn't (:9), and they will respond to this knowledge powerfully. The purpose of prophecy isn't to predict the future, but so that the generation who live at the time of its fulfilment will understand (as in Jn. 13:19; 14:29).

12:7 *Time, times...* - See on 7:25.

12:10 In the last days, "the wise shall understand" (12:10). Wisdom and Daniel are clearly associated, at least eight times (Dan. 1:17; 2:13,14,18,24,27,48; Ez. 28:3); as are Daniel and a desire to understand. Yet Daniel did not fully understand his latter day prophecies; "the wise shall understand" in the last days, Daniel was comforted. In other words, there will be a 'Daniel' category in the last days who will share his wisdom, sharing the character of Daniel, and who will be given the understanding he so earnestly sought.

12:13 A promise to Daniel of personal resurrection and receiving a specific place or "lot" in God's future Kingdom on earth.

1:2 The first three chapters of Hosea are about his marriage to a prostitute, who had children by other men and who were therefore not his children. Yet Hosea loved her, and oscillates between anger and passionate pleading with her. He fantasizes about how wonderful it would be to have her committed to him, and speculates as to how he might bring her to this. His relationship with her represented God's with Israel, and chapter 4 onwards speaks of God's situation with Israel in the language of marriage and intimate relationship. It may be possible to reason back from some of these chapters to understand other aspects of the Hosea: Gomer relationship.

*The beginning-* He'd have been tempted to just ignore it, to think he'd been dreaming something, to run away from it. But to his credit, he obeyed. According to the Mosaic Law, a whore should be burnt, not married. Hosea was told to break the letter of the Law, and marry a prostitute; thus he began what was to be quite a theme in both his life and his prophecy- that in the face of sin, God shows His grace. We've likely all seen this in our own lives- at our very weakest moments, the kindness and care of God for us is revealed.

1:10 *Yet the number-* "Yet" is the challenging word. In the face of all Israel's sin, in the face of the inevitable judgment which this attracted, in the very moment when it is declared, God goes on to speak of His loving salvation. This is so hard for humans to take on board, called as we are to manifest this same grace of God. In the heat of the moment of others' sin against us, we rarely find it in us to think let alone speak of their ultimate hope of salvation by grace. But this is the challenge of Hosea.

2:3 *Lest I strip her naked... and kill her-* The punishment for a prostitute, a punishment which she should've had at the start. But instead of this punishment, Hosea had married her. We are perhaps nervous to equate our sinfulness, our rebellion, our unfaithfulness, with Gomer's prostitution. But this, surely, is what we are intended to do, and to thereby perceive the extent of God's patient love toward us, to the end that that grace and goodness might lead us to repentance. Because Hosea had so loved this woman, he had legitimate feelings of anger- as does God, having loved us so much. Hosea was the wounded lover, the betrayed man. And these are exactly the feelings of God over the unfaithfulness of His people. The threat to strip her naked was what was done in the case of divorce for adultery. "She is not my wife, neither am I her husband" (2:2) is a verbatim quotation from various Babylonian divorce formulas, and was later incorporated into the Talmud as a divorce formula. Likewise the threat to withdraw her clothing, her "wool and linen" (2:9) likely refers to the obligation a husband had to his wife. Yet for all this talk of divorce, Hosea keeps wanting Gomer to return to him; in his heart he keeps coming back to her. This was an exact reflection of God's feelings for His people. Hosea did everything for this worthless woman. He gave her "the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal" (2:8). He was a wealthy man, and yet gave it all to his wife, who in turn blew it all with her boyfriends on Baal worship. It's like the millionaire marrying a worthless woman who manipulates him into giving her his money, which she blows down at the casino day by day, and sleeps with the guys she hangs out with down there. But "she did not recognize that it was Me who gave her" all these things (2:8)- i.e. she didn't appreciate it. And so Hosea decides that he will withdraw this generosity from her, and then, he surmises, "she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband'" (2:7). This was Hosea's hope, and in his own mind, he put these words in her



mouth. The hopefulness of Hosea was a reflection of the love he had for her. And all this speaks eloquently of the hopefulness of the Almighty Father who thought “*surely* they will reverence My Son” when He sent Him. And the purposeful anti-climax of the parable is that no, they don’t and won’t reverence His Son, and even worse, they kill Him. In the same way as Hosea had this plan to get Gomer to “return” to him, so God likewise planned that “afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh” (3:5). Both God and Hosea thought that their beloved would return if they distanced themselves from her (5:15). But it didn’t work out like this. Both God with Israel and Hosea with Gomer ended up *pleading* with her to return (14:1); “yet they do not return to Yahweh their God, nor seek Him, for all this” (7:10). It was and is a tragedy. In our preaching to Israel and to humanity generally, we are pleading with them to accept this most unusual love. The pain of God, the way He is left as it were standing there as a tragic figure, like Hosea was, of itself inspires us to plead with people all the more passionately; and to respond ourselves, to be the loving woman to Him the ultimately faithful man.

4:12 *The spirit of prostitution*- Gomer’s sexual addiction was reflected in Israel’s chronic unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The very process of sinning has a tendency to push people into a downwards spiritual spiral from which there is no easy exit (see 5:4).

4:15 Gilgal and Beth Aven were border towns between Judah and Israel. The nominally faithful people of Judah were slipping over the border to do quick idol worship and then returning, protesting their loyalty to Yahweh. This kind of hypocrisy can so easily be slipped into.

5:7 The way Hosea’s final child is called Lo-ammi was because “you are not My people” (1:9). This suggests that although Hosea did presumably have sexual relations with Gomer, these children were not actually conceived from him- i.e. she was continuing her relations with other men; her conception of the children is said to have been “shameful” (2:5) because they were the result of her prostitution (2:4). He calls them “*her* children”. Gomer appears to reason in 2:4 that the children were her lovers’ payment to her for her sexual services. And in the parallel relationship between God and Israel, Israel were unfaithful to Yahweh and “begotten foreign children” (Hos. 5:7), whilst at the same time claiming to keep the sacrifices and Sabbaths of the Law (Hos. 5:6,7; 2:11). This would confirm that Gomer acted as Hosea’s wife, assuring him of her faithfulness, in the same way as the sacrifices and Sabbaths were intended to reflect Israel’s exclusive faithfulness to Yahweh. Our unfaithfulness to God is this painful for Him.

6:6 *I desire... the knowledge of God* - Israel and Gomer were “destroyed for lack of knowledge” (4:6). Yet they cried out that “My God, how we know You!” (8:2). Israel’s attitude to the Law can so easily be our attitude to the principles of the Gospel, the New Covenant, in which we stand. We can ‘know’ it all, and externally keep it... but in reality not know it at all, focusing on the external sacrifices whilst knowing nothing of the God we supposedly worship. All this was exemplified by Gomer being an observant Jewess, whilst worshipping Baal and living a shameful life.

6:10 God’s realization of Israel’s prostitution, committed as it was amidst protestations of love for God (:4), was mirrored in Hosea’s tragic and heartbreaking relationship with his prostitute wife Gomer.

7:2 *I remember... ever before My face*- Sensitive Hosea remembered every unfaithfulness of Gomer; and in this sense God too remembered every sin of His people. This is what makes His patience and grace all the more remarkable, given that He doesn't mentally function as human beings do, forgetting sins against us just because of the nature of our fading memory rather than because we have forgiven them.

8:2 As in 7:14,16, the pain of God was that Israel's words of devotion to Him were meaningless. This was the pain Hosea would've had as Gomer protested her faithfulness to him, whilst sleeping with and getting pregnant by other men. We must ensure that the words we say in prayer and sing in song to God are really meant sincerely by us, and that we realistically live according to them.

8:13 *They will return to Egypt*- This is repeated in 9:3 and yet God says the very opposite in 11:5. We have God showing His extreme emotion, just as a betrayed and angry husband would- shouting threats one minute and then cancelling them out in expressions of deep love the next. The most hurt man on earth would, however, be nowhere near the pain and hurt felt by God Almighty at the unfaithfulness of His people. The huge extent of His love for Israel is reflected in the depth of His pain and the emotional nature of His outbursts. God has emotion and passion- for us, we who are but water, calcium and complex chemicals, specs of dust on the earth...

9:1 *You love the wages of a prostitute*- Israel are presented as sexually addicted, even paying men to sleep with her (8:9). It's one thing to sin and hate ourselves for it; it's another to love and revel in sin as Israel did.

9:4 Their offering of wine and bread to God would make them yet more unclean, just as it is possible to keep the breaking of bread service to our condemnation rather than to our blessing (1 Cor. 11:29). This stark reality means that the memorial meeting brings us to a T intersection in our lives; either we are drinking to our blessing (1 Cor. 10:16) or to our condemnation.

9:10 *I saw... as*- God looked upon Israel *as if* they were perfect when they left Egypt (Num. 23:21), even though they were not. He was in love with them, as He is with us, having counted His righteousness to us as we emerge from our Red Sea / baptism into Christ.

9:15 *I hated them... will love them no more*- And yet God protests His eternal and free love for Israel (14:4). See on 8:13.

10:11 *Her beautiful neck*- This isn't sarcasm, rather is it God recognizing the beauty of the woman He was having to judge. Such is His love even for those He has to reject.

11:8,9 Here we have one of the deepest windows onto the extent of God's hurt and variation of thought within Himself as He considers the behaviour of His people. His changes of mind are as it were ethically allowable exactly because He is God and not man; they are driven by the passion of the deepest love ever known in all existence.

11:12 *Ephraim surrounds Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit* - Gomer must have lied to Hosea so much. Israel are criticized throughout his prophecy for just the same (see 7:13 too). The untruthfulness became compulsive and obsessive: "he daily lies more and more" (12:1). Gomer would've lied about where she was going, about how she spent Hosea's money, about whose the

children were... The key proof of our spiritual sincerity is whether we are in the core of our beings *truthful* , both with our God and with ourselves.

12:3 *In his maturity he had power with God*- This suggests that Jacob reached spiritual maturity that night he wrestled with the Angel. 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. It was by his prayer and tears that he had this “power with God” and in a sense prevailed over God’s intention to slay him (:4). 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 clinging on, a pleading with tears. Yet Jacob that night really is a type of us all, for we are to turn to God as Jacob did then (:6).

13:10 Often in Hosea, God appeals to Israel to let Him be their ‘king’ (13:10). But there is a Hebraism whereby a husband is called the ‘king’ of his wife. God’s appeal was reflected in Hosea’s desire for Gomer to as it were re-marry him, to let him truly be her king / husband. And yet she felt like Israel: “What then should a king do [for] us?” (10:3). She was so selfish that she didn’t see anything in it for her... when so much love was being offered to her.

14:3 Hosea’s prophecy ends with God protesting His eternal love for Israel, and a description of them in the Kingdom, when they will have ‘returned’ to Him. Remember that the God / Israel relationship was a reflection of the Hosea / Gomer situation. I take this final, majestic section to be a reflection of Hosea’s fantasy, his day dream, that one day Gomer would return to him and blossom as a person. For fantasies are all a part of true love. “From Me you will acquire fruit” (14:8) is perhaps his fantasy that *somehow*, this worn out woman with dry breasts and a miscarrying womb (9:14) would *somehow* one day still bear him children of their own, and that in him “the fatherless” [a reference to Gomer’s illegitimate children] would find mercy in being accepted into the family (14:3). Hosea died with his dream unfulfilled. We are left with the question as to whether this similar loving intention of God for Israel will in fact be fulfilled, or whether it was what was potentially possible for Israel; or whether His fantasy for them will be fulfilled through a new Israel. If the latter, and we are that new Israel, then we can imagine what passionate joy the Father finds in our bumbling attempts to respond to Him and be His loyal and faithful wife. Whatever, the simple fact is that it all reflects an amazing grace, an ineffable love... and this God is our God, and Hosea who reflected all this is truly a pattern for ourselves in daily life. The very existence of such passionate love for us, love beyond reason, carries with it an inevitable warning as to our responsibilities.

## JOEL

1:2 *Elders... all of you*- Often the Bible brackets the elders with all the ordinary people, thus emphasizing that God relates with individuals; His appeal isn't merely to religious specialists or leaders, but to all of us.

1:12 If we lose joy, we have lost our faith. It was the same with Israel. "The vine [of Israel is] withered... for joy is withered"; the people of God were to be a people of joy, and when their joy was no more, they were no longer God's people; for "joy and gladness" were cut off from the house of God (:16). The experience of joy is the litmus test for a community of God's people. This thought gives rise to some sober self-examination, especially for those who may have come to feel that 'holding the faith' is a matter of glumly trudging onwards through this evil world, grimly gripping hold of our faith as we bemoan the state of those around us. To hold on to the Faith is described as holding on to the rejoicing of the hope unto the end (Heb. 3:6).

2:11 *His army*- The pagan armies were God's in the sense that He controlled them. No evil can happen to us without God allowing it; our worst enemies are ultimately sent and permitted by Him. There is no personal Satan figure who controls these people; God is in total control.

2:13 *Relents*- Despite having spoken as if God's judgment was inevitably going to come, Joel knew that God can state things and then change His planned judgments because He is so sensitive to human repentance. And so Joel calls for a fast, and for absolutely everyone in the community to repent and beg God for mercy. Even those in the process of marriage were to break off the ceremony (:16) and come to a special assembly (:15) to beg God to change His mind. Joel was so certain that God's prophetic word would be fulfilled that he appealed to people with such urgency and insistence to repent, so that the prophesied judgments wouldn't happen to them. Our belief in God's word will likewise motivate our witness and impart a spirit of urgency to it which we couldn't have if we weren't so convinced that the prophecies will come true.

2:20 *Northern army*- Babylon and Assyria are spoken of in the Bible as the 'northern' invader, although they were situated to the East of Israel. This was because there was no easy way through the desert separating them from Israel, and travel was typically up the Fertile Crescent and then down into Israel from the north. Joel is quoted and alluded to in the New Testament as if these things will come true in the last days before Christ returns. Dan. 11:40-44 speak of a latter day "King of the north" invading Israel just before Christ's coming. Geographically, Babylon and Assyria refer to what is today Iran and Iraq.

2:32 This passage is quoted in Acts 2:21-41 and interpreted as meaning that whoever calls upon themselves the Name of the Lord by baptism into His Name will be saved. People from many nations were baptized into the Name just before the 'last day' of Judah's destruction in AD70 (:28). It would seem that this was but a primary fulfilment of what will happen just before the final 'last day' of Christ's return. There will be a special preaching of the Gospel to all nations just before Christ returns (Mt. 24:14).

3:2 *Judgment on them there for My people*- The basis of judgment will be how individuals have treated God's people, both natural and spiritual Israel. Jesus was very clear that how we treat the

least of His brothers or sisters is how we treat Him, and He will judge people on this basis (Mt. 25:40).

3:9 *Sanctify war*- Declaring a holy war against Israel sounds like the Islamic *jihad*.

3:12-14 These verses seem to describe an invasion of Israel by many nations, resulting in them being destroyed in a valley in Israel; these verses are applied to the last days in the description of the battle of Armageddon in Rev. 16:16. God will be suddenly revealed in the Jerusalem area (:16), associated with His “mighty ones” “coming down” there (:11). Obadiah 21 speaks of the same situation. This surely refers to the return of Christ to earth from Heaven with His Angels with Him, and also the resurrection of His people, who will then also be His “mighty ones” with Him (1 Thess. 4:14; 2 Thess. 1:7). Jesus ascended to Heaven from Olivet, near Jerusalem, and the Angels promised that He would return to earth in the same way (Acts 1:11).

## AMOS

1:6 Notice that the reasons for the judgments are all because of what people did to other people. Human treatment of others is the basis for God's judgment. We also learn from this chapter that God noticed how Gentiles treated other Gentiles. He doesn't just ignore the unbelievers, zoning out on their actions and issues with each other. His sensitivity to human sin, and His total knowledge of all that goes on in this world, His reading of every motive behind every action, is simply colossal. It should encourage us that we are not alone in this world; the amazing knowledge of God means we can thereby feel His presence. The reference to "For three transgressions... and for four" can be read as meaning that God doesn't switch off, as it were, after the third sin; He is sensitive also to the fourth. He doesn't simply write people off as 'sinners' after a certain amount of sin; He keeps noticing their behaviour and the hurt of their sin continues growing within Him.

1:11 *His anger raged continually, and he kept his wrath forever*- The implication could be that anger is an acceptable emotion, but not if it becomes a continual state of mind.

2:1 *I will not turn away its punishment*- A tacit recognition that God can state a punishment or destiny against a person or group, and yet turn away from doing it in the light of their repentance, as happened with Israel at the time of Moses, or with Nineveh in the book of Jonah. However there is a point where such changes are no longer possible; a change of mind is no longer a possibility (Hos. 13:14).

2:2 The "fire" promised here and throughout chapter 1 is not so much literal fire as symbolic of God's anger and condemnation (see too Jer. 17:27; Jude 7). When Jesus spoke of fire as the punishment of the wicked and used the metaphor of Gehenna, the ever burning garbage site near Jerusalem, He too wasn't speaking literally but in harmony with His Father's figurative usage of "fire" in the Old Testament as a metaphor for judgment.

2:7 *To profane My holy name*- In our context, we have been baptized into the same Name. We can likewise profane that Name by our behaviour. This is the essence of the meaning of blaspheming God's Name.

2:8 *Drink the wine of the condemned*- Under the New Covenant, we too run the risk of drinking the wine of that covenant to our own condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29). As we hold that cup, we realize we are at a T-junction; we shall either be saved or condemned, and we should live life in the intensity of that knowledge.

2:11 *I raised up... Nazirites*- Becoming a Nazirite was totally voluntary. Yet God works through our freewill.

2:12 *You gave the Nazirites wine to drink*- Nazirites weren't allowed to drink wine (Num. 6:3). To lead others into sin, or discourage them from the spiritual commitments they have made, is reckoned by God as worthy of the strongest condemnation. We should be positive and supportive of others' spirituality rather than destructive of it. Jesus therefore had so much anger with the Pharisees and Jewish leadership for the very same reason.

3:2 We whom God has chosen in Christ are therefore more responsible for our sins than others in the world; they sin with far less accountability than we have. We must remember this when we are tempted to sin as they do.

3:6 A classic proof of the fact that God rather than any sinful Satan figure brings “evil” in the sense of disaster on earth (Is. 45:5-7).

3:7 See on 7:1-6.

3:9 Hebrew poetry rhymes according to the ideas presented rather than the assonance of the words. However, this doesn’t mean that in a couplet, the first part is directly equal to the second part. Subtle differences are set up in order to make a point. The lion has roared: who shall not fear? God has spoken: who can but speak forth? If a lion roars, so a man naturally fears as a result of it. God speaks, and just as naturally we can do nothing but speak it forth. Hence the hearers are to publish God’s purpose to the Gentile nations around them. The lion roars, and man fears; and we are set up to expect: God speaks, and man should fear. But there is an intended dashing of this expectation. God has spoken, just as the lion may roar; but we are not to *fear* but rather to *speak it forth* to others. If we believe that the Bible is indeed the inspired word of God, if we hear that voice of Yahweh, we will inevitably speak it forth to others. Hence Peter says that he could never agree not to speak forth God’s word, because to do so is a natural process for the believer (Acts 4:20).

4:4,5 God as it were encourages sinful people in their sin; there’s a downward and an upward spiral, we never remain in a neutral position in our spiritual journey.

4:10 *The stench of your camps*- These words have a strange relevance to the death camps of Europe in the 1940s. The tragedy of Israel’s history, and of so many individual lives, is that despite suffering so much, people refuse to return to their God. Their pain is therefore in vain.

4:13 *He who forms the mountains*- Nothing in the natural creation is static; although the mountains may appear so permanent and lifeless, God is forming them in an ongoing sense. God’s ongoing, unceasing work in the natural creation is the constant comfort that we are not alone.

5:18 It is quite possible to be enthusiastic about the coming of Christ- the final “day of the Lord”- and yet if we don’t live a serious spiritual life, then this day will actually be our destruction.

5:22 Peace offerings were freewill offerings of devotion to God. We can make them and other sacrifices to God, worship God enthusiastically (:23), keep the feasts solemnly (:21- cp. the breaking of bread meeting)- and yet God will be irritated by these things and angry with us if at the same time we are guilty of injustice to others (:24 and most of the chapter). Justice and not being harmful to others is of such paramount value to God.

5:26 In addition to carrying Yahweh’s tent or tabernacle through the wilderness, the Israelites took with them the gods of Egypt and carried their tent with them too. Leaving Egypt through the Red Sea is like baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2); Israel’s wilderness journey is analogous to our lives now as we travel towards the promised land of God’s Kingdom. We mustn’t take with us the gods of this world (cp. Egypt); God’s claim on us is total and exclusive.

6:1-6 The situation described here before the “day of the Lord” in those days is exactly the situation today. Self-indulgence, laziness, over sleeping, over eating, brainwashed by music and ignoring the needs of others, whilst psychologically putting the reality of God’s judgment far away (:3)- this is the spirit of our age, and it heralds the final day of the Lord.

7:1-6 God reveals His intention regarding Israel, but then Amos makes a case against this and is heard. In fact, these and other examples suggest that this is almost a pattern with God- to devise His purpose, and then in the 'gap' until its fulfilment, be open to the persuasion of His covenant people to change or amend those plans. This could be what 3:7 is speaking of: "Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing, unless He first reveals His secret to His servants the prophets". It's as if He reveals His plans to them *so that* they can then comment upon them in prayer.

7:2 God is open to changing His stated plan due to the mediation of others. It would even appear that Amos believed God could forgive the sins of others because of *his* prayers rather than their repentance. For Amos doesn't merely ask God not to execute His judgments, but to actually forgive Israel. There's an obvious similarity with the intercession of Moses; the only other person to pray "Forgive, I beseech You" is Moses- the same Hebrew words are found on his lips twice (Ex. 34:9; Num. 14:19). Moses' amazing example had been meditated upon by Amos as he did his agricultural work- and he rose up to the same level. He prayed the same prayer. We too should be motivated in our prayer lives by Biblical examples, even using the same words. So many Biblical prayers use the words of previous Scripture. God leads us to see the similarities between our situations and those of Biblical figures- e.g. by giving Amos a vision of judgment upon Israel in terms of a locust plague, which was intended to lead Amos to see Israel as Egypt and himself as Moses in making intercession to end the plague. Amos gets into the spirit of Moses by asking God to "cease" (7:5), using the same word used to describe how the plagues "ceased" as a result of Moses' intercession (Ex. 9:29,33,34).

7:14 Amos stresses that speaking forth God's word wasn't at all what he wished to do or was cut out for. Likewise Paul says that because preaching God's word was against his natural inclination, therefore a calling to preach the Gospel had indeed been given to him (1 Cor. 9:17). Paul was sent to the Gentiles and not the Jews as he might naturally have preferred; the disciples were unlearned and ignorant men called to preach to the Jewish intelligentsia; women weren't accepted as legal witnesses and yet the Lord asks women to be the first witnesses of His resurrection; always in the preaching of His word does God use those who humanly aren't qualified to do so. He doesn't use slick presentation, but rather human weakness in order to convert others. Amos doubtless alludes to himself in 3:8 where he says that a prophet cannot but speak out God's word- and this is alluded to by the apostles when they say they cannot but speak out what they have seen and heard of Christ. Note how Amos doesn't actually answer the serious false allegation against him personally, but gets on with speaking forth God's word- for this was his life's focus.

9:11,12 We have used the Septuagint version of these verses, because this is the form which is quoted under inspiration in Acts 15:14-18. There, James quotes these verses to prove that Gentiles could become called by God's Name through being baptized into the Name of His Son, the Lord Jesus; and that this process was not predicated upon circumcision. We see, therefore, the huge weight given by the early Christians to every Old Testament word of God. Note that Acts 15:14 speaks of God *visiting* the Gentiles, and quotes Am. 9:12 about the



Gentiles *seeking* the Lord as proof of this. God is in search of man, and some men are in search of Him. They meet in that moment of baptism into His Name as it is in His Son, and the union is a wonderful and eternal one.

## OBADIAH

:5 This could imply that Esau / Edom's anger with Jacob / Israel was justified to *some extent*- they were condemned because they took it too far. Unless we reign in our anger, we will soon go too far and slip into sin. Hence we shouldn't let the sun go down over our anger (Eph. 4:26).

:6 Every past day of judgment reveals something of the future. Edom's day of judgment is described as his hidden, secret things being searched through. This may be alluded to by Paul when he speaks of how "the hidden things" of our hearts will be revealed in the final searching of the day of judgment (1 Cor. 4:5).

:7 *Friends who eat your bread*- To eat bread together was a sign of friendship and fellowship. The breaking of bread service is therefore a sign of our personal friendship with God; it's a great honour to be invited there.

:10 The nation of Edom is judged for the same thing as the historical Esau- hatred of their brother. Our attitude to our brethren will be a major factor in determining our eternal future (Mt. 25:40).

:10-14 Pride, indifference to others' pain even though it is a judgment for their sins, resentment, feelings of superiority... These mental attitudes, rather than the many other sins of Edom, were what so angered God.

:21- see on Joel 3:12-14.

## JONAH

1:3 Jonah is described as going progressively 'down'- down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the hold of the ship, and then down into the depths of the sea (1:3,5; 2:6). Yet he was brought up from it. This was the depth of his degradation. Jonah was like Nineveh- the "wickedness" of Nineveh (1:2; 3:8) is the same Hebrew word used in 4:1 where Jonah was displeased "exceedingly", i.e. 'wickedly'. Their wickedness was paralleled with the wickedness of his hard heartedness towards them. When the sailors awoke him with the words "Get up and call ...", they were using the very words which God had used perhaps just days earlier to call him with. We can't escape the call- God will repeat it to us through life's circumstances, even through our very efforts to avoid the call. The obvious lesson is to willingly and in love respond to the calls we receive, rather than go through the agonies of seeking to avoid them. Jonah's response: "I am an Hebrew..." was basically his response to God... he didn't want to give Nineveh a chance of salvation because he was a patriotic Jew. God does these complex things with us many times daily... if we will perceive them.

2:2 Jonah knew his Bible well; his poem is absolutely full of references to the Psalms. And yet Ps. 139 had clearly stated that we cannot flee anywhere from God's presence; for even in the deep sea, He will find us. Jonah knew this; and yet he didn't know it. He had to learn what this meant in practice. And so, incident by incident, blow by blow, our theoretical knowledge is turned into flesh, into reality for us; for the same God who worked so hard in Jonah's life is at work in ours.

3:3 It took Jonah three days to walk through Nineveh (3:3). On the first day in the city, he told them that in 40 days God would destroy them (3:4); it follows that by the time he was in the middle of the city he was telling them that they had 37 days left. So too the Jews had between 37 and 40 years notice of the destruction of Jerusalem. It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that "the judge stands before the door" . What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

3:4 No conditions were given; but God changed His stated purpose because He is so sensitive to human repentance.

4:8 God created a great wind with which He brought Jonah and his fellows to their knees in 1:4. God here creates another great wind with which to teach Jonah something else. Jonah ought to have perceived the same hand of the same God at work with him. Jonah's life "ebbed away" inside the fish (2:7)- and a very similar word is used here in 4:8 about his experience as he sat under the vine. In the fish, Jonah prayed that God would save his life, and was heard. But when he was made to feel the same again, he instead prayed God to take away his life. Perhaps this shows that even when we respond well to circumstances, those same circumstances may repeat in order to test us as to whether we will continue to make that right response.



## MICAH

1:8 Micah didn't just mindlessly transmit God's word to God's people. He perceived the truth of the words he was repeating, and believed absolutely that they would come true; and so he wept and rolled himself in the dust (:10). This may have been from grief, but it may also be that he thought that *his* repentance and prayer could avert the judgment upon God's people which he was prophesying.

1:10 Rolling naked in the dust... this was the extent of Micah's passion for the repentance of his audience. Our preaching isn't to be an emotionless publicity campaign for our denomination or local church, but a passionate appeal for real response. Indifference, lack of passion, is the besetting tragedy of our age. When did you last really shed tears? When were you moved, really wrenched in your gut, by the suffering of others, by the sin of this world, your own sin, your part in humanity's tragic rejection of God... when did you last *feel* for God in His pain, as He sees His beloved children and creation walk away from Him day after day, second after second? When did you last feel ecstatic joy, deep sadness... in this post-modern world of surface level emotion? It's in all this that the words of the prophets and their personal nature as people challenge us- and their spirit is to be the spirit of our testimony to Jesus in this world (Rev. 19:10).

1:12 *Evil has come down*- Evil in the sense of calamity and disaster comes from God (Is. 45:5-7); it's not true that there is a personal Satan figure who brings evil, and God brings only good. Both good and evil ultimately come from God; He is in control of our lives, and has total power in the cosmos.

2:1 What people think about as they lay on their beds is known by God and is the basis of His judgment of them.

2:6 The apostles were likewise ordered not to preach, but their response was that it was impossible for them to keep quiet about God's word as it was in Christ (Acts 5:28). We cannot but share God's word with others if it really has a place in our hearts (Am. 3:8).

2:7 *Spirit... restrained?*- The prophets didn't speak their own words but God's words, because they spoke as they were moved by God's Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:21). For a prophet not to speak or preach would therefore be as good as trying to restrain the Spirit of God; and this cannot be done.

*My words do good*- The early chapters of Proverbs emphasize how God's words give strength to those who already obey them. There is an upward spiral in spiritual life, in which the Spirit and word of God is the dynamic. Exposure to God's word confirms us in living a spiritual life. Hence the importance of daily Bible reading.

3:12 *For your sake*- Other people suffer because of the sins of others. However, when Hezekiah studied the words of Micah, he repented and begged God to change His mind about this very verse- and God changed His mind and didn't bring this evil (Jer. 26:19). So God's words of prophecy are open to renegotiation, according to prayer and repentance. This adds intensity and significance to our entreaties of God, knowing that others (e.g. Moses) have successfully reasoned with God and He has changed His stated intentions.

4:1-4 A clear prophecy of the literal establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, based around Jerusalem. 'Mountains' are symbolic of kingdoms.

4:4 *Vine... fig tree*- These words were quoted by Rabshakeh, in offering the Jews this very situation in pagan Assyria (2 Kings 18:31,32). The world around us in its advertisements and glossy images is in fact a fake Kingdom of God, imitating the true Kingdom of God. And so the choice is highlighted for us- between the kingdoms of this world for today, and the eternal Kingdom of God tomorrow.

*For the mouth*- The wonder of the process of inspiration is that the black print we read on white paper in the Bible is the very mouth of God speaking to us.

4:8 The Kingdom of God which Jesus will establish at His return will in fact be a re-establishment of the Kingdom which was earlier, when Yahweh was Israel's Kingdom on earth (Ez. 21:25-27; 1 Chron. 29:23). This "former Kingdom" will be restored, again on earth, but to a far more glorious extent.

4:10 How was the travailing daughter of Zion to be delivered / rescued in *Babylon* after having been taken captive there from Jerusalem by the Babylonians? Surely in that there, God intended a spiritual revival of the people, there they would hear Ezekiel's appeal to repent, which if responded to would enable them to build the temple which he had described (Ez. 43:10,11) and thus usher in a Messianic Kingdom. God had so many wonderful plans for His people which they didn't allow to come true for them.

4:12 God assembles the nations to judge / thresh them, but they assemble themselves (:11). This is part of a large Biblical theme- that those who are judged in fact judge themselves. The only ones who will be rejected by God are those who themselves don't wish to be in His Kingdom.

5:1 Mk. 14:65 (Gk.) says that the Lord was hit with "strokes of rods". Perhaps it was in this sense that the rod comforted Messiah (Ps. 23:4) in that He saw immediately that prophecy was being fulfilled in Him. Our darkest moments likewise can be our greatest encouragement if only we perceive them as we should. As men mocked Him and smote Him, thus they were treating their judge at the time of judgment. In His time of dying, the Lord Jesus was the judge of Israel. This explains why when we come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment.

5:2 A prophecy of Christ's birth in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:6). This prophecy of His birth is prefaced by a statement that Messiah would be smitten upon the cheek with a rod (:1)- which happened at the end of His life. In our linear way of thinking, we'd expect this to be the other way around- Messiah is born, grows up, suffers, dies... but God doesn't think and write like that; the prophecies often appear to 'jump around' in their chronological fulfilment.

6:7 Micah comes to the point where he would fain make sacrifice for Israel, even to the point of offering his firstborn son, so strongly did he take upon himself the sins of his people. But he tells Israel that even this will be no good; they must repent themselves, for God doesn't work on the basis of substitution but representation. In all this, Micah came close to the spirit of the Father and Son. For the Father *would* give His firstborn for their sin.

7:16 *Ashamed of all their might*- In the day of judgment, people will be ashamed of the size of their bank accounts, the trust they put in investments, influential people, wealth, bodily strength. All human advantage will be despised- and we must live in that spirit today.

## NAHUM

1:4 *He rebukes*- These verses are full of allusion to what God did at the Red Sea- but they are written in the present tense, as if God's wonders are no less in our day too, even though they are expressed in a less visual way.

1:8 *Pursue His enemies into darkness*- The final day of judgment will feature the rejected being chased by Angels into darkness, where they will weep and bang their teeth in anger with themselves (Ps. 35:5,6; Job 18:18; Mt. 22:13).

1:15 *The feet of him*- This prophecy about Christ is quoted in Rom. 10:15 about our preaching, but with a subtle change of pronoun: "How beautiful are the feet of *them* that preach". We are the Lord Jesus to this world, because we are brethren in Him. This alone is a powerful imperative as to who we are, how we speak, the men and women we show ourselves to be. The Nahum passage is in the context of preaching to Israel the good news of their ultimate freedom from the Assyrian invasion which was then imminent. We are in a strikingly parallel situation in these last days, and should be making a special witness to Israel and the Jewish people.

2:1 Nineveh would have seemed invincible at the time Nahum prophesied. Nahum's words would have seemed as the rantings of a madman. The prophecies about Christ's return and the destruction of the present world order likewise demand faith to believe, but they will just as surely come true.

2:2 *Vine branches*- Israel were God's vineyard, the individual Israelites were the branches (Is. 5:1). Jesus uses the same figure about us- He is the vine and we who are baptized into Him are the branches (Jn. 15:5). Thus the individuals in Christ are now the true Israel of God, a nation currently without a homeland, but waiting for the establishment of our Kingdom on this earth (Gal. 3:27-29).

3:4 *And families*- One aspect of the sin of prostitution and much sexual sin is that it destroys families; and God is a family God who has created the family unit as His preferred method for His people.

3:5,6 The language of these verses is extreme. This is the fully legitimate anger of God against those who abuse His people and sin against Him. The grace and kindness of God shouldn't let us forget His wrath with sin which is also a part of His total character and personality.

3:7 *Nineveh is laid waste*- At the time Nahum was speaking, she was prosperous and powerful. But God's word is so sure of fulfilment that He can speak in the present tense, speaking of things which haven't yet happened as if they have (Rom. 4:17). We also, by faith, must view this world with the same eyes. It's all over for this world, right here and now, so certain is it that Christ will return and establish His Kingdom upon the ruins of the kingdoms of men.

3:9 *Infinite strength*- Egypt is presented in the Bible as representative of human strength. It *appeared* that their strength was infinite, but only God has infinite strength. This is an example of how the Bible often speaks of situations as they appear to people on earth, even though this is not ultimately how things are. The language of demons in the New Testament is another example. God sometimes adopts a human perspective in reasoning with us, in order to connect with us; just as we do when trying to communicate with and explain things to those e.g. children who understand something far less than we do.





## HABAKKUK

1:2 The closer we are to God, the more we will be able like Habakkuk to question Him, to have dialogue with Him, rather than accepting the principles of the Bible as His cold word to us which we simply have to accept without any response from us back to Him.

1:5 Paul appropriates the words of Hab. 1:5 LXX to his work of preaching (Acts 13:2; 14:26). Even if people don't believe our message, God is still using us to work His work. In the process of preaching the Gospel we feel God working with us; the exercise of preaching is therefore largely for our benefit, and it is not therefore ever a failure even if people disbelieve the Gospel we preach.

1:6 God 'raised up' evil people in order to fulfil His purpose. The temporary 'rise and rise' of the wicked shouldn't discourage us- it is actually of God, and they are merely tools in His hands.

1:12 If we truly believe that we are *His* people, not those of this world, and that we are truly part of His eternal family, then God's eternity becomes a guarantee of our eternal salvation. If He lives for ever, so shall we (this is true also of Christ- if we are connected with His resurrection to eternal life through baptism, we too shall live for ever with Him, Jn. 14:19; Rom. 6:8; 2 Cor. 13:4; 2 Tim. 2:11).

2:2 *May run* – Running in response to God's word is an idiom for obediently responding to it (Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; 2 Thess. 3:1). The 'plainer' the word is made, the more clearly it is understood, the greater will be our response to it. Correct understanding of God's word is therefore important because it is related to the extent of our 'running' in response to it.

2:3 The context is a prophecy concerning the coming Babylonian desolation of Jerusalem. There were some who felt that the fulfilment of these words of God was 'tarrying' so long that it would never come. We face the same temptation with regard to the prophecies of Christ's return.

2:4 *The justified*- Much is made of this verse in the New Testament, to teach that we sinners are counted righteous, declared in the right as we stand in the dock before the judgment of God, on the basis of our faith in Christ- rather than our works (Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38). The context of this verse teaches that living by faith is the antithesis of being proud. The life of faith, trusting thereby in grace, is a life of humility.

2:14 A clear prediction of God's Kingdom coming on earth.

2:16 Being given the cup of the Lord is a double symbol- of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16,21; 11:26); or, as here, a symbol of condemnation (Ps. 75:8; Jer. 51:7; Rev. 16:19). This adds some intensity to the cup we take at the memorial service. We are drinking that cup either to our condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29), or to our eternal blessing. Hence the breaking of bread meeting brings us up to a T-intersection in our lives.

3:2 *In wrath, You remember mercy*- God's anger and judgments aren't the wrath of an offended deity who is more powerful than us, as it were hitting back at us because we have upset Him. His judgments incorporate mercy, and are aimed at bringing good out of evil, teaching others His ways through them (Is. 26:9).

3:16 After twice approaching God with the question of “Why?”, and each time being given fresh insights into the awful nature of the judgment to come as a response, Habakkuk ends up with a trembling body and lips that ‘quivered at the sound’ of God’s word... and yet, at the very same time, feels that he still “will rejoice in the Lord” (:18), even though he doesn’t fully understand. Faith involves an element of acceptance that God is right, even though we don’t understand.

3:17 These were all the blessings promised for obedience. Habakkuk had been obedient, but didn’t seem to have received these blessings. Yet still he had the faith to rejoice in God’s grace, even though he didn’t understand the exact relationship between obedience and blessing in this life.

3:18 *Yet will I* - Even if others amongst God’s people turn away and are punished for it, yet we personally can still rejoice in our personal relationship with God.

## ZEPHANIAH

1:5 *And also swear*- Repeatedly the Bible condemns the human tendency to worship both the true God and also idols (1 Cor. 10:21). Yahweh has loved us so much that He is rightfully jealous over us, and our loyalty must be to Him alone.

1:12 *With candles*- Alluding to the Jewish custom of searching their homes for yeast, representing sin, at Passover time.

In weak moments we all tend to assume that God is somehow in limbo, indifferent and not paying attention to our behaviour or situation here on earth. The temporary silence of God doesn't mean that He is not watching intently. These people who thought that God was indifferent were themselves "settled on their dregs", they hadn't moved for a long time, and they thought God was like them. We must resist the temptation to think that God's attitudes to things and people, our own selves included, are merely a reflection of *our* attitudes (Ps. 50:21). The Bible reveals to us God's judgments, positions and emotions, and we must accept this revelation rather than assuming that God is somehow created in our own image.

1:17,18- a series of allusions to Sodom, showing that God's sinful people were no better than the worst Gentiles. Mere association with God's people and knowing truths about God doesn't mean of themselves that we are any better than the worst sinners.

2:3 Humility is a height which we should aspire to. This is a complete inversion of human thinking and values.

2:11 The pagan gods didn't exist at all, but God speaks of starving them to death. He speaks as if they exist, and then shows by exercising His great power that effectively they don't. God and His Son adopted the same approach with the demons or idols which were believed in.

2:12 *My sword*- God used the swords of pagan nations to do His judgments, but effectively they were *His* swords. The fact God uses people to do His will doesn't mean they are righteous. When bad things happen to us at the hands of evil people, we needn't think that God has left us at the whim of the wicked and forgotten us. He is actually using those people according to His plan.

2:15 *I am*- An allusion to the meaning of 'Yahweh'- 'I am that I am'. Those who effectively deny the existence of God are themselves playing God, claiming that *I* am, rather than accepting that *He* is. Acceptance of the fact that Yahweh is the only "I am" means that we will not be "I" centred, but God centred.

3:5 *Know no shame*- The righteous admit their sins and do know shame for them; and so they will come to a position where in the Kingdom of God, they will be aware that they have sinned but will not know shame for those sins (:11), so fully acceptant will they be of the work of Christ which has left them genuinely spotless and blameless before God's throne (Jude 24). Verse 19 continues the irony around the theme of "shame" by saying that the shame of sinners is known by everyone else- apart from they themselves, who "know no shame". The point is that we might as well be ashamed for our sins before others, because actually they do or will see the shame of our sins anyway.

3:7 God's judgments could have been averted *if* they repented. God may 'appoint' things to happen to a person, but if they repent, then that potential which He has designed will in fact not happen. In this lies the wonderful significance of repentance.

3:13 *Refuge in the name*- In our times, we can do this by being baptized into the Name.

3:18 In the Kingdom of God on earth, God will empower those who now long to be obedient to God's commands but cannot be due to circumstance or weakness. We will all then be able to serve God as strongly as we now wish. Our experiences in this life, even of our own weaknesses, are preparing our desire for that eternity which we will then be given.

## HAGGAI

1:2 The Apocryphal book of Baruch 6:2 records how Baruch changes the prophecy of Jer. 29:10, that Israel were to be 70 years in Babylon and then return: "When you reach Babylon you will be there many years, a period seven generations long, after which I will bring you back". The 70 years are turned into seven generations. This was precisely the mindset spoken against in Haggai 1:2, whereby the Jews reasoned that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. "The time" referred to the time spoken of by Jeremiah- but Baruch had re-interpreted the 70 years as meaning seven generations. And yet all this was done with a surface-level reverence for God's word- the exiles considered themselves blessed because they had God's law (Baruch 4:4). Indeed, much of Baruch is a condemnation of idols and a demand to worship Yahweh. Human nature seeks to defer serving God until later- we're quick to find excuses. But the Bible stresses how God's true servants rise up and serve Him immediately.

1:9 *Looked for much*- The Jews in Babylon for the most part chose to remain there rather than return to rebuild God's land and house. Many of those who did return did so, it seems, motivated by the hope of personal gain. They were more interested in building houses for themselves than in restoring God's house, and therefore God sent famine- they didn't get the "much" benefit and blessing for themselves which they had expected. We too can leave 'Babylon', the world, and sign up to God's work from the motive of personal benefit, rather than a genuine desire to see God's glory and His work and cause progressed.

1:14 *The spirit*- God can work directly on the human mind [spirit] and strengthen us in the attitudes we adopt.

2:5 *My Spirit*- God dwelt amongst Israel after they left Egypt through an Angel; He makes His Angels Spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). One way God's Spirit works amongst us His people is through the unseen ministry of Angels.

2:12,13 Unholiness spreads easier than holiness does. In spiritual things, it's easier to slip into a downward spiral than into an upward spiral. The Jews thought that mere vague association with holy things would somehow make them holy. Our attendance at meetings, identification on a social level with God's people, breaking bread etc. will not of itself make us holy.

2:17 One of the saddest things to observe is people suffering from situations which God uses to try to bring them back to Him, and them refusing to return to Him. So much tragic human suffering is in vain because people won't perceive the spiritual intention behind it.

## ZECHARIAH

1:2 God is frequently called “Yahweh of Armies” in Zechariah because the prophecy is seeking to assure the Jews that although everything seemed quiet on earth and in the land of Judah (:11), God’s invisible armies of Angels were very actively working. We need to also be aware of this.

1:12 The Angel didn’t understand- Angels don’t sin, they have God’s nature, but they still don’t know everything (Mt. 24:36).

1:16 God had returned to Jerusalem; through the prophets, He had called for the Jews to leave Babylon and also return to Jerusalem. But most of them preferred to stay in the soft life there. Those who returned were following where God led. The call to repentance in v.3 was in terms of ‘returning’ to God- and the Jews could’ve demonstrated this by returning to Jerusalem from Babylon. God had already returned to them; they had to return to Him. God takes the initiative with us, time and again.

1:21 A horn can be understood as a symbol of power.

2:7 God urged the Jews to leave Babylon. But as the book of Esther explains, they were quite comfortable there, Jews were in high places, they didn’t stay weeping by the rivers of Babylon for long; and there’s archaeological evidence they were involved in banking and commerce. But God told them to escape from it- for spiritually, it would kill them. Their position was urgent. But most preferred to remain there, rather than leave it all behind and make the long and uncertain journey to a land in ruins.

2:8 *Apple of His eye*- The most sensitive spot on the human body. God is so sensitive to us His people; His love for us is so great that He will be highly sensitive to everything done bad to us, and every pain we experience.

3:1 The context in Zechariah 3 was that of the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem from Babylon under Ezra and Nehemiah. That situation was reflected in the Heavenly court. The Jews were trying to rebuild the temple and re-establish a system of worship there. However, “the people of the land” acted as a satan [‘Satan’ means ‘adversary’] to the Jews. They are actually called “the adversaries of Judah” in Ezra 4:1. They wrote an accusation against the (new) inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem to the king of Persia (Ezra 4:6). The Hebrew word for “accusation” is related to that translated “satan”. 3: 8 tells us that the characters of verses 1 and 2 are ‘men of sign’ i.e. we have to interpret them. So the satans - the adversaries - stood before the angel along with Joshua the High Priest, who “was clothed with filthy garments” (:3) - without a mitre on his head (:5 implies). The inhabitants of the land, the satan, were complaining to God, manifested in the angel, that the new Jewish high priest was not really valid, as he did not wear the proper clothes (they had probably been lost during the captivity). The angel rebukes the satan, and proceeds to clothe Joshua with a set of priestly clothes and a mitre (:4,5), thus showing God’s acceptance of him. The inference behind the complaint was that God had not really chosen Jerusalem for the Jews to rebuild, and that therefore they were going ahead with their plans without God behind them. But the angel says that the Lord *has* chosen Jerusalem, in the same way as He *had* chosen Joshua to be high priest. Thus Joshua represented Jerusalem. “Isn’t this a burning stick plucked out of the fire?”, the angel asks satan concerning Jerusalem. This is quoted in Jude 23 concerning saving repentant sinners. Thus the angel is in effect saying, ‘Jerusalem has repented, therefore I have plucked them out

of the fire of judgment and destruction; you should not therefore be implying that Jerusalem and the Jews are so sinful that they cannot be restored to their land with Me behind them’.

4:6 The prophets continually criticize human strength. In our terms, this may translate into situations like what we do when we feel the first onset of an illness; when a car won’t start... do we trust in human strength, on the pretensions of science, and only turn to God if all else fails? In prophetic terms, this is *awful*! That we don’t first and totally turn to our God.

5:3 This condemns theft and dishonesty amongst the exiles who had returned from Babylon. Malachi and Haggai comment that the harvests were poor and the people suffered- because their focus was on building their own farms rather than building God’s house. Verses 5-11 seem to be saying that their wickedness was so great that they may as well be taken up by Angelic means and returned to Babylon [“Shinar”, :11] to build a pagan temple there, as an inversion of the way they had been taken by Angelic means from Babylon to Judah in order to build Yahweh’s temple.

6:12 Zerubbabel's name meant 'The branch /shoot from Babylon'. He could have fulfilled these prophecies, he was intended to- but history records he returned to Babylon. So the prophecy was reapplied to Joshua the High Priest- the Hebrew form of ‘Jesus’. But he also failed. The fulfilment has therefore been reapplied and rescheduled to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, “the branch” (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5).

6:15 So often, God sets up very detailed potentials for His people- but they are only realized if we play our part. It must be so tragic for God, enthusiastically creating plans in such detail, which are then never operationalized because of human laziness and small minded selfishness.

*You shall know*- Zechariah says this several times, implying that his words weren’t taken seriously by those he spoke with. This is the experience of all God’s true children.

7:5 We can do religious exercises such as fasting and other things which involve physical loss and discomfort for us, and yet our heart may still be far from God. Indeed, we can do these things as it were unto ourselves and not to God; but this isn’t the same as true spirituality (cp. Col. 2:21-23).

7:12 *His Spirit in the previous prophets*- The prophets, whose words are now in written form in the Bible, were inspired by God. His Spirit was in them, and was articulated through their words which we now read on paper. In this sense God’s words are Spirit and life (Jn. 6:63); and the prophets spoke not just their own words , but the words which God’s Spirit inspired (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Through absorbing God’s word into our lives, His Spirit and life will be active in us.

8:2 God’s enormous love for us His people explains why He is also so jealous over us, and why at times He has so much anger relating to us. Every thought or action of unfaithfulness or denial of Him is indescribably painful to Him.

8:3 Ezra 6:14 says that the captives who returned from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem prospered in their work and were inspired to it by the prophecies of Zechariah. He encouraged their hands to be strong in the work (8:13). Here in v. 3 God says that He has already returned to Zion (the temple mount); and so those who returned were as it were following Him. This prophecy that Jerusalem would surely be rebuilt would’ve encouraged the builders as they worked against so many obstacles and so much discouragement from within and without.

8:6 This question touches upon the psychology of the reason why we find it hard to believe God. We assume that if something is too hard for *us*, then it must be too hard for God. We assume that God is a man, just a bit bigger and wiser and more powerful than us, but broadly within our limitations. Thus we make God after our own image, instead of realizing that we are made in *His* image. Of course, we do this only subconsciously. The unlimited almightiness of God is what true faith accepts.

9:1 Note the mutuality between God and His people- our eyes look to Him, and His eyes look to us (:8). And in that catching of the eye, that flash moment when the God who is in search of man meets the man who is in search of God, there is the energy of the Spirit.

9:7 *He will be*- Note how often God states that the intended result of His judgment of Israel's enemies is that they will join the people of God.

9:9 The concept of a humble King was a contradiction in terms- a King was supposed to be proud and displaying his power, riding on a fine horse rather than a young ass. Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by entering Jerusalem sitting on a young donkey which hadn't been broken in (Lk. 19:30). It would've stopped and started and wandered rather than striding purposefully. It's rather like a new victorious president entering his capital city in a spluttering old car, rather than in a fleet of shining, powerful, quietly purring Mercedes. The point was that in God's Kingdom, true greatness is in humility. The mighty horse and chariot which human strength prefers is to be brought to nothing (:10; 10:5).

10:1 We shouldn't presume upon God's blessings; even in the time of rain, we are to ask for it. Even if we have food in the fridge and in the cupboard, we are to ask God to give us the food of today (Mt. 6:11).

10:3 *Because*- This implies that because Yahweh had visited His people and (potentially) made them a strong flock capable of doing His work, *therefore* the priests were at fault for not enabling Judah's spiritual revival. God is angry with those who don't play their part in enabling His potential plans for others to come true for them.

10:5- see on 9:9.

10:11 Repeatedly Zechariah emphasizes that it is the pride of these nations more than anything else which is the basis for their condemnation. The Nile was the pride of the Egyptians just as the Jordan was Judah's pride (11:3).

11:10 Israel rejected God's covenant, and therefore He rejected them in that He broke the unbreakable-by-Him covenant (2 Kings 17:15,20). In reality, they had rejected themselves, and broke the covenant (Jer. 31:32). It was only they who could break it, and God was only sadly confirming what they had done. And so with us. Only we can reject ourselves from God's covenant love.

11:11 It was the poor within the society of Zechariah's time who responded to God's word; and this is a principle, that the poor [in whatever sense] who accept the Gospel better than the wealthy (Lk. 7:22; 1 Cor. 1:26). The 'prosperity Gospel' is not Biblical.

11:14 Covenant relationship between people is broken [the horizontal level, as it were] when they break their covenant relationship with God [the vertical level]- v. 10. Conversely, if we are in covenant with God then we must be in meaningful covenant relationship with all those others who



are in covenant with God. In our times, baptism into Christ means that we are “in” the new covenant based around God’s Gospel promises (Gal. 3:27-29). We therefore are in covenant fellowship with all others who are in the same covenant status with God.

12:3 *Trample upon it* - The LXX of this verse is quoted in Lk. 21:24 as having a specific fulfilment in the last days before Christ returns.

12:10 This states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. The cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and believed. As we come before the cross in our minds, we are naturally driven to self-examination. There our thoughts are revealed (Lk. 2:35). This is why self-examination should occur naturally if we break bread properly, i.e. with our minds focused upon Him as He hung there.

*Only son... firstborn*- The Jews will come to understand something of God’s grief at the death of His only Son.

*Pierced*- It’s possible that the Lord Jesus still has marks in His hands and side where He was crucified- 13:6 may imply that the Jews of the last days will look upon them. He had them after His resurrection (Jn. 20:27), and marks of death were visible in the vision of Jesus which John saw (Rev. 5:6). Perhaps for absolute eternity He will carry these marks as a constant reminder to us all of the price paid for our redemption.

13:6 *Marks*- see on 12:10.

13:8 This could mean that two thirds of the Jews now living in Israel will die during the tribulation.

13:9 The purpose of Israel’s final tribulation will be to bring them to repentance; once there is repentance amongst them, then Christ will come (Is. 59:20). The quicker they repent, the shorter and lesser will be their tribulation. This explains why some of the prophecies of the last days are vague and hard to fit together chronologically- because there are various potential scenarios, depending upon the speed of Israel’s repentance. This trial of faith as gold is tried is going on in the lives of believers right now (1 Pet. 1:7)- the tribulations of our lives are therefore as intense and dramatic, in spiritual terms, as the tribulation about to break upon Israel. We shouldn’t underestimate the traumas which we go through spiritually.

14:4 This must connect with Christ’s ascension from Heaven from the Mount of Olives, with the Angels promising that He would return in the same way (Acts 1:11). Immediately prior to Christ’s second coming, Jerusalem will have been captured by her enemies; Christ comes when the remnant of Jews left alive repent and cry out to Him; see on 13:9.

14:7 This may suggest that the meaning of time collapses around the time of Christ’s coming. This would provide the answer to many practical questions- e.g. how shall we each stand before Christ’s

judgment seat individually and have some time in discussion about our lives; why can't we fit all the prophecies of the last days into some chronological order?

14:11 *No more curse*- Quoted in Rev. 22:3 about the future Kingdom of God on earth. God will be literally King over all the planet (:9); and there will be topographical changes around Jerusalem (:8).

14:12 Could this refer to nuclear warfare, used by God to punish those who use it? God will destroy Israel's enemies by turning them against each other (:13).

14:21 *A Canaanite*- This apparently strange ending reflects Zechariah's sadness that in his day, there had been unbelievers and even enemies allowed by God's people to have rooms right in the temple of Yahweh itself (Neh. 13:7,8). He looked forward, as all God's children do, to the time of God's Kingdom when the sheep and goats will finally be divided from each other for ever.

## MALACHI

1:4 Edom (Esau) was zealous to return and rebuild the ravaged land which God had once given him, whereas Israel wasn't, for the most part, zealous to return from Babylon to rebuild the land God had given them. And yet God still loved Israel above Edom, by pure grace. So often those who aren't God's people are more zealous for their causes than God's people are for His.

1:7 'The table of the Lord' refers to the altar. At the breaking of bread service, we eat of "the table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:21), the same phrase used here in the Septuagint. By breaking bread we are therefore like the priests of Israel eating at the altar. His work hasn't been delegated out to a group of specialists; we are all the priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9).

1:8 One doesn't give sub-standard service to their employer. One didn't bring him a defective animal as a gift. And yet Israel gave their God the lame and the blind animals, they only served Him as far as it didn't hurt them. They gave Him what cost them nothing. And yet they should not only have served Him *as* they served their earthly masters; but, because He is the "great God", they should have given Him even more. And so we must ask: the time we give to our careers and development in them, the *thought* we give to our secular lives, the respect we pay it... how does this compare to our attitude to Divine things?

1:10 There was nobody to even shut the doors of the temple; there was nobody willing to fulfil Ezekiel's prophecy / command about the temple doors being shut (Ez. 44:1,2; 46:1,2,12), and so the potential situation prophesied by Ezekiel didn't come true because God's people in Malachi's time just couldn't be bothered. So much potential was wasted at the return of Judah from Babylon, and it is in our age too.

1:13 *Weariness* - The repetitive nature of priestly work led them to treat it as "a weariness". They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, as in 2:10,11. Familiarity can so easily lead to our not grasping the awe of being in relationship with God.

2:7 The duty of the priests under the Old Covenant was to maintain true understanding of God's word, witness this to the world around them, and teach it to their brothers and sisters in Israel. Although there was a special priesthood, it was clearly God's intention that all Israel should be like priests; they were to be a "*Kingdom of priests*" (Ex. 19:6), and we are to be likewise (1 Pet. 2:5,9), not assuming others will care for us spiritually, but each of us taking real responsibility.

2:10,11 This may be a reference to how at the time of the restoration from Babylon, the Jews married unbelievers. This is described in the same terms used here- a breaking covenant with Him (Ezra 10:2,10; Neh. 13:27,29). Their marriage to unbelievers led them to accept the gods of their wives- and in this lay the sin of what they did.

2:15 *Make you one*- a reference to how God joins together husband and wife in the course of their married life, not just on their wedding day. The intention is that our children will be "Godly". If we are not united, not companions with each other, or if our partner is an unbeliever, it will be so much harder for us to raise Godly children.

3:6 God does change, as witnessed by men like Moses changing His stated intentions through prayer and intercession. What is unchangeable about Him is His grace to His sinful people.

3:14 Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's temple vision, tried to get them to 'follow His instructions' (s.w. Neh. 7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). For Ezekiel had prophesied that in the restored temple, God's instructions would be followed (Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16). But now, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w.). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God's Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose the faith- because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God's law, rather than willingly devoting their whole way of life to the realisation of His vision.

3:16 If we truly love God, we will naturally want to find and communicate with others who also do.

3:17 We are so very valuable to God- His jewels, His "very own". We can take comfort that we are not alone in this world, He is so intensely with us.

4:2 *The sun*- A prophecy of Christ's return. He will be like the dawn, chasing away the darkness which is now on the earth.

4:5 It seems that 'Elijah' will come to convert some in Israel to Christ before His second coming. John the Baptist was an Elijah prophet (Mt. 11:14); this prophecy of 'Elijah' may therefore not necessarily require literal Elijah to appear on earth, but the work of converting some in Israel could be fulfilled by others.

